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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CULTURAL STUDIES

MAGICAL REALISM AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS EVIL: A STUDY OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *AKÉ: THE YEARS OF CHILDHOOD* AND BEN OKRI'S *THE FAMISHED ROAD*

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts of the University of Buea in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Master of Arts (M.A.) Degree in African Literature

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DEDICATION

To my uncle

Asongayi Patrick

UNIVERSITY OF BUEA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CULTURAL STUDIES

CERTIFICATION

The thesis of **Nguni Mackeus (AR18P038)** entitled: **"Magical Realism and Attitudes towards Evil: A Study of Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*"**, submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Arts of the University of Buea in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of the Master of Arts (M.A.) Degree in African Literature, examined and approved by the examination panel of:

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ABSTRACT

This study titled "Magical Realism and Attitudes towards Evil: A Study of Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road"* demonstrates the African worldview on magical realism and the negative connotations that are attached to it by Eurocentric critics and scholars. Moreover, using Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as primary sources of data, the study uses the Afrocentric paradigm and Sociological approach, to argue that African traditional religion or belief system is neither idol worship, evil, nor fetishism. It is Eurocentric misrepresentation of the belief systems of Africans which has brought confusion in this area. This study relies on the assumption that the Eurocentric view of the African belief system with regards to magical realism and evil is based on false studies and assumptions. The critics in this area either did inadequate studies or no studies at all before proclaiming false assertions about African spirituality. Finally, the study reveals three main findings: one is that African belief system is built on African cosmology and it requires knowledge of African societies to fully understand it. Hence, African Traditional Religion is not fetishism as Eurocentric critics and scholars like Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther claim. The second finding is that the transformation of African societies largely depends on the commitment of African writers, and their ability to continue to inform and educate the masses about the importance of upholding the values of their belief systems. The third and the final contention is that it is needless to hang on the debate about whether or not the subject of evil should be treated and rather better focus on the measures to fight evil.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Magical realism dates back to the 1920s. In 1925, the German critic Franz Roh, coined the word "magic realism" to describe objectivity in German painting in his book *After Expressionism: Magic Realism.* According to him, the word was an expression for post-expressionist German painting where real forms were combined in such a way that they did not agree with the mundane reality. The term magic realism" was translated into Spanish in 1927 and later gained recognition by Latin Americans. Eventually, Alejo Carpentier developed interest in the concept and came up with his own coinage known as "Marvelous Realism" which was highly influenced by Roh's magic realism. He shared similar characteristics of Magic Realism like realistic setting, magical elements, deliberate withholding of information, critique of society, and unique plot structure. Nevertheless, Carpentier did not focus only on painting but he tried to look at the elements of the supernatural in other areas out of painting. Moreover, "Marvelous realism describes extraordinary physical as well as psychological landscapes from an entirely objective perspective, whereas, magic realism brings reality into a sharp focus in order to cause a paradigm shift" (Ahmad 23). These differences between Carpentier's and Roh's views brought in a little conflict about the subject.

In 1955, Angel Flores reconciled the conflict between Magic Realism and Marvelous Realism by bringing in "Magical Realism". He argues that, the Hispanic writer from Argentina, Jorge Luis Borges, was the first magical realist writer when he published his collection of short stories in 1935 entitled *A Universal History of Infamy*.

Subhas Yadav in "Magic Realism and Indian Aesthetics: An Attempt to Analyze *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*", opines that Magical Realism has two distinct phases: the first developed in the early 20's in Europe and characterizing mainly painting, and the second wave developed instead in the 60s, mainly in Latin America and affecting mainly literature.

The wave of Magical Realism affecting literature swept across the whole world in the 1950s and 60s and some critics have deemed it necessary to interpret African literature from this perspective. In a sense, this mode of writing left a mark on African literature which was gradually turning from the spoken word to the written word (from oral literature to written literature).

In African Traditional Religion (ATR), which is built on African ethos, other issues that come up in this scriptural form of literature in the advert of magical realism include African ontology, epistemology, spirituality, myths, belief systems and the concept of evil.

Evil is viewed as that which is bad. The concept is built on the belief that all immoral human acts which are committed knowingly against fellow human beings, and which turn to affect humans negatively are bad. It is manifested in varied forms such as theft, lies-telling, instigation of violence, greed, racism, discrimination, exploitation and murder.

Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri have used their artistic muse to showcase the concept of magic realism and the manifestation of evil in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and *The Famished Road* respectively.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this work is to demonstrate the African worldview on magical realism and evil, and the negative connotations that are attached to it as posited in Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. In order to achieve this aim, the work relies on the following objectives:

It examines the Western views of African societies in the domain of spirituality.

It shows how Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri deconstruct these Eurocentric views of African practices.

It equally shows how the two writers under study successfully maintain aesthetics in their works while portraying the concepts of evil and magical realism.

The data from the two texts under study connects textual analysis with the realities in the Nigerian society in particular and African societies at large.

Statement of Problem

African Traditional Religion is built on African ethos, but the Western worldview considers it as evil and magic. This study argues that African belief system is not evil and magic, but is built on their spirituality whose effect on the physical is either positive or negative depending on their relationship with man.

Research Questions

The research problem above can be broken down into the following research questions:

1. What is the Western worldview of the African belief system?

2. How are the concepts of magical realism and evil projected in the two novels under study?

3. To what extent can the novels under study be considered as perfect reflection of the realities in their societies?

4. What is the relationship between magical realism and evil and what is the place of aesthetics in magical realist texts?

Hypothesis

Based on the statement of problem and the research questions above, this study relies on the assumption that Eurocentric critics and scholars give negative connotations to African belief system because it surpasses them and they simply find it difficult to understand and present it the way it is. The critics in this area either did inadequate studies or no studies at all before proclaiming false assertions about African spirituality.

Significance of the Work

This work attempts to deconstruct the Western worldview and reconstruct the African worldview of the concepts of magical realism and evil which has been greatly misrepresented by Eurocentric critics and scholars. This is done by interpreting the ideas presented by Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri in their respective novels. Also, this study combines the ideas of different authors to create knowledge which goes a long way to create awareness. Here, the study proposes means through which we can be aware of evil and seek means to reduce or eliminate it.

Definition and Conceptualization of Key Terms

For clarity, and to avoid any ambiguity, it is important to define and conceptualize some of the key terms that are recurrent in this work. These terms include: "magical realism" and "evil."

Magical Realism

Magical realism has two words combined; magical and realism. On the one hand, a thing is said to be magical if it has magic in it. *The Random House Dictionary* defines "magic" as “the use of various techniques, as spells, charms, etc., that presumably assure human control of supernatural powers” (527). On the other hand, "realism", as defined by *The Random House Dictionary*, is "the representation in literature or arts of things as they really are" (730). Thus, magical realism is a mode of literature or art which involves the representation of things as they really are, while also adding extraordinary or mystical influence, charms or power.

In his article titled "Magic Realism in English Literature and Its Significant Contribution", Simhachalam Thamarana defines Magical Realism as "the style of writing or technique which includes magical as well as supernatural events narrated realistically without any doubt about improbability of the events" (263). In other words, this style of fiction paints a realistic view of the modern world while also adding magical elements. It implies that there is some sort of magic in the works of magical realist writers. Lois Parkinson Zamora outlines some characteristics of magical realism in his article titled "Magic Realism and the New World Baroque" as he says:

> The magic is an integral part and the most significant feature of this literary mode. In magical realist texts we can encounter apparitions and ghosts appearing, supernatural things happening, inanimate objects acquiring qualities of animate beings, people becoming invisible and the like. The distinct quality of the magic in magical realist texts consists in the fact that the magic is treated as a common, matter-of-fact phenomenon and none of the characters seem to be astonished by the existence of the supernatural in their lives. Most critiques tend to accept the feature of depicting the magical as part of our daily reality as a distinct characteristic of magical realism. Magical occurrences become part of everyday life, "...the supernatural ... is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism" (3).

In this study, "magical realism" will be considered from the definitions of Thamarana and Zamora. This is because their definitions are in line with the purpose for which this work is done.

Evil

In *The Anthropology of Evil*, Evil is said to be a force acting to destroy the integrity, happiness and welfare of normal society. It is the absence of good which could and should be present; the absence of which is void in what should be. In his article titled "Literature and Evil: Dostoyevsky's Poetic Thinking on Evil", Donny Gahral Adian attempts to answer the question "What is this thing we call evil?" where he says, "One thing for sure is, it is diametrically opposed to the good. As the good's opposition, evil cannot be defined apart from the good" (243). This means that evil is that which is bad. That which is bad does not abide to the moral, cultural, political and/or religious beliefs of the people in question, and according to *Websters New Dictionary of the American Language*, it "causes harm, pain, trouble, disaster, etc." (330).

There are two main types of evil according to the Western worldview: Moral evil and physical/natural evil. Moral evil covers the willful act of human beings such as murder, rape, suicide and abortion, while natural evil refers to natural disasters such as famines, landslides, earthquakes, and floods.

Scope of the Study

This thesis limits itself to two novels from two African novelists: *Aké: The Years of Childhood* by Wole Soyinka and *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri. The two novels are used to analyze magical realism as a literary mode and evil as a philosophical concept which is embedded in literature. The reason for the choices of novels is basically the thorough reading and the

discovery that they have some of the required elements of African belief systems which can be used to tackle the concept of evil. These have been misrepresented by Eurocentric critics and scholars.

Delimitations

This study basically uses only two novels for analysis because the two novels are voluminous and rich enough to cover concepts of African spirituality which are the main reasons behind the study. The effect of this in the work is that in some areas, there would be cross referencing for some detailed analysis. Furthermore, the study chooses Afrocentricity and Sociological approach over other literary and cultural theories because these theories give a better insight into African belief systems which are pertinent in this study.

Structure of the Work

This work is structured in four parts: general introduction, four chapters, conclusion and works cited. The first part covers the general introduction and it is made up of Background to Study, Aim and Objectives, Significance of the Study, Statement of Problem, Research Questions, Hypothesis, Definition and Conceptualization of Terms, Scope of the Work, Delimitations, and Structure of the Work.

The second part consists in the chapters where there are four of such chapters. Chapter one is titled **"Literature Review and Theoretical Framework".** It discusses what other critics have done in relation to magical realism and evil, the texts under study and the theories used. It also discusses two theories which are used in this work namely: Afrocentricity and the Sociological Approach to Literature.

Chapter two which is captioned **"African Ontology and Epistemology"** focuses on misrepresentation of African belief systems by Eurocentric critics and the reality of African belief systems. It is subdivided into "Western Perceptions of African Ontology and Epistemology", "the Complexities of Eurocentric Perceptions of Evil", and "African Sense of Evil in the Two Novels under Study".

Chapter three, titled **"Man and African Spirituality in the Texts under Study"** focuses on the manifestation of African spirituality in the two novels under study. In view of this, it discusses components of African spirituality such as herbalism, witchcraft, spirits, rituals, divination, exorcism, taboos and appeasement.

Chapter four is **"Critical Perspectives."** It attempts to bring out the literary devices that the two authors use to support their visions of African Traditional Religion which is not fetish but built on African ethos.

In the conclusion, salient points are summarized such as the classification of beings in African belief system into Supreme Being, gods/goddesses, ancestors, herbalists and environment, the relationship between man and spirituality in the African belief system which is in areas such as herbalism, spirits, rituals, witchcraft, exorcism, taboos, appeasement and the notion of the spirit child. The conclusion also discusses the findings. Here, we argue that African spirituality is not evil and fetish, but it is based on their belief system which has a cultural interpretation. It is by understanding this culture that one can fully understand African Traditional Religion or belief system. Finally, the conclusion suggests ways through which we can solve the problem of misrepresentation of African belief systems. Basically, Eurocentric critics and scholars need to

avoid false assumptions and shun emotions, and then remake a study of African belief systems in Africa before making assertions about it.

The last part is Works Cited.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The focus of this chapter is on what other critics have done with regards to magical realism and attitudes towards evil, the texts under study and the theories used for analysis and interpretation. In a sense, the chapter is divided into two parts. The first part reviews works of critics like Eustace Palmer, K. Saranya, Musa Idris Okpanachi, Muhammad Bello, Subhas Yadav, Raman de la Campa, Donny Gahral Adian and Roy W. Perrett. The second part elaborates on Afrocentricity, and the Sociological Approach which are the literary theories which guide the analyses and interpretations done in the work. .

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some critics have carried out studies in magical realism and evil in and around the texts under study. Different studies have also been done using Afrocentricity and the Sociological Approach which are implored in the analysis and interpretation done in this work. It is, therefore, ethical, and appropriate to make a review of these works so that we can easily view how this dissertation is different from such works and also view its contribution to knowledge.

Eustace Palmer published an article in *Teaching African Literature Today* titled "Teaching Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* & Syl Cheney Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*" where he focuses on areas like modernism and post-modernism, aesthetics, and magical realism in the two texts. With regards to magical realism, he argues that "both novels are a unique blend of the apparently supernatural or magical or mystical with the obviously realistic" (4). Despite this, he views the magical as having a cultural dimension and being multifaceted as what is magical in the western world may not be magical in African societies. He argues that:

> Magical realism asks us to see that concepts of the real have always differed according to time and place and that, although modern Western technological society has placed rigid boundaries between the 'real' and the 'supernatural,' the distinction for some other societies is not that clear cut. In various African societies, beings from the spirit world are supposed to hover around and mingle freely with human beings, and there are certain human beings who have the ability to see such spirits and communicate with them. A writer therefore who presents such beings is not being unrealistic or fantastic. He is merely presenting another order of reality (5).

Palmer summarizes his argument by saying that "if for some societies such phenomena are regarded as real, the term 'magical' should not be applied to them at all" (5). However, if Palmer's view is correct then it will be complex to say what exactly magical realism is. This is because the term will be defined with respect to particular societies. This will lead to skepticism in universal truth and doubt in universal knowledge. This work shares the same idea with Palmer in relation to the fact that magical realism blends the natural with the supernatural, but it does not work in line with Palmer's idea of bringing in skepticism in what is real and what is magical. This work instead focuses on magical realism as a universal mode of literature which is used to presents different attitudes towards evil.

K. Saranya in an article in *Pune Research, An International Journal in English* titled "Mysticism and Magical Realism as Aesthetics of Necessity in Ben Okri's Writings" shows how Okri deviates from the writings of other authors. According to Saranya, Okri does not write what every other African writer writes. Saranya says:

> Okri's works immediately depart from the ordinary, predictable and routine. Each of his works of fiction demonstrates a remarkable sense of formal experimentation, and each work progressively extends his creative exploration of multiple literary styles, genres and traditions. Thus he effectively combines the conventions of the Europeans Bildungsroman or coming-of-age novel, with Nigerian English dialects and modernist narrative strategies to explore a modern, postcolonial context (3)

The above quote suggests that Okri has a particular means of delivering his art which is different from the way other writers do. He is noted for his philosophical presentations in art and

redirection of experimental energy towards the exploration of African models rather than European ones. This therefore prepares him for "a new stage of aesthetic development" (Saranya 3). This is in line with the modernist and postmodernist famous saying that, "make it new." Okri makes it new in his own way. Nevertheless, this work does not seek to demonstrate if Ben Okri uses a style which is new as Saranya does. Instead, the work seeks to show how Okri uses this newness in style to tackle evil in the society.

In "Magic as Discourse Strategy in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*," Musa Idris Okpanachi and Muhammad Bello make observations on how the resources of language have been used to establish the themes of the supernatural and social power semantics. Through this, they are able to establish a link between the power of language and social reality which basically focuses in the supernatural. At the lexical level of analysis, it is discovered through random sampling of the supernatural field that the novel is situated in many areas. These include myth, social meanings reflecting social power, the subordination of people symbolically constructed through complex simultaneous choices of transitivity and in the personal interaction between the politicians and the masses. Thus, there is no tacit conversational frame that grants masses equal basis of turn taking. However, Okpanchi and Bello make these observations but fail to relate them to the concept of magical realism. In a sense, they raise arguments but do not follow the arguments in the magical perspective.

According to Subhas Yadav in his article titled "Magic Realism and Indian Aesthetics: An Attempt to Analyse 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,'" even though magical realism may be regarded by many to have started in Latin America, it is not "a new concept to the Indian Literary terrain and it has been part of the inherent realities for a very long time" (1). If we are to

relate this statement to the African scene and societies, it will still have the same effect. Magic has been a characteristic of African societies even before the advent of writing. When literature was still predominantly oral in Africa, there were tales which involved supernatural elements and characters that operated in the same environment with humans. These supernatural elements and characters were not strange to the people. In the tale of the tortoise borrowing wings from birds to attend a meeting in the sky for example, we do not seem to realize that it is magical that the tortoise borrows wings (we do not need to be told that it cannot use wings). This is because the magical is presented in a realistic way and thus, it is magical realism. The argument here is that magical realism existed in African folktales, myths and legends even before the term was coined by Franz Roy, the German art critic in 1925.

Subhas Yadav further argues that:

> Magical realism is not merely a magical literary expression, since its purpose is not only to arouse emotions but also to express them and above all, an attitude towards reality. The strategy of the writer is to suggest a supernatural reality without departing from nature, by deforming the perception of things, recognizable characters and events of the plot of his work (1).

This argument is not very different from Angel Flores's argument. Angel Flores argues that "magical realism fuses the real with the fantastic" (quizlet.com/31515133/magical-realism-vocab-flash-cards/). Similarly, Zamora argues in "Magic Realism and the New World Baroque" that in magical realist texts, magical occurrences become part of everyday life and the supernatural becomes an ordinary matter. It can therefore be concluded here that Subhas Yadav in this article merely restates ideas which have been postulated by other critics. His ability to organize these ideas however must be acknowledged and credited. This work, nonetheless, goes beyond simply restating what other critics have said before as Yadav does. It permeates through

what other critics have postulated and it focuses on how the ideas of such critics can combine to resolve the conflict between evil-skeptics and evil-revivalists.

Furthermore, in an article titled "Magical Realism and World Literature: A Genre for the Times", Roman de la Campa argues that magical realism has to be wholly welcomed by literary comparatism. This is to say that in an attempt to do comparative studies in literature we have to take magical realism into consideration. The main reason behind this is that "magical realism can be linked to an unsuspectedly rich history of related literary forms throughout the world" (Campa 206). Ironically, Campa argues again that this very form of literature that has to be taken into consideration when doing comparative studies is facing a number of queries. Some critiques like Daniela Eltit view magical realism as a Latin American style while others like Gayatri Spivak in her essay titled "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value" look upon the value attached to magical realism as "a Western code for determining which forms of writing or critical learning is welcome to world literature, often under the guise of first world radicalness" (208). As a shortcoming of Campa's essay, he spends time asserting individual views without stating his own view on the subject.

Moreover, in a study titled "Magical Realism and the New World Baroque", Lois Parkinson Zamora holds the view that the transatlantic appropriation of magical realism took three decades to occur. This implies that it came to Africa when other countries had already implored it for long. Zamora says this because to him, it seems that:

> texts adequately referred to as 'magical realist' do indeed raise questions about the nature of representation, and the nature of the objects represented, as realistic texts do not. . . While all works of fiction require that we visualize objects, realism requires of the objects that they represent only themselves. They may, of course, have symbolic or psychological or metaphysical content, but their signifying function is nonetheless, different from the objects in magical realist texts, which must represent not only

> themselves but also the potential for some kind of alternative reality, some kind of "magic". . . The magic may inhere in the object (1).

Zamora seems to suggest that the magic in magical realist texts does not fall from heaven like manna but it is an integral part of the society/world in the text. This nevertheless, only creates or increases the distance between the reader and the world of the text. This is because the magical elements in the texts may not be found magical in the real world of the reader. This also creates deviation from the original meaning of magic realism as Franz Roh used it in his 1925 essay to emphasize and celebrate the painters' return to realism after a decade or more of abstraction in art. In the contrary, this dissertation does not separate the reader from the texts. It relates the reader to the world of the texts so that what appears as magical in the texts is actually magical in the real world.

Concerning the concept if evil in literature, Donny Gahral Adian offers a very critical view of evil in his article titled "LITERATURE AND EVIL: Dostoyevsky's Poetic Thinking on Evil." He deviates from the popular way of viewing evil as a binary opposition of 'good'. To him, viewing evil as a binary opposition of good is more of a philosophical and theological thing than literary. He says "to understand the nature of evil, we need a poetic way of thinking . . . which goes beyond the binary of good and evil" (1). The only thing that we can sense of evil is what he calls "an aggressive manifestation of human anxiety" (2). Hence, "evil cannot show its true face. It can only be understood as some kind of veil hiding the essence of 'the good" (2).

If we go by Adian's view as shown above, we will ignore the claim of philosophy and theology that evil is directly opposed to good. According to Adian:

> The problem is that the nature of evil has always been repressed by philosophical and theological reflections. Both reflections put evil as a distorted manifestation of the hidden

> good. We need another way of reflecting upon the nature of evil as non-being. We need a way of thinking that can grasp the radical otherness of evil (3).

He believes that literature, especially poetry, is such a way of thinking because:

> It is not a mode of thought toward a transcendental articulation of reality. It is not positive answers that a poetic thinking seeks. Its only mission is to enlarge our space of imagination within our own thought. Philosophical and theological thinking, unfortunately, have abandoned this kind of mission (3).

Nevertheless, Adian's arguments are directly opposed to philosophical and theological ideas. This goes a long way to incite antagonism between literature and philosophy and literature and theology. The antagonism between philosophy and literature stems from books III and X of Plato's *The Republic* where philosophy is argued to be a higher art than poetry/literature. There, literature is thought to be three times removed from reality. In this dissertation, however, this art which is thought to be three times removed from reality offers the best view of evil which both philosophy and theology have not offered before. It views evil from the African perspective as the concept is based on both location and time. What is evil in the Western World may not be evil in Africa.

More still, in his article titled "Evil and Human Nature", Roy W. Perrett states that "something is an evil if it is a bad thing, one of life's minuses" (1). To him, many people misinterpret the concept of evil and equate evil only to wrong doings. He says:

> Evil is instead often misunderstood to be a very special moral category: it involves not just wrongdoing, but a special kind of intentional wrongdoing in which at least the following four features need to be present. Firstly, in order to be evil, the wrongdoing must flow from a particular kind of character. Secondly, the wrongdoing must be motivated in a particular way: it must be a wrongdoing which is done because it is wrong. Thirdly, the agent will take pleasure in the wrongness of the action. Finally, the agent will fail to exhibit the morally appropriate reactive attitudes (guilt, shame, regret, etc.) to her wrongdoing (1)

Perrett seems to underestimate the power of physical evil. According to him, physical evil may not be as rampant as moral evil because physical evil is not necessarily carried out by direct human actions. This leads to some sort of confusion in his work. Logically, if physical evil is not rampant in the society, then, by deductive reasoning, it follows that critics who hold the view that it is the greatest evil which occurs every day at high degree are wrong. Perrett does not recognize the devastating effects of physical evil such as wars, famines, accidents, mountain eruptions, floods, and diseases like Ebola, AIDS, and Covid19 which have taken away millions of lives. This is why this dissertation expands his view of evil and includes physical evil, instead of dealing only with moral evil as he does.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analyses and interpretations of the texts under study cannot be done without a guiding theory. This means that in order to effectively analyse and interpret the two texts under study, we need to be informed by a critical paradigm. There are many of such paradigms such as New Historicism, Marxist Critical Theory, Psychoanalytic Literary Theory, Afrocentricity and Sociological Approach. This work relies on Afrocentricity and Sociological Approach for analyses and interpretations.

AFROCENTRICITY

According to John H. Milan in "The Emerging Paradigm of Afrocentric Research Methods," "Afrocentricity is defined, partly, in contrast to Eurocentrism... everything which does not come out of Afrocentric perspective is believed to be Eurocentric" (9). Thus,

> Afrocenticity is in some respects a response to global (Eurocentric) attitudes about African people and their historical contributions; it seeks to correct what it sees as mistakes and ideas perpetuated by the racist philosophical underpinnings of western

> academic disciplines as they developed during and since Erope's Early" (en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrocentrism).

This paradigm is based on the idea that African people should re-assert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity. In other words, it is basically a revolutionary shift in thinking proposed as a way of constructing the adjustment to black disorientation, decenteredness, and lack of agency. Afrocentricity is also known as Afrocentrism. Its proponents include Molefi Kete Asante, Marimba Ani, Jacob Carruthers, Cheik Anta Diop, Asa Hilliard, Chancellor Williams and Ivan Van Sertima.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF AFROCENTRICITY

The origin of Afrocentricity is deeply rooted in other earlier Black Nationalist Movements such as Harlem Renaissance, Pan-Africanism, Negritude and Civil Rights Movement. With respect to the Harlem Renaissance, black Americans who had migrated to North America in the town of Harlem as a result of the Great Migration sought reincarnation into the African cultural belief systems and ways of life. With Pan Africanism, there emerged a number of activists such as Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois who promoted the idea of an African diaspora and called for a separate African state for Black Americans. Du Bois organized world conferences about Pan-Africanism from 1919 to 1927 which helped the foundation for Afrocentricity.

In the 1930s, Francophone African intellectuals such as Léopold Sedar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas brought about Negritude literary movement where they preached not only the need for a black homeland but also the cultural and genetic superiority of Blacks. This is the firm basis in which Afrocentricity relies.

The 1960s saw the Civil Rights Movement which made Afrocentricity gain significant legitimacy in the United States. This movement came along with the immigration of large

numbers of nonwhites. The desire to calve out the African cultural values and ideologies and praise them became very eminent. It was in this regard that Molefi Kete Asante by 1980 had published a book titled *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* in which he speaks of the need for an Afrocentric orientation to data.

TENETS OF AFROCENTRICITY

According to John Milan in "Emerging Paradigm of Afrocentric Research Methods and other online sources, the following constitute tenets of Afrocentricity:

1. "Afrocentric researchers pay attention to symbols, affect, instinct, intuition, and imaginary as multiple ways of knowing" (Milan 13).

2. Afrocentrism is highly interested in the psychological as determined by symbols, motifs, rituals, and signs.

3. It is committed in finding the subject-place of Africans in any social, political, economic, or religious phenomenon with implications for questions of sex, gender and class.

4. It focuses on the defence of African cultural elements as historically valid.

5. It makes use of a powerful imperative from historical sources to revise the collective text of African people.

6. It examines etymological uses of words and terms in order to know the source of an author's location.

7. The Afrocentric method locates the imaginative structure of a system of economics, bureau of politics, policy of government, expression of cultural form in the attitude, direction, and

language of the phenon (reco gnized by similarity of characteristics), be it text, institution, interaction, or event.

SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

The sociological approach examines literature in the cultural, economic and political context in which it is written and received, exploring the relationships between the writer and the society. It may examine the author's society to better understand the literary work. It may also examine the representation of such societal elements within the literature itself. This is done by testing and modifying how the world works through scientific analysis. The main difference between sociological approach and other approaches consists of how to treat social facts, whether they can be treated as natural ones or not.

With the sociological approach, the critic might look at the society or context in which the text was written or he/she may look at the society in which the text is read or seen or heard. The critic might be asking; What can the society that the author lived in tell me about his/her work?" Or the critic might instead be asking; "What does this text mean to our society?" The proponents of this approach include Madame de Stale, Jonathan Herder, Hippolyte Taine, Lucian Goldman, Leo Lowenthal, Robert Escarpit and John Hall.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

Although this approach has a long and distinguished history from Plato onwards, it has been fully developed by twentieth century critics like Lucian Goldman, Leo Lowenthal and John Hall. In his article titled "The Historical Development of the Sociological Approach to the Study of Literature", Arun Murlidha Jadhay states that in order to understand the development of the sociological approach to the study of literature, it is necessary to see the historical development

of this approach through the contribution of the social critics and scholars' (1). Among these critics and scholars are: Jonathan Herder (1744-1803), who is best known for his contribution to the philosophy of history and culture. He believed that the emergence and development of literature stem from certain social and geographical environment, race and customs, and cultural and political conditions. It follows that the base of literature to him is the social structure.

After Herder came Madame de Stale (1766-1817) who related literature to climate, geography and social institutions. She had a broader view of literature as she related any exercise of thought in writing to literature. After her came Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) who is often regarded as the father of the sociology of literature. He connects literature to race, milieu and moment. This has to do with the author, and the setting.

Contrary to Taine is the idea of Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx views the sociological approach as a scientific method of literary interpretation. He and Frederick Engels analyzed literature in terms of material foundations with their main aim being to demonstrate the relationship between the material and aesthetic modes of production (base and superstructure). Therefore literature is formed from the interactions and conflicts between the base and superstructure.

After these critics others followed like Lucian Goldman, Leo Lowenthal and Robert Escarpit who expatiated on the fact that literature is a product of the society. As a product of the society, it can only be fully understood by reading it alongside the society.

TENETS OF SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

The Sociological Approach to literature is said to have the following tenets:

1. It involves the dual reading of the text and the society of both the author and the reader.

2. Furthermore, it deals with social mechanisms which are essential in exemplifying the middle ground between social law and description.
3. Also, the sociological approach makes use of abstract and testable propositions about society, heavily relying on the scientific method which aims for objectivity and to avoid passive value judgments.
4. With the sociological approach, societies are organized into distinct social units (such as family, government, education, and religion) that tell us what the rules are.
5. Finally, the sociological approach attempts to explain social behaviours and provides evidence that support the claims about social behaviours.

To conclude, the aim of this chapter was to focus on Literature Review and Theoretical Framework. We have been able to review the works of critics such as Eustace Palmer, K. Saranya, Idris Musa Okpanachi, Muhammad Bello, Subhas Yadav, Roman de la Campa, Lois Parkinson Zamora, Donny Gahra Adian and Roy W. Perrett. The main dissections made in the literature review here are that, in addition to language and style, the two authors under study have been able to make a perfect representation of African belief systems which previous critics have misrepresented in their works. These authors have used the newness in their art to address the problem of evil in their societies. We have also discussed two theories, namely: Afrocentricity and Sociological Approach to Literature. The next chapter will focus on aspects of African ontology and epistemology which have been misrepresented by Eurocentric critics and scholars.

CHAPTER TWO

AFRICAN ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to discuss aspects of African ontology and epistemology which have been misrepresented by Eurocentric critics and scholars. In view of this, the chapter will highlight Western perceptions of the African societies and practices which are false and then show what exactly constitutes African ontology and epistemology.

> Ontology is the philosophical understanding of the nature of beings, existence or reality as well as the basic classifications of beings and their interaction. Ontology often deals with questions about the existence of entities or beings and their categorization and relationship within a hierarchy including their sub-divisions depicting their similarities or otherwise. Ontology thus, concerns itself with fundamental questions about existence of things and their categories, the meaning of beings and their various modes as well as their interactive relations and reactions attendant thereto (Agbo 52)

In essence, African ontology is what is out there in Africa to know. It has to do with the questions of either what exists in Africa is real (realism) or perceived (subjectivism). Thus, African ontology is the theory of African existence, concerned with the nature of reality and that of human existence. Ontology always goes along with epistemology.

According to Bernice Quampah et al. in "Philosophical Foundation of Knowledge on Africa",

> Epistemology is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theory [of ontology], methodology, and method of investigation. It is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know. It is about what we can hope to know about reality and how we can acquire knowledge about the reality (854).

By way of summary, African epistemology deals with the theory of knowledge about Africa, a way of understanding and explaining what we know about Africa. According to Emmanuel Efem Etta in "The Reality of African Epistemology" African epistemology is embedded in African metaphysics which is in turn rooted in African philosophy. So to understand African

epistemology one needs to understand African philosophy. Again, every knowledge claim embodies a certain way of understanding what is to know (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding how to know what to know (epistemology). The Western perception of African ontology and epistemology is quite different from its reality. In the following subsection, this study will examine these Western perceptions.

WESTERN PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Eurocentric critics and scholars like Joseph Conrad and Bishop Ajayi Crowther perceive Africa and its belief systems different from its reality. This section shows how such critics and scholars understand these.

The Spirit World

African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life and therefore African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane. Many African religious scholars have argued that Africans cannot be defined without taking their spirituality into consideration. In "Ethics, African Societal Values and the Workplace", John Mtuwafhthu Mafunisa says "African traditional religion is a way of life and a search for well-being within the community in the here and now of everyday experience. It encompasses beliefs concerning a supreme being, ancestors and the mediation of diviners and/or rainmakers" (120). This is explained intricately and forcefully by Ng'weshemi in *Rediscovering the Human. The Quest for a Christo-Theological Anthropology in Africa* when he argues that "For Africans all life is religion. Religion infiltrates through every dimension of people's life and experience to the extent that separation between the sacred and the secular, the visible and the invisible, or the spiritual from the material, is impossible" (140).

However, the concepts of God, spirits, ancestors and divinities in African traditional religious ontology have been so misunderstood by many scholars to the point of seeing Africans as people who do not know the Supreme Being nor worship Him. Moreover, the Eurocentric classification of Africans has been nothing apart from viewing all African beliefs as paganism. According to Emeka C. Ekeke and Chike A. Ekeopara in "God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology"

> Various factors led to this controversy and misunderstanding, such as prejudice by Western scholars who measured African traditional religious concept with Christianity. Other factors include lack of indebt study of African religion leading to hasty conclusion. Most of those who came to study the religions of Africa were armchair scholars who depended on data from missionaries who themselves concentrated in one community or tribe. They used the scanty information derived from one or two localities in Africa to draw conclusion about the ontology of God, divinities and spirits in Africa (209).

These false conclusions by Europeans put forth the description of African spirit world as evil. Western perceptions of traditional religions initially depended upon a Christian framework for understanding variations in religious beliefs and practices, which often resulted in the characterization of non-Christian religions as somehow unfit to be called religions or to be the work of the devil. According to them, Africans worship many gods, do not believe in a supreme God, worship dead spirits and are paganic in nature. They equally viewed African Traditional Religions as magic. In *African Religions and Philosophy*, however, John Mbiti argues that "Magic belongs to the religious mentality of the African people. But religion is not magic, and magic cannot explain religion. Religion is greater than magic, and only an ignorant outsider could imagine that African religions are nothing more than magic" (10).

Contrary to Western perceptions of African Traditional Religions, Africans believe in a Supreme God, gods/goddesses, ancestors, herbalists and the natural environment. The Supreme God is the

highest in the order of African classification of spirits and any other spirit bounds to Him and takes orders from Him. According to Md Didarul Islam and Shafiul Islam in "African Traditional Concept of God: A Critical Analysis",

> God is the Supreme entity to the adherents of the traditional religions of Africa and is considered to be the origin of everything in this universe. In Africa, God is viewed in both immanent and transcendent dimensions. This very idea of Oneness of the Supreme Being is core to the followers and this belief creates no place for the atheists in their traditional concept of God. There is no sacred text in written form, but the root of this traditional idea of God is mainly taken from proverbs, short statements, stories, religious rituals, prayers, songs, myths, etc. The knowledge of God is a gift given at the time of birth to a newborn baby. According to an Ashanti proverb, 'No one shows a child the Supreme Being'. Knowing about God is believed to be an instinctive knowledge to the religious adherents (1).

Besides, different African societies attribute different names to God based on their respective languages. The Bangwa of Cameroon call Him "Ndem". Here, they do not move to Him directly for their prayers. In addition, there are no ancestral places to worship Him. They channel their prayers through ancestors and "melem" (gods) who in turn intercede for them. The Swahili-speaking peoples of East and Central Africa use "Mungu" as the name of the Supreme Being. The most used name of the Supreme Being among Akans in general is "Onyame". The Supreme God or Supreme Being in the Yoruba community is called "Olorun", also called "Olodumare". Humans do not worship Olorun directly; there are no sacred areas of worship or ordained person. Among the Igbo of Nigeria He is called "Chukwu".

In the order of spirituality in Africa, the Supreme God is followed by gods/goddesses. Mazisi Kunene offers a great description of gods in his article entitled "The Relevance of African Cosmological Systems to African Literature Today". He argues that:

> The gods are not worshipped in Africa but They are participants in man's life as allies. They themselves may sometimes enlist the services of special men and women to convey

> their will. Man equally has the right to appeal to them on issues affecting his welfare. It is forbidden, however, to appeal the destruction of a personal enemy unless it can be demonstrated that the opponent has violated a fundamental ethic. The gods are forces that link man with the unknowable Supreme Creator. This does not mean that man must approach the Creator through them but rather that they are delegated by the Creator with specific creative and divine responsibilities. The gods utilize this potential on behalf of man. Man can appeal to them for their gifts but their power is limited, for man already has a direct relationship with the Creator through the agency of his ancestors (192-193).

It becomes evident that Western perception that Africans worship gods is false. They only revered them. Again, Westerners have always condemned African gods without considering the fact that they too have angels who are equivalent to gods/goddesses in the African context. Thus, the magical and evil attributions perpetuated by the Westerners on the African belief systems are false.

Furthermore, Africans believe in the existence of their ancestors. The ancestors to them are alive; they are the living dead. P.J. Nel opines in "Morality and Religion in African Thought" that:

> Ancestors are generally not perceived to be ghost or spirits, but living dead, and they are portrayed as departed family member(s) and thus identifiable family members. It is, however, also true that only specific members of the living dead, and not all deceased, occupy the position of ancestors. . . Ancestor belief is, however, also integrated in what would generally be termed cultural practices, such as birth, name giving, marriage, etc (37).

Africans have perfect connections with the Supreme God through their ancestors. In Kenjo Jumbam's *The White Man of God*, Yaya argues that Mama cannot contact God directly except through the connection of ancestors. She says:

> You tell me you make your requests directly to God. Who are you to approach God? Can you go directly to the Fon here? You cannot, and do you think you can go directly to God and get to him? Don't fool yourself. God is a spirit and communicates only with spirits. And your ancestors are your intermediaries (33).

Western worldviews reduce African Traditional Religions to ancestral worships. This is a great misconception. African Religion is not ancestral worship. Africans only remember ancestors and

then believe that the ancestors can help as intermediaries between man and the Supreme God. The belief in the existence of ancestors results from the belief of the continuation of life after death. This is found in all African societies even though there is no hell fire to be feared, nor paradise to be hoped for after death. Europeans who attribute false claims on African belief in ancestors fail to recognize that their saints are equivalent to African ancestors.

On Wole's birthday in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, his friend Osiki tells him stories of *egungun* which Wole "knew that the *egungun* were spirits of the dead. They spoke in guttural voices and were to be feared even more than kidnappers" (Soyinka 31). Eurocentric critics like Tinu in the novel fail to understand that Westerners have *egungun* too; just the name is different. They call theirs saints. Wole argues that:

> It seemed important to find out. The stained-glass windows behind the altar of St Peter's church displayed the figures three white men, dressed in robes which were very clearly *egungun* robes. Their faces were exposed, which was very unlike our own *egungun*, but I felt that this was something peculiar to the country from which those white people came. After all Osiki had explained that they were many kinds of *egungun*. I sought his opinion on the three figures only to have Tinu interrupt (32-33).

Tinu interrupts to argue that they are not *egungun*; they are not masqueraders, but missionaries. The certainty here is they are dead and they are being honoured. Therefore, it is worthless for Europeans to criticize African belief system which they practice a similar system and simply change the parlances.

Herbalists also form part in the order of African spirituality. They are traditional healers who are capable of connecting with the spirit world for the betterment of humans. Eurocentric view has linked their activities to fetishism and evil which is completely wrong. Some of them simply use

herbs for treatment while others treat spiritual issues. They are not very different from priests in the Western system. They work on the environment which is the final part of African spirituality.

Nevertheless, it is worthy to note that Gyekye Kwame opines in *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* that some objective Western travelers have written that Africans before the coming of Westerners had an idea of the true God, and ascribed to Him the attributes of Almighty and Omnipresent; they believe He created the universe, and therefore vastly prefer Him before their idol-gods; but they do not pray to Him or offer sacrifices to Him. It is this true God that Africans respond to in their daily engagements, upon whom they depend for their moral law through the divinities, spirits and ancestors.

In traditional African societies, the Supreme Being may not be directly involved in the affairs of humans. This is why Idowu calls the Yoruba religion "diffused monotheism". They had a monotheistic religion originally, but as the religion lost its originality over time, many people turned to rely on divinities. Thus, the Supreme Being is not exclusively worshipped by traditional Africans. They instead use divinities and ancestors as intermediaries to link with the Supreme Being. The hierarchy of beings is therefore highly respected in Africa.

Below is a summary of the hierarchy of beings in African and Western spirituality.

WESTERN RELIGION= Supreme God > Angels > Saints > Priests > Environment

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION= Supreme Being > gods/goddesses > Ancestors > Herbalists/Priests > Environment

As seen above, the order of beings in African spirituality begins with the Supreme Being on top, followed by gods/goddesses, ancestors, herbalists and the environment. This hierarchy relies on

the foundational religious beliefs of the people. There are essentially, four foundational religious beliefs in African Traditional Religion: the belief in mystical power, the belief in spirit beings, the belief in divinities/gods and the belief in Supreme Being.

The World of Celestial Bodies

Celestial bodies are things floating around in space outside of the earth. They include things like the sun, the moon, planets, and stars. Because Western religions are sky-oriented, they turn to condemn African Traditional Religion because it is earth-oriented. As seen in the Old Testament, when sacrifices were burnt, the smoke was expected to move to the sky so that it could be confirmed that God had accepted the sacrifices. In Africa however, sacrifices are offered to the earth and the sacrifices are expected to be received by ancestors who are in the earth.

Africans rely on celestial bodies for different purposes. To begin with, the sun serves a great purpose in the African belief systems. They use it for time and other related purposes. In Africa it is very evident for an elder to say time based on the position of the sun. Eurocentric view fails to acknowledge this and instead view these practices as rudimentary and uncivilized. This is due to false knowledge that they have about Africa and Africans.

The moon is another celestial body which serves a great purpose in Africa yet Eurocentric world view does not recognize it. In most cases, the moon detects seasons for certain activities in Africa. In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, is the timekeeper and the new moon indicates the time for the New Yam festival. However, Ezeulu cannot eat the yam and pronounce different season because he has not completed the twelve yams that he is supposed to eat all together.

The sky too serves an important purpose in African belief systems. Many myths have been formulated to talk about the sky. Some hold that the sky was once on earth and it was pushed up by a woman pounding cocoyams. Another one holds that the sky was designed to show the fate of greedy animals like the tortoise in tales. These tales form an indisputably rich African cultural background which cannot be underestimated in any way.

The Earth and Allied Worlds

The earth is the fundamental location for African spirituality. Since they don't believe in paradise or hell after death, they consider the earth as the basis for their spirituality. Their religion is earth-oriented unlike Western religion which is sky-oriented. In Africa we offer sacrifices to ancestors on earth. We believe that the ancestors are underneath the earth and that they will absorb the sacrifices underneath the earth.

Furthermore, Africans believe that all the components of the earth are inhabited by spirits. Animists hold the view that there are spirits all over the earth, be it in the sea, trees, caves, river banks or any similar places. On earth, there are herbalists who constitute part of the chain of African spirituality. They link the common man with other components of the spirits like the ancestors and gods. In a sense, the earth inhabits the living, the death and the unborn. When one reads John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo*, one gathers the impression that herbalists who inhabit the earth have a great role to play in order to rescue human beings from all forms of attack. In the novel, it is thanks to Aloh-Mbong, the Prince of Concealed Secrets that Ngwe is brought back from unconsciousness to life. We are told that:

> He [Aloh-Mbong] wondered in the great ponds of Lebialem, entered the caves of Mbruohngwi and Sehwart, combed the hills and valleys and every crack on the body

> earth, and challenged the evil spirits and wizards from the underworld to a combat. No one dared to challenge him, so he reappeared at the shrine to meet his visitors (4).

From this excerpt, it is clear that all activities are happening on mother earth. Even spirits are said to be underworld which is a clear indication that Africans believe that every aspect of spirituality is beneath and/or on earth.

Eurocentric worldview sees these things as evil practices. They attribute the belief in many gods to it. They fail to acknowledge that their concept of Trinitarian Monotheism is equally the belief in many gods. With this concept they believe that there are three persons in one God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The Concept of Abiku

Abiku is a Yoruba word that can be translated as "predestined to death". Therefore, an abiku child comes to the world to die and be reborn and the process continues. It is believed that abiku plummet the fortune of their parents and their great joy is to see their mother cry when they die. According to the Yoruba belief, they make a certain pledge concerning their life duration with their mates in the spirit world. At the expiration of the time, they die and reunite with their mates. It is also believed in some traditions that the abiku child is married in the spiritual world and some even have children. This is why some of them find it difficult to bear children in the physical world. In the Igbo community, they are called *Obanje*. Among the Bangwas of Cameroon, an abiku is called *Molabia* which is translated as "child of two worlds.

J.P. Clark presents the toils, anguish and frustrations of having an abiku in his poem titled "Abiku". Here, the parents cry that the abiku should permanently decide the world of his choice. The spirit-child should choose either the world of the spirits or that of the living. The

complexities of choosing make readers doubt if it is morally just for such children to live. These children of two worlds are presented in the two novels under study with similar behaviours. They include Bukola in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Azaro and his friend, Ade, in *The Famished Road*. Being a spirit child, Bukola is Mr(s) B's daughter. Wole wonders how they (especially Mrs. B) cope with her:

> Her only daughter, Bukola, was not of our world. When we threw our voices against the school walls of Lower Parsonage and listened to them echo from a long distance, it seemed to me that Bukola was one of the denizens of that other world where the voice was caught, sieved, re-spun and cast back in diminishing copies. Amulets, bangles, tiny rattles and dark copper-twist rings earthed her through ankles, fingers, wrists and waist. She knew she was abiku (Soyinka 15_16).

As an abiku, her ways are completely different from the ways of other children. She is always looking for ways to leave the physical world and reunite with her spirit companions in the world beyond. Looking at her, Wole "wondered how Mrs. B coped with such a supernatural being who died, was re-born, died again and kept going and coming as often as she pleased" (16).

In *The Famished Road*, the story of abiku is not very different. Azaro is an abiku who fails to keep to the promises that he makes with his spirit companions. He is constantly being tormented by these companions yet with the help of his parents, he battles to live on. His spirit companions keep pursuing him but he never goes back to live with them forever. In every single attempt that he makes to go, his parents, with the help of an herbalist bring him back to life.

Ade is another abiku in *The Famished Road*. Unlike Azaro, he is ready to meet his companions in the spirit world. He recounts the number of times that he has lived:

> I see the image of two thousand years. I drank in its words. It took many centuries to grow in me. I see a great musician in a land across the seas. Nine hundred years ago. The musician was me. I see a priest, I see a ruler of gentle people. The priest was me, the ruler was me. I see a wicked warrior who killed many innocent people and who delighted in

> bloodshed. I was him. There was once a soldier stoned to death and fed to the crocodiles in Egypt. I was that soldier (Okri 478).

It follows that Ade has lived several times before. He tells us that "Coming and going, I have seen the world" (477). With the concept of abiku intertwining the two novels, it becomes indisputable that it is part of African ontology. Africans believe in it and they respect abiku children. The bodies of such children used to be mutilated in order to identify them when they come back after death. Western religions have overshadowed some of these beliefs and Africans are gradually ignoring their belief systems.

The Concept of Morality

According to Van Der Walt in "Morality in Africa: Yesterday and Today. The Reason for the Contemporary Crisis", traditional African morality can be described in the following terms: (1) communalistic; (2) humanistic or anthropocentric; (3) pragmatic and utilitarian; (4) tribalistic; (5) shame-oriented and (6) this-worldly. It is made up of rules, norms and values that guide the conduct of the African people and the attitudes and responses of the people to such rules, norms and values.

Morality and African traditional religion are correlative values. This is because the fundamental values of African traditional religion stem from the ethical conceptions of the people. Again, both morality and traditional religion are concerned with the values of human life. Aden Husien and Olira Kebede argue in "The Conception of Morality in Indigenous African Culture" that "the moral beliefs and principles of the African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs" (60).

Unfortunately, the concept of African traditional morality has been completely misunderstood by Eurocentric critics. Aden Husien and Olira Kebede further postulate that:

> Many foreigners have erroneous misunderstanding of African morality. Some even tend to regard Africans as devoid of morality and moral consciousness. For instance they asserted that "Africans do not distinguish between good and evil... they are devoid of moral content or of universally accepted ethical norms" (Temple, 1952) (1).

Even though these Eurocentric views on African morality have had a great negative impact on the world of the academia, much positive impact has also been derived from it. It has given impetus to the rise of scholars like John Mbiti, Gyekye Kwame and Aden Husien who have taken the challenge to posit African worldview in the subject. Closely related to the concept of morality is the concept of evil.

The Concept of Evil

Different classes of people in the society such as laymen, social scientists, journalists, and politicians have ventured into questioning the alarming rate of increase in the practice of evil in the world today. According to these people, all atrocities and horrors such as genocides, rapes, theft, mass murders, political fraud, massive kidnapping, earthquakes, mountain eruptions and floods constitute the indisputable actions and happenings which can be considered as evil. Their interests in the subject, and their ascriptions to it, have motivated the intellectual world such as moral, political and legal philosophers to gain interest in the concept of evil.

For clarity and for the purpose of this dissertation, we shall indicate that Western studies classify two concepts of evil: a narrow concept and a broad concept. The narrow concept picks out only the most morally despicable sorts of actions, characters and events. It follows that evil in this sense applies only to moral agents and their actions since it involves only moral condemnation. If

only human beings are moral agents, then only human beings can perform evil according to this narrow concept. Thus evil in this sense is more often meant when the term evil is used in contemporary moral, political and legal contexts.

With regards to the broad concept, every state of affairs, every wrongful action or character flaw such as a severe headache, earthquake, fire outbreak, greed, anger, theft and lies telling constitute the indisputable core of evil in the society. There are two categories of evil in this domain. One is physical evil which is based on the state of those that do not result from the intensions or negligence of moral agents such as earthquakes, floods and headaches, while the other is moral evil which results from the intensions or negligence of moral agents such as abortion and rape. Theologians focus much of their energy and attention on evil in the broad sense. In this work we disqualify the broad concept of evil because it is not built on the African belief systems. In other words, Africans do not believe in natural occurrences. Everything in Africa which seems natural has a spiritual backing. The broad concept of evil does not recognize that some of the so-called natural occurrences which are classified as physical evil are actually a way of life of the African people.

A cursory glance at the concept of evil reveals that there are certain key issues worth mentioning when discussing the concept. In the subsequent discussions, these key issues will be looked into. To begin with, evil is part of Life's Duality. According to this, evil is part of life. No one brought evil into the world. It is simply impossible for there to be good without evil. How can there be good without its opposite? How can there be a coin with just one side? It is simply impossible. In this case therefore, the way to handle evil is to accept it the way we embrace good. In fact, good is not necessarily better than evil, it is just more comfortable.

Moreover, evil is different from misfortune. Westerners often confuse between evil and misfortune and as such, they use the words interchangeably. This is why they fall into the trap of relating some natural occurrences to evil without considering that in some societies such occurrences are explainable based on culture. Misfortune occurs when a tree falls on your house. It is not anybody's fault, unless you consider that you should have built your house somewhere else. The former is misfortune while the latter is evil.

Also, evil is somehow a part of Western God's plan. According to Western religious beliefs, man was allowed to sin because God gave him free choices and he chose evil. In order to show the other angels the consequences of evil, God is allowing an experiment to happen for a short time on earth that will prove once and for all what happens when free beings choose evil.

If created beings are free to choose evil, then the entity of evil must exist. It was only God who knew about it, but neither the angels nor humans knew, and yet He allowed man the choice to choose. Man and angels were innocent. The mere fact that they were innocent, that they did not know evil existed, however, does not deny its reality. If evil existed at all, even if God was the only one who knew about it, how did it get there? And why is it so important for God to go to such elaborate length to show its danger? Why did God not just close the door of evil and throw away the key? Again, is evil so big that God cannot destroy it?

In addition, God is infinitely good and ultimately powerful. A good and powerful God like that will not allow evil to happen if it is not His plan. He will just crush it and terminate its existence. But since He has not crushed it and terminated its existence, it becomes evident that its existence is part of His plan.

Evil-Skepticism

Evil-skepticism is the habitual doubt or questioning of the reasons why we need to treat the subject of evil. Many critics like Immanuel Kant, St. Augustine, Jean Paul Sartre, Inga Clendinnen and Philip Cole have argued that evil is inexplicable. To them, any attempt to explain evil signals a failure to understand the nature of evil. According to St Augustine in Philip Kheng Hong Djung's article titled "Augustine's Account of Evil as Privation of Good", evil is non-being: a lack of goodness, rather than a positive substance or quality. Going by this view, there is nothing real that stands in need of explanation. Thus, we simply have to ignore the concept of evil.

Another philosopher who is not still convinced why we should treat the concept of evil is Immanuel Kant as indicated in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. His philosophy echoes Augustine's in some respects. According to him, it is inappropriate to seek the causes of evil because to do so implies that it belongs to the order of nature that is subject to laws of cause and effect. By implication, if we keep tracing the cause and effect relationship of evil, we will get to the ultimate cause who is God. This is in line with the law of cause and effect relationship. Kant seems to stop critics from venturing into the quest for the origin of evil simply because he wants to support the infinite goodness of God and then remove Him from the scene of evil.

According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Jean Paul Sartre also falls in the category of evil-skeptics. According to him, it is "bad faith" to rationalize or explain our actions since this amounts to a denial of our freedom and an evasion of responsibility. Why should we embark on the discussion of evil when we know that at the end we will not accept our responsibility as the people responsible for evil in the world? Hence, it is worthless talking about the concept of evil.

Also, science does not find the concept of evil useful since it cannot be explained scientifically. From a scientific perspective, the difficulty of explaining evil leads to doubts about the usefulness of the concept. This is why some critics even attempt to replace the term evil with different terms. Simon Baron-Cohen, author of *Zero Degrees of Empathy*, for example, wants to replace the term with empathy erosion or empathy deficiency. Unlike evil which has no means of measurement, empathy can be measured by psychiatrists and neuroscientists.

Therefore, evil-skeptics find it difficult to value the concept of evil like any other concept. The concept basically lacks sufficient explanatory power. Their arguments have led to the emergence of another school of thought known as evil-revivalism which holds a contrary view on the subject of evil.

Evil-Revivalism

The arguments of evil-skeptics have not gone undisputed upon. Evil-revivalists have emerged to defend the concept of evil as they hold that we have to spend more time to dwell on it so as to reduce the rate of evil in the world. They believe that the concept of evil has a place in our moral and political thinking and discourse. On this view, the concept of evil should be revived, not abandoned.

Evil-revivalists argue that the concept of evil needs not make reference to supernatural spirits, dark forces, or monsters. There is a secular moral concept of evil which is distinct from fictional or religious conceptions and it is this secular conception of evil that meant most often when the term evil is used in moral and political contexts. In a sense, evil-revivalists seek to offer plausible analyses of evil which do not make reference to supernatural spirits, dark forces, or monsters, but which fully capture secular uses of the term evil. They believe that if they are able to offer

plausible analyses of evil which do not make reference to the supernatural, they will have successfully defended the concept of evil from the evil-skeptical objection that ascriptions of evil necessarily imply unwarranted metaphysical commitment.

Contrary to evil-skeptics who argue that the concept of evil is explanatorily useless, evil-revivalists argue that, firstly, the concept of evil might be worth keeping for descriptive or prescriptive purposes even if it is not explanatorily useful. Secondly, they argue that evil is no less explanatorily useful than other moral concepts such as good, bad, right, and wrong. Thus, if we should abandon the concept of evil, we should abandon these other moral concepts as well. Again, some evil-revivalists like Eve Garrard and Luke Rushell point out that even if the concept of evil cannot provide a complete explanation for the performance of an action, it can provide a partial explanation. For example, Garrard argues that evil actions result from a particular kind of motivation. Call this an "E" motivation. Thus, to say that an action is evil is to say that it has resulted from an "E" motivation. This explains partially why the action was performed.

Furthermore, many schools of thought like evil-skeptics believe that the concept of evil is dangerous. Evil-revivalists believe that because it is dangerous, more literary and philosophical work needs to be done on it to clear up ambiguities and reduce the likelihood of abuse or misuse. Claudia Card argues that it is more dangerous to ignore evil than to try to understand it. For, if we do not understand evil, we will be ill-equipped to root out its sources, and thus, we will be unable to prevent evils from occurring in the future. It is only when you understand something well that you can begin to seek means to prevent it. We cannot prevent an earthquake if we do not understand what it is and how it occurs.

In the nutshell, the misfortune that evil comes along with cannot be permitted to continue happening. Therefore, we need to fully understand how it happens so that we can prevent it. The most effective way of doing this is by understanding the nature of evil, and not abandoning the concept. The concept may lack explanatory power but it is necessary if we want to fully understand certain actions of human beings. We will not know how to prevent evil if we do not fully understand it.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF EUROCENTRIC PERCEPTIONS OF EVIL

Since Westerners mostly view evil in the broad sense, they perceive some occurrences in Africa as evil without taking into consideration the belief systems of the people. They consider natural occurrences as evil but fail to realize that Africans do not believe in natural occurrences. In Shadrach Ambanasom's *Son of the Native Soil* for example, the storm on the eve of Achamba's death is not regarded as a natural storm. It is seen as an omen by the people and finally it really is an omen. In the Eurocentric perspective, every natural occurrence which brings about damages and which does not result from direct human action is viewed as "physical evil". In other words, "physical evil" does not stem from direct human activities. It seemingly appears to occur in accordance to nature. This is contrary to African beliefs. According to a spirit in *The Famished Road*, the so-called physical evil results from the stubbornness of the people. The spirit tells Azaro that:

> The road is their soul, the soul of their history. That is why when they have built a long section of it, or forgotten the words of their prophet and begun to think they have completed it, landquakes happen, lightning strikes, invisible volcanoes erupt, rivers descend on them, hurricanes tear up their earth, the road goes mad and twists and destroys itself, or the people become distorted in spirit and start to turn the road into other things, or the workers go insane, the people start wars, revolts cripple everything and a thousand things distract them and wreck what they have built and a new generation comes along and begins again from the wreckage (Okri 329-330).

In *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and *The Famished Road* natural occurrences take the following forms: starvation and famine, accident, fire outbreak, poverty, social illness, flood, collapse of buildings and earthquakes. In the subsequent analysis, we shall focus on the discussion of these forms of occurrences in the two texts under study which Westerners who do not have sufficient knowledge of African cosmology see as evil.

Famine and Starvation

Famine occurs when there is severe shortage of food and this usually leads to starvation. Even though it is not caused by direct human action in the physical realm, it is considered absolutely bad and classified by worldview under evil. The evil in famine increases when it leads to starvation and death. Famine and starvation take a central position in *The Famished Road*. From the title of the novel, we are much convinced that famine must be a great theme in it. The title refers to the myth that Azaro's father tells him about the "King of the Road" who was always famished. What had happened was that the King of the Road had become part of all the roads in this world. Thus, it ate every food that was brought to it and the people who brought the food until finally it had to eat itself because of hunger. Although this story appears in the novel as a myth, it goes beyond being a simple myth to be a direct representation of gullible people who want all of everything. The implication of wanting everything is that one day you will not have the means to get it and you will be forced to do yourself harm in order to be satisfied.

To starve, however, does not only mean that you are gullible. It does not only also mean that you failed to plan. Sometimes we plan but our plans do not go as we planned and we find ourselves starving because there is no immediate available means to quench the hunger. This is the case

with the photographer in the novel. He starves because people who take pictures fail to pay him. Azaro says:

> One day I saw him [photographer] looking hungry and miserable and when I asked him what was wrong he snarled at me, snatched up the tripods of his camera and, screaming that no one ever paid for their photographs, pursued me down the street. He was quit fierce that day. His hunger and bitterness made him ugly, and I avoided him for a while (Okri 142).

We see that his hunger results from failures beyond his control. Through hunger he is depicted as an angry man. As the old adage goes, a hungry man is an angry man. Hunger can lead humans to do mischievous acts. This is also the case with Dad when he returns from work very hungry and bitter. He "pounced on her [Mum] and grabbed her neck and pressed her face against the mattress. Mum didn't resist or fight back and Dad pushed her head sideways, towering over her so I couldn't see her face, and then went back to his chair" (OKri172). It is ironical that Dad directs his power to suppress a woman whom he calls his wife. He is clearly defined by what he says earlier in the novel that "The only power poor people have is their hunger" (Okri 70). Finally we can say that famine and starvation most often only lead to much negativity in the society.

In most African societies, famine occurs either as a warning to something which is yet to come or as an aftermath when the cosmic order is disrupted. This is exactly what happens in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. The people of Abazon are in serious famine and starvation because they have been abandoned by the state. This famine forces them to visit their president, Sam, who must do something about their situation. In a sense, the natural occurrence occurs to stir the people to fight against the regime which does not bother about the people's severe conditions. In this way, it should not be termed evil because it is for the betterment of the people.

Collapse of Buildings and Fire Outbreak

Although the collapse of buildings and fire outbreaks may come with disastrous consequences, they are never an end to themselves. They mostly occur as retaliation to some disruptions in the order of the universe. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Rev. J.J. fails to respect the day set aside for the outing of the *egugun* spirit. As a sign of punishment for this calamity, the building of his church collapses. This is in no way evil as Western critics view it. It is an occurrence to call Rev. J.J. to order so that he will never disrupt the cosmic order again.

Nevertheless, some occurrences may seem so natural that we need to make a series of successive cause and effect relationship between we get the real cause. For example, heavy rainfall leads to the collapse of some parts in the family house of Wole. He says:

> The flimsier structures of Aké, built of unbaked mud could not stand up to the rains of July and August. The corrugated iron sheets were penetrated by the wind which ripped them off, flung them over other roofs, leaving the rain to find the weakest point in the walls, dissolve the mud and flush out the household. But sometimes the rain acted first; it found the crack in the thin cement coating, soaked it to its foundation, then the house collapsed on its inmates (Soyinka 98).

The house of the Landlord also collapses in *The Famished Road* although it is not as a result of rain but the cause is unknown. It is not appealing to human's sense of goodness for a house to collapse. When it collapses, it renders people homeless and in some cases, people even die in the process.

Similarly, fire outbreak is classified under this category. Mankind has witnessed many instances of fire outbreak in societies and the effects have been so scary. Many a person has been burnt in fire, many businesses have been shattered by fire and many other elements of nature have suffered the many effects of fire disaster. As a spirit child in *The Famished Road*, Azaro is able

to visualize a disastrous combustion before it happens. He runs out of the house, his parents follow him up but as they return, they "discovered that the compound was burning" (9). Moreover, the Police Officer's house burns and Azaro sees spirits in it. All these burnings have a message to pass across. The former reveals the intuitive intelligence of Azaro while the later reveals the bad deeds of the Police Officer. Why then should they be called evil?

Accidents and Floods

Accidents are unexpected events with negative consequences occurring without the intention of the one suffering the consequences. As a matter of fact, the person who suffers the consequences of accidents never plans to suffer. During the Canon's child birthday party in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Wole unintentionally wounds his head. Again, Wole runs into the cutlass of one senior student when they play while other students work. These are not planned acts. They just occur to put the concerned character in order. In *The Famished Road*, Madame Koto's car has an accident. According to the story, the driver gets drunk and as there is hullabaloo during Dad's party:

> Panic showed on the driver's face as he seemed to wake up suddenly, and in his awakening he lost control. People fled, disorientated by the yellow birds. In the arc of the lights I saw the forms of people leaping into the air, leaping, some of them, into invisibility; leaping, others, into new forms. Finally, the car cut through the crowd, and knocked Ade and one of the beggars sideways. Then the car smashed into the cement platform, into the wall of the compound, and its lights went off (Okri 421).

In a typical African society, this is never natural. This is why the masses in the community of the text sometimes view Madame Koto as someone who has been using foul means to gather her wealth. This accident could be one of such foul means in the belief system of Africans.

In the same line of Western misconception, flood is viewed as physical evil. In many environments, there is usually an overflow of water from lakes and other bodies of water due to excessive rainfall or other inputs of water. The consequences are always disastrous and include death, migration and many more. In *The Famished Road*, there is heavy rainfall and flood which leads to the drowning of the white man. As it rains:

> The white man stood there with his foot on the log. He wore a thick yellow raincoat and black boots. He was looking through a pair of binoculars at something on the other side of the pit. Suddenly the path turned into a ditch. The earth moved. Floodwaters from the forest pored underneath us. I clung to a stump. The white man Cher shouted, his binoculars flew into the pit, and I saw him slide away from view. He slid down slowly into the pit, as a stream of water washed him away. The log moved. The earth gave way in clumps and covered him as he disappeared (Okri 288).

Hence, flood leads to the death of the white man who has been a nuisance in the black community. He has expropriated native lands and subjected them to hard manual labour. Flood is rampant in many societies. On the 21st of August 2020, there was heavy flood in many quarters in Douala, Cameroon such as Bepanda Safari, Akwa, New Bell, Nkololoun, Bongo Cite Berge, Makape Missoke, Carriere de tete, Bepanda Bongo, and Bonamoussadi. This rendered many people homeless and equally slowed down business activities in the affected areas. This is not the result of direct human action but it is never natural. It may happen sometimes because the gods are angry with humans. In this sense they exercise their wrath through floods.

Poverty and Social Illness (Epidemic and Pandemic)

Poverty is one of the greatest cankerworms eating up most societies. It has the tendency of commanding disrespect for the poor involved. As if that is not enough, poverty leads to the classification of the society where the rich counterparts turn to be on top and possess absolute power. Even in most societies which are called democratic societies, the poor do not have a voice

or even if they are given a voice, inferiority complex exposes them. Poverty may stem from the ignorance of human beings and the limitation of human knowledge.

In *The Famished Road*, poverty is like an epidemic. It affects a great number of people in the unknown setting of the novel which is typical of a West African society. The society in the novel is stratified into the poor and the rich, political parties are streamlined between the rich and the poor, and the rich like the Landlord use their wealth to threaten and influence the poor. The poor turn to begging for survival but it does not get better. The family of Azaro gets so poor that they cannot even afford a candle. They stay in darkness. "It was dark. Children played in the passage. Inside, we had no light because we couldn't afford a candle" (Okri 78). Until we get rid of this poverty, mankind cannot live a life of abundance and freedom. Edward E. Beals argues in *How to Attract Money: The Law of Financial Success* that there is no joy in poverty and that money means freedom, independence, liberty, and the ability to do great good, as well as great evil. It follows that with riches, we can avoid bad deeds, or at least reduce its rate in the society. Without it we will suffer from evil. We will be affected by evil such as epidemics and pandemics.

On the one hand, an epidemic is a widespread disease that affects many individuals in a population such as the cholera outbreak in Cameroon in 2018. On the other hand, a pandemic is an epidemic over a wide geographical area and affecting a large proportion of the population such as the Corona Virus which is currently affecting the whole world. Following the distribution of spoiled milk by politicians, everyone in the society in *The Famished Road* begins to cough and vomit. Again, as people drink in Madame Koto's bar, a woman sneezes and everyone begins to sneeze too. Azaro narrates that:

> Then I began sneezing. Dad hit me on the head. Another of the women took up the sneezing. Dad joined in. We sneezed for such a long time and with such intensity that it seemed we would lose our heads altogether. The woman who began it sprayed her mucus everywhere and sneezed out the last lamp (Okri 298-299).

These are all epidemics hitting the world of the text. The real world has witnessed plenty of such sicknesses. The most recent which is still current is the Covid19 pandemic and it has brought about more than 23 million confirmed cases and more than 800,000 deaths. This is a result of the anger of the gods. They need to be appeased and sacrifices need to be offered.

AFRICAN SENSE OF EVIL IN THE TWO NOVELS UNDER STUDY

The discussion above has debunked Eurocentric perceptions of evil in Africa. Now, this section seeks to discuss what is really evil in the African worldview with respect to the two novels under study. In this sense, the chapter will discuss evil in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and *The Famished Road*. It is worth noting that the fact that Westerners view natural occurrences in Africa as evil is evil in itself. This is because it is against the belief systems of the people. Thus, the natural occurrences have a cultural interpretation and so should not be called evil. What Africans view as evil are the following:

Theft and Lies-Telling

Theft is indisputably a human act which is highly prohibited in many societies. It has the tendency of bringing fear and terror in the society, while also putting the life of the thief in danger. Inasmuch as human dignity is concerned, it is denigrating for anyone to get involved in stealing. In the two novels under study, we may quickly visualize only what can be called "petit theft". This is minor theft in contrary to grand theft. Instances of this petit theft are many in the two novels.

In *Aké: The Years of Childhood* for example, Wole finds himself stealing many things which are against the moral precepts of life. He steals his younger brother's Lactogen. He tells us that:

> After Dipo [his younger brother] was weaned and had begun to eat solids, the big tin of Lactogen lay in a corner of the pantry, forgotten. I had developed a passion for the powdered delicacy, it seemed the most exquisite taste in the world, soft, melty, light on the tongue. It was not merely a question of stealing a handful at a time; I had appropriated the entire tin which nobody remembered, secreted it among other bric-a-brac in the pantry. From where it emerged from time to time to sacrifice my craving. (Soyinka 90)

Wole appears to be so greedy in this act by not only stealing a bit of the Lactogen, but stealing the whole tin. Whatever be the case, it is ethically wrong to venture into stealing. Once one begins to steal, the anxiety to steal only keeps increasing. Besides Wole, there are other characters in the novel who steal as well. An example is the case of the three students who steal a fowl, roast it and claim that they were doing an experiment before the fowl ran into the fire.

In *The Famished Road*, this petit theft also plays a part in plot development. The case at hand is the stealing operation done by beggars during the celebration at Madame Koto's bar. Azaro tells us that:

> The beautiful beggar girl, sitting under a table watched me as I went up and down [in search for Madame Koto]. I was about to ask her a question when she mentioned me to be quiet. She pointed. I followed her finger with my gaze and saw that the beggars were carrying out a complicated stealing operation. They grabbed fruits and fried meat and bowls of stew and plates of rice from the tables and passed them on in a relay of hands. The food disappeared beneath the tent. Helen was their watch-woman (Okri 462).

Basically, these beggars belong to the Party of the Poor and they find it very difficult to survive in a society where there is food only for people who support a particular party. Survival becomes a struggle for them and they must do whatever it takes to survive despite the moral implications. This set of beggars is chastised and alienated. They are humiliated and starved. Most importantly

however, they must survive. Azaro even steals food from their house and gives them because he cares. He says "I took to stealing food from the house for them" (Okri 492).

Petit theft, however, is just a springboard for grand theft. In African societies, there is grand theft all over. The local population steals as well as the political rulers. Recently (Friday 21st August 2020), there was daylight robbery at Mitanyen Cooperative Credit Union in Bamenda, Cameroon. This operation was carried out by unidentified gunmen. This is an instance of grand theft. Similarly, politicians and colonizers/neo-colonizers keep stealing and looting our sources. They steal our manpower, steal our brains, steal our money and rape our societies of their mineral resources and forest reserves. These have rendered most African societies poor and helpless. Thus, theft becomes a cankerworm eating up most societies. This is evil and most people who engage in it always deny it. This leads to lies-telling.

When human beings carry out actions which they know are not worth carrying out, they turn to lie to defend themselves. In a similar way, when they fail to do what is expected of them, they may also lie to defend themselves. Lies-telling, like theft, is against the moral principles that ought to be cultivated for the positive development of humans. One great disadvantage of telling lies is that the liar will constantly have to remember their lies so that they do not say a different thing when they are required to talk again.

Both Soyinka and Okri satirize the act of lies-telling. They view it as one of the greatest moral decadences of human beings. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Wole constantly lies especially when he carries out unwanted acts like stealing. In *The Famished Road*, politicians constantly lie to win the attention and support of the masses. One of the greatest lies is piloted by members of the Party of the Rich. They distribute spoiled milk and when they are later accused for the act,

they insist that "it was their rivals, the Party of the Poor, who had been impersonating them, pretending to be them" (Okri 152). They say "THEY WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MILK, NOT US. THEY WANT TO DISCREDIT US" (152). We actually know that they did the act because they were with the Landlord who is a strong member of their party. Still in this political lie, the thugs of the Party of the Rich beat a man in Madame Koto's bar to unconsciousness because he does not support their party. After beating him, they completely change the story and put the man at fault. Azaro tells us that:

> The two thugs, switching methods to suit the mood of the crowd, said that the man was a vicious creature who had beaten his wife unconsciously and abandoned his three children. They were starving and his wife had been in hospital for seven days. His wife, they said, was their sister (Okri 218).

Lying in the domain of politics as seen above is very rampant in African societies. The reconstruction of Africa cannot hold in the presence of such lies. The lies begin from individuals in the society before growing up to cover the society at large. In the novel, individuals like Azaro lie. Azaro lies to his father about the money that Madame Koto gives him. He tells his father that he picked the money and no matter how his father insists that he should tell him the truth, he says "I went on lying" (Okri 372). Thus, in order to build Africa, we must stop the lie. We need to examine ourselves from the level of individuals and change ourselves so that we can attract change in the society at large.

Instigation of violence and Greed

The world is full of chaotic activities which have led to the destruction of many lives. There is fighting everywhere, there is conflict and instability in all human activities. This has contributed greatly to the inability of humans to live in harmony. This violence in societies is in no way lesser than any other moral evil in the society. This is why Soyinka and Okri have spent a great

amount of their time to criticize it. For example, in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Wole's elder sister, Nubi, Wole's mother and Joseph instigate his kid brother, Dipo, to fight him. As Wole stands absent-mindedly, Dipo starts a fight. Wole says:

> Cheers rang out from all sides while I stood limply, patronizingly amused by his antics. He was like a gnome, so frisky and so full of joy at being alive and among attentive grown-ups. But then, with no warning at all, only the sound of Joseph's "Come on Dipo, show him," this compact little creature launched himself at me, fist flying. I was borne backwards by the sheer weight of the charge and could no longer separate the different causes of the ringing in my ears (Soyinka 103).

Wole only finds himself very stupid that he retaliates to this humiliation from his own brother instead of letting it go. In essence, it is unethical to promote any violence of any kind in the society. Violence only begets violence and it rarely solves problems.

Still in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, there is an evening contest where a Doctor Magician intends to demonstrate his magic. Unfortunately, an armed volunteer tries to test the magic and everything ends in violence. Wole tells us that the magician acknowledges the fact that he has been in a severe contest with the volunteer but suddenly:

> He dived on the sleeping figure [volunteer], pulled up his dansiki. Sure enough, around his waist was a leather thong of amulets. This he ripped off and held out to the audience; we understood this to be the Doctors explanation of the man's prolonged resistance. His next motion was the most terrifying moment of the entire evening. He pounced on the long sword with which he had sliced his assistant in half and, raising it, darted towards the couch with an intend that no one could mistake. Some of the audience fled, others covered their eyes and screamed. I was merely open-mouthed in horror, unable to belief that an evening's entertainment of magic could be about to end in such a violent manner (Soyinka 151).

Here, we see the negative implications that violence brings. It brings fear and panic in the society. This is evil. It is against the moral principles of humans. Violence is so rampant in *The Famished Road*. It covers a great part of the plot of the novel. As a matter of fact, all the battles that Black Tyger engages in constitute violence in the novel. He fights great boxers and spirits. His survival

turns to depend on his ability to fight and defeat his opponents. Besides Black Tyger's fights, there are other violence like the one caused by the police when the Landlords house gets burned and he seeks police intervention, the one between political thugs and the masses after the distribution of spoiled milk to masses and sudden return with garri, and also the one which erupts when the political thugs of the Party of the Rich try to prevent the Carpenter from entering into Madame Kotos bar. All these violence constitute acts committed by humans which still work against humans. It is simply evil.

In another dimension, human beings do evil by desiring material things more than they need. This is greed. Greed is one of the seven deadly sins. It is evil in itself. It cuts across the two novels under study. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, an instance of greed occurs when Wole's friend, Osiki leaves Wole after school, goes home and eats Wole's food. Wole tells us that Osiki loses patience in waiting for him after school as he wanders around.

> Finally, Osiki lost patience. He would usually wait for me at home even while Tinu had her own food. On this day however, being perhaps more hungry than usual, Osiki decided not to wait. Afterwards he tried to explain that he had only meant to eat half of the food but had been unable to stop himself (Soyinka 26).

The food here is a symbolic representation of power. The greedy nature of Osiki is directly similar to the greedy nature of some people when they are in possession of power. They use it in their own advantage without bothering about the other people. Similarly, some people consume national wealth without caring about the wellbeing of others. This is exponential evil. Even Wole too is greedy. He eats his akara and ventures into eating Essay's own before Wild Christian gives him a blow. He tells us that "the blow could easily have been for eating that crumb of akara which, for her, could have meant GREED and would call for something more than a blow to the head" (Soyinka 58).

Okri also debunks this evil called greed in his own novel. He debunks the whites who seize native lands greedily. According to him, "they took our lands, burned our gods, and they carried away many of our people to become slaves across the sea" (282). The continuous dwelling of greed in the two novels under study indicates that greed is no lesser evil compared to other bad moral conducts.

Envy, Jealousy and Gossips

In a society where people focus on other people's achievements instead of their own, there is bound to be envy, jealousy and gossip. The people envy the achievements of others and then get jealous about such achievements. This leads to gossip. One thing about these things is that, there are mostly done by poor and unsuccessful people. These have been demonstrated by Soyinka and Okri in their respective novels.

In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Wole's grandfather views envy as one of the predominant evil forces in the world. Moreover, he sees this force everywhere. He says:

> Human beings are what they are. Some are good, some are evil. Others turn to evil simply because they are desperate. Envy, hm, you mustn't make the mistake of thinking that envy is not a powerful force for the action of many men. It is a disease you will find everywhere, yes everywhere (Soyinka 143).

From this quote, it is clear that envy is evil and it is what is killing many people. This envy usually leads to jealousy and gossips. The case at hand is the success story of Madame Koto in *The Famished Road*. People envy her, jealous her and gossip about her. We are told that:

> Rumours, always stale, began to circulate that she had joined the most terrifying cults in the land, that she had been accepted in organizations that usually never allowed women, that she performed rituals in the forest ... people came to believe that Madame Koto had exceeded her witchcraft. The people glared at her hatefully when she went past. They said she wore the hair of animals and human beings on her head. The rumours got so wild

> that it was hinted that her cult made sacrifices of human blood to lengthen her life and that she was more than a hundred years old (Okri 374).

All these things are said about her because of her success. It is very recurrent in some African societies. Some people do not believe in the reward of hard work and smart work. They believe that overwhelming success results from some sort of spirituality: dependency on God/gods. This is why when a person becomes very successful, he/she is said to have been favoured by a spiritual being. This mindset has to be deconstructed and reshaped as on the contrary, success results from different factors such as hard work, smart work, perseverance, consistency and endurance. People who do not see success as a result of these factors turn to gossip all over. As they keep gossiping, people with a success mindset keep succeeding. This is why Azaro says "In spite of what people said, however, she [Madame Koto] prospered, while the rest of us suffered" (Okri 374).

Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination are all evil which have destroyed many societies and human beings alike. The history of racism is very painful to think of, especially for the black race. The black race has undergone severe suffering from the white race simply because of the race issue. This issue is brought into *Aké: The Years of Childhood*. The chiefs of Egbaland join the struggle of the women to say "the white man was to leave the precincts of the palace immediately as his very presence was an abomination not merely to the women but to the palace which belonged to the people of Egbaland" (Soyinka 212). In addition, Mrs. Kuti who is one of the leading women in the struggle tells Wole that:

> The white man is a racist... You know your history of the slave trade . . . to him the black man is only a beast of burden, a work-donkey. As for Asians and that includes the Indians, Japanese, Chinese and so on, they are only a small grade above us. So, dropping that

> terrible weapon, experimenting with such horrifying thing [bomb] on human beings as long as they are not white-for them is the same as experimenting on cattle (Soyinka 227).

Here, there is gross racism as any race which is not white is considered subhuman. The whites feel free to test their weapons on any other race apart from white because they believe that their race is the most superior and any other race is inferior. This boils down to Edward Said's postcolonial concept of Orientalism where the West is the "self" while the East is the "others."

One thing which most people fail to acknowledge is the fact that this discrimination is not only across race borders. Even among people with the same race, there is discrimination. This is very clear if we take into consideration what happens to different political parties in *The Famished Road*. There is discrimination everywhere among the parties. In the market for example, people who belong to a particular party have places to sell their commodities while people in the opposition party are chased away. The party thugs of the Party of the Rich say "if you don't belong to our party you don't belong to this space in the market" (Okri 168). This demonstrates that discrimination is everywhere.

Exploitation and Mismanagement

Exploitation and mismanagement have become very rampant in our present day societies. They constitute a great potion of the evil in the world nowadays. People exploit and mismanage scarce resources. This can be in the economic, political, social and cultural domains. The greatest exploitation in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* is the exploitation of women through taxes. However, the women say no to the taxes as they rebel. In *The Famished Road*, the white man is said to have exploited the natives by seizing their lands and taking the blacks for slavery.

> They forgot that we are all brothers and sisters and that black people are the ancestors of the human race. The second time they came they brought guns. They took our lands,

> burned our gods, and they carried away many of our people to become slaves across the see... They want to own the whole world and conquer the sun... They are misusing the powers God gave all of us (Okri 282).

Exploitation and mismanagement result from one group of people under-looking another. This is evil and it is supposed to be suppressed. The peak of mismanagement comes when Black Tyger is unable to organize and manage his finances. Each time he has money, he spends it all on drinks and goes broke again. Thus, the foundation of mismanagement of state funds begins with inability to manage personal finances. The authors under study look forward to creating a society which will be void of exploitation and mismanagement for the betterment of human beings.

Murder and Suicide Mission

Deliberate taking of other people's lives has become a recurrent evil in the society nowadays. Some people even go up the extent of killing themselves. These habits are bad and devilish in nature. For this reason, we see them as evil in the society. The killing could result from wars or any similar quarries in the society. Women always talk about the killings in *The Famished Road*. "They talked about their children or their husbands or about the forthcoming elections and about the thugs and the violence, the people of different parties killed in skirmishes deep in the country" (Okri 75). In another episode, Mum conceives suicide when she thinks that all hopes are gone and that she has suffered a lot in the world. She says: "This life is too much for me. I am going to hang myself one of these days" (Okri 477). This is the true nature of life and failure to face it the way it is only makes one to conceive evil ideas like the one Mum conceives. "Today will be tough", according to Jack Ma of Alibaba in one of his personal development speeches, "tomorrow will be tougher but the day after tomorrow will be great." If we do not persist to face these tough days, we will not be able to enjoy the good days ahead. Thus, the best way is to shun the evil thoughts of murder and suicide and keep working even when it gets tough.

Anger and Revenge

Most people show their dissatisfaction of the activities of this world through anger. In order to exercise this anger, they turn to revenge thereby doing double evil. This double evil never sums up to good deeds. This is why the results of doing it are always catastrophic. In *The Famished Road*, there are instances where Azaro appears to be quick-tempered. Firstly, he rushes for firewood to harm Madame Koto when she beats him. Secondly, he rushes for hammer when a man in the bar cracks him on the head. He says:

> One of the men in the bar got up, came over me, and cracked me on the head/ "you are mad" he said/ I spat at him, but it didn't travel very far/ "Look at this bad boy" he said, and cracked me a second time. I spat again. It landed on my shirt. Madame Koto came into the bar. The man slapped me with two thick fingers and I shouted and rushed for the hammer on the counter (Okri 240).

This act of always rushing for weapons to fight results from the moral decadence of the society. Nobody cares about the sanctity of human life because society has made it worthless. In a society where state binding forces like political thugs carry out demoralizing activities and go totally free, no one can respect the values which ought to be cultivated by the citizens. Everyone can exercise their anger the way they deem best. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, the revenge story is not different. Essay punishes Mr. Odejimi for the whole day because he plucks off a flower from his garden. The quest to repeal these evil activities is a necessity.

Black-legging and Political Threat

In a society where there is mutual distrust because of political scandals, there are always people who infiltrate both political arms. These people constitute those who are usually referred to as "black legs." Black legs are either for both political arms or neither for any political arm at all. They serve as spies for one another. Their activities come along with political threat. We see this

aspect of black-legging in the character trait of Wild Christian in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*. The women form a collective team to fight against all forms of taxes and tax collectors (Ogboni). Unfortunately, she betrays the struggle by helping one ogboni hide in her store when the struggle is getting rougher and the said ogboni is still wanting to go to the conflict scene. When she sees women coming for him, "She rushed out and dragged him into the shop, shut one half of the door on him and said, Quickly Baba. Remove your robes, remove all your ogboni gear" (Soyinka 214). This aspect of betraying the people's course is very eminent in most societies. This is usually done for self-interest and not for altruistic purposes.

Political threat surfaces when the masses and many other opposition members are forced to vote against their wishes. They are forced to vote for parties that they do not support. The Landlord in *The Famished Road* forces his tenants to vote for the Party of the Rich which is the party that he belongs to. He says:

> Anybody who wants to live in my house, under this roof that I built with my own hands, should vote for my party... And remember this: we have people at the polling station who will be watching you. We will know who you vote for. Whether you vote for our man or not we will win anyway. But if you don't vote for him there will be trouble. You might as well begin to look for another place now and see if you can get another landlord as good as me (Okri 198).

It is ironical that the Landlord thinks that he is good when he is hated by tenants for his ruthlessness.

This refusal of universal suffrage is evil which is eating up most African societies. The quest for freedom to vote is always the precedent and it always leads to clashes. In a sense, political threat results in conflict which is one of the evil that permeates the world. As continuation of political threat, Dad cries out that they were going to kill him "because I won't vote for them" (Okri 284).

It follows that it is not safe for people who are against the people who are in control of power (politicians). In summary, there is no democracy.

Drunkenness and Gambling

Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins (others are envy, greed, sloth, pride and wrath). Drunkenness is part of gluttony. It follows that drunkenness is a deadly sin too. Therefore it is evil to drink excessively. Gambling mostly results from sloth which is also a deadly sin. Hence, when one drinks excessively and also gambles around, that person is committing double mortal sins which constitute gross evil. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Uncle Dipo represents the gluttonous crew. He drinks, staggers and frightens the children. Wole tells us that he "went towards the pot, swayed, unbuttoned his fly and began to urinate in it" (Soyinka 122). This bad behavior resulting from excess alcohol has ruined many people in the society. The story is not very different in *The Famished Road*. Dad comes back home very drunk and he consistently talks to the chair. "You are looking at me, chair, he said you don't want me to sit on you, eh, because I fell in mud, isn't that correct? ... Now I'm going to sit on you, whether I'm covered in mud or even in gold, you hear? And if you move, I will beat you up" (Okri 94). Even though this brings humour, it is evil that he drinks excessively in the first place. The vision of the authors with respect to gambling and drunkenness is simply to create awareness which will go a long way to limit these vices.

To conclude, the aim of this chapter was to discuss aspects of African ontology and epistemology which have been misrepresented by Eurocentric critics and scholars. The chapter also set out to present what actually constitutes African ontology and epistemology. In this chapter, we have been able to discuss various aspects which constitute African ontology and

epistemology such as the spirit world, the world of celestial bodies, the earth and allied worlds, the concepts of abiku, morality, and evil. The chapter has ended with the contention that what Eurocentric critics view as evil in Africa is not really evil but it has a cultural interpretation which only people who understand African cultures can have true knowledge about. In the next chapter, our focus will be on man and African spirituality in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and *The Famished Road.*

CHAPTER THREE

MAN AND AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY IN THE TEXTS UNDER STUDY

Despite Western condemnation, African spirituality remains a rich spirituality in all areas. It is the collection of ways in which African culture and peoples relate to the spiritual. It has continued to survive within the scope of African continent and in the diaspora even though at a very low rate. The low rate is either as a result of fear, shame from its practitioners or colonial brainwash which has converted most Africans from their sense of Africanism. In spite of these, African spirituality simply remains a system of relating to the spirit world for strength, personal power, and healing. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the manifestation of African spirituality in the two novels under study. In view of this, we will discuss a cross section of areas that make up African spirituality like herbalism, spirits, rituals, witchcraft, exorcism, taboos, appeasement and the notion of the spirit child (Abiku).

Herbalists

In Africa, most sicknesses are believed to have been caused by something/someone beyond the physical. This encompasses relations among God, ancestors and the universe. The result is that a connector or intermediary is needed to link the physical universe with the spiritual realm so as to provide solutions to the problems of human beings. Therefore the place of the herbalist becomes indispensable. In most cases, the herbalist uses herbs to treat physical illnesses. When the illness is spiritual however, the herbalist (sometimes the witch doctor who is a person who attempts to cure sicknesses and to exorcise evil spirits by use of magic) uses spiritual methods to treat the sicknesses. The role of the herbalist cannot be underrated in the two novels under study.

In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Wole follows a procession of matching policemen towards Ibara and when he gets to the market, he sees old women who are herbalists. He describes their stalls and positions as follows:

> It was the strangest lines of stalls in the entire market, with its assortment of stones, beads, pieces of iron, coloured powders in little heaps, small parcels tied up in leaves, bottles filled with the strangest liquids, and barks and leaves visible within the bottles. There were also the dried snakes and mice (42).

The products of these women are much like herbs which Wole has drunk before. He says that:

> When I looked in the trays again I recognized barks and roots similar to those which were bought by father, stuffed into bottles and jars where they were left to soak for days. They were given to us for some ailments. Some we simply drank at periods mysteriously communicated to either parent. And they were other barks bred in huge pots. Once, after a fever, I brought out in a rash. I remembered being washed everyday with the contents from such pots. The herbs and roots brought home in baskets, boiled and allowed to cool, I was scrubbed in them, given pungent liquids from other stuffed jars to drink, and put to bed (42-43).

Here, we see the power of herbalism in the African context. This has been highly blackmailed and condemned by Westerners and even some brainwashed Africans who fail to understand the intricacies of the functionalities of this form of medication. Some even associate it to diabolic witchcraft and evil especially when it ventures into dealing with the spiritual aspects of human lives. These western views are false because African herbalists aim for the betterment of human life. Even in situations where they tackle spiritual problems, it is still to better human life. In *The Famished Road*, we come across herbalists who fight spiritual battles to better the condition of humans. An instance is the case of the one eye-herbalist who breaks the spells when Azaro is held as captive in the Police Officer's house. In a flashback, Azaro tells us that;

> The herbalist went on to tell her [Mum] that I was being held by a man and a woman who either wanted to keep me as their own child or sacrifice me for money, and that I was surrounded with such powerful spells that if Mum didn't act quickly I would be lost to her forever. Mum paid the fee and sat in the dark, listening as the strange-eyed herbalist

> embarked on the most extravagant conjurations she had ever witnessed. The herbalist wrestled with the powers of the house, trying to break the spells surrounding me (30).

Thus, the herbalist in Africa works in the spiritual realm to free humans from bondage in the physical world. This leads to the creation of direct mutual relationships between the physical and the spiritual worlds. Another case at hand is the herbalist who treats Mum when she falls sick and she is in a trance. Azaro tells us that:

> Dad was praying over Mum's body. There was a herbalist in the room. . . he sprinkled the room with liquid from a half-calabash. There were candles on both sides of Mum's body. She lay on the mat, breathing gently. Her eye-lids shone with antimony. The corpse of a bat lay by her face... The herbalist made her sit up and drink from a bowl of bitter liquid. Mum contorted her face the herbalist began whipping the air, driving out unwanted spirits with his charmed flywhisk. The air cracked with their cries. When he had sealed our spaces with gnomic spells, he made Mum sit up again. Under our intense gaze, he bit Mum's shoulder and pulled out a long needle and three cowries from her flesh. He went outside and buried them in the earth (61),

Thus, the herbalist fights with spirits to restore life to Mum. The needle and cowries that he removes are always believed to have been put by the enemies. Once removed, the patient is relieved and they get well.

Furthermore, herbalists are used in typical African societies to cut some connections with the spirit world. This is most especially when humans do not want such connections. In this case, the herbalist needs to move into the spiritual realm and destroy the connections so as to free the person involved. These connections could be marine marriages, secret societies, or "abiku" relationships. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro's parents always use a herbalist to bring him back to life when he goes subconscious and he is in the process of transcendentalism. One of these herbalists is the woman who fights with the three-headed spirit which attempts to transcend with Azaro when he is beaten by Dad for always troubling him. It should be noted that the immediate cause of the beating is when Azaro hits and breaks the Old Man's window with a stone. The

herbalist embarks on a serious fight with the three-headed spirit as they get to the banks of the river in the spirit world and they are about to board a canoe. Azaro says:

> She [the herbalist, women] took step towards us and for the first time I noticed that she had the feet of the lioness. Her eyes were those of the tiger. The spirit went forward, attempted to brush her aside, to reach the canoes. Lightning flashed from their contact. The light was so dazzling that for a while all I saw were two small moons revolving in a glass of clear alcohol (337).

It is worthy to note that herbalists usually own and work in shrines. Their shrine is to them what hospital is to medical doctors and church is to priests/ pastors. From there, they command spirits and mediate between the living and the living dead. In *The Famished Road*, after the Landlord's house burns and the police clash with the masses, a woman takes Azaro to the shrine house for proper treatment. He postulates that:

> We arrived at the island and the woman with glasses lifted me out of the canoe, and led me to a hut. It was really a bathroom. She made me wash. When she had dried me with a coarse towel, she smeared me all over with oil. She led me to the shrinehouse and spread me out on a mat (13).

The shrine serves as a place of relieve. It is a place where the sick find solace and relief of their pains and grief. It is not a filthy and paganic place as Eurocentric critics describe it. The coming of the white man to Africa and the introduction of Western religions have led to the destruction of many of these shrines. Some herbalists have even been converted either forcefully or willingly into Western religions like Christianity and Islam. This is because they view African belief systems as witchcraft without studying it deeply.

Witchcraft

The word "witchcraft" is the combination of two words; "witch" and "craft". The former means "practitioner" while the latter means "art of performing magic". Witchcraft means different

things in different historical and cultural contexts. It follows that in order to understand it we need to situate it in a particular time period and space. Eurocentric critics fail to understand this and they use all sorts of barbaric words to describe some acts performed by Africans. Most of the things they call witchcraft are acts beyond their comprehension. They are limited in the ability to manipulate elements of nature to work in accordance to their desires and so they view people performing such acts as sorcerers. These acts which are beyond human understanding are many in the two novels under study and they mostly appear too magical.

To begin with, in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Soyinka uses a series of literary devices to project acts which seem to be magical, and which cut across the entire novel. In a flashback, for example, Wild Christian tells Soyinka and other children her story where she and others went to pick snails beyond the "rocks" and "clumb of bamboo." During this, she says spirits chased them until they got home and her brother rebuked the spirits before they turned back. It is beyond the comprehension of Europeans that spirits chase people during the day. In a similar way, when Rev. J.J. preaches on the day that has been reserved for the outing of the *egungun*, the hall collapses. The story goes thus:

> He [Rev. J.J.] had been warned not to preach on a particular day which was the day for an *egungun* outing, but he persisted and held a service. The *egungun* precession passed while the service was in progress and using his ancestral voice, called on the preacher to stop at once, disperse his people and come out to pay obeisance. Rev. J.J. ignored him. The *egungun* then left, taking his followers with him but on passing the main door, he tapped on it with his wand three times. Hardly had the last member of his procession left the church premises than the building collapsed (Soyinka 8-9).

The collapse of the building can only be explained by looking into the act that the *egungun* performs. The cause of the collapse is in the spiritual realm and it goes beyond ordinary human comprehension. This is common in African cosmology. There are people who exercise their

powers by carrying out acts which appear to be magical and beyond human comprehension. There are instances where warning is done through actions which appear so mysterious in the eyes of an average human being.

In *The Famished Road*, the extraordinary contributes greatly in the development of plot, style, setting and characterization which an average person may be tempted to call evil unless they study African spirituality in details. In the beginning of Book One of Section One, the narrator tells us of strange acts that their king used to perform. He says:

> Our king was a wonderful personage who sometimes appeared in the form of a great cat. He had a red beard and eyes of greenish sapphire. He had been born uncountable times and was a legend in all worlds, known by a hundred different names. He always lived the most extraordinary lives (Okri 3).

This suggests that the king was mysterious in his ways. He was simply an abiku (a child who is born to die and be born again repeatedly). This notion of the abiku cuts across the novel. The narrator, Azaro, is an abiku. As an abiku, he is connected both in the world of the living and the world of the living dead. His spirit companions always sing for him and keep calling on him to come and join them in the spirit world. Moreover, he says "as a child I could read people's minds. I could foretell their futures. Accidents happened in places I had just left" (Okri 9). In a sense, Azaro has a third eye. This is common in the Yoruba society in which the inspiration of the novel comes from and it is their way of life with a cultural interpretation.

Furthermore, some characters perform mysterious actions which cause fear and anxiety among characters present in the scene and readers alike. As customers keep drinking in Madame Koto's bar for example, Azaro tells us that "One of them even brought out an eye, polished it and blew on it and dipped it into his palm-wine and pushed it back into his red eye-socket" (Okri 110).

This is part of African values which are beginning to fade away because of the encounter with Europeans. Again, there are characters in the novel whose appearances seem so extraordinary to be real. Azaro tells us about some of these characters like the prostitutes. He says "I saw that some of the prostitutes, who would be future brides of decadent power had legs like goats. Some of the women, who were chimeras and sirens and broken courtesans, had legs of spiders and birds" (Okri 460). By presenting these abnormal characters mingling in the affairs of humankind, Okri ridicules the spiritual and moral decadence of the society. Africans are gradually losing a sense of attachment with their belief systems because the systems have been viewed by westerners as witchcraft. The earlier Africans begin to ignore these Europeans' criticisms and fall back on their belief systems, the better.

Spirits

In African societies, spirits are essential and there are harboured in the earth. They can be in trees like baobab, wooden objects like 'Afo-A-Kom' among the Kom people, caves like 'Mbegwi' among the Bangwa people, and stones like 'Totankeng' still among the Bangwa people. The Supreme God, ancestors, divinities, witches and wizards all function in the spirit world. According to animists, spirits inhabit some or all classes of natural objects or phenomena. In essence, the supernatural coexists with the natural. Just like there is conflict in the physical world, there is also conflict in the spiritual world. This conflict transcends into the sub-consciousness of characters and goes beyond apprehension by "simple" and "empty" human reasoning. It takes someone connected in the realm of the spirits (someone like a witchdoctor, someone like an abiku) to visualize these conflicts. Readers can only get to see such conflicts in literary texts through the eyes of the above-mentioned people (witchdoctors and abiku).

When one reads Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Okri's *The Famished Road*, one gets the impression that they both make use of such characters whom one comes across to visualize and understand the struggle in the world of the spirits. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Bukola, the abiku child, fights within herself. Her fight is on whether she should stay in the physical world or join her spirit companions in the spirit world. This is more of a psychological issue. Bukola plays over her psychic and this time around chooses to live unlike the previous times which she had preferred to die. Similarly, in *The Famished Road*, Azaro is in the crossroads as he contemplates if he should remain in the physical world or leave and rejoin his spirit companions who are always calling for him and singing beautiful songs for him. At some points, he attempts to go. This is coupled with the fact that he breaks the Blind Old Man's window and Dad beats him for the act. Azaro departs from the world as a means of punishing his father in particular and family at large. He says:

> I punished him by retreating from the world. I tortured them both by listening with fullness of heart to the unsung melodies of spirit companions. And because Dad said nothing to me, because he made no attempt to reach me, made no gestures towards me, did nothing to appease me, did not even attempt to smile at me, I listened to what the three-headed spirit was saying (Okri 326).

The three-headed spirit was telling Azaro to follow him to meet his companions in the spirit world. It is thanks to a witchdoctor (the Naked Woman) who fights a serious battle with the spirits to bring Azaro back.

Furthermore, there are often times when the spirit world and the physical world turn to conflict in different aspects. The battle to rescue Uncle Sanya in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, for example, is a battle between the physical and the spiritual worlds. After Uncle Sanya goes searching for snails where he is not supposed to enter, he falls sick having been chased by a

wood spirit. An elderly woman, one of J.Js converts turns up at the house on a routine visit and offers sacrifices which help to fight the spirits in the spiritual world and to liberate Uncle Sanya. Basically, this fight results from the stubbornness of Uncle Sanya and other people who forcefully go into the forest even when they have been warned not to go there. Hence, elements of nature are not in harmony when there is constant clash amongst them. In order to ensure harmony and stability in the world, no element of the universe is supposed to be a threat to another.

The peak of the conflict between the natural and the supernatural is in *The Famished Road*. These two cosmological elements are always in serious clashes. For example, when Azaro begins to stay with the Police Officer, he constantly clashes with ghosts and spirits, especially the spirit of the deceased son of the Police Officer. These ghosts and spirits keep hovering around and in the officer's house. Azaro says:

> The ghosts gathered round the man and wife and starred at them in silent amazement. The spirit with the twinkling eye drank the froth of the Guiness a moment before the officer did. The officer drank contentedly. When his wife got up to fetch a soft drink for herself, the ghost with milk-white legs went with her. When the officer went to the toilet, the spirit in uniform accompanied him. And when they were sitting peacefully the ghosts stood in front of them so closed that their faces almost touched (Okri 26).

The presence of these ghosts and spirits which keep walking around humankind is largely as a result of humankind's reckless actions towards them. In the case of this novel, the presence of these ghosts and spirits in the officer's house is because of his bad deeds. He has even killed some of the people whose ghosts and spirits are in his house. Azaro tells us that "I realized that the ghosts and spirits were in the house because the officer had somehow been responsible for their deaths" (Okri 26). It becomes clear here that the evil that men do lives with them. Those who relate African belief system with evil do not understand that ghost and spirits that Africans

belief in either come to reward or punish people based on their actions on earth. Every reward and punishment is on earth since Africans do not believe in hell to be feared after death or paradise to be enjoyed after death.

The greatest fight between the natural and the supernatural is in the psychic. Deep in Azaro's psychic, there is a serious conflict between himself as human and his spirit companions, together with his spiritual being. As human, he wants to live in the physical. As spirit, he wants to join his spirit companions who keep calling for him. He narrates that:

> I was sitting against a wall, weaving in and out of sleep, surrounded by the confusion of human bodies when I heard those sweet voices singing again. My spirit companions, their voices seductive beyond endurance, sang to me, asking me to honour my pact, to not be deceived by the forgetful celebrations of men, and to return to the land where feasting knows no end (Okri 48).

With this luring, Azaro's spirit cannot resist. The spirit ventures into going before Madame Koto catches him and brings him back. Inasmuch as the conflict between the natural and supernatural is concerned, it becomes very difficult to control it when both the natural and the supernatural are entangled in a single being and they keep fighting on who wins. It takes beyond simple human power to separate such a fight between self-spirit and self-body. It requires the power of mystical humans like the witchdoctors. This is why most often, when Azaro is in the process of migration into the spirit world, a herbalist must partake in the restoration of his spirit in his body.

Another instance of conflict between the natural and supernatural occurs when Azaro removes Madame Koto's fetish which has been attracting customers into her bar. Madame Koto and other spirits chase him. He says:

> In her heavy milk-contorted gait, she bounded after me. She wasn't the only one. The spirits were after me as well, and one of them held his detached arm in the air like a

> misbegotten club. I fled down the paths. Their heavy footsteps sounded behind me and they shouted my name: Azaro! Azaro!... So I ran deeper into the forest (Okri 138).

From this excerpt, we deduce that Madame Koto has a secret for her success in business. Her secret is her connection with the spirit world. She is able to attract customers both from the spirit and the physical worlds. Nonetheless, it is ironical that her so-called secret is described as a fetish. It is bad to venture into fetishism because it attracts unwanted spirits into one's life. Evil-skeptics warn about this danger. Worthy of note is the fact that Eurocentric critics attach fetishism to all African beliefs and so, care has to be taken when making classification of spirits between good and bad.

Furthermore, politics fuel the conflict between the natural and the spirit worlds in *The Famished Road*. The coming of politics into the society in the text creates numerous chaotic scenes. Politicians fight politicians, political thugs fight masses and thugs fight thugs. There is division in the whole community as the poor are completely isolated. There is alienation in the society and wherever the opposing forces meet, there is a fight. For example, when the politicians and their thugs come to share garri after having poisoned the whole community with milk, there is a serious fight. This fight is joined by the dead from the spirit world thereby leading to conflict between the natural and the supernatural. Azaro tells us that:

> As I sat in the car, overcome with fear, I saw the dead rising. I saw them rising at the same moment that the second wave of havoc started with the chants of the antagonists. The dead joined the innocents, mingled with the thugs, merged with the night, and plundered the antagonists with the cries of the wounded (Okri 180).

The participation of the dead in the affairs of the living is a way of ensuring justice. This is why the dead fight to protect the oppressed masses. When the superstructure or the ruling class turns against the proletariats, there is bound to be clashes and in the case of this novel, it takes only the

power and support of the dead to restore justice amongst the people. The dead are never dead in Africa. They are the living-dead. They play a great role in the activities of the living. This is why they have to join the fight in the world of the living so that there can be justice.

Another terrifying area where the natural confronts with the supernatural is in boxing-when Dad engages in boxing contests. He fights three principal spirits and defeats them all. These spirits are Yellow Jaguar, Green Leopard, and the Tall Man in White Suit. In the case of Yellow Jaguar, he and Dad fight, get into the swamp and he disappears. He later returns very angry and he beats Dad wildly. At the end however, Azaro tells us that:

> And Dad, dead on cue, utterly surprised the man with the unrestrained and desperate fury of his own counter-attack. Dad rose miraculously in stature. And with all the concentrated rage, and insanity of those who have a single moment in which to choose between living and dying, Dad broke the chains of his exhaustion and thundered such blows on the man as would annihilate an entire race of giants. I don't know if it was the sheer monstrous accumulation of all the blows and punches, the howitzer combinations, amidst blur of Dad's madness, the man let out a terrified bowl. He staggered backwards. Dad followed him, baffled, arms raised. Then the man stood straight and still, his bright yellow eyes askew. The wind sighed above his head. The yellow eyes dimmed. Then they shut. When his eyes closed, it became darker all round, as if a mysterious lamp had been blown out. Then like a tree that had waited a long time after its death to fall, the man keeled over slowly. And when he hit the earth with an unnatural thud, the strangest thing happened. The man disappeared. Into the earth. Into the darkness. I have no way of telling (Okri 357).

Thus, Dad defeats the spirit. This boasts his way into the boxing world. Even though he is destroyed, he is never defeated. His bravery and victories earn him the name Black Tyger. Similar to this fight with Yellow Jaguar is that with Green Leopard. Dad is seriously beaten but at the end, he defeats Green Leopard. We are told that:

> Dad didn't rush into an attack. He didn't move forward. He punched from the spot where he stood, as if he were in an invisible, invulnerable circle of power. A short burst of this close-range fighting ended with an upper cut that travelled from Dad’s solidly planted feet and all the mud of his rage. It connected with Green Leopard's jaw, drawing a great

> sigh from the crowd. The day darkened. A cloud passed over the face of the sun. Birds wheeled overhead... Green Leopard stood, arms out, as if he had gone deaf, or as if he had been shut from behind. His eyes were blank, his mouth open. A cloud of dust flew up as the great boxer collapsed slowly to the floor (Okri 400-401).

This fight contributes greatly to the development of Black Tyger's character. For him to fight and defeat a spirit like Green Leopard is an indication that he is favoured by the spirits. He fights, he defeats and he celebrates his victory over spirits. This pushes critics to question the possession of power between the living and the dead. At some point, we even question if Black Tyger is human or spirit.

Moreover, after the fight with Green Leopard, Dad/Black Tyger proceeds to fight spirits which are relatives of Green Leopard in his dream. He says:

> I have been having the most terrible experiences... I was sleeping and then I wasn't sleeping anymore. Suddenly I found myself fighting seven spirits. They said they had been sent by Green Leopard's mother. And they wanted to kill me in my sleep so that I wouldn't wake up. I fought them for a long time. All the time you thought I was sleeping I was battling with them. They fought me viciously and kept trying to come out of my dreams to fight my wife. Eventually, I defeated them (Okri 406).

Here, we witness Okri's ability to use hallucination to project the greatness of his protagonist. Even in the protagonist's dream, he still wins. Going by Napoleon Hill's idea in *Think and Grow Rich* where he says what we think comes to pass, it becomes obvious that Black Tyger's success in battles is a product of his thoughts. This relates to Freudian concept of dream work. Black Tyger dreams about this fight because his mind has been so much focused on it. Moreover, he has recently participated in a fight of equal magnitude. The dreaming of this fight leads to the purgation of emotions thereby relieving him of the stress of continuous thought.

The last in the triple major fights between Black Tyger and supernatural beings is that with the Tall Man in White Suit. This is a spectacular fight that everyone, except Semi the bet man and

Black Tyger himself, bets against Black Tyger. This spirit "methodically" and "scientifically" beats Black Tyger very well. According to the narration that we get from Azaro,

> The man cracked Dad with a punch so fast that it was only when the women hurled Dad back into the arena that we registered its effect. The man went on striking Dad with electric punches, his feasts were so fast that it seemed he was completely still the whole time, while Dad's head kept snapping backwards, as if the air, or an invisible hand, were responsible. His nose became swollen, the bridge broke, blood spurted out. Dad tried hard not to breathe in his own blood. When he breathed, it was in excruciation and fatigue. Suddenly, he seemed terrified of pain. The man would move his shoulder slightly and Dad's head would jerk backwards. The man jabbed Dad at will, with cold menacing indifference (Okri 471-472).

In spite of the fact that the man beats Dad so woefully, Dad's patience, persistence, perseverance and resistance keep him fighting back until he succeeds. These keep adding to the unbeatable character traits of Black Tyger. As these character traits keep emerging, we keep discovering more themes which go a long way to contribute to the development of the plot of the story. For example, with Dad's persevering trait, the theme of endurance emerges and it is supported by a literary device like pathos. All these help in the development of the plot and in revealing character traits

It is important to note that, there are good spirits and bad spirits. Good spirits construct while bad spirits destroy. Good spirits can either be human spirits or natural spirits. Human spirits are mostly ancestors. Ancestors can be recent dead ancestors as well as spirits of the long dead. Whichever form it takes, it all remains spirit. Africans cannot be separated from spirits.

They live and mingle together. An attempt to separate them is an attempt to disrupt the cosmic order which will have great negative impact on human lives. Thus, it is important and necessary to respect spirits in Africa and treat them with honour and dignity because failure to do so will disrupt the cosmic order which attracts punishment.

Rituals

Victor Turner defines ritual as a "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and power." He quotes Monica Wilson who studied African rituals with her husband, Godfrey Wilson, and posited that:

> Rituals reveal values at their deepest level ... men express in ritual what move them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies (6).

It follows that rituals are symbolic. Moreover, there are deeply rooted in culture as they are prescribed by the people's culture. Rituals may emanate from the spontaneous or pre-arranged acts or actions of an individual or a group of people. This is why there are personal and communal/group rites. Some common rites in Africa include: worship rites, rites of passage, atonement and purification rites, oaths of allegiance, dedication rites, coming of age rites, coronation rites, marriage rites, funeral rites, and graduation rites.

In the novels under study, there are several rites which are densely metaphorical and symbolic, and which help in revealing the visions of the authors. The rites form an indisputable part of the relationship between man and spirituality as some of them connect their performers with the realm of the spirits. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, there is a cleansing/ purification rite which is meant to cleanse Uncle Sanya of the crimes that he commits by going into the restricted areas of the forest to pick snails. He falls sick and the woman who wants to do the cleansing demands as follows:

> I want a basket of agidi, containing 50 wraps. Then prepare some ekuru in a large bowl. Make sure the ekuru stew is prepared with plenty of locust bean and crayfish. It must smell as appetizing as possible. . .When all was prepared however, the old woman took

> everything to Sanya's sick room, plus a pot of cold water and cups, locked the door on him and ordered everybody away (Soyinka 10-11).

It is after performing this ritual that Uncle Sanya is healed from the torment of spirits. The ritual is a secret one and that is why the old woman must lock the door in order to perform it. Through it, Uncle Sanya's relationship with the spirit world is purified. He eats with them as we hear him talking in the house when he is locked therein alone. He says "behave yourself, there is enough for everyone. All right you take this, have an extra wrap... Open your mouth... here... you don't have to fight over that bit, here is another piece of crayfish. .. behave, I said" (11).

Another purification rite is that which is done to stop Mrs. B's maid from pissing on the bed or from wetting the mat. She has been wetting the mat all her life. She is walked round the village with the mat on her head as a rite to stop her from wetting the mat again. Wole says:

> The offending mat was rolled and borne on her head, the procession went from house to house where a stop was made and the girl had to dance her dance of shame . . . I watched Mrs. B and maid, the former leading, walk back in silence that had descended once more on the parsonage and wondered if the maid was still going to wet her mat that night. Lewanle said the treatment always worked, but only if in addition, she roasted the egg-nest of the praying mantis and ate it. Lewanle claimed to have made a particular cousin eat at least a dozen egg-nest of the praying mantis plus a special portion prepared according to the recipe of an old woman at Ibarapa (87-89).

Most traditional African societies perform this rite and it has been working with them. They believe in its effectiveness.

Furthermore, there is a greeting rite in the novel. During holidays, Wole and other members of the family visit their father's village which is Isara. In Isara, there is a greeting rite especially when it concerns children greeting elders. The children need to prostrate.

Unfortunately, Essay's children have not been initiated in this rite. This leads to breakdown in communication as the children fail to perform their greeting rites. Still in Isara, a rite of passage

is done to fortify and initiate Wole into adulthood. Father pierces his ankle in this initiation process.

> I felt my right ankle suddenly in the grip of a voice, the heel pressed against the ground. Just as swiftly, the hand moved into the ball of my foot, pressing downward and maintaining the pressure of the heel against the ground. The little boy swabbed the ankle with a wad soaked in something, the first moment the elderly man had seized the most scalpel-like of the metal objects, dipped it in the clay dish and sharp pain began at my ankle and kept up my body to the brain. I yelped! The left hand kept my foot firmly fixed to the ground. As I cried out I would have twisted my body, only they were now two strong hands, Father's, keeping my shoulders pressed against the back rest of the chair (146).

Here, although painful, the initiation rite is necessary. The people of Aké believe that this rite opens people's eyes to detect what is right from what is wrong; it detects good and evil. This is why after performing the rite, Father tells Wole that "whoever offers you food, take it. Eat it. Don't be afraid, as long as your heart says yes, Eat. If your mind misgives, even for a moment, don't take it, and never step in that house again" (147). Thus, rituals open the spiritual eyes of people thereby connecting them with the world of the spirits.

In *The Famished Road*, there is a ritual to reintegrate Azaro into the world of the living after his attempt to depart into the world of his spirit companions. He departs because his father beats him for breaking the Old Man's window. An herbalist brings him back to life.

He says:

> The herbalist came again on another visit. He performed rituals and treated me with the deepest suspicion. He told Dad and Mum to be kinder to me, to not shout, not beat, not restrict me, to not quarrel amongst themselves, and he hinted at the prospect of performing the ceremonies that would cut off my access to the world of spirits. He said something about retrieving my spirit tokens which he believed I had hidden in secret places (Okri 341).

In this light, the relationship between man and spirituality is established. Humans in the world of the text believe that with the necessary rituals the connection with the spirit world can be disconnected just as it can be established. Therefore, rituals serve as a gateway to and from the spirit world. African belief systems, as seen in their ritual practices, are earth-oriented. This is why all the rituals take place on earth and the passage is beneath the earth. It is worth noting that formal, highly stylized rituals are mostly found in religions. The church itself is a ritual because it is formal and highly stylized; it follows a particular pattern which is fixed.

Divination

Divination creates the link between the physical and the spiritual worlds. The person who fulfills the role of the intermediary between the two worlds is the diviner. Through divination, humans are able to contact ancestors, determine the cause of certain things such as magic, sorcery, or witchcraft against the sick or barren. It is the diviner who has the ability to find out about the spirit that may be troubling someone, what the spirit wants and what can be done to remedy the situation. Eurocentric critics usually misrepresent divination to ancestral worship and describe it as demonic.

In the two novels under study, the role of divination cannot be underrated. It is a diviner who rescues Uncle Sanya in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*. It is thanks to a diviner that Mum in *The Famished Road* is treated of her sickness. Similarly, Azaro lives on because a diviner is able to fight the spirits which attempt to take him to the world of his spirit companions. Thus, divination is the key which can be used to open the lock of the door that separates humans from ancestors in Africa. It is still widely practiced throughout Africa even though Western Christianity has had a

great impact on it. Christianity has condemned it and it has attempted to replace it with Christian healing methods like deliverance and casting of demons.

Exorcism

This is the religious or spiritual practice of evicting demons or other spiritual entities from a person, or an area, that is believed to be possessed. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, the naked woman who comes to Beere's compound with a sacrificial pot is believed to be possessed. Hence, she needs to be exorcised so that she can be free. Exorcism is so high in *The Famished Road*. Characters are possessed and thus, need to be exorcised. As a spirit child, Azaro is always possessed with spirits. His spirit companions are always calling for him to join them. Wherever he goes, spirits follow. For example, as Dad fights, he says:

> The spirit came in through the shut door and pestered me to follow him. Dad piled up the benches to keep the door securely shut. The spirit followed me everywhere, reminded me of promises that were not his business, pleading, threatening, with a head in front of me all the time, and another head talking always into my ear (303).

Once possessed, it is believed in the African belief systems that, one needs to undergo exorcism in order to be free. One of the functions of traditional medicine men and women is to determine the identity of evil spirits so as to exorcise them. Nature spirits, spirits under the control of malicious sorcerers, and spirits from without constitute these "evil spirits." The spirits mostly cause dangers. If a person is possessed by a spirit that is causing danger to the family and the community, then the spirit must be exorcised from that person. So, its essence is to drive away a notorious spirit which endangers a village (community) or individual. Such spirits usually lead their possessors to do things which are not worthy in the society. They simply push them to do things which are regarded as taboo in the society.

Taboos

A taboo is an implicit prohibition on something (usually against an utterance or behavior) based on a cultural sense that it is excessively repulsive or, perhaps, too sacred for ordinary people (en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taboo). In Africa, it is a taboo to carryout morally unacceptable acts like theft, lies-telling and suicide. In Isara in *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, it is a taboo for children to greet elderly people by handshake. Wole breaks down this law by refusing to follow the greeting format which prostrating. An elder tells him "dédolé" (prostrate yourself) but he still refuses. Once taboos are broken, the victim who has broken them needs to be cleansed and sometimes appeasements need to be done in order to readjust the cosmic order.

Appeasement

Africans believe that in order to enjoy a good relationship with ancestors one needs to appease them. This will lead to good health, success and prosperity. Misfortune awaits those who fail to appease the ancestors. Such people could suffer from poor harvest, illness, theft, unemployment, et cetera. Appeasements can be done by offering sacrifices. Sometimes it is the herbalist who advises people facing misfortunes like accidents to do appeasements so as to free themselves. Bole Butake has demonstrated this in his play *Lake God*. In this play, the Fon, influenced by Reverend Father Leo, refuses to appease the lake god. Consequently, the lake explodes and kills almost the entire community.

Essentially, appeasement has always been a cultural aspect of African societies long before the coming of the white man into the continent. The white man has condemned some of these appeasements and have equated them to ancestral and idol worships. They view appeasement as a way of glorifying deities which is against their religious precepts. This has always caused great

disasters in the continent since refusal to appease always leads to disruption of the order of the universe. This idea is also illustrated in Wole Soyinka's *Dead and The King's Horseman*. According to the Yoruba tradition, when the king dies, his spirit is supposed to be appeased by allowing his horseman transcend into the world of the spirits with him. This is because the horseman's spirit is essential to helping the chief's spirit ascend to the world of the living dead. If this is not done, the chief's spirit will wander the ear and cause harm to the people. However, this horseman (Elesin), influenced by the British authorities and his love for life, does not perform the ritual. The calamity which befalls the people here is that Elesin's son, Olunde, who has returned to Nigeria after studying medicine in Europe, takes his father's responsibility and commits suicide to honour his family and the cosmic order. Elesin also kills himself as a consequence. Therefore, the role of appeasement cannot be underestimated in the traditional belief systems of Africans.

Abiku

The idea of reincarnation/ born again is not new in Africa. Before the coming of Western religious beliefs about born again, Africans had already been witnessing a similar phenomenon although there was no universal name attached to it throughout Africa. Again, this manifestation was/is not done by everyone but by some children with specific capabilities. The Igbo call these set of children Ogbanje as demonstrated in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In this novel, Ezinma, Ekwefi's only child with Okonkwo, is an ogbanje. Ekwefi has given birth to ten children all together and nine have died, probably as ogbanje children. Okonkwo consults a medicine man who tells him that an ogbanje is tormenting them. Worthy of note is fact that a medicine man even mutilated the dead body of Ekwefi's third child to prevent this ogbanje spirit from pursuing

the family. Unfortunately, it keeps following the family right up to Ezinma, the tenth child. When she is born, she shows signs of ogbanje like persistent sickness. Even as a medicine man, Okagbue Uyanwa finds her iya-uwa (the small buried pebble that is ogbanje's physical link to the spirit world), she still falls sick repeatedly and it frightens people. Her manifestations are basically those of an ogbanje. The Yoruba people call children like her "Abiku."

The abiku plays an important role in the relationship between man and spirituality in African belief systems. Abiku means "predestined to death". An abiku child comes to the world to die and be reborn and the process continues. It is believed that abiku plummet the fortune of their parents and their great joy is to see their mother cry when they die. According to the Yoruba belief, they make a certain pledge concerning their life duration with their mates in the spirit world. At the expiration of the time, they die and reunite with their mates. It is also believed in some traditions that the abiku child is married in the spiritual world and some even have children. This is why some of them find it difficult to bear children in the physical world. The Bangwas of Cameroon call an abiku "Molabia" which means "child of two worlds."

In the novels under study, the abiku have similar behavioral patterns. Bukola in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Azaro and his friend Ade in *The Famished Road* are all abiku. Bukola is Mr(s) B's daughter. Wole wonders how they (especially Mrs. B) cope with her:

> Her only daughter, Bukola, was not of our world. When we threw our voices against the school walls of Lower Parsonage and listened to them echo from a long distance, it seemed to me that Bukola was one of the denizens of that other world where the voice was caught, sieved, re-spun and cast back in diminishing copies. Amulets, bangles, tiny rattles and dark copper-twist rings earthed her through ankles, fingers, wrists and waist. She knew she was abiku (Soyinka 15_16).

As an abiku, her ways are completely different from the ways of other children. She is always looking for ways to leave the physical world and reunite with her spirit companions in the world beyond. Looking at her, Wole "wondered how Mrs. B coped with such a supernatural being who died, was re-born, died again and kept going and coming as often as she pleased" (16). It is Mrs. B who suffers most because these spirit children always torment their mothers most.

In *The Famished Road*, the story of abiku is not very different. Azaro is an abiku who fails to keep to the promises that he has made with his spirit companions. He is constantly being tormented by these companions yet, with the help of his parents, he battles to live on. His spirit companions keep pursuing him but he never goes back to live with them forever. In every single attempt that he makes to go, his parents, with the help of an herbalist bring him back to life. The Abiku child enjoys some advantages over any other human being. They act as seers as stated by Azaro. He says:

> As a child I could read people's minds. I could foretell their futures. Accidents happened in places I had just left. One night I was standing in the street with Mum when a voice said: 'Cross over.' I tugged Mum across the street and a few moments later an articulated lorry plunged into the house we had been standing in front of and killed an entire family. . . On another night I was asleep when the great king stared down at me. I woke up, ran out of the room, and up the road. My parents came after me. They were dragging me back when they discovered that the compound was burning. On that night our lives changed (9).

Hence, an abiku as seen above does not only bring misfortune but he/she brings good luck too. He/she saves lives when need be. Therefore, they should not be utterly condemned. Ade is another abiku in *The Famished Road*. Unlike Azaro, he is ready to meet his companions in the spirit world. He recounts the number of times that he has lived:

> I see the image of two thousand years. I drank in its words. It took many centuries to grow in me. I see a great musician in a land across the seas. Nine hundred years ago. The

> musician was me. I see a priest, I see a ruler of gentle people. The priest was me, the ruler was me. I see a wicked warrior who killed many innocent people and who delighted in bloodshed. I was him. There was once a soldier stoned to death and fed to the crocodiles in Egypt. I was that soldier (Okri 478).

It follows that Ade has lived several times before. He tells us that "Coming and going, I have seen the world" (477). Through the concept of the spirit child, we are able to create a relationship between man and spirituality in Africa. This is because the spirit child links the spirit world with the physical world. Furthermore, the spirit child creates job for, and sustains the herbalist. This is because as the spirit child manifests, herbalist get the opportunity to cure them of the manifestation.

To conclude, this chapter set out to discuss the manifestation of African spirituality in the two texts under study. We have been able to discuss concepts in the circle of man and spirituality such as herbalism, spirits, rituals, witchcraft, exorcism, taboos, appeasements and abiku. The chapter argues that African spirituality is termed barbaric, fetish and satanic not because it possesses such qualities, but because it inspires Africans to directly fight and challenge the powers of colonizers and their church. An example is the Mau Mau oath of 1952 which aimed partly to protect African spirituality. Also, the chapter argues that African belief systems surpass Eurocentric critics and scholars and this makes them to describe African spirituality with such coinages. For example, Bishop Samuel Crowther (1809-1891) translated the bible into Yoruba and he called "Esu", which is a highly revered indigenous Yoruba deity, "devil". This was ignorance. Though a Nigerian, he was educated in Oxford before becoming the first Anglican bishop. He was charged with the responsibility of converting "pagan" Africans into Christians and that is why he described Yorubaland as "land of heathenism, superstition, and vice"

(Adefarkan 42). Again, Film industries like Nollywood have played great role in the destruction of African spirituality. The films project a negative picture of African belief systems.

Furthermore, the chapter argues that practitioners of African spiritual traditions and herbal traditions alike need to tell the world about their spirituality because if they don't tell, different people will always twist it. This can be summarized by the African proverb which says "Until the lion learns to tell his tell, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."

The next chapter will focus on the critical perspectives of this work and the texts under study.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

An author with a vision looks for all possibilities to embellish their vision with artistic ornaments. These artistic ornaments are what we usually refer to as, "narrative techniques." Narrative techniques are methods or devices that a writer uses to pass their information across. Both Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri have visions which they project in an embellished language and unique style. In other words, their language and style of narration are rich and peculiar and they use them to support their vision. The aim of this chapter is to explore techniques which the two authors use to project their visions. The techniques include satire, suspense, hallucinations, verisimilitude, autobiography, use of details, use of colour, allegory, diction, bildungsroman, and syncretism. Below are analyses of how the two authors use these techniques to put forth their vision. This constitutes the critical perspective of the work.

Use of Satire

"Satire has a long and honorable history as a means of exposing vice and folly, revealing the workings of power and providing valuable social and political comment" (Watson 139_140). It has been defined by many scholars in the literary world. According to Bryandis Gunnarsdotttir in *The Satire as a Social Mirror: Jonathan Swifts A Modest Proposal in Contest*, satire is: "a work or manner that blends a censorius attitude with humor and wit for improving human institutions or humanity" (10). According to Dan Goldwasser and Xiao Zhang in *Understanding Satirical Articles using Common-Sense*, "satire is a writing technique for passing criticism using humor, irony or exaggeration" (537)." These definitions give us a hint of what satire is all about. In summary, satirists use laughter to address situations they find unacceptable and, therefore, in

need of change. Both Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri use this device to pass their message across. They create scenarios where even in deep pain we still laugh and purge out emotions.

In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Soyinka satirizes the use of charms and spells for protection. He creates a character Paa Adatan who believes that he can fight Hitler's soldiers with their sophisticated weapons when they bring the Second World War to Aké. He warns consistently that when the German soldiers come he will defeat them with no one's support. He tells Wole's mother that:

> Ah, Mama Wole, this English people just wan the glory for den self. Den no wan black man to win dis war and finish off dat non-sense-yeye Hitler one time! Now look them. Hitler dey bombing us for Lagos already and they no fit defend we . . . When dey come Mama, dem go know say there be black man medicine. I go pile dem corpse alongside the wall of this palace, dem go know say we don dey fight war here, long time before dey know wetin be war for den foolish land (Soyinka 110).

Humourously with this, he draws out his sword and draws a line on the ground and then says "Dat na in case they come while I dey chop my eba for buka. If they try cross this line, guns go turn to broom for dem hand. Dem go begin dey sweeping dis very ground till I come back (110_111). It is ridiculous that upon all these, Paa Adatan does not even stage any strong resistance against the soldiers when they come. They simply tie him up and leave him humiliated in the space of no time. Hence, Wole Soyinka ridicules these ineffective charms which some people believe so much in. There have led to the death of many people in the society.

Following the ongoing crisis in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, many people have lost their lives because the so-called charms and bullet proofs rarely work. This does not indicate any limitations in the ability of Africans to use their craft to control the environment. In typical African societies where there are true people to manipulate the elements of the

universe to work in their favour, these spells and charms are used perfectly. It is in modern African societies that lie and deception have entered into the whole show and fake people use fake spells and charms to extort money from people.

Soyinka also ridicules the poor reaction of rulers towards protesting masses. He does this through the Balogun of one of the Egba districts. Instead of soothing the women who are protesting, this Balogun attempts to kick and disperse them. This only worsens the situation. Even as the situation worsens, it is humourous that the Balogun falls down in his attempt to kick and disperse the women. Wole says:

> For something happened to the Balogun's thigh as he suited action to his threat and delivered a kick in the general direction of the women. As he set that leg down, it simply gave way under him and he collapsed. Embarrassed, he very quickly scrambled up, only to half-collapse again as he attempted to set his weight on it (212_213).

In a sense, the Balogun's approach of resolving problems is imperfect. The people always get angrier in such conditions. Thus people who find themselves in such situations need to look for better means which will calm the situation rather than aggravate it.

Again, Soyinka satirizes irresponsibility. He creates an atmosphere which is uncalled for people who denigrate their dignities and get themselves into mess. Uncle Dipo is an irresponsible character who gets himself drinking all the time and he keeps messing up. He is even presented as a stranger in his own kinship by blood. Moreover in a drunken state, he calls his own family members bastards without remorse. Wole tells us that:

> The stranger moved forward and there was no longer any room for error; we had seen a few drunks before. Hitler, ghost or the devil himself, the stranger was clearly drunk. He moved forward, coming up the yard in the same direction we had fled. His eyes felt then on one of our huge water-pots, buried deep in the ground and partly opened. This was the favourite pot of the house. It was sheltered both by the wall and two luxuriant crotons on

> either side; at all time of the day, its water was cool and refreshing. The stranger went towards the pot, swayed, unbuttoned his fly and began to urinate in it (122).

This ungrateful lifestyle is not to be tolerated. Humans always shun it. In Africa it is believed that people who possess such bad habits can easily transfer the habits to their namesakes. It becomes a habit of lineages where everyone in that lineage who bears the name is automatically possessed by the character trait. In the novel, Dipo who is named after Uncle Dipo becomes unbearable. "Our own Dipo continued to grow in energy and mischief, nothing could daunt him" (Soyinka 124). The situation only gets worst as Young Dipo does not ameliorate in character. Wole tells us that:

> Perhaps a year later, long after the visit of the mystery uncle, Wild Christian announced that Dipo's name was to be changed to Femi. She explained that it had been on her mind for some time because children named Dipo always turned out wild and ungovernable. The change of name left us mostly indifferent, but I hid my own astonishment (125).

The essence of this change of name is to break the transferable bad character from moving from one generation to another. The bad character might have been an inherited curse. Under no circumstance should Eurocentric critics condemn this because it is not different from what contemporary pastors call "ancestral curses" which they yearn to break.

In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri equally uses satire extensively. He satirizes drunkenness, betrayal, inequity, theft and many more ills. One instance of satire is when Dad drinks to stupor, robes himself in mud and when he comes back home, he keeps misbehaving as he keeps talking to himself and to a chair.

> I fell into mud/ Dad Said./ I was coming down the road, drinking, singing, and the road said to me: Watch yourself. So I abused the road. Then it turned into a river, and I swam. It changed into fire and I sweated. It transformed into a tiger, and I killed it with one blow. And then it shrunk into a big rat and I shouted at it and it ran like the creditors. And then it dissolved into mud and I lost my shoe. If I had money I would be a great man ... You are looking at me chair... you don't want me to sit on you, eh, because I fell in mud, isn't

> that correct?. . . I'm talking to you, chair. Are you better than any bed? I talk to you and you move. What do you think you are, eh? (Okri 94).

As the chair remains silent, Dad kicks it. This shows the folly in drunkenness. Okri chastises this folly just like Soyinka chastises other follies. The aim of this is to stop drunkenness in the society.

Another instance of satire is deliberate poisoning of the local population by politicians. They share spoiled milk to the masses. The milk affects everyone in the stomach. This is an instance of misuse of power. These politicians use the landlord for their political activities and he ends up humiliated in the presence of the population as they share milk. He is dragged out of the van and into mud. His worthlessness is exposed as he is not different from any other human being despite the fact that he has been using wealth as an apparatus to control his tenants.

> The landlord looked sick with fright. Sweat broke out on his face and he struggled to take off his agbada, but it got caught in the outstretched clawing hands of all the struggling hungry people. The more he tried to get it off, the more entangled it became in all the hands. It was as though his cloth too had become an extension of his party's promises, a gift to everyone. . . He clung on stubbornly and they dragged him along with his garment, out of the van, till only his feet were left showing, kicking vainly at the air (Okri 124)

Okri here ridicules people who climb the political ladder without support from the masses. They end up in humiliation and the only people who can rescue them are the masses and not their political colleagues.

Suspense

The two authors under study do not make all their information explicit. They spice the plot of their stories with suspense and they also let readers give meaning to the magical aspects in their texts. These authors are caught in between exposing the secret behind some aspects of their cultures and the spread of knowledge. This explains why they will present characters with strange ways of behavior but they will hardly explain why such characters behave that way. It is

thus, the place of critics to carefully analyze the origin of such behaviors. By analyzing the behaviours perfectly, we can grasp the authorial vision which is mainly that of the projection of African spirituality which is not fetish but based on African cosmologicalsystems.

In Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, the character, Uncle Sanya is said to be spending much of his time in the forest playing while others walk around and search for snails. At the end, his basket is still fuller than anybody's basket. Moreover, when he falls sick, an old woman locks him in a room with food and he gets well yet we are not told what he does to get well. Wole tells us that when he is locked in the room, he is heard saying: "Behave yourself, there is enough for everybody. All right you take this, have an extra wrap... Open your mouth... here... you don't have to fight over that bit ... here is another piece of crayfish... behave, I said (9).

Here, Wole Soyinka successfully keeps readers in suspense as he leaves them to decide for themselves what exactly cures Uncle Sanya. Similarly, Bukola is an abiku. According to Wole in the novel, an abiku is "a supernatural being who died, was re-born, died again and kept going and coming as often as she pleased" (Soyinka 16). Even though we are told that this child is always called by her spirit companions in the world of the living dead, we are suspended as we keep wondering what will stop the child from taking a firm decision to ignore the companions. To completely wrap our thoughts in the suspense, Soyinka deliberately talks less about this abiku character.

In Okri's *The Famished Road*, withholding of information is very rampant. The narrator performs strange acts but we are never told whether he uses evil spirit to perform such acts or good spirit. This is partly because these acts may not be strange to the people concerned. If for some reason there are strange to some people, they should not be generalized as 'magical.' The narrator says:

> As a child I could read people's minds. I could foretell their futures. Accidents happened in places I had just left. One night I was standing in the street with Mum when a voice said:
>
> Cross over.
>
> I tugged mum across the street and a few moments later an articulated lorry plunged into the house we had been standing in front of and killed an entire family.
>
> On another night I was asleep when the great king stared down at me. I worked up, ran out of the room, and up the road. My parents came after me. They were dragging me back when we discovered that the compound was burning (Okri 9).

A psychoanalyst may view this from the perspective of the power of intuition. However, the fact that the reason behind these things is not revealed only goes to support the fact that there is deliberate withholding of information. In a sense, this is the power to foresee the future. Azaro, the narrator is more or less a seer and this gives him the ability to take himself out of dangerous scenes before the scenes take place.

Furthermore, Okri uses suspense to sustain the plot of his story with respect to the various conflicts that take place in the novel. He has the tendency of holding his readers spell bound by presenting the episodes in the novel in a way that rises and falls. Each conflict gives readers the zeal to read further so as to discover many other conflicts. These conflicts are numerous. An instance is that which results from the clash between the police and the masses after the house of the Landlord burns and he brings the police to arrest people. Azaro tells us that:

> He [the Landlord] hurried away and returned an hour later with three policemen. They fell on and flogged us with whips and cracked our skulls with batons. We fought them back. We beat them with sticks and ropes. We tore their colonial uniforms and sent them packing (Okri 10).

Readers yearn to read what follows. Okri meets his target after holding readers spell bound. This fight continues when the policemen go for reinforcement. It is through the fight that we begin to come in contact with the strength of Dad. He lures two of the policemen down a side street and

gives them a severe trashing. As continuation of the exposure of his strength, we come across another incidence where his creditors throw stones at his wife in his absence. When he comes back from work, Azaro says:

> We ran into one of the creditors who was just coming out of the toilet. Dad straight up to him and without saying a single word he feinted with a right jab at the fellows face and punched him in the stomach. The creditor bent over, grunting, and Dad grabbed him round the waist and threw him back first on the ground. . . The second creditor had witnessed the efficiency of Dads fury and had started to run (Okri 64).

Besides the demonstration of Dad's strength, these fights support authorial vision as the aim is always to free the masses from oppression. Firstly, the masses have been repressing the brutality of the police but these repressed images suddenly force themselves out in the form of anger thereby leading to violence. Secondly, Dad has been planning to be a universal boxer. His demonstration in these remarkable fights only goes a long way to remove these repressed images of planning to be a universal boxer. He removes the images from the unconscious into the conscious and then puts them into action in real life. Thus, leading to the purgation of emotions.

Another crucial instance of violence which creates suspense to support authorial vision is the fight between Madame Koto and a customer who refuses to pay his drinks on the flimsy excuse that he has been insulted by Azaro. This customer, having played draft with Dad, insists that he will not pay Madame Koto until Azaro apologizes. He says "I won't pay till you tell that boy to apologize to me" (Okri 36). When he keeps insisting not to pay, Azaro tells us that:

> Then, suddenly, to our astonishment, the woman [Madame Koto] lifted him up by the pants and threw him to the ground. The crowd yelled. The man flailed, got up, shouted and huffed. Then he pounced on her, lashing at her face. Dad started towards him, but his rescue attempt was cut short (Okri 36-37).

This scene reveals a lot in terms of the theme of conflict. We clearly visualize the power of the woman. The woman stands out as an outstanding figure who does not let societal construct or

norms diminish her reputation. She fights to get what she knows rightfully belongs to her. Still from the spectacular scene, we see Azaro as a disrespectful child. He insults his elders. It is still this disrespectful attitude which pushes him to stone the Old man who keeps playing his accordion (musical instrument) during the fight between Black Tyger and Yellow Jaguar.

The height of conflict increases when greater seeds of discord are sown following the activities of politicians. There are constant clashes between the political thugs of the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor. The Party of the Rich keeps terrorizing the entire community, especially the marketplace, the bar and the streets. They fight anyone who does not support their political views. Dad, together with all other poor people, stands directly against the ideologies of the Party of the Rich. His family suffers the consequences as his wife is chased out of her market place by the thugs of the party. Through this, Okri shows the discrimination and injustice which permeates most African societies.

As if that is not enough, the Party of the Rich distributes spoiled milk to the masses and the milk affects all those who drink it. The masses repress their anger and stay put. The party comes again to distribute what they call "national garri." The repressed anger of the masses overflows and they call the party thugs "thieves" thereby causing a fight. Azaro says:

> The thugs jumped down and whipped the people, the photographer frenziedly took pictures, and the people went on stoning the side windows till they gave completely and then they threw rocks at the men handing out garri. The men shouted, blood appeared on their faces; the politician appealed for help; someone in the crowd shouted: Stone them. . . The thugs went on whipping till a fierce crowd of men surged over them. When the thugs reappeared they were mostly naked. The women, with a special vengeance, cracked firewood and planks on their heads (Okri 154).

From this conflict, we are able to understand the division that politics brings among people. It is worthy to note that most African countries since independence have been plagued by political

chaos like the ones in the novel. In fact, political instability is a crucial division factor in African countries. Ruling parties turn to grasp absolute powers and anyone who is not in support of them is doomed to fail. This is a mentality which has to be reshaped so that politicians understand that people who are against their political views are not to be hunted and killed but are supposed to be listened to because they also have good ideas which can be used for the reconstruction of Africa.

It is worth noting that the various conflicts in *The Famished Road* are captured by the photographer so that they can stand the test of time. His arts, moreover, attracts conflict and he is constantly hunted by people whose photographs of bad deeds are taken. He captures many conflicts that take place in the world of the text. We keep suspended because we don't know his fate. He says:

> I took photographs of women at the market being attacked by the thugs. The women fought them back. I took pictures of riot against our white rulers. I took pictures of a policeman taking bribes. The policeman saw me and pursued me. I escaped . . . I turned invisible... Because if you have power you don't use it all the time (Okri 232).

It is therefore clear that physical conflict cuts across the two novels with far reaching consequences such as the creation of awareness and complete transformation of the society. The conflicts rely heavily on suspense to project the vision of the author. Freedom is a vision which must be forcefully taken and not expected to be given. Africans need to be free from mental slavery.

Use of Hallucinations

Hallucinations are sensations that appear to be real but are created within the mind. They are common in people with mental illness such as schizophrenia. Such people perceive objects or events in any of their five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch) in the absence of an

external stimulus. Ben Okri's novel is filled with hallucinations. His protagonist undergoes a series of mental adventures which are never put in external realities. Some of the hallucinations in the novel include the following:

After the creditors ask for their money when Dad is not home and then leave, Dad comes back and Azaro tells everything to him. As lights go off and Dad lights a cigarette, Azaro begins to hallucinate as he says:

> I watched the bright point of his cigarette in the dark and it eventually lulled me into Madame Koto's bar. Dad was there. The bar had moved deep into the forest and all her customers were animals and birds. I sat on a bench which was really the back of a goat and I drank off the back of a bull. A massive chicken without feather strode into the bar, sat next to me, and ordered palm-wine and peppersoup. Madame Koto didn't want to serve the chicken, but Dad said: Serve him! Madame Koto went out and fetched a great broom and she chased the chicken round the bar lashing its head. Dad laughed. The chicken laughed. Madame Koto tripped, fell, and got up. She wacked the chicken on the head and missed. The chicken ran out of the bar, destroying the door frame, and laughed deep into the forest (59_60).

In this scene, we see a complete story which is totally formulated in the mind. The story helps in building the plot and it adds to the spiritual side of the main storyline. It demonstrates that in Africa, both spirits and non-spirits inhabit the earth. Therefore, hallucination creates an impact on the plot of the story.

Another hallucination in the novel occurs when Dad declares to Azaro and Mum that the milk that the politicians shared is "rotten milk". As he says this, he sleeps off and Mum blows off the candle and sleeps too. Azaro begins to hallucinate:

> I stayed awake for a while. I was still feverish and the darkness quivered with figures moving about blindly. Just before I fell asleep I heard a noise on the cupboard and as I looked I saw something growing out of the milk. It grew very tall and white and resolved itself into a ghostly agbada. There was no one in the agbada and it took off from the powdered milk and flew around the room. Then the garment, all white, folded itself, compacted, and settled into the form of a bright indigo dragonfly. It buzzed its wings

> round the room and disappeared into the impenetrable darkness of a corner. My headache grew more severe (127).

The cause of this particular hallucination can be traced from the Azaro's last activities of the day. He and his family actually discussed about the milk and what they said about the milk was not positive. The fear of what the negative repercussions of drinking the milk will cause has stoke into his subconscious mind and it is coming out in the form of hallucination. The hallucination helps in recreating the past which can be used to reshape the present and improve on the future. Through it, we have a hint of the authorial vision of presenting African spirituality as it really is, and not as misrepresented by Eurocentric critics.

Verisimilitude

According to www.masterclass.com/articles/22-essential-literary-devices#22-different- types-of-literary-devices-and-to-use-them, "Verisimilitude is a theoretical concept that determines the semblance of truth in an assertion or hypothesis. It is an essential tenet of fiction writing. . . When using verisimilitude in writing, the goal is to be credible and convincing." Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri use this technique to put forth their visions in their respective novels.

When one reads *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and *The Famished Road*, one gathers the impression that setting is true-to-life in the two novels. This becomes clearer if the said reader makes a parallel reading of the texts and the societies from which there are drawn. Some actions in the novels take place in realistic environments and realistic historical eras. It is within these environments and time period that characters behave in a way that we need to transcend into their thoughts or subconscious minds to explain why they do so.

In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Soyinka tells his boyhood story before and during World War II in a Yoruba village in Western Nigeria called Aké-a place where he spent his first 11 years of life before moving in 1946 to the Government College in Ibadan. Within this geographical setting in the novel, many incidents take place which sum up to give the novel its grandeur. In Aké, Wole lives an inquisitive life where he questions everything that comes his way and finds himself in all sorts of debates which reveal his character trait. He questions why the band of policemen match towards the direction of Ibara and then he follows them; he questions why he should prostrate to greet elders in Isara village; he debates with his father, Essay, on whether it is rain which forms water or water which forms rain. Constant asking of questions helps remove information from your interlocutor's sub-consciousness into their conscious mind thereby purging emotions. This is exactly what happens to Wole's interlocutors.

Published in 1981, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* is actually set when the Second World War is still ongoing. This holds true especially when we consider scenes which recount and mention events of the war. A typical example is when Paa Adatan is curiously waiting for the German forces to come so that he can crush them. Another instance is when Mrs. Kuti tells the commissioner over phone that they would not have burned Hiroshima if it were not a place inhabited by non-whites. It should be recalled that the allied powers bombed the two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War.

Nigeria witnessed an economic crisis when the Second World War was going on. In 1945, a general strike involving tens of thousands of workers began with railway workers, then spread to other nationalized industries including non-civil and civil service workers, with workers at private firms supporting the strike and refusing to cross picket lines. The strike resulted from the

wrong steps that the colonial regime took in response to the agitations of workers like the demand for an increase in wages to meet up with the inflation that the economy was facing.

Wole Soyinka seems to represent this strike in his novel as he includes the women's protest. The women's protest in the novel seems to be a direct reflection of the general strike which took place in Nigeria during that time. In the novel, the women report to Kabyosi in Alake. They cry of hunger which is affecting the entire Egbaland because of the high taxes which are levied on commodities. In a unified voice, they simply say NO MORE TAXATION. The cry of the women attracts the sympathy of men (chiefs) who join to chase the white man out of their land. We are told that:

> Chiefs appeared on the same balcony, were hooted away with only one demand-that white man was to leave the precincts the palace immediately as his very presence was an abomination not merely to the women but to the palace which belonged to the people of Egbaland. The mood was now violent, the group was lost amidst the multitude, vainly attempting to placate the women (Soyinka 212).

In summary, Wole Soyinka draws his inspirations from the chaotic nature of the Nigerian society in the 1940s which was characterized by strikes and the desire to liberate the country from colonial rule. This makes the novel realistic thereby bringing out the aspect of verisimilitude which helps in building the vision of the author.

In *The Famished Road*, time setting is very realistic and it is during the slow and painful emergence from British colonialism and the uncertain aftermath of Nigerian independence. This period is characterized by political violence as the two political parties in the text-the Party of Rich and the Party of the Poor-turn to fight each other. Basically, plot development in the novel is enhanced by this conflict and the vision of the author is built.

In addition, it is realistic that spirits hover around African societies. According to John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy*, Africans believe in the living dead. These living dead are ancestors who come around in the form of spirits after their decease. In a sense, they live in the same environment with humans and they partake in all human activities. As if that is not enough, people who are able to manipulate the elements of nature to work in their favour in the spiritual realm also play around with spirits to ensure their success (Madame Koto is an example of such characters). Okri simply takes these true happenings and use them to form a perfect story. It is worth noting that his novel is a compilation of various African myths. It is similar to Amos Tutula's The Palm Wine Drinkard where various myths are combined to form the adventures of the protagonist. Through this realism, Okri's vision about African spirituality is not fetish, but built on African ethos.

Autobiography

An autobiography is a story of one's own life. In *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, Wole Soyinka presents a typical West African society of the Yoruba culture and way of life. His story, even though embellished with some fictional ingredients for the sake of art, is true to life. The novel is an autobiographical bildungsroman as it talks about the growth and development of the main character, Wole, who grows up to the age of 11. The autobiographical nature of the novel speaks at great length to its readers. Readers gain trust and a sense of verisimilitude in the episodes of the novel. Wole becomes a single entity with duality in roles as he stands out as the protagonist in the novel as well as the author of the novel. The novel relies on his childhood story in a West African village known as Aké. It recounts his childhood memories in and around this village as

he moves from primary school there to Government College Ibadan. It is through Wole that the authorial vision is revealed to readers.

The Use of Details

A thorough reading of the under study reveals that the authors use details to support the realistic part of their novels. At every given instance, they describe and narrate the activities going on in the storyline while also prescribing. In *Aké; the Years of Childhood*, the use of details begins right in the first page with the description of the Canon's residence. We are told that:

> Only the Canons residence could have housed the weekly Guest. For one thing, it was the only storey-building in the parsonage. It was square and solid as the Canon himself, riddled with black wooden-framed windows . . . From the upper floor of the Canons house one almost looked the top of Itóko straight in its pagan eye. It stood at the highest lived-in point of the parsonage, just missing overlooking the gate (Soyinka 2)

The use of details like the one above creates clear and concise mental pictures in the reader's mind. We are able to gain an insight into what is going on in the novels. Furthermore, details also help in plot development. This is the case with the details used to describe the naked woman who goes to Beere's compound at night with a sacrificial pot. The story of this woman is an anecdote which comes in with the details to elaborate on the plot of the story. Similarly in *The Famished Road,* Okri consistently uses details especially in his description of the various battles that take place in the novel. This goes a long way to improve on the quality of the novel. Wendy B. Faris argues in "Ordinary Enchantment: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative" that one of the defining features of realism is an extensive use of details to highlight the mimetic and referential quality of the writing. Okri works with this notion and he pictures all spectacular actions in a language embellished with great artistic ornaments. In his narrative, we

are able to transcend into the world of the text and feel our presence in the various battle scenes because of his ability to use details.

The use of Colour

Colour plays a great role in the two novels under study. Principally, there is local colour which projects the cultures of the African people. In *Aké: the Years of Childhood*, local colour is found in items such as the sacrificial items which they use to cure Uncle Sanya and equally the ones that the naked woman caught in Beere's compound carries. It is in *The Famished Road* that the use of colour is very eminent. Many characters in the novel are described with colour. Some of these characters include "Yellow" Jaguar, "Green" Leopard, "Black" Tyger, the "White" Man, and the Tall Man in "White". Among all these colours, the colour which stands out as a victorious colour is black. Black Tyger demonstrates the resilient, persistent, and enduring nature of the black colour which always wins. Symbolically, this stands for the African continent. This continent, like Black Tyger, has faced many challenges both from within and from without. Nonetheless, it has been able to stand strong against the challenges such as slavery and slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The continent has been destroyed but not defeated as it continues to find ways to exist. Hence, the vision of demystifying the fake myths that Europeans conceive of Africa/black race and culture is visible here.

Allegory

An allegory is a symbolic representation which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning. Paula M.L. Moya has demonstrated in a book titled *Social Imperative: Race, Close Reading, and Contemporary Literary Criticism* that thinking through literature is one of the best ways to confront social issues such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality because literature allows

writers and readers alike to explore them in all their particularity and embeddedness in the social world. Thus, literature is one of the key sites in which the social order can be imaginatively examined and reshaped. In this line, we see literature as a critique of something beyond itself.

The two novels under study go beyond their fictive nature to reflect the society from which they are written. To begin with, Wole Soyinka criticizes many aspects of the Nigerian society in *Aké: The Years of Childhood;* he criticizes theft, lies-telling, and largely exploitation through taxes. Towards the end of the novel for example, the women led by Kemberi as deputy of Mrs. Ransom Kuti rise, fight and defeat the Ogboni (tax collectors). These women begin by holding meeting sessions and Wole says "At every meeting a report was given about the course of the No More Taxation demand" (Soyinka 199). They stand against economic exploitation through taxes. These allegorical ideas are presented in socialist realist tendencies.

Socialist realist writers are writers who diagnose sociopolitical and economic maladies of the society and propose doses of socio-therapy. In other words, they do not only identify the problems of the society like critical realist writers, but they go ahead to propose solutions to the problems identified. In his book titled *Critical Issues in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry*, Andrew Ngeh quotes an online source which states that socialist realism is:

> A soviet artistic doctrine, realistic in its nature which has as a purpose the furtherance of the goals of socialism and communism. Basically some of the goals of socialist realism include: optimism and hope, conscientisation and revolt... the use of simple and accessible language ... a sympathetic portrayal of characters from the oppressed. a sense of patriotism defined in terms of concern with the struggle of socialism. Socialist realist writers must be politically active on the side of the oppressed (22).

Maxim Gorky is the doyen of this school of thought. According to him, the writer must have a good knowledge of the past history and of the social phenomenon of contemporary society in

which he is called upon to fulfil his dual role of midwife and grave-digger. Both Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri fulfil these roles in their respective novels.

Even though there are other problems in the society like theft, racism and lies-telling, the greatest problem of the society that Wole Soyinka identifies is high taxation for women. This is a call for concern and it unites the women like never before. They stand and say "NO MORE TAXATION." Thus, the solution that Wole Soyinka proposes for the fight against taxation is protest.

> The women rose in a body. Hands flew to heads and off came the head-ties, unfurling in the air like hundreds of banners. The head-ties flew downwards, turned into sashes and arced round the waists to be secured with a grim decisiveness. Kemberi leading the way, they poured out of the grammar school compound, filled the streets and marched towards the palace at Aké (Soyinka 202).

Here, we see the strength of unity, we see the power of women who unite. They succeed in their quest and this is a vision that Soyinka is passing across: the strength of unity to fight against all injustices in the society.

In *The Famished Road*, there are also many adversities ranging from political, economic, and social to religious. Okri however, focuses on the quest for equity in the society which its absence is a form of social injustice. The society in the text makes life unbearable for the poor: they lack food to eat, they lack an identity, they are denied a universal suffrage, they are alienated and tortured all over. Their plight is the quest for equity. Led by Black Tyger, they find a place for themselves. They engage in different battles with the oppressors who are people belonging to the Party of the Rich. Their triumph over all battles only goes a long way to support the idea that writers of socialist realist literature support the proletarian class in their various quests. In other words they side with the masses.

Still in *The Famished Road,* Okri greatly explores the use of satire to ridicule many aspects of the Yoruba society in particular and African societies at large and this forms an indisputable core of allegory. He ridicules the bad treatment of the poor by the rich. The rich belong to the Party of the Rich while the poor belong to the Party of the Poor. These two parties are in constant clashes whenever they meet. Okri ridicules the Party of the Rich by damaging their reputation through their activities and so-called "charity" work. In their so-called charity work during political campaigns and rallies, they distribute poisoned milk to the citizens which turns out to worry the bellies of everyone who drinks it. As if that is not enough, the political thugs of the Party of the Rich constantly lash citizens who have different political views. Azaro's mother, Mum, for example, loses her business place in the market because she does not support the Party of the Rich. These inhuman political acts demonstrate the absence of a universal suffrage in the society. Through the various allegories, the visions of the two writers under study are demonstrated.

Diction

Language is very important in delivering an art, especially literature. It serves as a vehicle to pass information across. Sometimes it is plain and some other times it is metaphorical and we need to decode it in order to unveil the numerous meanings behind it. Although English language, mixed with some parlances of African languages, is the main language of transmission of ideas in the two novels under study, the manner in which Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri use it is different. Unlike *The Famished Road* which is written in simple and concise language, much of *Aké: The Years of Childhood* is like poetry with vivid descriptions and often lyrical phrases. This does not suggest that the narrative is slow moving, neither does it suggest that the language is difficult to

understand. *The Famished Road* gives a simple, clear and concise narration which anyone can read and understand without stress.

One most important characteristic of language used by the two authors is that it reflects the African way of life. Through the language, we are able to have some understanding of the African culture, belief systems and spirituality. The vision of the authors is to demonstrate that these aspects are based on African cosmology, and so, they are not evil as Eurocentric critics claim.

The Journey Motif

The journey motif serves as a great symbol used in literature to represent a character's adventure which most often leads to self-discovery. It is often prompted by two diametrically opposing factors: push factors and pull factors. The former are the factors which are sending the traveling character from their original habitat such as war, political instability, floods, earthquakes etc. while the latter are factors which are attracting the travelling character to their new destination such as greener pasture, education, and tourism. The relatives of Wole for example, usually leave Isara village with their commodities to sell in *Abeokuta* market.

Also, Wole leaves Aké for Ibadan to further his studies. In a similar way, the photographer in

The Famished Road leaves his room and goes to an unnamed location because of threat. These are very common migratory routes in our day-to-day lives. These movements are common in the two novels under study.

However, the journey motif in the two novels under study does not only end in physical migration. There is transcendentalism as characters travel beyond the physical world and into the

spiritual world. This movement is also caused by both push factors and pull factors. In A*ké: The Years of Childhood,* Bukola the spirit child always transcends because of both push and pull factors. She tells Wole that:

> Let us say I want something and my mother says No. It isn't all the time mind you, but sometimes my father and mother will deny me something. So then I may hear my other companions saying, "You see, they don't want you there that is what we've been telling you." They may say that and then I get the feeling of wanting to go away. I really want to go away. I always tell my parents I will go, I will go if you don't do me so and so. If they don't, I just faint (Soyinka 17_18).

Here, it is clear that the push factor is the reluctance of her parents to grant her desires while the pull factors are the promises and condemnations of her friends in the spirit world. This is similar in *The Famished Road*. When a feast is thrown in celebration of Azaro's return after he gets missing and is found, his spirit companions begin to call him to follow them again.

He says:

> My spirit companions, their voices seductive beyond endurance, sang to me, asking me to honour my pact, not to be deceived by the forgetful celebrations of men, and to return to the land where feasting knows no end. They urged me on with their angelic voices, and I found myself floating over the bodies of drunken men, and out into the night. I walked on the wings of beautiful songs, down the street, without the faintest notion of where the voices were leading me (Okri 48).

This migration from the physical to the spiritual realm is central in the two novels. What makes a slight difference is that in *The Famished Road*, most of the migrations are done through hallucinations unlike *Aké: The Years of Childhood* where there are presented plainly. Most of the hallucinations which involve taking adventures are done by Azaro. An instance is when Dad comes back from work when Mum is sick. In darkness, Azaro begins to hallucinate as Dad smokes:

> I watched the bright point of the cigarette in the dark and it eventually lulled me into Madame Koto's bar. Dad was there. The bar had moved deep into the forest and all her customers were animals and birds. I sat on a bench which was really the back of a goat and I drank off the back of a bull. A massive chicken without feathers strode into the bar, sat next to me, and ordered palm-wine and peppersoup (Okri 59_60).

Therefore, the journey motif helps in projecting the visions of the authors. Through it, we understand the functioning of the interactions of both physical and spirit worlds.

Unique Plot Structure

As Aristotle holds in *Poetics*, plot is very important in every literary work for many reasons. To begin with, the result of a man's actions determines his success or failure, and hence his happiness. So it is action which is paramount-not character, which does not necessarily affect every action. Again, the actions of life cannot be replicated without plot. Plot therefore is necessary for every literary work. For this reason, Aristotle spends enormous time to explain about plot where he describes the elements of plot, which are: completeness, magnitude, unity and universality. With regards to completeness, the story has to have a clear beginning, middle and end. These three distributions are further elaborated through the Freytag's pyramid, supported by William Shakespeare. The pyramid consists of five parts namely exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement. This is the traditional plot structure.

The plot structure of the texts under study is not like the traditional plot structure of introduction, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. In other words, the texts do not follow a typical narrative with a clear beginning, middle and end like other literary genres. This makes for a more reading experience, as the reader does not know when the plot will advance or when the conflict will take place. Thus, the plot structures of *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and *The Famished Road* are different and unique. *Aké: The Years of Childhood* for example, is an

autobiographical novel and it follows the events in the real life of the author rather than follow a universal plot structure. The events in the story are overlapping and are narrated as they occurred. Conflict in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* comes right at the end of the novel when the women mobilize against tax collectors. The storyline will not be the same if its events are restructured to suit the traditional plot structure.

The Famished Road too has its own structure which is completely unique. It takes the shape of a moving snake as the climatic events keep rising and falling. When the novel begins, readers are held calmed. When the story gets to the fight between the police and the inhabitants of Azaro's neighbourhood, readers feel that it is the climax of the story. Subsequently, the violence ends and the story still goes in a cool head until politicians share spoiled milk and later come with garri. Here, readers also feel that it is the peak of the climax until tension is still calmed. Again, we proceed smoothly until Black Tyger starts fighting his battles in the boxing contests. During each fight, readers feel that it is the climax but they are always suspended and later reintroduced to a different battle until the novel ends. This unique plot structure makes readers read this 500 pages novel without feeling bored. Thus, the fact that the two novels do not both follow the traditional plot structure but have a unique plot structure each means that they work in the same line to support authorial vision. They both deviate from laid down parameters of a plot. Hence, the two authors use this unique plot structures to convey their messages.

Bildungsroman

A bildungsroman is a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist. In other words, it is a novel which deals with the coming of age of the main character. There is usually a journey that the protagonist undertakes which is sometimes physical,

but it can also be psychological or spiritual journey of discovery. Again, there is loss of innocence as the character evolves. Furthermore, the protagonist generally finds an aspect of the society that rubs them raw and there is a fierce struggle to conform. Furthermore, the protagonist is usually pushed to their limit while trying to find themselves or to complete their task.

Aké: The Years of Childhood is a bildungsroman which recounts the life story of Wole Soyinka until he is eleven years of age. In rich and evocative language he tells the tales of his school days and adventures in a captivating narrative, sometimes recollecting fears and dangers but always sensitive to the surprises of childhood life. His days are full of discoveries, excitements, the presence of spirits and the tribal rituals of his colourful family. The story ends with Wole about to go to college at the age of eleven and enter a new world of responsibility and wider horizons as his remarkable childhood comes to an end. In essence, the novel dwells on Wole Soyinka's growth and development from childhood to his youthful age. Within this period, he encounters different challenges that society offers. These challenges prepare him for adulthood.

The Famished Road can also be viewed as a bildungsroman coupled with the fact that it is based on the growth of the protagonist. Like most of Okri's novels, the protagonist is a young man trying to make sense of the chaotic reality that surrounds him. His growth is largely spiritual growth as he attempts to celebrate life. As Azaro grows, he ignores his pact with his spirit companions and he prefers to live in a chaotic world where there is instability, social unrest, economic downturn, uncertainty, and gross evil. He chooses to live amongst human beings who are full of evil instead of rejoining his friends in the spirit world who keep calling and promising him a better life. He chooses to live in a world where the rich do not care about the wellbeing of the poor and rather subdue them and use their riches to threaten and control them. Azaro

embraces life which is full of spirits hovering around and partaking in the activities of humans. Despite all the challenges in the society, the protagonist faces life in a bold manner and he grows up in this environment. This makes the novel bildungsroman in nature.

Syncretism

Alan R. Tripett defines syncretism as "the union of two opposite forces, beliefs or tenets so that the united form is a new thing, neither one nor the other." It is a style which involves the amalgamation of two different religions, cultures or schools of thought. The two merged religions, cultures or thoughts may form either a completely new thought or it may simply be a combination of the two in one body/system. Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri use this technique in their writings as they present syncretic religions and cultures.

In *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and *The Famished Road*, African Traditional Religion exists hand in gloves with Western religion. The two form a creole kind of religion which is neither typically African nor Western. It is rather the combination of elements of the two. In this sense, characters embrace a religion without denying the existence and potentials of another. Wild Christian is an example of such characters. Although she is an African, she embraces Christianity and she does not completely forgo some of her African values. She still believes in some rituals like walking round the village with someone who wets the bed so as to stop them from wetting the bed. Again, although she and her family are Christians they still let their son, Wole, to undergo a traditional rite of passage which is based on African ethos. Father pierces his ankles to fortify him and as a means of protecting him against danger.

Similarly, Mum is a staunch Christian in The Famished Road but this does not stop her from accepting treatments from a traditional medicine man when she is sick. She blends African belief

systems with western beliefs. In addition, her family does not hesitate to seek the protection of herbalists to cure Azaro, their spirit child, when he attempts to transcend into the world beyond. Hence, colonialism has left an eternal stain on African cultures and Africans have embraced the stain and incorporated it into their belief systems to form a creole system in which they preserve some of their belief systems while also accepting foreign systems. Thus, this makes Africans impeccably religious.

Myths and Anecdotes

In the African milieu, myths interconnect the states of being, what philosophers call the different levels of being. To begin with, the abiku myth is a universal myth amongst the Yoruba people. This myth finds its place in the two texts under study. The abiku in the two texts are Bukola, Azaro and Ade. They share similar characteristics. They are all perturbed by their spirit companions and they all have the habit of punishing their family members when they wrong them. Through them readers get an insight into the spiritual world. This demonstrates a sense of Africanism as Africans believe in the coexistence of the natural and the supernatural.

Another myth is that of the King of the Road as narrated by Azaro's father. As the story goes, the King of the Road is a giant with an insatiable appetite. He asks for sacrifice from anyone who walks the roads of the world. He receives the sacrifices for a long time and as such, he allows people to travel the roads in peace. Unfortunately, famine strikes the people and they stop offering the sacrifices because there is no food. The King does not give a damn as he kills anyone who ventures into the roads and even those who stay in the house. Consequently the people offer large sacrifices with the hope of appeasing the King, but to no avail. In reaction, they poison him thereby making him hungr He eats everything and even eats himself until what

is left is only his stomach which later melts into the road when rain falls. As such, he becomes part of all the roads in the world, and his appetite can never be appeased.

This myth is a style adopted to showcase some African belief systems which are not evil but have a cultural interpretation.

To conclude, the aim of this chapter was to explore the critical perspectives of the texts under study. The chapter set out to critically examine the narrative techniques which the two authors under study use to project their visions. We have been able to explore techniques such as satire, suspense, hallucinations, verisimilitude, myth, syncretism, autobiography, details, colour, allegory, diction, and bildungsroman which the two authors have adapted into their writings to put forth their visions. The chapter argues that the two authors have similar visions with regards to African belief systems. Firstly, it argues that they set out to liberate Africans from mental slavery in terms of Traditional Religion which is not fetish as it is built on African ethos. Secondly, it argues that Africans have been victimized by colonization and thus, their belief systems have been infiltrated by Western belief systems. A way out is syncretism which blends African belief systems with Western belief systems. In this regard, there will be need for henotheism with regards to religious beliefs. This means that we have to follow our religious beliefs without denying the existence of other religions and their gods.

CONCLUSION

The initially stated overarching aim of this work was to demonstrate the African worldview on magical realism and evil, and the negative connotations that are attached to it as posited in Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. In order to achieve this aim, the work was going to rely on some objectives such as the presentation of Western views of African societies in the domain of spirituality, an exponential attempt to deconstruct these Eurocentric views, an insight into how the two writers under study successfully maintain aesthetics in their works while portraying their visions, and the use of the data from the two texts under study to demonstrate the beauty of African cultures through magical realism.

While recognizing the limitations of our analysis, this work has used Afrocentricity and Sociological Approach to analyze Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* in relation to magical realism and evil. In this regard, the work has done a literature review, and has also discussed African ontology and epistemology, man and African spirituality, and critical perspectives.

The work has contributed to knowledge in a number of ways. To begin with, it has shown that African belief system is not what it has been said to be by Eurocentric critics and scholars. It argues that African spirituality is termed evil, barbaric, fetish and satanic not because it possesses such qualities, but because it inspires Africans to directly fight and challenge the powers of colonizers and their church. An example is the Mau Mau oath of 1952 which aimed partly to protect African spirituality. Again, the work argues that ignorance plays a great role in influencing them to call African spirituality all sorts of negative names. In other words, African

spirituality surpasses them. The work has attempted to bridge the gap between Eurocentric views and the realities about the African belief systems.

In addition, it has attempted to resolve the conflict between evil-skeptics and evil-revivalists after weighing the pros and cons of treating evil. The work suggests that it is needless to hang on the debate about whether evil should be treated or not and it is rather better to focus on how we can repeal evil in the world.

Furthermore, the work has added more knowledge in the magical realist genre while also revealing the African world view in the connection between the physical world and the spiritual world. The work affirms the view that there is a powerful connection between the two worlds as far as African societies are concerned. Inhabitants of the two worlds even live mutually.

The work has also discovered that evil in the African cosmology is not what the Westetern worldview holds. Contrary to African belief systems, the world considers natural occurrences as evil. What Eurocentric critics view as evil in Africa is not really evil but it has a cultural interpretation which only people who understand African cultures can have true knowledge about. In this line we are looking at natural occurrences like earthquakes, gas disasters, floods and mountain eruptions. They all have cultural interpretations.

The final argument in this work is that practitioners of African spiritual traditions and herbal traditions alike need to tell the world about their spirituality because if they don't tell, different people will always twist it. This can be summarized by the African proverb which says "Until the lion learns to tell his tale, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."

There are a number of gaps in the work which can be filled by future researchers in this area. The work has not exhausted the Afrocentric paradigm and Sociological approach in the sense that it has not examined the ideas of all Afrocentric and Sociological critics individually. Perhaps extensive research in this area can change the outlook of this work and reshape views suggested in it.

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