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1. We should never ever give up.
2. You are never too old to chase your dreams.
3. It looks like a solitary sport, but it takes a team.

(Swimmer Diana Nyad, 64 years old, after reaching the shore, being the first person ever to swim from Havana to Florida without a shark cage¹)

**To all those who
supported me**

¹ FloridaKeysTV. "Diana Nyad Arrives in Key West After 111-Mile Swim From Cuba." Online video clip. Youtube. Youtube, 2 September 2013. 4 April 2017. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcvjw582G0>>.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. ORIGINS OF MAGICAL REALISM	2
3. MAGICAL REALISM – A TROUBLED CONCEPT	2
4. CHARACTERISTICS OF MAGICAL REALIST FICTION.....	4
5. MAGICAL REALIST TEXTS AND THE READER	7
6. AFRICAN LITERATURE AND MAGICAL REALISM.....	7
7. MAGICAL REALISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM.....	8
7.1 Postcolonial Discourse.....	9
8. CRITICISM.....	10
9. THE PALM-WINE DRINKARD AND HIS DEAD PALM-WINE TAPSTER IN THE DEADS' TOWN (AMOS TUTUOLA)	13
9.1 Short Summary	13
9.2 Author's Biography	14
9.3 Tutuola – the African Shakespeare?	14
9.4 What Has Literature Got to Do with it?	15
9.5 What Literary Genre Can <i>The Palm-Wine Drinkard</i> Be Attributed to?	16
9.6 Numbers and/versus Reality	17
9.7 The Geography of Tutuola's World	19
9.8 Colonial Trauma	20
9.9 Examples of Magical Realism in <i>The Palm-Wine Drinkard</i>	22
9.9.1 Do Not Follow Unknown Man's Beauty – The Complete Gentleman.....	22
9.9.2 How the Palm-Wine Drinkard Brought Death into the World.....	25
9.9.3 L'Enfant Terrible	27
9.9.4 The Faithful Mother	29
9.9.5 The "Invisible Pawn" or the Principle of "Give and Take"	31
9.10 <i>The Palm-Wine Drinkard</i> and Christian Motifs.....	32
9.11 Wilderness vs. Nature Tamed by Man.....	33
9.12 Final Thoughts on <i>The Palm-Wine Drinkard</i>	34
10. THE LAST HARMATTAN OF ALUSINE DUNBAR (SYL CHENEY- COKER).....	37

10.1	Short Summary	37
10.2	Author's Biography	39
10.3	Magical Realist Characters.....	40
10.3.1	Sulaiman alias Alusine Dunbar – the Historical Link within the Story	40
1.3.1.1	<i>Sulaiman's Mirror</i>	40
10.3.2	Fatmatta the Bird Woman – A Feminist Mother Africa?	45
10.3.3	Isatu	51
10.3.4	Sebastian Cromantine – Closely Connected to the Dead	55
10.4	Magical Realism and Trauma in <i>The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar</i>	57
10.5	Symbolism in <i>The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar</i>	58
10.5.1	The Scorpion	59
10.5.2	The Elephant.....	59
10.5.3	The Snake	60
10.5.4	The Bird.....	61
10.6	Final Thoughts on <i>The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar</i>	62
11.	THE HEART OF REDNESS (ZAKES MDA)	65
11.1	Short Summary	65
11.2	Biography of the Author.....	66
11.3	Zakes Mda – A Magical Realist Writer?	67
11.4	The Xhosa Cattle Killing Movement	69
11.5	Examples of Magical Realism in <i>The Heart of Redness</i>	70
11.5.1	Unbelievers.....	71
11.5.1.1	<i>Bhonco</i>	71
11.5.1.2	<i>Xoliswa Ximiya</i>	73
11.5.2	Believers	74
11.5.2.1	<i>Zim</i>	74
11.5.2.2	<i>Qukezwa</i>	74
11.5.3	From Capitalist to <i>Believer</i> : Camagu	77
11.6	Final Thoughts on <i>The Heart of Redness</i>	78
12.	SONG FOR NIGHT (CHRIS ABANI)	79
12.1	Short Summary	79
12.2	Biography of the Author.....	80

12.3	Children at War.....	81
12.4	What Do We Mean if We Talk about Trauma?	82
12.5	Can Writing Help to Cope with Trauma?	83
12.6	What Role Does Magical Realism Play in Writing Trauma?	84
12.7	Overall Structure of <i>Song for Night</i>	85
12.8	We Die Only Once, and for Such a Long Time	86
12.9	Time Is fleeting.....	87
12.10	A Voiceless Narrator.....	89
12.11	Examples of Magical Realism in <i>Song for Night</i>	91
12.11.1	Events Only Later Understood as Magical Realist	92
12.11.2	Events Strongly Pointing towards Magical Realism.....	94
12.11.3	Events Undeniably Magical Realist.....	97
12.12	Final Thoughts on <i>Song for Night</i>	100
13.	CONCLUSION	103
14.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	107
14.1	Primary Sources	107
14.2	Secondary Sources	107
14.3	Illustrations	115
15.	APPENDIX.....	117
15.1	Abstract.....	117
15.2	Deutsche Zusammenfassung.....	117

1. INTRODUCTION

Magical realism is a well-known phenomenon in Latin American postcolonial writing. It is, however, important to point out that the genre of magical realism is really an international phenomenon and writers using magical realism can be found all over the world and thus, of course, also in Africa, which will be shown by the works of Amos Tutuola (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*), Syl Cheney-Coker (*The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*), Zakes Mda (*The Heart of Redness*) and Chris Abani (*Song for Night*). The aim of my paper is to demonstrate that magical realism characterizes the work of different Anglo-African writers.

This diploma thesis thus in a first step describes the origins of magical realism and why the concept is so difficult to define, what its main characteristics are and what stance readers take towards the genre. It will then be discussed what impact magical realism has had on African literature, especially with regard to coping with colonial trauma.

My hypothesis, and what I would like to show in this paper, is that magical realism forms an integral part of the Anglo-African storytelling culture of the 20th century, which can partly be explained by the fact that there is no clear definition of what constitutes magical realism, but only descriptions of features which point towards it. Moreover, in magical realism oral African story-telling combines easily and almost naturally with Western traditions of writing and towards the present, it lends itself to postmodern techniques of writing for its continual crossing of the borderlines between fact and fiction. The main part of the paper thus discusses the works of the renowned Anglo-African writers cited above and aims at proposing possible interpretations of magical realist events.

In the conclusion, the significance of magical realism in African fiction will be underlined – especially with regard to coping with trauma – and parallels between the magical realist events in the four novels will be established.

2. ORIGINS OF MAGICAL REALISM

It was Franz Roh who coined the German term *Magischer Realismus* in the 1920s. He used the expression to describe a way of painting which signified a return to realism and the turning away from expressionism's apocalyptic world view.

(See Zamora and Faris 15)

However, magical realism in painting did not prove to be a long-lived phenomenon and quickly sank into oblivion. As far as literature is concerned, Roh's *Magischer Realismus* had a large impact as parts of Roh's book were translated into Spanish in the 1930s. In 1928, the Italian journalist Bontempelli founded the *journal 900* and started to promote his idea of magical realism. Intellectuals all over Europe read Bontempelli's journal and thus the concept of magical realism spread and it was in Latin America that it reached its heyday.

(See Binder 3)

However, this should not distract from the fact that magical realism has become an international phenomenon. Among the most renowned magical realist writers, we find Salman Rushdie (India), Robert Kroetsch (Canada) and there are several African magical realist writers like André Brink, Amos Tutuola or Zakes Mda.

3. MAGICAL REALISM – A TROUBLED CONCEPT

There are, in fact countless definitions of magical realism. The following explanation was proposed by Leal:

magical Realism is, more than anything else, an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles, in closed or open structures. What is the attitude of the magical realist toward reality? I have already said that he doesn't create imaginary worlds in which we can hide from everyday reality. In Magical Realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. (Leal 121)

Bowers offers another interesting definition:

The key to understanding how magical realism works is to understand the way in which the narrative is constructed in order to provide a realistic context for the magical events of the fiction. Magical realism therefore relies upon realism but only so that it can stretch what is acceptable as real to its limits. It is therefore related to realism but it is a narrative mode distinct from it.
(Bowers 22)

The number of definitions, which exist, show that *magical realism* has always been a troubled concept. "The term 'magic realism' is an oxymoron [...] [composed of] the binary opposition [...] [of] realism [...] and fantasy (Slemon 409). Basically, as Slemon argues, it consists of "two fictional worlds" (Slemon 409) competing with each other and which, eventually, remain incompatible. According to Bowers, there are three different terms: *magic realism*, *magical realism* and *marvellous realism* (see Bowers 131).

Magical realism is about "the mystery of life" (Bowers 20). The term was coined "in 1925 referring to art that attempts to produce a clear depiction of reality that includes a presentation of the mysterious elements of everyday life" (Bowers 131). Bowers stresses that the concept of *magical realism*, on the other hand, was created in the 1940s in relation to narrative fiction which "presents extraordinary occurrences as an ordinary part of everyday reality" (Bowers 131) and thus will be used throughout this thesis. The third concept, *marvellous realism* – a translation from the Spanish term "lo realismo maravilloso" (Bowers 131) – is according to Bowers used when referring to Latin American fiction only (see Bowers 131). As there is so much confusion, some critics simply use magic(al) realism as an "umbrella term" (Bowers 131).

It is, however, also important not to confuse *magical realism* with science fiction or fables. In science fiction, there is always a rational explanation for what is going on. Wishnia provides clear criteria for distinguishing between the two:

In magic realism, we have the weird things without the explanatory framing. In [science fiction] (and horror), even the unexplained is explained by the framing effect of the genre classification: Weird things happen because it's [science fiction]. (Wishnia qtd. in Schroeder 10)

It is also necessary to distinguish *magical realism* from fables. As Cwar points out, fables have symbolic character and contain fantastic elements as well as a clear moral lesson. Essentially, a fable is an allegory to real life. Contrary to the fable, in *magical realism*, characters are realistic, realism and fantasy is combined, the moral lesson can be ambiguous, i.e. interpreted in different ways and the main purpose is to challenge realism.

(Cwar, <http://www.powershow.com>)

Some experts believe that the origins of *magical realism* go back to the Greek philosopher Aristotle and his concept of mimesis. Aristotle claimed that art needed to be perceived as real by the viewer because humans can only learn through imitation and in that way people could understand "the universal truths of life" (Bowers 20). He even noted that "[i]t is better to convince the reader of the realism of something impossible rather than to be unconvincing about something that is true" (Bowers 20).

Although *magical realism* is a difficult concept, there are characteristics most magical realist texts share.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF MAGICAL REALIST FICTION

According to Faris (167-174) there are five main characteristics of magical realist fiction:

1. 'Irreducible element' of magic (Faris 167)
2. Descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world (Faris 169)
3. Two contradictory understandings [possible] (Faris 171)
4. Near-merging of two realms, two worlds (Faris 172)
5. Boundaries of time, space, and identity are blurred (see Faris 173)

An "irreducible element of magic" (Faris 167) cannot be explained by ordinary laws of rationality, but appears to be *normal* according to the logic of the text (see Faris 167). In Mda's *Ways of Dying*, for example, neither the reader, nor Noria's surroundings are surprised that she is pregnant for fifteen months. In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the family is rather disgusted than startled by their son turning into an insect.

The second characteristic, namely that "descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world" (Faris 169) means that magical realist fiction, contrary to fantasy and science fiction, seems to be real. The fictional world closely resembles the real one, descriptions are mostly very detailed and it is exactly those details that make a story appear *real*. Faris also stresses that "eternal mythic truths and historical events are both essential components of our collective memory" (Faris 170). As far as the "near-merging of [...] two worlds" (Faris 172) is concerned, magical realism can be compared to two circles which intersect and it is in this intersection that magical realist events happen (see Faris 172). Faris also mentions "[f]luid boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead" (Faris 172). In *The Heart of Redness*, an example of such a fluid boundary would be the scars which Bhonco has inherited from his ancestors and finally even passes on to his daughter Xoliswa.

The fifth main characteristic relates to time, space and identity. Common sense understandings are questioned: "magical realism reorients not only our habits of time, but our sense of identity as well [...]" (Faris 174).

Faris also offers nine further specifications or secondary specifications (see Faris 175-186):

1. Metafictional dimensions (Faris 175)
2. Verbal magic (Faris 176)
3. Childlike/primitive writing (see Faris 177)
4. Repetition (Faris 177)
5. Metamorphoses (Faris 178)
6. Against the established order (Faris 179)
7. Rural settings (Faris 182)
8. Jungian [...] perspective [...] (Faris 183); [...] sense of collective relatedness (Faris 183)
9. Carnavalesque spirit (Faris 184)

Magical realist texts often comment on themselves. Faris takes Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as an example, where a young doctor is only allowed to examine his female patient by looking through a hole in a sheet. This is seen as a metaphor for the creation of fiction and thus represent the metafictional level.

(See Faris 175-176)

Regarding intertextuality, Faris notes that there is some sort of "linguistic magic" (Faris 176) which encompasses magical realism and that the fact that characters of other fictions are part of the plot is a well-known phenomenon (f.ex. Don Quixote) (see Faris 176). The third criterion is childlike or primitive writing. It is often characterized by a "matter-of-fact way" (Faris 177) of storytelling, which resembles the way a child would describe an unfamiliar situation without reflecting on it in detail (see Faris 177). In *The Heart of Redness* an example would be Qukezwa when she tells Camagu that she does not have a husband and he could still marry her.

Repetition is another feature of magical realist writing. In the *The Heart of Redness*, the scars which are passed on from one generation to the next are a good example. There is also what Faris calls a "pattern of reversal" (Faris 178) as in the end, the scars are inherited by Bhonco's daughter Xoliswa who is the prototype *Unbeliever*. As Faris states, there is "a lack of human control over events: what you thought you controlled controls you" (Faris 178).

The fifth specification is "metamorphosis" (Faris 178). In Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the protagonist transforms into a bird several times and Cheney-Coker's Fatmatta takes the shape of an angel, when she rescues Emmanuel Cromantine. Another (prototype) example of metamorphosis would be Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, where Gregor Samsa turns into an insect (see Faris 178-179).

Concerning specification number six, Faris states that "in several instances, magical realist texts are written in reaction to totalitarian regimes" (Faris 179). In most cases, magical realist texts reflect a desire for freedom and represent a critique of the established regime (see Faris 180).

The seventh specification claims that magical realism takes place in rural settings. The rural setting is of particular importance in *The Heart of Redness*, as the environmental aspect plays a major role (see Faris 182). Moreover, *magical realism* is usually characterised by a Jungian perspective (eighth specification), which means that the magic results from "collective relatedness" (Faris 183). Jung was of the opinion that human beings possess "primordial images" (Merrell-Wolff 90) which are the deepest

layers of our psyche and at the same time the archetypes of the collective unconsciousness.

The ninth and last specification Faris mentions is the "carnavalesque spirit" (Faris 184), implying that the author is mocking or challenging authority and the traditional social hierarchy (Faris 184).

5. MAGICAL REALIST TEXTS AND THE READER

Thiem raises the question how a reader can *enter* a text and compares this to *entering* a mirror or a painting (see Thiem 237). It is literally impossible. So how do we actually get lost in a story? Thiem stresses that "[t]o read a 'gripping' story is to feel transported into its fictional world," (Thiem 238). What happens is that the reader is in two worlds at the same time and returning to the world outside the book is like recovering from a state of trance. Moreover, the reason why people read often is to flee from reality, which Thiem calls "escapist reading" (Thiem 243), one of the major points of criticism regarding magical realism.

(See Thiem 238-329)

However, the readers' wish to escape reality might be one of the prime reasons why they easily accept the conflicting realities in magical realist texts. Another cause might be that readers are used to conflicting worlds as their personal realities always form a sharp contrast with the fictional world anyway.

So if the readership enjoys magic, what exactly is the connection to African literature and does the South African author Zakes Mda need to accept that his works are labelled *magical realist*?

6. AFRICAN LITERATURE AND MAGICAL REALISM

Like in the rest of the world, the novel is the most important genre in African literature. Irele even claims that it has taken the place of oral narration (see Irele 1). Irele also states that there is an "oral-literate interface" (Irele 1) which is typical for African writers and which shows the influence oral story telling has had on African writers as

it "provide[s] the imaginative background and [...] the structural model" (Irele 1). Oral storytelling in Africa is not just a way of narration, but also a way of life. In this context, Amuta highlights that while it was liberalism which led to the development of the Western novel, the question of race and nationalist politics formed the basis of the African novel (see Amuta 127). The Zimbabwean academic and writer Emmanuel Ngara remarks:

The writings of committed, political ideologists and talented academics were an expression, in ideological terms, of a new social psychology, a new level of political and ideological awareness after an era of acceptance of and submission to colonial domination, cultural imperialism and capitalist exploitation.
(Ngara qtd. in Amuta 127)

Magical realism is therefore considered as a means of expressing the horrors of colonialism and writing against trauma.

7. MAGICAL REALISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM

In the context of postcolonial writing, however, what can magic realism offer? The term "postcolonial" is as problematic as "magic realism," but broadly speaking, postcolonial writing encompasses a wide range of discursive practices which resist colonialism and colonial ideologies. Undoubtedly notions of identity, history and perspective are important to postcolonial writers, but perhaps the most dramatic effect of the colonization process is that the colonized are forced to occupy two conflicting worlds or spaces, referred to by Linda Hutcheon as a duality of 'post-colonial doubled identity and history'. (Hamacher-Lubitz 95)

Many critics believe that the origins of the African novel can be found in the traumatizing experience of colonialism, i.e. the contact with Europe. This, however, also implies the belief that it was due to the European missionaries who brought literacy and Western schooling to Africa that a new African elite could develop, some of which eventually became writers.

(See Irele 2)

Moreover, the novel was part of the syllabus imposed by the colonist forces in various parts of Africa. This sort of education created a "colonized bourgeoisie" (Amuta 126). This bourgeoisie was either assimilated by the colonized forces or used the knowledge

acquired to combat them. The second option was the more attractive one and the novel became a prominent art form in expressing opposition.

(See Amuta 126)

Amuta further claims that although literature as an art form usually does not flourish where people are suppressed, it cannot be denied that the culture of the colonizers influenced the African people (see Amuta 126-127).

Irele, however, stresses that this view needs to be questioned because in fact it was the Arabs who brought literacy to Africa much earlier than the Europeans and the Koran (and not the Bible) served as reference for written texts for about a millennium (see Irele 2). Irele also makes it a point that in her view it was neither the Koran nor the Bible which left the first literary traces in Africa as its true origins are to be found in two canonical texts: the *Aethiopica* by the Greek writer Heliodorus and *The Golden Ass* by the Latin author Apuleius. This also proves that the African writers had the capacities to master foreign languages and use them to create their own literature.

(See Irele 2)

7.1 Postcolonial Discourse

No matter in which precise form colonialism occurs, it always results in a kind of "double vision" (Slemon 411) or binary opposition which is caused by the transfer of a language to a new environment as well as by "imposing a foreign language on an indigenous population" (Slemon 411). This causes problems because as Howells points out: "Our way of seeing is structured by the forms in which our language enables us to 'see'" (Howells qtd. in Slemon 411). Ideally, over time, it should become possible to express *the local* in the new language (see Slemon 411). As Slemon (411) states, in *magical realism*, there is a struggle between the codes of a language used and codes of utopian story telling which reflect "local realism" (Slemon 411) as well as ancient beliefs about the world (see Slemon 411). A postcolonial text therefore mirrors "the social relations of a postcolonial culture" (Slemon 411). Slemon also argues that postcolonial texts "seek to recuperate the lost voices and discarded fragments that imperialist cognitive structures push to the margins of critical consciousness" (Slemon 415).

8. CRITICISM

As stated at the beginning, the concept of magical realism has always been disputed as the attitudes towards it differ significantly. Most critics view it as a genre of its own right, for others it only labels a new form of exoticism (see Binder 18).

One major point of criticism is that the term has been used for works and authors from a multitude of cultural backgrounds (Latin America, India, South Africa, Canada) and that it is extremely difficult to find one definition which comprises all its features. Although the concept is deficient of a clear theoretical basis, it is commonly used today. González Echevarría calls this "a theoretical vacuum" (González Echevarría 108). Still, it is very unlikely that a more adequate and more clearly defined term will be developed in the near future (see Binder 19).

Another reason why magical realist works are criticised, is reception. They have often been qualified as "escapist literature" (Binder 19) destined to the Western reader and thus being nothing more than "kitsch" (Binder 19). While it might be true that some readers choose magical realist texts to escape reality, Bowers stresses that predictions of how readers receive a text should not be made (see Bowers 46). Still, the background knowledge of the readership is always of importance. Supposing that somebody is not aware of South Africa's history of colonialism and the apartheid regime, then the escapist approach would be in the foreground (see Binder 19-20). The main problem is that "it is indeed very difficult for a western [sic] reader to read beyond his or her cultural context" (Binder 20).

Another strong point of critique is that magical realist writers are often highly educated and lead a privileged life (see Binder 20-21). As a consequence, they have little in common with the rural communities they describe, whose members are often poor and illiterate farmers or workers (see Binder 20-21). Other critics, however, do not view this as problematic at all. For them, the only thing that really matters is that the text works (see Binder 20-21).

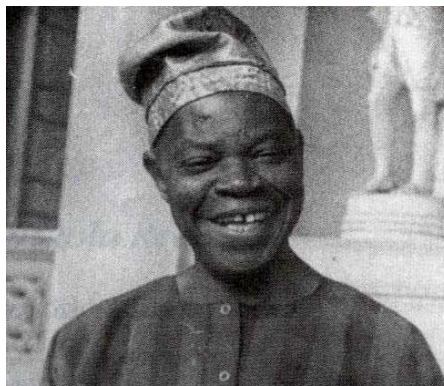
Some critics are also of the opinion that magical realism contributes to the prejudices against non-Western societies. Although Western societies are built on the values of

Enlightenment, i.e. reason, rationality and science, this accusation might or might not hold true (see Binder 20-21).

9. THE PALM-WINE DRINKARD AND HIS DEAD PALM-WINE TAPSTER IN THE DEAD'S TOWN (AMOS TUTUOLA)

Teachers of English language and educated Africans who pride themselves on their mastery of English will be surprised to learn that in creative writing grammar does not count very much. In art, too, perspective, proportion, symmetry, have very little importance to great artists.

(Liyong 77)



(Fig. 1: Photo of Amos Tutuola,
<http://weirdfictionreview.com>)

9.1 Short Summary

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is the story of a young man who spends his days doing nothing, but drinking palm-wine. His father is a rich man and apart from buying his son a huge palm-tree farm, he has also engaged a professional palm-wine tapster. Unfortunately, the tapster falls from a tree one day and is dead. As the palm-wine drinkard is not able to find an equally skilled tapster, he decides to travel to *Deads' Town* to take his tapster back home.

Although the drinkard can do magic, the journey proves to be more difficult than he imagined and he has to face many challenges. The drinkard for example has to trap Death, save a young lady who is held prisoner by a skull and fight different monsters. In the end, when the drinkard finally arrives in *Deads' Town* he is, however, not able

to persuade the tapster to come back home. Still, the story has a positive ending because the drinkard has grown as a person and is now prepared to take responsibility.

9.2 Author's Biography

Amos Tutuola was born in Abeokuta in 1920 as the son of a cocoa farmer. Although his father was a hard-working man and cocoa farming a flourishing business, the family was poor because it was the colonial government to which the main profits went. And as the family consisted of seven children, Tutuola's father could only afford a couple of years schooling for his son. Tutuola was a brilliant student and moved on to high school. Unfortunately, the wife of his employer in Lagos proved to be a particularly nasty woman who derived pleasure from hitting and insulting the young Tutuola, so that Tutuola finally left Lagos without completing high school. After his father's death, Tutuola finally found work as messenger at the Department of Labour in Lagos. The work was hardly fulfilling and often there were long periods of waiting to be assigned a task. Tutuola thus had the idea to write down some of the stories he knew from childhood, which meant that he wrote *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.

(See Ajani 4-7)

He then offered the manuscript to Lutterworth Press as he had read in a newspaper that other African authors worked with them. Mary Senior, the African Editorial Secretary immediately fell in love with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, but was unable to get it on the publishing list for internal reasons. A colleague of hers finally came up with the idea that Faber and Faber might accept the manuscript and they did. It is thus much due to the two experts from Lutterworth Press that Amos Tutuola became an internationally renowned author.

(See Lindfors, *Early West African Writers* 18-24)

9.3 Tutuola – the African Shakespeare?

Tutuola undoubtedly possessed an unbounded imagination, but – as he himself never denied – *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* has his roots in Yoruba folktales (see Dussutour-Hammer 25-26). While some critics claim that Tutuola mainly reproduces these stories, Obiechina provides clear criteria for his originality. "His mode of delivering,

dramatic gestures and verbal dexterity are the essential qualities that mark him out as a good story-teller" (Obiechina 85). Obiechina further explains that African storytelling is characterised by the fact that different persons retell the same story and by doing so the individual storyteller makes the story *his* (see Obiechina 85). And of course not everybody is a gifted storyteller, from which, according to Obiechina, follows that Tutuola possesses the necessary *originality* of a writer (see Obiechina 85). He even compares Tutuola to Shakespeare and "to the problem of adaptation and borrowing in Elizabethan literature" (Obiechina 86). Obiechina (86) emphasizes that some of the most celebrated literature of the age was inspired by existing themes and works and not without some irony, he states that "the world is certainly much the richer for having Shakespeare" (Obiechina 86).

9.4 What Has Literature Got to Do with it?²

Another point of criticism which is frequently brought forward against Tutuola is his usage of English. And it is true that after reading the first couple of pages, the reader understands that Tutuola does not perfectly master *The Queen's English* in the grammatical sense. As Ajani points out, "most of the criticisms of his works have been centered on the language in which he chose to write, rather than on the message and merit of his works" (Ajani 2). Tutuola's English is strongly influenced by his mother tongue Yoruba, he only uses English to be able to communicate his stories to an audience beyond Nigeria (see Fox 203). However, when Tutuola sent his manuscript to Lutterworth Press, he also did not feel competent in the English language and added a note for Ms. Senior, the Editorial Secretary:

I shall be very much grateful if you will correct my "WRONG-ENGLISH" etc. and can alter the story itself if possible, of course, it is not necessary to tell you as you are an expert in this work.
(Tutuola qtd. in Lindfors, *Early West African Writers* 22)

² (Achebe 154)

Luckily enough, Faber and Faber in the end decided not to change the text, which may be the main reasons why it became such a success. Later in his life Tutuola commented thus on his usage of English:

Probably if I had more education, that might change my writing or improve it or change it to another thing people would not admire. [...] Perhaps with higher education, I might not be a popular writer. I might not write folktales. I might not take it as anything important. I would take it as superstition and not write in that line.

(Interview with Tutuola qtd. in Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant* 143)

So in the end one has to admit that Tutuola's English is special, but does it really matter? E.B. White once said "Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar" (www.brainyquote.com) ...

9.5 What Literary Genre Can *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* Be Attributed to?

The Palm-Wine Drinkard belongs to the genre of folktale and is, more precisely speaking, a quest, which is a common form of folktale. According to Ogundipe-Leslie (108) it is not only "the simplest of all artistic patterns" (Ogundipe-Leslie 108), but also "a well-worn motif in the genre of folk-tale" (Ogundipe-Leslie 108). Ogundipe-Leslie further argues that Tutuola instinctively, and not "through an intellectual choice" (Ogundipe-Leslie 108), decided to give his story the form of a quest.

As far as structure is concerned, it takes the protagonist about twenty-one episodes to find his palm-wine tapster and the return journey is made up of about nine episodes (see Ogundipe-Leslie 107-109). The structure is thus asymmetrical, but typical for quests, as the aim is building up suspense (see Ogundipe-Leslie 107-109). With regard to content, Hogan highlights that the novel is based on "the fundamental Yoruba principles of fertility and reciprocity" (Hogan 36). Tutuola wants to remind young people of Yoruba traditions and customs because they often think European culture is more desirable (see Tutuola qtd. in Thelwell 214). Tutuola himself explained clearly what he was worried about:

I noticed that our young men, our young sons and daughters did not pay much attention to our traditional things or culture or customs. They adopted, they concentrated their minds only on European things. They left our customs, so if I do this they may change their mind ... to remember our custom, not to leave it to die ... That was my intention.
(Tutuola qtd. in Thelwell 214)

However, although Tutuola wants to bring Yoruba culture closer to the reader, he himself cannot completely escape European influence as for example his predilection for numbers shows.

9.6 Numbers and/versus Reality

Tutuola loves to play with numbers. Although *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a truly magic tale, Tutuola adds numbers wherever he can to make his story more realist – no matter how impossible his figures may be if one thinks about it more closely (see Hoffman 487-488). This already becomes clear at the very beginning of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*:

So my father gave me a palm-tree farm which was nine miles square and it contained 560,000 palm-trees, and this palm-wine tapster was tapping one hundred and fifty kegs of palm-wine every morning, but before 2 o'clock p.m., I would have drunk all of it; after that he would go and tap another 75 kegs in the evening which I would be drinking till morning.
(Tutuola 7)

The reader may just wonder at the huge size of the farm (560,000 palm trees!) and how one can consume 2, 900 litres (approximately) of palm wine until 2 p.m. every day (even if one takes into consideration that the palm wine drinkard can count on his friends' help). And although the protagonist possesses numerous extraordinary qualities, he still has to earn his life. He once completely runs out of money and changes himself into a boat so that his wife can take passengers from shore to shore and earn money. Even his *Complete Gentleman* meticulously pays rent for all the various parts of his body which he borrowed from other people. Jones remarks "[h]is [Tutuola's] use of money is interesting. The curious creature had inventoried £2,000 in the market place. In the manner of an official receipt, Tutuola writes the sum out in words as well as in figures. This interplay of the world of hard commerce and the world

of fantasy combine to give Tutuola his bizarre dream effect" (Jones 47). Jones further argues that Tutuola's love for figures stems from his job at the government (see Jones 47), but it also shows that being able to make ends meet is something that Tutuola seems to worry about constantly so that his palm-wine drinkard finds remarkable ways of earning money and does not even shy away from selling his own death:

Now by that time and before we entered inside the white tree, we had 'sold our death' to somebody at the door for the sum of £70: 18: 6d and 'lent our fear' to somebody at the door as well on interest of £3: 10: 0d per month, so we did not care about death and we did not fear again.
(Tutuola 67)

The drinkard's selling of his own death – which appears to be completely logic and natural within the story – already constitutes a magical realist event as defined in the introductory section. And there are many more of such episodes. The palm-wine drinkard for example encounters a wise old lady, the "Faithful-Mother" (Tutuola 69) who lives in a tree which measures "one thousand and fifty feet in length and about two hundred feet in diameter" (Tutuola 65) or gets caught in a bag of "150 feet diameter [...] [that] could contain 45 persons" (Tutuola 103) together with his wife and "9 terrible creatures" (Tutuola 104). All these examples raise the question why Tutuola focuses so much on figures. As far as the indication of costs or earnings is concerned, Hoffman even calls Tutuola "obsessed with monetary precision" (Hoffman 489) and states that "in the course of his fantastic journey everything seems to have its price" (Hoffman 489).

It is, however, a paradox that magic and materialism co-exist in Tutuola's world. During his quest, there are several occasions when the palm-wine drinkard worries about material needs. Yet, when he comes into possession of a magic egg, he can suddenly wish for anything he likes and takes care of a community of thousands of people:

So when it was ten o'clock and when the whole of these people sat down quietly, then I commanded the egg as before and at once, it produced food and drinks for each of these people, so that everyone of them who had not eaten for a year, ate and drank to his or her satisfaction [...]
(Tutuola 121)

In the end, after the lazy neighbours have profited from the magic egg and the drinkard's hospitality, the drinkard accidentally breaks the egg and it cannot do magic any more, which angers the neighbours who, as Obiechina stresses, are only looking for an easy life and are no real friends. When the protagonist eventually manages to put the parts of the egg together again, its magic works in the opposite direction. When asked by the drinkard, it does not produce food anymore, but whips which start beating the false friends and drive them away.

(See Obiechina 88-89)

This is one of the passages to which critics attribute a moral meaning or as Obiechina puts it: "[...] there is really nothing like honest labour for honest returns" (Obiechina 89). One could thus conclude that magic cannot replace honest labour and that there are always limits which need to be respected.

9.7 The Geography of Tutuola's World

Although Tutuola's world is full of magic, there exist firm boundaries which cannot be overcome. According to Obiechina (89), every being that exists within the palm-wine drinkard's world is very conscious of the territory it belongs to and trespassing is not only undesirable, but actively avoided (see the people in *Deads' Town*, the *Red-People* or the *Complete Gentleman* who warns the young girl not to follow him into the woods). Moreover, the inhabitants of the *Tutuolean universe* are also physically very different from each other, which can also be interpreted as a kind of barrier (see Obiechina 89). Moreover, Quayson observes that "the spirit-figures are obeying the dictates of the episodic format that controls the narrative in general" (Quayson 63). As Obiechina stresses, the only persons who actively transgress boundaries are the palm-wine drinkard and his wife, which is mostly met with hostility on the part of those who occupy the respective territories (like for example the dead babies who drive the drinkard away from the road, the mountain creatures which do not dare to cross the stream or the dead tapster who refuses to leave *Deads' Town*) (see Obiechina 89). It is, however, also true that it is impossible for the protagonist to stay within his pre-defined boundaries if he wants to pursue his quest and find his tapster and he also seems to be less conscious of boundaries – in the literal as well as in the figurative sense – than anybody else (see Obiechina 89).

Obiechina also observes that *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a mixture between a "folktale/quest hero" (Obiechina 95) and a "trickster (or Picaro)" (Obiechina 95). Obiechina further elaborates on the difference between the two, stating that "the quest hero is single-mindedly bent toward achieving a worthy objective [...], [while being] courageous, bold, resourceful, intelligent and pleasant, whereas the trickster is clever, sly, intemperate and given to phallic obsession" (Obiechina 95). The critic concedes that although the palm-wine drinkard shares picaresque qualities, he never tricks or profits from other people. Obiechina is also convinced that Tutuola gave his hero exactly these qualities because this was the only way to tell a story which gave his imagination enough room: Not only the hero possesses incredible supernatural powers, but also his antagonists (like the "half-bodied baby" (Tutuola 35), the "complete gentleman" (Tutuola 21) or "the red fish" (Tutuola 75)). In Obiechina's view, the palm-wine drinkard's enemies are so powerful that they can be compared to Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (see Obiechina 95). In spite of that, those who mean well also possess unearthly powers. The drinkard is – according to himself – the "Father of gods who could do anything in this world" (Tutuola 23) and he later receives support in his quest by his wife who is a prophet (see Obiechina 98). Similar to an oracle, the drinkard's wife makes announcements which can be interpreted in different ways, but in the end turn out to be true (see Obiechina 98). Talking about a stranger who wants to borrow money from the drinkard and work for him in return, she for example once tells her husband "the man would be a – 'WONDERFUL HARD WORKER, BUT HE WOULD BE A WONDERFUL ROBBER IN FUTURE'" (Tutuola 86). Unfortunately, her prophecies are always riddles and it only becomes clear later how they were to be understood, but they contribute to the magic, fairy-tale atmosphere of the story.

9.8 Colonial Trauma

Just like in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* by Cheney-Coker (which will be discussed later), colonial trauma is present in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, although in a more latent way. The first indication can already be found in the first paragraph of the novel, where we read: "In those days we did not know other money, except COWRIES, so that everything was very cheap, and my father was the richest man in our town" (Tutuola 7). This passage at the very beginning already implies trauma, namely "the

transition from a traditional to a colonial economy" (Hoffman 489). As Hoffman points out, the Nigerians obviously were wealthier before being colonized by the British and had a higher standard of living (see Hoffman 489). This becomes even more explicit, when the palm-wine drinkard meets a man who asks him what *poor* means and at the same time wants to borrow money:

One night, at about ten o'clock, I saw a certain man who came to my house. He told me that he was always hearing the word – "POOR," but he did not know it and he wanted to know it. He said that he wanted to borrow some amount and he would be working for me in return as a "pawn" or as a permanent hired labourer. But when he said this, I asked how much did he want to borrow? He said that he wanted to borrow two thousand cowries (COWRIES), which was equivalent to six-pence (6d) in British money.
(Tutuola 85-86)

So, two thousand cowries in the money of the colonizer equal six pence, a very low sum of money, which "suggests the creation of a new system of poverty imposed by the alien, colonial culture. The difference between 6d and two thousand cowries is not merely a difference in quantity, but a difference in quality [...]" (Hoffman 489). However, although Tutuola criticizes the colonial government, his palm-wine drinkard always uses the British pound as basis for all his calculations – with the precision of an accountant, which might also be based on the fact that Tutuola worked for the Government of Labour for some years (see Hoffman 488-490). Fortunately, this job, which Tutuola found exceedingly boring, did not kill off his imagination. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* abounds in magical realism, but there are a few episodes which are really remarkable and will thus be discussed in detail.

9.9 Examples of Magical Realism in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*

9.9.1 Do Not Follow Unknown Man's Beauty³ – The Complete Gentleman⁴

Maybe the most intriguing episode of magical realism in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is the young lady meeting the man of her dreams, or as Tutuola puts it "a complete gentleman" (Tutuola 18):

As they were travelling along in this endless forest then the complete gentleman in the market that the lady was following, began to return the hired parts of his body to the owners and he was paying them the rentage money. When he reached where he hired the left foot, he pulled it out, he gave it to the owner and paid him, and they kept going; [...] When they went furthermore, then they reached where he hired the belly, ribs, chest etc., then he pulled them out and gave them to the owner and paid for the rentage. [...] When the lady saw that the gentleman became a Skull, she began to faint, but the Skull told her if she would die she would die and she would follow him to his house.
(Tutuola 20-21)

This story, which Tutuola appropriated in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, is a popular African Yoruba folktale: There is a young lady who according to her parents' wishes should already be married, but turns down every man her father proposes. In the end, she falls in love and marries a handsome stranger who turns out to be a devilish creature. In fact, after the *Complete Gentleman* has returned the various parts of his body, there remains nothing of him, but a mere skull. The *Skull* lives together with a family of other skulls who all see to it that the young lady cannot flee from the *Skull's* house. She has to sit on a frog and the *Skull* ties a string with a cowrie around her neck. The moment the lady tries to flee, the cowrie screams alarm. The moral of the story thus is to warn young girls not to act against the will of their parents (see Jones 72-73): "This is why girls should marry the men chosen by their parents and not marry strangers, however handsome" (Jones 73). Or as Obiechina puts it: "Obedience to parents and elders by children is a cardinal virtue, disobedience is often visited by punishment and remorse" (Obiechina 99).

³ (Tutuola 19)

⁴ (Tutuola 21)

Apart from the moral aspect, the rescue of the lady poses great difficulty to the palm-wine drinkard. The only reason why he can succeed throughout the whole story is that he makes frequent use of his *juju*, his magical powers, which enable him to take on any form or shape he likes in a process of metamorphosis. "Metamorphosis offers him both a means of protection and a facility to display his magical power" (Obiechina 87).

The palm-wine drinkard for example manages to escape the skulls due to his ability to transform:

[...] I was still running away with the lady. As these Skulls were chasing me about in the forest, they were rolling on the ground like large stones and also humming with terrible noise, but when I saw that they had nearly caught me or if I continued to run away like that, no doubt, they would catch me sooner, then I changed the lady to a kitten and put her inside my pocket and changed myself to a very small bird which I could describe as a "sparrow" in English language. After that I flew away [...].
(Tutuola 28)

However, our hero does not only use his skills to do good to others, but also employs them to his own profit as he desperately tries to find out where his palm wine tapster is. At the beginning of his quest, he reaches a village, where an old man lives of whom the palm-wine drinkard thinks that he knows where he will find his tapster. The old man decides to put the palm-wine drinkard to the test before helping him:

[...] after that he told me to go to his native black-smith in an unknown place, or who was living in another town, and bring the right thing that he had told the black-smith to make for him. He said that if I could bring the right thing that he told the black-smith to make for him, then he would believe that I was the "Father of gods who could do everything in this world" and he would tell me where my tapster was. [...] I used one of my juju and at once I changed into a very big bird and flew back to the roof of the old man's house; [...] he [the old man] and his wife came out from the house and when he saw me (bird) on the roof, he told his wife that if he had not sent me to his native black-smith to bring the bell that he told the black-smith to make for him, he would tell me to mention the name of the bird.
(Tutuola 10-11)

So, in order to find out what the old man had ordered at the blacksmith's, the drinkard uses one of his jujus, i.e. his power to transform into another being or element. And during his journey, the drinkard once runs completely out of money. He thus takes the

shape of a canoe so that he and his wife can earn money by offering people to cross the river in their canoe:

I commanded one juju which was given me by a kind spirit who was a friend of mine and at once the juju changed me to a big canoe. Then my wife went inside the canoe with the paddle and paddling it, she used the canoe as "ferry" to carry passengers across the river, the fare for adults was 3d (three pence) and half fare for children. In the evening time, then I changed to a man as before and when we checked the money that my wife had collected for that day, it was £7: 5: 3d. After that we went back to the town, we bought all our needs.
(Tutuola 39)

It is thus the ability to take on another shape that helps the palm-wine drinkard to complete his quest. It is interesting that just like a modern superhero, the drinkard can change his form, but he cannot do magic beyond his special capacities, he for example cannot read other people's thoughts (which would have been a great help completing the task set by the old man). Obiechina stresses that "[a]s a result of this [shape shifting], some enthusiastic critics have referred to his [Tutuola's] writing as Kafkaesque" (Obiechina 87). Obiechina thinks that this comparison is misleading as the reason why the two authors have their heroes *metamorphose* could not be a more different one: The transformation Kafka's Gregor Samsa undergoes in *The Transformation* basically is the reason for the protagonist's ruin (see Obiechina 87). In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, however, metamorphosis helps the protagonist to master difficult situations. Obiechina stresses that according to Tutuola, Man has the inborn ability to face up to and tackle problems. Metamorphosis serves as a means of defeating enemies and overcoming difficulties (see Obiechina 87). It seems that Tutuola wants to point out that it is natural for Man to be confronted with hardship and to struggle, but that it is always possible to prevail if one demonstrates enough perseverance (see Obiechina 87). Obiechina thus concludes that

In Kafka's stories, metamorphosis is a process of de-energization, a process demonstrating the deflated state of Man when confronted with inexplicable and portentous forces. Tutuola's tales reveal man as possessing the power and the ability to face up to or circumvent the menaces of those inimical forces.
(Obiechina 87)

Another prominent example of magical realism in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is the *trapping of Death*.

9.9.2 How the Palm-Wine Drinkard Brought Death into the World

Whereas Tutuola's "complete gentleman" (Tutuola 21) according to Faris is an example of the secondary feature of magical realism, "metamorphoses" (Faris 178), the episode, where the drinkard sets out to capture Death (which is the prerequisite for obtaining information about his tapster) corresponds to the fifth primary feature, i.e. boundaries "of time, space, and identity" (Faris 173) are blurred.

One of the first tasks the palm-wine drinkard has to master on his quest is to capture Death and bring him to the house of a man who pretends to know where the Drinkard's tapster is. As the palm-wine drinkard has no idea where *Death* lives, he goes to a crossroads, lies down and waits. Women who are passing by pity the poor young man sleeping in the streets and say that his head points in the direction of Death's territory. Now the drinkard knows which way to follow. According to Mbembe this is a decisive factor within the story as it constitutes "the gate that opens onto the process of *unwinding*" (Mbembe 2003). According to Lewis (ch. 4), it is at the crossroads that the drinkard gathers the strength to defeat death:

He (Death) asked me from where did I come? I replied that I came from a certain town which was not so far from his place. Then he asked what did I come to do? I told him that I had been hearing about him in my town and all over the world and I thought within myself that one day I should come and visit or to know him personally.
(Tutuola 13)

Although – due to a trick – the drinkard succeeds in making *Death* his prisoner, it remains *Death* who controls the palm-wine drinkard throughout the story (see Lewis ch. 4) as the drinkard desperately seeks to bring back his dead tapster, which finally proves impossible. Instead, the dead tapster gives the drinkard a magic egg as a present:

[...] then he [the tapster] gave me an 'EGG'. He told me to keep it as safely as gold and said that if I reached my town, I should keep it inside my box and said that the use of the egg was to give me anything that I wanted in this world and if I wanted to use it, I must put it in a big bowl of water, then I would mention the name of anything that I wanted.
(Tutuola 101)

It is interesting that due to the magic powers of the egg received from a dead person/*Death*, the drinkard will later be able to feed his neighbours. Lewis thus concludes that the "[...] hero conquers death, is controlled by death, and receives life from death. [...] Death, then, becomes the beginning generator of life" (Lewis ch. 4). In the same way, death seems to be essential for further development.

Moreover, Hogan points to the fact that the egg has two main qualities: It is "a food and a symbol of reproduction" (Hogan 38). First, the egg supplies all the people who ask the palm-wine drinkard for help with food. After only a very short time, however, the people become lazy and greedy (see Hogan 38). Nobody wants to work anymore, everyone thinks it quite natural to be sustained by the egg. They want everything to be done for them and in their anger even break the egg in the end (see Hogan 38). The drinkard is able to mend it, but the magic powers of the egg now work in the opposite direction (see Hogan 38). Instead of food, the lazy people are now supplied with whips to punish them for their behaviour (see Hogan 38):

When he commanded it to produce anything it could, the egg produced only millions of whips and started to flog them all at once, so those who brought their children and old people did not remember to take them away before they escaped. All the king's attendants were severely beaten by these whips and also all the kings.
(Tutuola 124)

In the article "Work and Play in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*" (Achebe 100) Achebe reflects on the question what happens to a person who equals laziness with work and lives according to the principle "Pleasure be thou my work!" (Achebe 102). According to Achebe, the palm-wine drinkard's quest is a punishment for having refused to do honest work, so the drinkard has to undergo a process of purification until in the end he becomes a better person. Part of the drinkard's guilt is that he profited from his father's money – who obviously was a rich man – to make his tapster

do slave-like and senseless work. In short, at the beginning of the book, the drinkard lives from exploiting others and thus offends the principle of balance. Life cannot only be about taking, you also have to give and only hard work deserves to be compensated by repose and pleasure.

(See Achebe 102-103)

It thus becomes clear that the egg is a binary opposition: It can give life or take it. Also, just like in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, the boundaries between life and death in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* are fluent, but interestingly enough the idea of territories which allow no trespassing remains strong. It is finally not possible for the drinkard to take his tapster away from "Deads' Town" (Tutuola 96) and back home, but in the end the quest and difficulties are overcome in order to find that the tapster made the palm-wine drinkard grow as a person. When he has to capture *Death*, he literally faces death and at the end of the book he eventually learns to accept it and lets his tapster go.

Another episode in the book where balance needs to be restored is when the palm-wine drinkard's strange son is born. As Obiechina (97) highlights, in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* we do not only find stock characters like death/the devil, but also moralising motifs like "l'enfant terrible" (Obiechina 97).

9.9.3 L'Enfant Terrible

After the palm-wine drinkard and his wife have been married for about three years, the left thumb of the lady suddenly starts to swell and reaches enormous proportions. When the thumb finally bursts open, a male baby boy with supernatural powers is born. The child is a kind of prodigy and immediately after birth the drinkard compares him to a 10-year-old. Unfortunately, the child turns out to be bad-natured and terrorises the neighbourhood. He for example eats up all the food in the village and burns down the houses of the elders. Hogan points to the fact that due to "inappropriate reproduction" (Hogan 45), the child turns out to be a "tohosu child" (Hogan 45). As Hogan explains, the *tohosu* just like the *abiku* are "wandering ghosts" (Hogan 45) whose aim it is "to enter a woman's womb and be born" (Hogan 45). Whereas the *abiku* (as explained in

detail in the chapter about *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*) die after birth or quite shortly after birth just to rejoice at their parents' grief, the *tohosu* want to share all the food they can get hold of with their fellow spirits (see Hogan 45-46). As a consequence, a *tohosu* child is always hungry, although it is provided with plenty of food (see Hogan 45-46). This angers the child and due to its extraordinary strength it attacks and terrorises the people in its surroundings (see Hogan 45-46). Another characteristic of the *tohosu* are physical deformations (see Hogan 45-46). Ellis further points out that "[t]he Yorubas have a superstition which has close points of resemblance with the 'changeling' superstition of Northern Europe" (Ellis 120), while Herskovits and Herskovits describe them as follows:

Among the things that distinguish a *tohosu* from a normal child are hermaphroditism and gross physical anomalies. Abnormal traits include macrocephaly, and the appearance of teeth and the abundance of hair at birth. The *tohosu* are held able to speak at birth and to turn at will into men of any age, in order to pit their strength against giants, sorcers and kings.
(Herskovits and Herskovits 30-31)

In the end, the palm-wine drinkard sees no other way out than to burn down the house of his father-in-law in order to get rid of the child, but the child returns like a phoenix from the ashes and his anger turns against his parents:

[...] I lighted the house with fire and closed the rest of the windows and doors which he did not close before he slept. Before he woke up, there was a great fire around the house and roof, smoke did not allow him to help himself, so he burnt together with the house to ashes. [...] and there I saw that the middle of the ashes rose up suddenly and at the same time there appeared a half-bodied baby, he was talking with a lower voice like a telephone. [...] but as we did not stop and take him with us, he then commanded that our eyes should be blinded and we became blinded at the same moment as he said it; [...] he commanded again that we should stop breathing, truly speaking we could not breathe.
(Tutuola 34-35)

The parents are finally forced to take the child with them and only by chance manage to get rid of it, when Zurrjir decides to follow *Song, Drum and Dance*, which he finds more entertaining than his parents. The reader, by the way, finds it quite normal that the child has extraordinary qualities (like being able to beat up an adult man if the child does not get his will) as the powers of the child seem to be naturally linked to the

strange circumstances of his birth (see Obiechina 97). And as a consequence, the child "is often a source of infliction to his parents in particular and the community in general" (Obiechina 97). It is interesting to note that while Obiechina (97) views the son of the palm-wine drinkard as the prototype *enfant terrible*, Ogundipe-Leslie takes a completely different position. Ogundipe-Leslie argues that it is the community which is cruel against the individual that does not fit in: "The individual is sacrificed to ensure the well-being of the collectivity" (Ogundipe-Leslie 110). This is why the palm-wine drinkard decides to kill his boy child, who is nothing but a nuisance to him, without feeling the slightest regret (see Ogundipe-Leslie 110). Anyhow, getting rid of the child does not mean an end to the protagonist's troubles. Still, there is a place, where the drinkard and his wife find rest and peace: a white tree, inside of which the "Faithful Mother" (Tutuola 68) lives.

9.9.4 The Faithful Mother

After having been heavily mistreated at the "Unreturnable Heaven's Town" (Tutuola 57), populated by cruel dead people who were not allowed to enter heaven, the palm-wine drinkard and his wife finally manage to escape and suddenly notice a tree "which was about one thousand and fifty feet in length and about two hundred feet in diameter" (Tutuola 65) so that the reader gets the impression that "[s]cale is immaterial in the bush" (Onabiyi 57). Inside the tree, which houses a whole town, lives the "Faithful Mother" (Tutuola 67) who not only takes care of the wounded drinkard and his wife, but offers them a stay in her town comparable to a holiday in a luxury hotel:

[...] the servant served us with the food and drinks, but after we had eaten and drank [sic!] to our satisfaction, then the Faithful-Mother told us to follow her and we did so. She took us to the largest dancing hall which was in the centre of that house, and there we saw that over 300 people were dancing all together. The hall was decorated with about one million pounds (£) and there were many images and our own too were in the centre of the hall.
(Tutuola 68)

It is also noteworthy that before entering the immense tree, the drinkard and his wife again take care of money matters. Quite naturally, they sell their death and lend their fear to a complete stranger, which makes it clear that at the place they are going neither death nor fear awaits them (see Hogan 47) or as Hogan puts it: "[...] this is a utopia of

immortality and perfect security" (Hogan 47). Whereas most of the people the drinkard and his wife encounter on their journey turn out to be greedy and want to profit from them, the contrary is the case here and "the principle of limitless nurturance is personified in a 'faithful mother'" (Hogan 47-48). *The Faithful Mother* understood as a nurturer also incorporates the *Mother Africa motif* because she treats her guests like a mother her children: She takes care of them when they are injured, never lets them go hungry or thirsty and sees to it that they are entertained, so that she can be sure they are happy.

Critics have long wondered at this land of milk and honey. According to Collins, the white tree is a combination of missionary station and luxury resort (see Collins qtd. in Wehrs 110) and Achebe accuses Tutuola of having fallen for a westernised dream of consumption (see Achebe 107). Hoffman, however, puts the critique in relation by stressing that although Tutuola "incorporates colonial innovations" (Hoffman 491), he at the same time criticises or even "naturalizes" (Hoffman 491) them by embedding them into an African context (see Hoffman 491). One such instance, where Western lifestyle is incorporated and could easily slip the reader's attention is when the drinkard and his wife have just left *The Faithful Mother* and suddenly see a strange woman in the bush who is red from head to toe and wearing high heels.

The woman takes them to "Red Town" (Tutuola 73), where dead people live who are terrorized by two red monsters. The drinkard helps the people and kills those monsters, showing selflessness for the first time. He thereby adheres to the "principle of reciprocity" (Hogan 35) and is rewarded by fate: He becomes rich. One day a man approaches him and wants to borrow two thousand cowries (the stranger wants to understand the signification of *poor*). In return, to pay off his debts, the stranger offers to work for the drinkard.

9.9.5 The "Invisible Pawn"⁵ or the Principle of "Give and Take"⁶

After having consulted his wife who has prophetic powers, the drinkard accepts the stranger's offer, though his wife warns him that "the man would be a – 'WONDERFUL HARD WORKER, BUT HE WOULD BE A WONDERFUL ROBBER IN THE FUTURE'" (Tutuola 86). And as usual, her words turn out to be true. *Give and Take* completes every task the drinkard sets him, however, he insists to do his work at night only and he does things in excess. When the drinkard for example asks him to cut firewood, he clears all the trees in the neighbourhood and in the end there is so much wood in the village that people can hardly leave their homes. As *Give and Take* works so hard, the drinkard feels that he should receive some reward and offers him to take some yams and crops from his field, which turns out to be a big mistake:

So the following morning when the labourers had told him to take some yams and corn from the farm, everybody went to his farm, but unfortunately they found their farms without crops that they had planted there, for all the farms had been cleared by these bush-creatures as flat as a football field.
(Tutuola 89)

As it turns out in the end, *Give and Take* was only able to cope with such an extraordinary workload because he is the head of all the bush animals. Of course all the other villagers are extremely angry with the palm-wine drinkard as now they have nothing to eat and no crops to plant in the future. As the drinkard and his wife fear for their lives, the drinkard again asks *Give and Take* for help. The creature is willing to help another time and rids the drinkard of his problem – by killing every inhabitant of the village except the drinkard and his wife.

Achebe argues that the episode with *Give and Take* is again intended to stress the value of honest work (see Achebe 111). After making an effort and cultivating his own fields, the drinkard seizes the first opportunity to turn into a lazy man once more and is happy that *Give and Take* does all the work for him. This disturbs the natural balance and proves that "a community which lets some invisible hand do its work for it will sooner or later forfeit the harvest" (Achebe 111). And *Give and Take's* help really comes at a

⁵ (Tutuola 85)

⁶ (Tutuola 86)

high price because in the end he kills all the villagers, for which the drinkard could be held morally responsible because it is the consequence of his laziness. All in all, the moral aspects in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* are very strong and in some cases linked to Christianity.

9.10 *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Christian Motifs

"Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense" (The Holy Bible, Proverbs 12:11) the Bible says. Tutuola was born into a Yoruba family, but his parents had converted to Christianity (see Ajani 5). Although the family – especially the grandparents upheld Yoruba tradition – Tutuola was consequently influenced by Christianity (see Ajani 5). To prove his loyalty to the Christian faith (and maybe to please his father), the author even changed his African name *Olatubosun Odegami* into *Amos Tutuola* (*Amos* in reference to St. Amos, the Christian prophet of righteousness) (see Ajani 5).

It is therefore not surprising that *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, although it is dedicated to Yoruba tradition, contains Christian motifs. Towards the end of the book, two moral dilemmas are presented: One is about a husband who dies and leaves three wives behind. One wife dies of a broken heart, another one leaves to find a magician who can resurrect the dead and the third one protects the dead bodies. So all three women show loyalty to their dead husband. In the end, the magician is really able to revive the husband and the first wife. As a reward he claims one of the wives, which creates a moral dilemma for the husband because each of his wives was faithful. Obiechina states that the selflessness of the women can be compared to Christ's sacrifice for man (see Obiechina 99). In this case, however, the sacrifice would become meaningless if the husband would send away one of his wives (see Obiechina 99). If the husband decided to do so, Obiechina argues, "it is as if Christ would have allowed himself to be crucified only that Man may be claimed by the Devil – a case of stupid self-immolation and a repudiation of reason" (Obiechina 99). Thus, there is no solution for the problem.

The other moral problem is about a debtor and a professional debt collector. The debtor dies without having paid off his debt. This makes the debt collector so angry that he

kills himself so that he can continue claiming the money from the dead debtor. Of course, such exaggerated accuracy appears ridiculous and the reader will agree that forgiveness in the Biblical sense would be the better option (see Obiechina 99). Anouzie stresses that the episode where the drinkard has to fight the red bird and the red fish is reminiscent of "the Apocalypse of John and the New Testament founded upon conflicts with dragons or the myth of man in becoming" (Anouzie 200). There is also a variation of Jonah and the Whale, when the drinkard and his wife are trapped in the stomach of a constantly hungry monster (see Anouzie 200):

As I was in his stomach, I commanded my juju which changed the wooden-doll back to my wife, gun, egg, cutlass and loads at once. Then I loaded the gun and fired into his stomach [...]
(Tutuola 110)

It is interesting that one of the stories is called *The Gospel of Mathew*, while Tutuola's quite similar version would be classified as magical realist event. And there is yet another parallel between the *Bible* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. At first, the drinkard spends his days on his *Garden of Eden*-like palm wine farm. But the expulsion follows short at hand.

9.11 Wilderness vs. Nature Tamed by Man

The palm wine farm, where we find the drinkard at the very beginning, has been bought for him by his wealthy father and is looked after by his tapster. The drinkard has nothing to do except consuming palm wine, he is served by the people and by nature surrounding him. The death of his tapster, however, expels him from this paradise and he has to journey through different parts of the country, often characterised by inhospitable regions. There is an alternation between hospitable regions and wilderness (see Edwards 207). The closer the drinkard gets to Deads' Town, the more unfriendly nature seems to become. The first time the drinkard has to leave the well-trimmed paths is when he follows the *Skull* into the woods:

[...] the gentleman left the really road on which we were travelling and branched into an endless forest and I was following him, [...] The first thing that he did when he entered the hole (house) [...] (Tutuola 26)

So the *Skull* lives in a hole in a deep forest, which can hardly be called a comfortable residence. And the further the drinkard and his wife travel, the more nature seems to oppose them (see Edwards 207). They, for example, travel through a field, where nature seems to hurt them deliberately or they come across the ruin of a former palace, where nature seems to symbolize death (e.g. decaying leaves) (see Edwards 207):

This field had no trees or palm-trees, only long wild grasses grew there, all resembled corn-plants, the edges of its leaves were as sharp as razor blades and hairy.
(Tutuola 43)

The palace was almost covered with refuse, it resembled an old ruined house, it was very rough. When these field creatures saw that the king was not at home, they waited for half an hour before he came, but when we (my wife and I) saw him, he himself was refuse, because he was almost covered with both dried and undried leaves and we could not see his feet and face etc.
(Tutuola 45)

Although in the course of the quest, friendly places seem to become rarer and rarer, they still exist and help the drinkard and his wife regather their forces. Among those places are *Wraith Island*, *The Faithful Mother's* white tree or the village, where the drinkard finally becomes rich due to the magic seeds (Edwards 208-210). Though, whenever the drinkard encounters such a friendly environment, he immediately becomes lazy again and nearly forgets about his quest. In order to grow as a person, the drinkard has to face wilderness (or in a figurative sense the difficulties in life) because laziness does not get him anywhere (see Edwards 210). It is true that, in the end he does not succeed in bringing his tapster back home, but the quest made a wise man out of him (so that others start asking for his advice as reflected in the moral dilemmas of the debtor and the debt collector or of the man and his three wives) who is now willing to work and make an effort. Finally, the "principle of reciprocity" (Hogan 36) is adhered to and the balance restored.

9.12 Final Thoughts on *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*

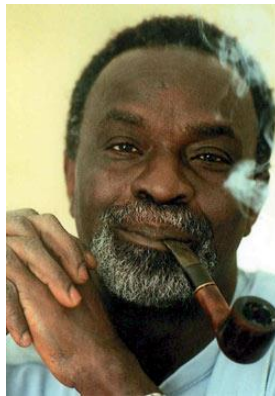
The Palm-Wine Drinkard thus clearly contains moral motifs: work hard, listen to your parents' advice, respect tradition and most of all, do not waste away your life. Luckily for the reader, Tutuola did not choose to convey these ideas – which could be called

universal truths – in some sort of boring moral book, but used magical realism to enchant his audience. And maybe these two key elements, *the universal truths* and *the magic* are the reason why *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* became an international success. So when (some) critics point out that Tutuola does not use *Standard English* and that not even the title of the book is in *correct* English (you will for example not find the term *drinkard* in the Merriam Webster dictionary), one might just as well ask: *Whose standard is the standard?*. An object of art – may it be a painting or a piece of literature – can never follow strict rules and regulations. That is what makes it art.

10. THE LAST HARMATTAN OF ALUSINE DUNBAR (SYL CHENEY-COKER)

*[...] there are those who when they come to plead
say make us Black Englishmen decorated Afro-Saxons
but we African wandering urchins
who will return one day
say oh listen Africa
the tomtoms of the revolution
beat in our hearts at night [...]
(Cheney-Coker, Freetown)*

*Things would come to me like that. I am really at a loss to understand how people
can mistake all this as just a mere example of magical realism.
(Cheney-Coker interviewed by Cooper, ALA Bulletin 16)*



(Fig. 2: Photo of Syl-Cheney Coker,
<http://d19lga30codh7.cloudfront.net>)

10.1 Short Summary

The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar is a complex story, which spans over centuries and tells the family story of four generations. At the beginning the reader is in present-day Africa: The righteous General Massimiara has been imprisoned by the corrupt government and languishes in a cave, where a century ago slaves were kept before they were shipped to America. The General has always been interested in the history of Malagueta and thinks about its past.

Book I

The gold merchant N'jai arrives back home in Kasila after many years of absence, accompanied by the seer and magician Sulaiman the Nubian. His wife Mariamu, who desperately wants to have a child and fears she could be infertile, decides to seek Sulaiman's advice and spends the night with him. Mariamu gets pregnant immediately and is overjoyed when her daughter Fatmatta is born. However, Fatmatta is not like other children. As she is Sulaiman's daughter, she also possesses magical powers and only acts according to her own discretion. She finally marries a good-looking gentleman who turns out to be an albino who literally *falls apart* in the wedding night. Fatmatta's bad luck continues and she is sold into slavery, where her magical powers protect her from being raped by the slave owners. When Fatmatta finally manages to return to Africa, she is already an old woman. On the journey she meets Jeanette Cromantine, whom she tells her life story. Jeanette's mother was a slave who could not keep her child, so Jeanette was raised by a good-hearted pastor to spare her from becoming a slave, too. Jeanette's husband Sebastian used to be a slave, but decided to fight in the War of Independence and thus won his freedom. Now Jeanette and Sebastian are on their way back to Africa.

Book II

Another returnee travelling with them is Gustavius Martin, who falls in love and marries the local woman Isatu. Both couples work hard and are successful back in Africa. Jeanette's son is called Emmanuel and Isatu's Garbage. However, when a potato plague breaks out, the indigenous population blames the settlers. They attack Malagueta and the settlers have to flee.

Book III

Only when another group of settlers, led by Thomas Bookerman arrives, the original settlers are able to rebuild Malagueta with their help. However, also the newly established paradise cannot last, as one day a delegation sent by King George arrives to colonize Malagueta. At first, Captain Hammerstone and his people are driven away

by the Malaguetans, but soon new ships with colonizers arrive and Malagueta can no longer resist.

Book IV

Arabs arrive in Malagueta and start trading there. At first, they receive the support of the British who in the end decide to withdraw as they feel they are now longer able to govern Malagueta. Malagueta is now freed from colonial rule, but the government, led by President Sanka Maru, is completely corrupt. The President, who has allowed the dumping of toxic waste on Malagueta's shores. Malagueta therefore seems to be stuck in a dead-end, when Sulaiman the Nubian comes back on a flying carpet and punishes President Sanka Maru and Colonel Akongo. So, in the end there remains at least a glimmer of hope that the situation will improve and Malagueta might one day live up to the original settlers' utopian dream of it.

10.2 Author's Biography

Syl Cheney-Coker was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone on June 28, 1945 as member of a Christian-Creole minority. At the age of 21, he went to the USA to study at the universities of Oregon and Wisconsin. Cheney-Coker also started working as a journalist at the same time. In 1975, he taught as a visiting professor at the University of the Philippines and in 1977 in Nigeria at Maiduguri University. In 1980 Cheney-Coker published a collection of poems (*The Graveyard Also Has Teeth*), followed by his debut epic novel *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* in 1990, for which he was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize the following year. In the early 1990s, Cheney-Coker returned to his home country Sierra Leone, where he worked as a journalist for the newspaper Vanguard. However, when in 1997 the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council seizes power, Cheney-Coker has to go into exile and stays with friends in the USA, where he teaches at Medgar Evers College of New York City University. In 2003 he can finally go home to Sierra Leone and in 2014, when he publishes *Sacred River*, he even returns to Malagueta, the Utopian town on which *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* is based.

(See *Literarisches Portrait*, www.marabout.de)

In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* we find two types of characters: There are the "human characters" (Bernard 275) who lead an ordinary life and there are "the superhuman or supernatural characters, liv[ing] in, beyond and above the human world" (Bernard 275). Naturally, the story focuses on that sort of *hero* characters, as they are not only morally stronger, but also able to overcome various boundaries due to magic.

10.3 Magical Realist Characters

10.3.1 Sulaiman alias Alusine Dunbar – the Historical Link within the Story

One of the two most prominent representatives of magical realism in Cheney-Coker's novel (which is actually named after him) is the seer Sulaiman who is later called Alusine Dunbar. Sulaiman reflects the cyclical nature of the story and appears again and again throughout the centuries. He is able to see the future through his looking-glass and Cooper (see *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 146) describes him as "an all-powerful narrator with god-like powers to look into mirrors, to be immortal and to not only tell, but predict and then ensure that his prophesies materialize by acting on his predictions" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 146).

1.3.1.1 Sulaiman's Mirror

The mirror plays an important role because on the one hand it permits Sulaiman to see the future and on the other hand it is a means of looking beneath the surface. It therefore allows the reader a "moment de reflexion" ("moment of reflexion," my translation) (Elsaesser and Hagener 78). Bernard (283) also claims that the mirror "unproblematizes the 'life' (not history) of Kasila and places it in the realm of magic and incomprehensibility" (Bernard 283). Bernard further explains that the fact that Malagueta's future is reflected in the mirror means that there is less room to critically question its history (see Bernard 283). Overall, the mirror also serves as a red thread because it allows the readers to orientate themselves within the story and provides a forecasting of what will happen next:

Not surprisingly, on that last day he was alone, and after he had arranged the treatise on learning which Ahmed the Elephant would find after Sulaiman had gone, the sage drew a circle on his mirror, which he had placed between his legs, squatting on a mat. He commanded the mirror to show him the pages of the learned fakirs, the chronicles of the seeker by Mahmud Kati of Timbuctoo. [...] 'The world is a turtle head,' he exclaimed. He saw the proverbial golden comb of a mermaid, which was not a comb but the tongue of a scorpion licking the head of a beautiful young woman at the bottom of that dark abyss of knowing. Then he could not help hearing the strange, beautiful woman talking about one surreptitious night that Sulaiman had forgotten about.
(Cheney-Coker 35)

However, Sulaiman not only has the gift of telling the future, he also transgresses the boundaries between death and life and seems to be immortal. He *leaves* the story a couple of times, but returns within intervals giving the reader the impression that he wants to make sure that his predications come true:

Everything was mirrored in the looking-glass: the octoroon woman who would bring the potato plague, the albino who would marry the most beautiful woman in the world, the man who would be afraid of snakes and would use the skull of his father as a guiding light, and the one-eyed man who would lead a great mission in the atmospheric darkness of the forest tracing the first strangers who would be wiped out because of the potato plague.
(Cheney-Coker 25)

Sulaiman's vision of the future at the very beginning of the book already shows that the long dreamed of return to Africa will neither be easy nor without throwbacks or as Caulker puts it: "the smooth homecoming is not to be" (Caulker 139). Unfortunately, the settlers will not be able to completely leave their past behind them and "the Edenic portrait of Malagueta will be short lived" (Caulker 141) as their newly gained freedom is quickly threatened by colonial interests. Interestingly, Caulker points to the fact that the "panoptic and prophetic picture" (Caulker 129) of Malagueta, which Sulaiman dresses before the eyes of the reader, in fact mirrors the history of Sierra Leone (see Caulker 129):

[The settlers] would control the place for one hundred and seventy-five years, and would establish a most spurious society with laughable manners, and would for a while live under the impression of being in control of their destinies, they would in the end be pushed aside by the "tumultuous onslaught of the soapstone people."
(Cheney-Coker 19)

In the 18th century, former slaves began to return to Africa and established a settlement in Sierra Leone. However, although Britain had forbid slave trade by 1807, it upheld its control of West Africa, which led to rebellions.

(See *The Commonwealth* 2016, thecommonwealth.org)

As Caulker (129) explains, the term "soapstone people" (Cheney-Coker 19) is a clear reference to British colonialism (see Caulker 129-130) and points to the fact that something will always stand in between the African native population and the homecomers. At the end of the story, General Massimiara is executed and the paradisiac spirit of Malagueta has been destroyed by the consequences of colonialism as well as by the corruption and greediness of the new government. It thus seems that the villains won the upper hand, but there still remains hope as Sulaiman – just like in the fairy tale *Thousand and One Nights* – arrives flying on a magic carpet and punishes the bad ones:

President Sanka Maru walked to a window, pushed the curtains aside and saw a magic carpet flying in the air, not knowing that it had come a long way and that its arrival had been predicted by an albino afraid of light. Mesmerised by the occurrence, Sanka Maru thought he was seeing things when an old man lowered himself from the carpet, waved to him, and disappeared under a tree. 'It is a miracle,' said the giant, as he remained near the window. (Cheney-Coker 395)

But Sulaiman did not come to salute the President Sanka Maru, but to punish him for his evil doings, as it was Sanka Maru who sentenced the innocent General Masimiara to death:

Concentrating on the stylistic movement of his pen that had condemned General Tamba Masimiara to death, he suddenly had a shock when he saw an old man come in, walking past the guards who did not bother him. The old creature came straight to him, with the blazing light of his power growing from his testicles. Sanka Maru lowered his hand to get his revolver, not knowing that that movement had been imagined in all the decrees that he would sign, since time immemorial, when he had not even been born. It was the last thing that he did. The light of the testicles glowed with a fierce brilliance, and he felt himself lifted out of the grandiloquent illusion of power, borne into space as if he were a dwarf, by a force too terrible to contemplate but which left him awed by the realisation that in the history of creation no one had told him that what had been ordained by Divine Providence could not be altered by man; not even by a presidential decree, as he came crashing down in the middle of a street so that when the dust had been

cleared, his countrymen and women would see not the eyes of a dead general, but the paralysed wreck of Sanku Maru.
(Cheney-Coker 396-397)

In an interview with Cooper (Cooper, *ALA Bulletin* 15-16), Cheney-Coker commented on this scene and the idea to let Sulaiman fly on a magic carpet:

I remember someone saying to me that on the night that a major character in my novel, Tamba Masimiara, the general, died (you know he was modelled on someone who really lived in Sierra Leone) the night that the real soldier died, there was such a strong wind. It was just incomprehensible. There hadn't been a wind like that in a long time. So I woke up one morning thinking about it and I said: well, why don't you have Alusine Dunbar flying on a magic carpet and let this wind with its enormous power ... Things would come to me like that.
(Cooper, *ALA Bulletin* 15-16)

Besides the corrupt President Sanka Maru, Colonel Lookdown Akongo in whom General Massimiara confided and who betrayed him, also receives his punishment at the very end of the story:

Entwined between the legs of his svelte mistress, he was just thinking about his promotion to general, when he felt the fingers of a powerful creature picking him up. He tried to come away from the woman, but felt the two of them being lifted together in an insoluble tryst, where they had been star-crossed to go on making love intact like a pair of dogs. [...] he and his concubine could not hope for deliverance from their lust, because they had been condemned to an eternal public disgrace in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*.
(Cheney-Coker 398)

Asked about ideological similarities between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (García Márquez') and *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, Cheney-Coker elaborates on the above-cited last passages of his book and explains:

For me in spite of all the sadness and suffering [...], at the end there is hope. [...] After 350 years when Alusine Dunbar comes back, his reason for coming back is to see if what he had divined initially will not be destroyed by very ordinary people. He had perceived and prophesied that Malagueta was going to be created. It was going to be messed up, but at the end something, however infinitely small, was going to be preserved. This is why he stands there and watches the last political character, Sanku Maru, being destroyed. [...] I hope it is clear to the reader we are going to start all over again.
(Cheney-Coker interviewed by Cooper, *ALA Bulletin* 11)

Cheney-Coker is thus quite positive about the future: It is possible to start all over again and to do better. Still, Sulaiman not only represent a *cyclical* link within the story, he also connects the world of the living and the dead (see Mbiti 74). The idea that the dead are not gone, but remain close and intermingled with the life of their family is part of African culture (see Mbiti 74). It therefore follows the logic of the story that his disciple Ahmed seeks Sulaiman's advice (long after he has disappeared and must be dead according to his age) by means of the mirror which serves as a kind of connecting door between the living and the dead. The seer meanwhile is comfortably settled in Paradise (dressed in the finest clothes and surrounded by beautiful women), but prepared to listen to the problems of the living and give advice and later in the story he will even return:

Then he drew a few lines which looked like stalactites on it with a chalk, rapped his knuckles a few times on the mirror, recited a verse and waited. Sulaiman the Nubian came through the door of the mirror from another country where, from his looks, it seemed he had been living a life of lavish indulgence. He sat in a large cane chair that had a high back shaped like the wings of an eagle, and he wore a gown of rich brocade and gold rings on all ten fingers. To complete his expensive look, he had put on shoes that were made from leopard skin and his feet rested on a tamed civet cat with a gold chain around its neck, its skin of luminous black, yellow and white contrasting with the Afghan rug that covered the floor. Sulaiman looked like a man who had been on a long holiday. He had the unmistakeable air of contentment, of a man whose calm and happiness could not be shaken by even an earthquake, and Ahmed was not surprised that just as in former times when Sulaiman had enthralled Mariamu, the Nubian now had two women with the dazzling beauty of Somali shepherdesses standing on either side behind him and smiling down at him.

At first, Sulaiman did not recognise his former disciple. He had gone away for a long time, oblivious to the problems of the people of his former life, living in the tranquil world of the primates. While he was there, he had shed sixty years from his age, and now had the appearance of a youth of twenty though he had not lost the immense dignity and authority of his person. That was why he did not recognise the man who had summoned him until he saw the same forlornness of the boy whom he had rescued from the Arabs in Zanzibar.

Sulaiman expressed shocked surprise at his dishevelled state.

'What happened to you, my son?' he asked. 'You look like scorched earth!'

'It's the woman. She has driven me mad.'

(Cheney-Coker 41)

This woman who has driven Ahmed *mad* is no stranger to Sulaiman at all, as Ahmed is talking about Sulaiman's daughter Fatmatta. Sulaiman gives Ahmed the advice to concentrate on his work, but is not too worried because he already knows that his daughter Fatmatta and Ahmed will finally be reconciled.

10.3.2 Fatmatta the Bird Woman – A Feminist Mother Africa?

When the reader first encounters Fatmatta (apart from Sulaiman the second major magical realist character in the story), she is already an old woman and on her way back to Africa, where she was born. Unfortunately, she will not make it back to Africa alive, so the other travellers promise to bury her in the land of her fathers, once they have reached the shore. Before Fatmatta dies, she tells another passenger, a young woman called Jeanette Cromantine, her life story. As Fatmatta in truth is the daughter of Sulaiman the Nubian and not of N'jai the gold merchant (her mother's husband) it is clear from her childhood onwards that Fatmatta is special:

Her head seemed unusually small though that was overshadowed by the evidence that she would have a rich and healthy crop of hair and that she already had eyes that were glassy and magnetic. She did not cry and, when left for a long time, she tried to put the big toe of her right foot in her mouth, which the diviner put down to her amazing power of strength and domination in the future. 'You will have to watch this one,' said the diviner. 'She will have the power of three women.'

(Cheney-Coker 31)

As Cooper points out, Fatmatta "is in reality offspring of no parents and mother to no child. She is mythologized into Goddess, Devil, Temptress [...]. She is an Africanized version of the mermaid of Western mythology" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 123). It is Cheney-Coker himself who makes the reference to the symbolism of the mermaid: Looking into his looking-glass before Fatmatta's birth, Sulaiman "saw the proverbial golden comb of the mermaid, which was not a comb, but the tongue of a scorpion" (Cheney-Coker 35).

The scorpion actually is the animal Fatmatta is associated with and it helps her to exert a destructive power over men by making them impotent, both in the proper and in the figurative sense. Her first *victim* is Ahmed, Sulaiman's disciple who falls madly in love with Fatmatta:

He went forward, freed of all trepidation, but his movements were fast and careless so that Fatmatta turned but she did not protect herself, and Ahmed saw the deep and treacherous valley of a temptress, straddled by shimmering breasts with their dark berry nipples. He had almost reached the woman when he saw in her eyes the scorpion, with the look which he did not know would produce a

menacing rupture of the embryonic tissues of his youth. Suddenly, the hot and urgent fever pitch of his blood began to dry and he felt the solid evidence of his manhood turning into flabby flesh, drained of its liquid, like an udder. An immense pain gipped him, and he experienced the sharp needles of thorns growing in his heart, and he did not see the smile of a killjoy on Fatmatta's face as he collapsed, jettisoned by his quivering desire, into the slough of degradation. (Cheney-Coker 44)

However, Ahmed and Fatmatta later on reconcile, which is underlined by the fact that Sebastian Cromantine sees an elephant and a scorpion dancing, when he arrives at Kasila. As the reader knows, the elephant represents Ahmed and the scorpion Fatmatta. "Ahmed and Fatmatta have been reincarnated in the animals they are associated with, and [...] their troubled relationship has found some peace; [...]" (Deandrea 39).

They started to dance as if they had known each other in another world. When they were exhausted, the elephant kneeled down and let the scorpion climb on its back and, gently this time, the great beast went back to the woods, trumpeting the memory of former times when he had seen the proverbial eyes of the woman, who no longer tormented him as he bore her triumphantly into the silver light of morning. (Cheney-Coker 70-71)

In the end, Fatmatta and Ahmed therefore are not only reconciled, but happily united. This is an interesting development and Cooper (see *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 124) argues that Fatmatta's role in the story changes over time. While at first she seems to be a cold-hearted "[t]emptress" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 123), she changes into a "Mother Africa" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 120) who protects the founding members of Malagueta and harms all those who do Africa and its people wrong. This transformation is preceded by Fatmatta overestimating her power over men and falling for the wrong one who is nothing but a beautiful illusion so that she has to learn the terrible truth about her husband in her wedding night:

Like all albinos he hated the sun, but when he had heard through the grapevine of the albinos about the beautiful woman who could talk to birds and had the power of a scorpion, he borrowed the body of the most handsome man to die of love, bought a bottle of lotion that the marabouts swore would restore his colour, and went off to marry her. He tried to move, to get to a small bag lying on the floor, for the lotion, but he had lost it in the schism of events for his wedding, and quickly, he began to disintegrate. He felt his skin turning yellow again and his

soft hair becoming coarse. A cold shiver wrapped him, making him shudder in spite of the fire in the room. It was then that his childhood came back to him with its roads of bitter lamentation and the hated cups of snake-intestines brew that he had been made to drink. Bitterly, he realised that he had not been able to cheat fate. As his beauty began to fade quickly, his face contorted into a terrible scowl, he knew he was dying a second time without the power of regeneration. His second death was lonely and not assured of the forty days of mourning once received by those who died. As dramatically as he had appeared on that day heralded by the flamboyant birds, he crashed with a thud on the floor, foaming at the mouth, beside his wife.
(Cheney-Coker 57-58)

So what happens to Fatmatta essentially corresponds to what Cooper calls "the Tutuolan tale about the wayward, militant woman who refuses her father's choice of husband and seeks the perfect, beautiful gentleman, only to have him change into a skull" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 123) – and just like "the beautiful 'complete' gentleman" (Tutuola 18) in the *Palmwine Drinkard*, Fatmatta's husband starts to disintegrate once they are alone.

From a gender perspective, this raises the interesting question what makes an African woman a good woman and whether she can only be a fighter for the right cause when she supports her husband's case.

After this traumatizing incident, Fatmatta is a broken woman. Although she is rescued by Ahmed who is still in love with her and eventually marries him, she is not able to love him and finally decides to leave. This again seems to be punished by fate and Fatmatta is captured by a slave trader who sells her to a farmer called McKinley. But Fatmatta still has the power to harm those who aim to harm herself or her compatriots. Fatmatta's destructive power is "harnessed to a crucial cause" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 124):

Andrew McKinley pushed her down on the bed; but when he tried to take her he discovered that the power of the arousal that only that morning had been his manhood had been calmed by a prodigiously cold wind that seemed to be blowing in his own belly, which left him trembling and awed by the velocity of its force. He fell back on the bed, and he did not know that what he was responding to was some incomprehensible movements of planetary commotion when Venus had moved in opposition to Mars, and that the woman had entered into a complex orbit of her two halves where she could drown him at the bottom of a billowing river in which his name and wealth were unrecognised. He saw a scorpion crawling in her eyes [...]. (Cheney-Coker 66)

When McKinley, to whom Fatmatta now is nothing but a nuisance, decides to sell her, all the other slavers who try to abuse Fatmatta suffer the same fate, so that the reader can "rejoice in the moral rightness, the justness of the fate of such men" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 124):

The belief that she was a creature not of this world but of one where men would be tormented by the scorpion in her eyes and be tainted for ever by the curse of impotence once they had forced themselves upon her did not become widespread until after she had passed through a dozen plantations in two years.
(Cheney-Coker 66)

Cooper points out that "[t]he awesome and unnatural power of women may become an instrument against slavery and racism, but at the price of reinforcing, rather than breaking, the paradigm of female as fatal" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 125). And it is true that Fatmatta does not correspond to the image of the traditional African woman who should ideally dedicate herself to raising a family. In this context, Cooper talks about a "linkage between woman and the land [and] her fertility as a metaphor [...]" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 122). Still, Fatmatta represents the "mother Africa motif" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 125), as after her death, Cheney-Coker makes her the guardian angel of Malagueta and its founding members (see Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 125). But just like the slave owners who tried to force themselves on her, Fatmatta becomes Captain Hammerstone's nightmare, as he tries to force colonial law on the Malaguetans:

Captain Hammerstone was dancing as he had never danced before; his partner was a tall, graceful woman who resisted coming into his arms. He tried to trick her, promising he would go to the bottom of any ocean to retrieve sunken treasures if only she would stop avoiding him. When eventually she came into his arms she touched him at the back of his neck and Captain Hammerstone felt a lacerating, scorching heat run down his spine; he removed her hand and saw that it was spattered with his blood. He woke up violently, and, for the first time in his life, he saw the face of death.
(Cheney-Coker 281-282)

The only reason why it could be questioned that Fatmatta is a true *Mother Africa* is the fact that she has no children of her own (see Cooper 125). In fact, Fatmatta has

successfully avoided having a mulatto child by one of the slave owners – which Cooper describes as a positive thing as these children would also have become slaves (see Cooper 125). However, this leaves her childless, which does not correspond to the image of the mature woman in African society (see Cooper 125). Cheney-Coker thus circumvents the problem by having her support Jeanette Cromantine during her difficult childbirth, when Jeanette is about to lose her strength (see Cooper 125):

Jeanette Cromantine discovered, during her ordeal, that her senses were not tuned to the pain she was feeling. A great cloud enveloped her, and she felt her body go limp. [...] The pains that had begun to tear at her insides stopped, and Jeanette Cromantine saw the celestial face of Fatmatta the Bird-Woman. She had lost the premature wrinkles of old age, which years of labouring in the fields and in the kitchens of supercilious brides had left on her face. As if time had not kept up with her, she had the body of a girl of sixteen, the hands of a woman who had never known what it was like to work. [...]

'Move over, sister,' said Fatmatta the Bird-Woman.

She held the hand of Jeanette Cromantine; then, as if she was transmitting her strength to the woman who was losing hers, Fatmatta the Bird-Woman began to rub the belly of the woman, who was thrashing on the bed. Large beads of sweat broke out on Jeanette Cromantine's face, but they were mopped by the gentle hand of the other woman. They were two women who were completing a journey they had begun a long time ago. 'Wear my glass beads for me,' Fatmatta the Bird-Woman had told Jeanette Cromantine many years earlier. Now, as the labour reached the high seas of childbirth, Fatmatta the Bird-Woman removed the new set of glass beads from her neck. She rubbed them gently on the forehead of Jeanette Cromantine, and muttered some sort of incantation.

'Now, you goin to deliver,' she told the raving woman. [...]

'Where is Fatmatta the Bird-Woman?' she asked.

'No one been here, just you and me, and you got a nice, woolly-haired boy, just like de daddy.'

(Cheney-Coker 109-110)

It is interesting to note that Jeanette is not in the least worried or surprised to see Fatmatta who has died many years ago. This shows again that in African society death is rather seen as a state of transition than a finality (see Deandrea 39), which also becomes clear when Fatmatta returns the dead body of Emmanuel to his mother after he has been shot dead in the last fight for Malagueta. Fatmatta comes to save him from "falling into the slough of degradation" (Cheney-Coker 318). The way Fatmatta is described is strongly reminiscent of the way angels are depicted in Christianity:

No sooner had she said that than she saw the angel descending from the clouds into her compound.

'Lawd have mercy! It's Fatmatta the Bird-Woman and ma boy,' she cried.

With a gentle movement of her arms, the angel laid the dead man at the feet of the old woman; she called the old woman 'my sister' just as she had done many, many years ago, when Jeanette Cromantine had been in a terrible middle passage, between life and death, on the threshold of motherhood, bringing her boy into the world, but who had now been returned to her for ever from the whirlwind of the harmattan blowing over Malagueta.

Louisa was trying a new dress on Fatmatta-Emilia when she was attracted by the screaming of her mother-in-law. She rushed out of the house to see the old woman crying over the body of her son.

'Fire! Fire! The cotton tree has fallen,' the younger woman cried, moving the old woman away from the man as the angel disappeared into the seablue clouds, surrounded by a great school of larks.

Garbage saw the clouds as the angel ascended. He had woken up from the daze that Alusine Dunbar had thrown over him, and started to run in the direction of the house with the lycopods. When he got there, all traces of it had been wiped out, as if a great hurricane had blown it off the face of the earth, carted it away into the depths of the sea, like a fabled ship full of the wonders of threat magician, beyond the vertigoes of rediscovery.

(Cheney-Coker 318)

Although Fatmatta assumes a number of different roles (angel, femme fatale, victim of colonialism), Cheney-Coker is not able to break with the stereotype of what society requires a woman to be like. There is no criticism of patriarchal society and even if some of the women seem to act on eye-level with their husbands, "the proud tradition of men and women standing together against the oppression of slavery and colonialism" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 127) is the core message. Asked by Cooper in an interview about the significance of the "strong, powerful women" (Cooper, *ALA Bulletin* 13) in the book, Cheney-Coker explained:

There have been some rather strong women in my life and I don't think they were strong because they were women. I think they were strong because they were people. [...] [My mother] had given me so much. She had been the strongest force in my life. [...] I do not have any set values about writing about strong women. I wrote about strong women I had known, my mother being one of them.

(Cooper, *ALA Bulletin* 13-14)

And there is yet another strong woman in the book, who must be mentioned: the indigenous woman Isatu. She marries the builder Gustavius Martins against the wishes of the king of Kasilia, who allowed the repatriates to settle down and found Malagueta.

10.3.3 Isatu

Isatu desperately longs to have a child, but suffers one miscarriage after the other. One day, two curious dwarfs come to Bolanda (the small town, where Isatu's parents live) to perform and show off the magic they can do. When one dwarf locks his "brother-sister" (Cheney-Coker 204) as they call each other in a bottle, Isatu, who is watching the performance, faints and the remaining dwarf decides to help her and accompanies her and Gustavius home:

'You there,' said the dwarf. 'Take me home with you so that I can revive your wife.' [...]

The small man had succeeded in trapping his brother-sister in the bottle, which he announced as the last wonder of Sulaiman the Nubian who was still roaming in the area one hundred years after he had last been seen being dragged by the primates. [...]

When he had smashed the bottle on the floor, his brother-sister came back to his original form. Afterwards, they related the story of how they were the last members of a race of dwarf children who had been trapped in a grove by an evil spirit, which had once been a beautiful woman who had consorted with the devil. By so doing she had sold her soul to him, and promised him all the children of the region. Teaming up together the children had found a way out of the grove, and discovered the herbs that could prolong life, shorten the forms of people, and allow them to be in several places at the same time.

'Each of us represents several lives in the intrepid kingdom of children forced to live without mothers, but once in every twelve years we recognise a woman who has suffered, and in whom one of us chooses to be reborn. That was why your wife was touched by the power of the sect, because she was one of those women whose children had been stolen from them, in their sleep, by the devil which has the shape of a seahorse.'

(Cheney-Coker 205)

This story is based on Yoruba folklore which describes the existence of *abiku* children. Mobolade explains that these children usually die within a very short period of time and are reborn to the same Mother again and again. As the mother loses one child after the other, the parents are left behind completely desperate, which, however, does not bother the *abiku*. On the contrary, the more the mother cries, the more money the *abiku*

can make by selling her tears. The *abiku* spirits usually live in trees, anthills or dunghills – places which a pregnant woman should avoid at certain times (before dawn, when it is very hot in the afternoon and on starless nights). If a pregnant woman has bad luck and comes across an *abiku*, it will take her baby's place and she will lose one child after the other.

(See Mobolade 62-64)

The dwarfs insist that Isatu and Gustavius have to purify themselves and offer to perform the necessary ceremony to rid them of "the dirt of the world" (Cheney-Coker 206), which is highly appreciated by Isatu's mother. The dwarfs explain that there are two reasons for Isatu's misfortune: First, Isatu married a stranger who has been *contaminated* with Western culture as he used to be a slave and "has partly lost touch with his African origins" (Bertinetti, *Coterminous Worlds* 203) and secondly, the couple has not visited Isatu's parents for more than two years. Both, Isatu and Gustavius, have lost contact with their roots and are therefore denied to have children (see Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 130). Cooper in detail elaborates on the problem and poses the question: "Why should the marriage between ex-slave and local African not be so blessed?" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 130) One reason is that Isatu acted against her family's will when she married a stranger and left her village to live with him (see Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 130). And when Isatu finally feels she should go and see her family after some years have passed, her father Santigue Dambolla is already dead, but his ghost is still present, which everybody except of Gustavius can feel:

The first time they heard him going through the house, they saw the doors of all the rooms open and close behind him, they saw the pictures on the wall shake with the force of a hurricane and the wicker chair on the porch move into position so he could sit down as in the suffocating afternoons. When Sawida Dambolla tried to pour coffee into a mug and take it to him, she saw his own mug filled with coffee, right next to his chair, after it had been missing since the day of his death.

As soon as they had grown accustomed to his presence in the house again, they left the doors open, put food on the table in the dining room so he could go and come as he pleased.

Gustavius Martins was the only one who did not see the dead man moving about the house. Years of being in the wasteland of America had stripped him of the power to make contact with the dead [...].

(Cheney-Coker 201-202)

Santigue Dambolla used to be extremely worried about his daughter Isatu when he was still alive and thus contacted a medicine man to find out more about his daughter's problems:

Well, we still have medicine men here, and when your father consulted one, the diviner saw you in a grove where your child was imprisoned among other children with hairs that had become entangled in the roots of the trees. No woman, the diviner said, could hope to bring forth a child from that confusion of limbs. So that although you had not told us about your repeated miscarriages – not that you young ones tell us anything these days, how different it was in our time when your mother examined you every morning to see whether you were pregnant – so although you kept it a secret from us, we knew about your problems.
(Cheney-Coker 198)

In fact, the medicine man came to the same conclusion as the dwarfs. Isatu has acted against the wish of her parents by marrying a stranger. Now she has to face the consequences of her doing just like Fatmatta or the young lady in Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*. However, by returning to Isatu's mother and helping her with the farm work, the young couple has made the first step in the right direction. Cooper states that a "woman's fertility is linked to the African soil and traditional customs, and the process of spiritual cleansing and regeneration is begun with the 'couple from Malagueta' becoming farmers and bringing Dambolla's farm back to life" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 131). Still, this is not enough to purify the couple, they still have to undergo the ritual of the dwarfs who find clear words for their situation:

'[...] [Y]ou and the woman, tainted by the garbage of your union, possess a single spirit that is eternal, and your purity of minds can release you on one condition.'
'And what is that condition?' asked Gustavius Martins.
'That you be washed with the sap of the leaves of the grove where the foetuses of your wife have been trapped for years.'
(Cheney-Coker 206)

As Isatu's mother also thinks it to be the best solution, the couple finally agrees to undergo the treatment in order to clean themselves from "impurities contracted in exile" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 130):

A week later, Gustavius and Isatu Martins stood naked in front of a boiling cauldron, inhaling the pungency of leaves and roots which the dwarfs had gone to the forest to find. Spirals of smoke rose from the pot, and the senses of the man and the woman were filled with a vapour that made them innocent and childlike in the baptism of their second coming. When they were beginning to feel their feet moving into the territory of their regeneration, the dwarfs touched them with the tails of horses soaked in the cauldron. The voices of the dwarfs spoke as if in a dream, and the woman felt the encrustation of the dirt and garbage that years of marriage to a man without the roots of the forest had imposed on her, while the man felt the garbage of the world across the sea of blood rubbing off his body, so that they were one again, cleansed of all impurities, and could touch each other with their feathery hands which had been anointed, and with their bodies which had been repossessed by new seeds, so that the fecundity of the woman could respond to the male-power of the husband.
(Cheney-Coker 206)

Cooper takes a closer look at the cleansing ceremony and stresses that "[c]leansed to the bone and at one with the African soil, the two people are their essential, animal cores – male power and female fertility" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 131). The dwarfs also give the family clear instructions what needs to be done as soon as the baby is born: The baby must be brought to the place where Santigue Dambolla died and be "thrown at the foot of the plants, near the garbage" (Cheney-Coker 206). The couple follows all the instructions and it is actually the dead grandfather who catches and saves the baby, once it has been "immersed [...] in the land, in the roots" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 133). Isatu and Gustavius decide to call their child *Garbage* to remind them of the impurities from which the dwarfs have freed them.

Isatu Martins slept for twenty hours. While she was asleep, she had a vision of her husband and mother taking her child to the banana grove near the garbage. She saw them throw the child there and then walk away. When they had gone back to the house, Santigue Dambolla appeared with his feet of a dead man, and picked up the child. Suddenly they began to fly above the fire of the flame-trees, like two birds. She saw the big bird plucking the feathers of the small bird as if they were useless. Miraculously, in the glare of the fire that lit up the sky, the skin of the small bird was stripped of the feathers of past seasons, and its body was smooth and clean like the skink's with the smell of fresh leaves.
(Cheney-Coker 207-208)

Although the parents intend a positive meaning, it is not without irony that the baby receives the name *Garbage*. On the one hand, this signifies that the boy still "carries with him the impurities of his father's history" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West*

African Fiction 133) and on the other hand it reflects Cheney-Coker's doubts "regarding the role of poetry in his society" (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 151). It seems that Garbage, who later becomes a famous poet, represents Cheney-Coker's alter-ego in the story. Cooper stresses that the discrepancy between the work which Garbage, the poet, does and what his name actually signifies – namely rubbish – is very striking (see Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 151). Cheney-Coker himself highlights the strangeness of the name, when Alphonso Garrison tells his daughter Arabella that he wants her opinion on some poems "by that young man with the incredible name of dustbin" (Cheney-Coker 329). In spite of all the irony, the role of the poet who can change society is highlighted (see Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* 151): When the settlers ask Garbage to lead a new revolt against the English, he refuses to do so and reasons that "poetry was a much more dangerous weapon than a whole army" (Cheney-Coker 351). And apart from Isatu, there is yet another character, Sebastian Cromantine, one of the founders of Malagueta, who gets advice from his dead father.

However, the curious naming is not the only interesting feature of Book Two. It also shows that in African culture people do not regard death as the ultimate end of life, but believe that the dead can and will come back as ghosts until their affairs have been arranged.

10.3.4 Sebastian Cromantine – Closely Connected to the Dead

Europeans generally are of the opinion that life starts with birth (or conception) and ends with death. From the African point of view "death [is] an integrated and continuous developmental life process" (Baloyi, <http://iaccp.org>), which implies that there are "interwoven connections between the visible and invisible ontologies" (Baloyi, <http://iaccp.org>). Rather than the end of life, death leads to a new stage of existence. The dead continue to exist amongst the living and influence their lives. (See Baloyi, <http://iaccp.org>).

There are several passages in the book, where the living and the dead intermingle, which is, as mentioned in the introduction, one of the key features of magical realism according to Faris who explains that "[f]luid boundaries between the worlds of the

living and the dead are traced only to be crossed" (Faris 172). At the very beginning of the book, Sebastian Cromantine for example receives a visit by his dead father's ghost:

It was a voice that he remembered from another time, deep and lonely. It had the faraway gravity of a rootless man burdened by his inability to find a resting place. When the voice called him for the third time, Sebastian Cromantine got up from his bed and went to open the door to see who was there. [...]

It was when he was getting up to get a cup of water from the earthen jug that he saw it move, and heard the voice again. He went closer and saw three small bones at the bottom of the jug. He threw the cup to the floor and started screaming: 'You don't frighten me, you don't frighten me!'

He ran back to his bed, threw the blanket over his face and broke out in a terrible sweat. But in that instant when he thought he was to be attacked by the bones, Sebastian Cromantine felt someone touch him on his shoulder and call his name three times in a voice that was friendly and reassuring. Tense, he knew that it was the same voice that had called him that former time.

Although the hand disappeared as miraculously as it had appeared, Sebastian Cromantine was left with the conviction about the ownership of that hand and how far its possessor had come to wake him from his intolerable burden. It was the hand of a dead man who had walked over innumerable swamps dragging the metallic evidence of his chain and the implacable look of his misery. Sebastian left his room and started running, afraid to turn back; he ran over the crops, over the poison ivy, the sharp-toothed traps for the wolves, with the steps of the dead man on his trail.

(Cheney-Coker 9-10)

Even though Sebastian's father died many years ago, there still exists a "spiritual connection" (Borman 109) between father and son. The reason why Sebastian's father cannot find peace is that his bones are not buried in Africa. Cheney-Coker describes the father as "a rootless man burdened by his inability to find a resting place" (Cheney-Coker 9). His father links Sebastian to a past when his family lived in freedom. That is why he and his wife Jeanette decide to travel back to Africa and Sebastian takes his father's bones with him. On the boat, Sebastian shows Jeanette the skull of his father and tells her that he will use it as a lantern to guide them home. This shows how strongly Sebastian is connected to his home country and his ancestors, as he is sure that they will help him make the dangerous journey back to Africa, where he and Jeanette belong (see Borman 109-110).

Years later, when Jeanette and Sebastian are comfortably settled in Malagueta, but Sebastian suffers from an inexplicable depression, his father appears to him in a dream and comforts him. Once again, the dead father saves Sebastian and shows him a way to overcome his lethargy. Although this dream is not a magical realist event by itself, it still shows how the spirit of Sebastian's father has changed. Back then in America, it seemed to be threatening and restless, whereas now he gives Sebastian comfort and vigour. Moreover, Sebastian is told by other Malaguetans that his father is "cured of wandering, spending his days as a fisherman" (Cheney-Coker 88), peacefully smoking his pipe. Obviously, his father's spirit has found peace (see Bertinetti, *Emerging Perspectives* 232).

Throughout the story, Sebastian remains the character who cares most about the ancestors and who does his best to keep up a good relationship with them. As a business he finally takes up producing beautiful tombstones and he even gives a party in honour of the ancestors. With this party, which everyone attends, Sebastian succeeds in reconciling the first and the second wave of returnees (see Borman 111) and creates "a shared sense of identity as Malaguetans, all of which is built upon a renewal of the magical connections that first attached Sebastian to West Africa" (Borman 111). Unfortunately, in the end the party is disturbed by Captain Hammerstone and his men who have just arrived in Malagueta and plan to make it a colony for King George. Borman comments on Hammerstone's arrival the following way: "Whereas Sebastian Cromantine looked to honor the dead as part of life, Hammerstone imposes a new way of seeing life in Malagueta as pointed towards the future, [and] not [towards] those who had come before" (Borman 117). In spite of Hammerstone not being entirely a bad person and having good intentions like his strong belief in the future and the technical progress he brings to Malagueta, he causes new colonial trauma.

10.4 Magical Realism and Trauma in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*

In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* magical realism is mostly linked to trauma and serves to escape desperate situations or to bring about justice. When for example General Massimiara has been executed, the corrupt officials responsible for his death are punished by Sulaiman the Nubian (Sanka Maru is killed and Colonel Lookdown

Akongo permanently disgraced). Another example is Fatmatta whom the beads she wears protect from being raped by the slave owners and who herself can do magic, which she uses to support the righteous. Magical realism thus becomes a "valid tool for conveying trauma" (Mrak 2) so that the "unrepresentable can be expressed" (Bowers 77). Cheney-Coker's magical realism clearly has a "subversive potential" (Mrak 4) and is meant to criticise the political situation in Sierra Leone, his home country on which he modelled Malagueta. As Mrak states "Magical realism is an effective tool for postcolonial and/or Aboriginal authors to present their singular perspective on politics, culture and history" (Mrak 4). In this context, Bernard highlights that Cheney-Coker focuses on two main aspects: "magical realism and history" (Bernard 292), both of which expressed and reinforced through symbolism.

10.5 Symbolism in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*

In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* we find two types of symbols: Animals which are associated with persons – the scorpion, the elephant and the snake – and recurring images like wind and water.

As Bernard (see 292-293) points out, wind and water describe a movement into a specific direction, but it is at the same time in the nature of the element to return (if we for example think of the tides). Water is also linked to history: Africans are enslaved and transported across the sea, so that the sea becomes the barrier between liberty and captivity (see Bernard 292-293). It is telling that General Massimiara's prison is located close by the sea and that in former times Africans were held prisoners there before they were transported to America as slaves (see Bernard 292-293). This can be interpreted as Malagueta still not having been able to liberate itself from colonialism (see Bernard 292-293). Moreover, water also signifies overcoming boundaries in the figurative sense: When Gustavius Martins first meets the local girl Isatu, she is bathing in a stream and Gustavius decides to marry her against the wishes of the local king and even makes the greatest effort to adapt to local traditions (see Bernard 292-293).

Bernard also elaborates on the fact that "[t]he motion of wind and water connotes a moral lesson to the Malaguetans [sic!]" (Bernard 292): There is always a process of change, freedom cannot be taken for granted, but needs to be fought for and defended.

At the same time water, which eventually washes away everything, also symbolises the "meaninglessness, futility and absurdity" (Bernard 292) of life.

The animal signs, for their part, are directly linked to characters in the book. There is for example the scorpion which flickers in Fatmatta's eyes every time she gets angry.

10.5.1 The Scorpion

In Africa, the scorpion commonly represents "dangerous powers" (Becker 261) people fear and in Egyptian mythology the goddess Selket is always depicted with a scorpion on her head (see McDevitt, <http://www.egyptianmyths.net>). Selket protects the dead (the canopic jars with their intestines) and is also a guardian of the magicians (see McDevitt, <http://www.egyptianmyths.net>) In astrology, the Scorpio is regarded a female sign which stands for sturdiness (see Becker 262). All these qualities are mirrored in Fatmatta: She possesses magical powers which people – mostly men – fear (Ahmed, the slave owners), but she also protects the righteous. In her quality as protectress, she supports Jeanette during her difficult childbirth and when Emmanuel Cromantine is shot dead in the fight between the original settlers and the colonial forces, she carries away his body so that it does not fall in the hands of the enemy.

10.5.2 The Elephant

The elephant is the sign of Ahmed, the disciple of Sulaiman the Nubian. People even call him "Ahmed the Elephant" (Cheney-Coker 38). Ahmed is madly in love with Fatmatta, who although she marries him in the end, never shares his feelings. Still, their story has a happy ending because when Thomas Bookerman arrives at Malagueta, he sees a scorpion happily dancing with an elephant at shore, which means that in the end Ahmed and Fatmatta are reconciled (see Becker 99). This happy end is possible as Ahmed embodies the traits associated with the symbol of the elephant: He is wise and peaceful and never uses force to reach his goals (see Becker 99). Moreover, in African culture elephants also stand for "the enormity of knowledge, and since they are believed to embody parts of all other animals, the universality of knowledge" (Werness 163) and as the successor of Sulaiman the Nubian, Ahmed personifies these qualities.

10.5.3 The Snake

The snake is an ambiguous symbol. It can for example mean "life/death, male/female, progenitor/monster" (Werness 377). With the exception of Western societies, it is often viewed as a positive force and has a firm place in African art: "as architectural ornament, on masks, on staffs and canes [...]" (Warnes 380) and the *Tabwa* people believe snakes are "earth spirits" (Warnes 380). Nonetheless, just like Camagu in *The Heart of Redness*, Sebastian Cromantine is terrified of snakes and Sulaiman even sees "the man who would be afraid of snakes" (Cheney-Coker 25) in his looking glass. There are several instances in the book, where Sebastian is confronted with the snake until he finally manages to conquer his fears.

Suddenly, he heard a rustle in a tree nearby. A large green snake inched its way down from a branch, dropped to the ground and disappeared into the grass of the approaching night. Sebastian Cromantine experienced a terrible fright. (Cheney-Coker 76)

In fact, Sebastian is so afraid of snakes that he falls seriously ill:

Soon after her husband succumbed to the snake fever, Jeanette Cromantine woke from her life of a woman raised to be above the drudgeries of life, to face the urgency of the situation. (Cheney-Coker 76)

In the end, however, Sebastian manages to conquer his fears. He confronts the snake and thus his painful past:

[...] and in the ominous moment when a great snake appeared behind him. But unlike former times he did not run from that horror. Seizing his axe, he attacked the serpent with a prodigious strength in the hope of finishing it off with a single blow. The snake kept on coming, trying to raise its head, to strike the enraged man, but Sebastian Cromantine did not lose control. He let the snake exhaust itself, then as it tried once more to strike, Sebastian hacked its head off. He was no longer terrified of the images of the past. (Cheney-Coker 100)

For Sebastian the snake seems to incarnate the bad memories of his past as a slave, which haunt him. It is only with the help of his wife Jeanette that he can survive the

"snake fever" (Cheney-Coker 76), before he finally kills the snake and leaves his past behind.

10.5.4 The Bird

Africans believe that birds – which are "the freest creature[s] in the world" (Mutwa 2) carry the souls of people "who have reached a high state of perfection" (Mutwa 2) and therefore need to be treated with respect. In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, vultures are mentioned at various instances. According to African traditions, these birds need to be paid special respect as they are "the birds of the Lord, or the birds of the king" (Mutwa 10). Birds are also associated with Fatmatta who is even called "the Bird" (Cheney-Coker 15) as she can talk to them. After her death, she even takes on the form of a bird to protect the souls of Sebastian and Emmanuel when they die:

Great, bald griffon vultures appeared in the sky and Sebastian Cromantine was shocked that even in his delirium he could make out the different shapes of their faces. He saw that one of the vultures was small and had the face of a woman from a remote past, whom he had buried on the shores of a town when he and the other mourners had had the perspicacity and gravity of a language formed in the plantations, with which they had sung her home. [...] Sebastian Cromantine felt the lids of his eyes shut for ever. The last thing he remembered was the feeling of the vultures picking him up with their beaks so that he flew skyward in their midst, freed of all worries in that world which he had helped to give a name. (Cheney-Coker 310-311)

When Emmanuel Cromantine is shot dead in a confrontation between the settlers and the British colonizers, Fatmatta turns into a bird and carries him home to his mother:

Swooping down like a bird, she caught Emmanuel Cromantine before he hit the ground, kissed him on the forehead, leaving everyone confused, except for Alusine Dunbar, who knew through what crypt a great scorpion had passed to light up the eyes of the woman so that she could come through the looking-glass of all eternity, with the golden amulets round her arms, to stop Emmanuel Cromantine falling into the slough of degradation. (Cheney-Coker 317-318)

Unlike Fatmatta, Sebastian does not possess any magical powers. Still, he feels when a dead person is present and when he sees a funeral procession, he immediately understands that the birds have come to take the soul of the deceased to heaven:

Then an instant miracle occurred; he saw the dead man trying to sit up, bothered by all the attention he was getting. [...] Two white doves circled overhead, came and rested on the coffin, and while the pallbearers tried to shoo the birds away, Sebastian Cromantine was filled with the most terrifying desire to shake the hand of the dead man.

'Look at dem birds, he is going to heaven,' he said.

(Cheney-Coker 143)

Just like in Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* and Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, birds represent a link between the world of the living and the dead. Moreover, they are connected to some sort of *higher spirit*: they carry the souls of the dead and communicate with those who are strongly linked to Africa like Fatmatta and Zim in *The Heart of Redness*.

10.6 Final Thoughts on *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*

The magical realist events in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* are clearly linked to the trauma of colonialism and serve the protagonists as a means of overcoming it. It is interesting to note that although the historical aspect is a crucial component of the novel and depicts Sierra Leone's difficult history, Cheney-Coker is not so negative about the future as for example Garcia Marquez in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Cheney-Coker "tends to view colonialism as a transitory phase in the country's history in a wider historical context" (Can 203). In an interview with Cooper the author explicitly states that he does believe in a positive future and that people are able to make their life better:

At the end [of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*] there's an almost nihilistic acceptance of the hopelessness of life. I don't see it that way. For me in spite of all the sadness and suffering, and Jeanette Cromantine does suffer a lot in my novel, at the end there is hope. [...] I hope it is clear to the reader that what I am dealing with is our version of the cyclical nature of life. After 350 years when Alusine Dunbar comes back, his reason for coming back is to see if what he had divined initially will not be destroyed by very ordinary people. He had perceived and prophesied that Malagueta was going to be created. It was going to be messed up, but at the end something, however infinitely small, was going to be preserved. [...] I hope it is clear to the reader we are going to start all over again.

(Cooper, *ALA Bulletin* 11)

So although Malagueta's future looks gloomy after General Massimiara has been executed, there still remains a glint of hope that everything will turn out well after the villains of the story have been punished. But one thing is clear: A good future for Malagueta and its citizens will not be easy to achieve, but needs to be fought for – if necessary with magic.

11. THE HEART OF REDNESS (ZAKES MDA)



(Fig.3: Photo of Zakes Mda,
<http://www.penguinrandomhouse.co.za>)

11.1 Short Summary

In *The Heart of Redness*⁷, two time-lines alternate: the present and the past. The past is about the historically documented *Cattle Killing Movement* within the Xhosa community. While the Xhosa people are fighting a desperate guerrilla war against the British colonial forces, a young woman, Nongqawuse, has a vision. She tells the Xhosa people that if they kill all their cattle, their ancestors will return from the dead, bring them new cattle as well as wealth and most importantly help them drive away the British. The young girl is proclaimed a prophetess and the Xhosa are divided into two groups: the *Believers* and the *Unbelievers*. Nongqawuse even causes division within families: the brothers Twin (*Believer*) and Twin-Twin (*Unbeliever*) are turned into bitter opponents. In the end, the Dead of course do not rise, but thousands of Xhosa die from hunger after having slaughtered their cattle. The Xhosa people are now so weak that it is easy for the British colonizers to win the upper hand.

⁷ Originally, Mda intended to call his book *Ululants*. However, his publishers advised him to find another title, as most readers would not know what the term means. It was actually a friend of Mda who came up with the title *The Heart of Redness*, which Mda immediately liked, as it describes the dichotomy between customary and modern lifestyle in South Africa by referring to traditional Xhosa clothing and body colouring. (See Oxford University Press Southern Africa, interview with Mda, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Be_iRYHYPY)

The strand of narration set in the present is closely connected to the past and the old rivalry between Believers and Unbelievers, which still exists. Bhonco, a descendent from Twin-Twin, whose daughter Xoliswa Ximiya is the head of the local school and has studied in the U.S., firmly believes in progress according to the model of the Western world. Bhonco thinks it is a good idea to develop his village Qolorha-by-Sea, where Nongqawuse came from, into a gambling city and a tourist resort. Bhonco's main opponent is Zim, a *Believer*, with whom he constantly quarrels. Zim, just like his daughter Qukezwa, is closely attached to nature and both oppose the development project for their village. When Camagu, who has lived in the United States for thirty years, comes to Qolorha looking for a woman he met at a funeral, he at first becomes attached to the *Unbelievers*, especially the school teacher Xoliswa Ximiya. After some time, however, he gets charmed by Qukezwa and her great knowledge about nature and traditions, much to the anger of the *Unbelievers*. Camagu's role slowly develops into that of a mediator and finally, instead of turning Qolorha into a tourist resort, he develops a concept of eco-tourism for the region, which is appreciated by the majority of the villagers and means that Qolorha can remain an ecologically intact region, while the villagers are at the same time able to make a living.

11.2 Biography of the Author

Zakes Mda (Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni Mda) was born in 1948 in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. In 1947, Mda's father became president of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), but later had to go into exile. Mda was only 12 years old, when in 1960 police officers came to question him about his father, and fearing for their security, the family left South Africa and moved to Lesotho. Mda published his first short story at the age of fifteen and today is one of the most renowned South African writers. In 1965, Mda became a political activist and joined the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), but was quickly disillusioned, as the PAC wanted him to commit violent acts against Afrikaner, which Mda refused to do. After completing his studies (Visual Arts and Literature), Mda moved to the United States in 1981 and stayed there for three years. In 1984, he returned to Lesotho and spent six months in a small mountain village to learn more about the villagers' traditional lifestyle. In 1982, Mda completed his master studies in Theatre and in 1983 in Communication and Television.

Mda finished his doctoral studies in 1987 and two years later was appointed head of the English department at Cape Town University. In 1995, he decided to consecrate the majority of his time to writing. His plays, collected in *The Plays of Zakes Mda* (1990), have been translated into all official South African languages. Among his most renowned novels count *Ways of Dying* (1995), *The Heart of Redness* (2000), *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) and *The Whale Caller* (2005).

(See *South African History Online*, www.sahistory.org)

11.3 Zakes Mda – A Magical Realist Writer?

Zakes Mda's work has long attracted international attention. After studying law for a couple of years, he decided that he wanted to become a writer. Memory, history, community and the reestablishment of national identity belong to the main themes of his novels.

(See *South African History Online*, www.sahistory.org.za)

The preface of the 2002 edition of *The Madonna of Excelsior* says that Zakes Mda's novels "have been acclaimed for their introduction of magical realism into South African fiction" (qtd. in Warnes 74). In this context, Warnes raises the provocative question whether magical realism in connection with Mda's novels is more than a marketing tool (see Warnes 74). Warnes comes to the conclusion that Mda is a truly magical realist writer, with the particularity that he not only makes "use of an indigenous resource base" (Warnes 79), but also "adapts and modifies [it] for the purposes of elucidating an unfolding post-apartheid consciousness about identities, past and future" (Warnes 79) and thus "[h]is magical realism cannot be understood outside of this context" (Warnes 79). This view is partly shared by Slemon who claims that magical realism is commonly regarded as "the 'characteristic' literary and cultural form of formerly colonized cultures" (Slemon 408), but argues that it would be too easy to classify a form of literary expression as being nothing more than the result of colonization.

What cannot be denied is that Mda is a master of juxtapositions (present – past, tradition – modern lifestyle) (see Warnes 81) and he addresses them between the poles

of "respect, distrust and outright satire" (Warnes 81), which also holds true for his magical realism.

In this context, it is interesting to note what Zakes Mda thinks about his being described as a magical realist writer:

I have never said that my work is not magical realism. I've merely said that I do not categorize my work. I do not set out to write magical realism but if critics see it as such, good luck to them, that's fine. I don't quarrel with that because I am sure they see some element in it that reminds them of magical realism. I draw from the same sources as the creators of magical realism hence the "magic." I say "magic" in quotes, you see, because the world from which my fiction draws hasn't got that line of demarcation between the supernatural on one hand and what you would call objective reality on the other hand. The two merge and live side by side. Those who live in that world can't separate the two. In fact, that's how they live their lives. What in the Western world you consider as magic is part of their day-to-day lives, you see, and it is part of their real world. It is part of their realism. When I write about those characters who live in a world like that, obviously to the Western reader it will seem magical. But those people don't consider that as magic at all, it is just a part of their real world.

(Mda interviewed by Kachuba, <http://www.africaspeaks.com>)

It seems that Mda is of the opinion that what Western critics term *magical realism* is in fact part of South African tradition and reality as the Western societies' and the South African idea of what reality exactly means differs. Obviously, in Western societies there is no place for the supernatural, while in South Africa it is part of everyday life. However, "[t]he fact that Mda was unaware of the Latin American mode [when writing *The Heart of Redness*] does not preclude his application of it" (Barker 10).

Mda himself once claimed in an interview that his aim was to tell stories the way he had been told them by his grandmother when he was little. In fact, writers are often influenced by memories of childhood storytelling.

(See Finchham, www.ohioswallow.com)

Still, in an interview with *Soka Gakkai International Quarterly (SGIQ)*, when asked whether the apartheid system formed his way of writing, Mda admits the following:

SGIQ: How has your own experience of the political and physical reality of South Africa shaped your imagination?

ZM: The apartheid system in South Africa, with all its draconian laws, was so absurd that you could take a slice of real life as it unfolded out there in the streets, transfer it to the page, canvas or stage, and have a wonderful work of absurdist art without any intervention from imagination. To resist that, I had to train myself in new methods of creating art – using imagination and creating works that were not dependent on realistic representation, on verisimilitude, and drawing more from the magical methods of the oral traditions, using more extended metaphor and allegory, embracing flights of fancy.

(*Soka Gakkai International Quarterly (SGIQ)*, Interview with Mda, <http://www.sgiquarterly.org>)

Although Mda does not think of himself as a typical magical realist writer and stresses that he primarily draws from South African culture, he still admits that apartheid and colonialism made it necessary for him to use imagination. This can be interpreted as Mda trying to escape the bitter reality and *magical realism* becoming a means of articulating the *unspeakable*. In any case, the trauma of colonialism was also the driving force which made Latin American writers develop magical realism. So after all, it seems justified to consider Mda a magical realist writer. In this context, Barker observes the following: "Taking for example Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, we might question the applicability of the term magic realism, yet we immediately recognize the unsuitability of other terms describing the mixing of elements of realism and fantasy. Whatever else the novel is, it is not science fiction, fantasy, fable or fairy tale" (Barker 3).

11.4 The Xhosa Cattle Killing Movement

As the storyline set in the past of *The Heart of Redness* treats the Xhosa cattle killing movement, the historical background will be briefly explained. In 1856, two young girls, Nongqawuse and Nombanda went to the fields to scare away birds so that they would not feed on the crops. Nongqawuse was suddenly addressed by two men who explained to her that the Xhosa cattle was contaminated as people practised too much witchcraft and thus needed to be killed. If the Xhosa did as requested, the Dead would rise and bring along a large number of new cattle. In order to prepare for the arrival, the Xhosa not only had to kill all their cattle, but also build new houses and refrain from cultivating new crops. When Nongqawuse and her friend told the people in the village, nobody believed them. They thought it was a joke. The girls returned to the

fields and told the men that people did not believe them and the strange men demanded to talk to Nongqawuse's uncle Mhlakaza. From the way the children described the strangers to him, Mhlakaza was convinced one of them was his dead brother. Mhlakaza went to the fields, but he could neither see the men, nor hear them. It was through Nongqawuse that they spoke to him. Mhlakaza returned to the village and told the villagers about the strangers and the necessity to kill all cattle. Some of the people believed him, others did not. A line of division ran through Xhosa society and the great cattle killing started, which finally ruined the Xhosa and helped the British colonizers to win the upper hand.

(See Peires 78-100)

As a consequence, in history books and at school, Nongqawuse has often been represented as a girl who wanted to show off and brought death and despair on the Xhosa people. However, given the situation of the Xhosa people who were suffering from lung sickness, drought and the constant suppression and attacks by the British colonizers, Schatteman argues that the cattle killing was "a logical, rational, and perhaps even inevitable response of a nation driven to desperation" (Schatteman 277).

11.5 Examples of Magical Realism in *The Heart of Redness*

Compared to his other works, *The Heart of Redness* is Mda's novel which contains the largest number of magical realist elements (see Warnes 84). However, it is interesting to note that magical realist events only occur in the *present* part of the story and never in the *past*. Moreover, characters are divided into *Believers* and *Unbelievers*, with the exception of Camagu, who at first represents modernity, but then starts to rediscover the importance of the old traditions.

In this context, it is interesting to note that in the storyline which covers the past, it was the *Believers* who were wrong about the future and believed false prophecies, while in the present the inverse situation has occurred (see Schatteman 285): It is the *Unbelievers* who believe the false promises of the government and approve of the construction of a tourist resort and gambling centre (see Schatteman 285).

As Klopper highlights, "the present repeats rather than supersedes the past" (Klopper 95) and "it is magic realism which constitutes the narrative glue" (Barker 12).

11.5.1 Unbelievers

11.5.1.1 *Bhonco*

For Bhonco, the supernatural is something negative and that is why he decided to reinitiate the *Cult of Unbelievers*, which is about suffering and lamenting the mistakes of the past. In fact, for Bhonco, nature and the old belief impede modernity and hinder people from leading better lives, which is the reason why he is amongst those who advocate the construction of a gambling complex. However, although Bhonco is suspicious of the supernatural and fights the old belief, he cannot quite escape it.

Bhonco and his fellow Unbelievers for example regularly get into a trance state in order to recall pain and sadness. One day, the abaThwa, who used to be called Bushmen by the ancient colonialists, appear before Bhonco and his friends during a trance:

"Wake your friends up," says the leader of the abaThwa, mixing isiXhosa with his own language which is composed of clicks. "Wake them up!"
"Hey, what is the matter?" Bhonco asks.
"We demand the return of our dance!" says the leader.
(Mda 187)

Bhonco is not surprised at all that the abaThwa have come to visit, but he is extremely angry because he believes that it was Zim who sent them. Still, the *Unbelievers* do not dare not to comply because they fear they might be punished by the *abaThwa* and so they agree that they will have to invent another dance.

This episode is interesting because, as Warnes states, it suggests that traditions and rituals are not sacred and can be changed if need be (see Warnes 88). Also, the reason why the *abaThwa* demand their dance to be returned is significant. Obviously, the Unbelievers have not used it wisely (see Warnes 88). Instead of trying to heal the wounds of the past, they only profited from it to relive past pain (see Warnes 88)

Generally, Bhonco seems to accept that there are supernatural powers of old which are constantly at work. When he is stung by bees, he is for example immediately convinced

that Zim, who can talk to animals, sent them and is highly irritated by his daughter's suggestion of taking him to the hospital:

Education has made this girl mad, thinks Bhonco. Has she forgotten that, according to the tradition of the amaXhosa, bees are the messengers of the ancestors? When one has been stung, one has to appease the ancestors by slaughtering an ox or a goat and by brewing a lot of sorghum beer. (Mda 227)

"It must be that scoundrel Zim," moans Bhonco. "He must have talked our common ancestor into sending me these bees. And the headless old man complied! Don't they know? Bees are not for playing games of vengeance!" (Mda 228)

So, even though Bhonco supports his daughter Xoliswa in her striving for modernity and wants their village to become a tourist attraction, "he still believes in the malignant forces of the unknown" (Sewlall 213). Bhonco thus is not a true representative of modernity, as in his world the magic and the real coexist. This also becomes clear when Mr. Smith from the development committee talks about jet skiing and a rollercoaster by the sea. Bhonco immediately becomes suspicious and worried as the sea is holy to the amaXhosa people and also because "[t]he new people that were prophesied by the false prophet, Nongqawuse, were supposed to come riding on the waves too" (Mda 230).

Maybe the most important magical realist element connected to Bhonco are the scars he wears. They were originally inflicted on his ancestor Twin-Twin because people believed his wife to be a witch and are now passed on from generation to generation.

Yes, Bhonco carries the scars that were inflicted on his great-grandfather, Twin-Twin, by men who flogged him after he had been identified as a wizard by Prophet Mlanjeni, the Man of the River. Every first boy-child in subsequent generations of Twin-Twin's tree is born with the scars. Even those of the Middle Generations, their first males carried scars. (Mda 13)

The scars, which are passed on from generation to generation, prove that past and present are connected. According to Schattemann, the scars display the *Unbelievers'* "anger at the traditionalists who so readily followed the leadership that brought on mass suicide and consequently helped to pave the way for the imposition of apartheid"

(Schatterman 284). In any case, although the scars have so far only been passed on to male offspring, Bhonco is wrong to think that his daughter Xoliswa will not be affected because she is a woman.

11.5.1.2 *Xoliswa Ximiya*

Although the scars, which are passed on from generation to generation, have never shown on the body of a female descendent, at the end of the book, they suddenly appear on Xoliswa Ximiya's body:

But this is not the end of Xoliswa Ximiya's troubles. She wakes up one day and finds that the scars of history have erupted on her body. All of a sudden her ancestor's flagellation has become her flagellation. She rebels against these heathen scars. She refuses to believe that they are part of an ancestral vengeance. She curses her father for resuscitating the Cult of the Unbelievers. (Mda 261)

Xoliswa is outraged and decides to find a cosmetic surgeon and to have the scars removed. She comes to the conclusion that the sooner she leaves *the heart of redness* the better it will be for her. The fact that the scars are passed on to her is extraordinary because Xoliswa represents modernity and is "the most unbelieving – in the many senses in which this word is used in the novel – of all Qolorha-by-Sea residents" (Warnes 87). Pires points out that "[e]ven though the Unbelievers want to forget their history, which they regard as debilitating, particularly the Nongqawuse episode, it seems they are condemned to carry the scars of that history on their very bodies" (Pires 137). It is therefore very likely that Mda wanted to explain that it is not possible to escape or ignore the wounds of the past and in this case the horrors of the apartheid system. Despite of the seriousness of the message, Mda adds a mocking touch because suddenly the supernatural seems to respect gender equality, when the scars are for the first time transferred to a woman (see Warnes 87). Also, the reader will easily imagine the self-confident Xoliswa foaming with rage (see Warnes 87).

11.5.2 Believers

11.5.2.1 Zim

As far as the *Believers* are concerned, magical events are usually connected to nature. Unlike the *Unbelievers*, "the Believers are capable of putting magic into their own service" (Grzęda 162), with the restriction that magic only occurs in the present storyline (see Grzęda 162-163). Zim, for example, can talk to animals and sends *ing'ang'ane* birds to terrorize Bhonco:

Finally Zim gets revenge. He sends *ing'ang'ane* birds, the hadedah ibis, to laugh at Bhonco. They are drab grey, stubby-legged birds with metallic green or purple wings. Three or four birds follow him wherever he goes, emitting their rude laughter. They sit on the roof of his ixande house, and continue laughing. (Mda 196-197)

At first, the villagers are convinced that Bhonco will send the hammerhead bird to pay Zim back in kind, but they soon realise that Bhonco cannot communicate with the birds. As Bhonco is a declared Unbeliever this can be understood as him having lost contact with nature (see Warnes 87-88). However, it is also true that apart from wanting to defend Xhosa traditions, Zim "fears everything modern and foreign to the Xhosa culture as a potential threat" (Pires 134).

11.5.2.2 Qukezwa

Qukezwa is Zim's daughter and the last in the line of the *Believers*. She represents the old traditions and is closely attached to nature. Maybe the most prominent and significant magical realist event in the story is when Qukezwa sings Camagu into an orgasm and becomes pregnant afterwards:

Camagu has never heard such singing before. He once read of the amaXhosa mountain women who were good at split-tone singing. He also heard that the only other people in the world who could do this were Tibetan monks. He did not expect that this girl could be the guardian of a dying tradition. For some time he is spellbound. Then he realizes that his pants are wet. (Mda 152)

Klopper states that Qukezwa became pregnant by "an immaculate conception prompted seemingly from the feelings they have for one another as the village matrons confirm her virginity" (Klopper 99). The pregnancy could thus be interpreted as Camagu and Qukezwa coming close on a mental level, as they start to share views on the importance of conserving nature and traditional values and are both against Qolorha being turned into a tourist resort. Klopper even argues that "[a]s the novel progresses, the identities of the two characters increasingly merge so that at the end they are virtually indistinguishable" (Klopper 102). Samuelson interprets the *immaculate conception* as a combination of magical realist and Christian themes, namely Virgin Mary conceiving Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Samuelson 241). In fact, there are two instances in the book, where there is a reference to the Christian belief system. Apart from the *immaculate conception*, Nongqawuse's prophecies can also be compared to the Christian idea of apocalypse, which signifies that only those who believe and act according to God's will can be saved (see Samuelson 241-243).

Moreover, the *immaculate conception* of the 20th century Qukezwa represents a sharp contrast to the 19th century Qukezwa who prostituted herself to help her people fight the colonizers during the War of Mlanjeni:

Khoikhoi women sold their bodies to the British soldiers in order to smuggle canisters of gunpowder to their fighting men. Twin and his friends made snide remarks behind these women's backs. They slept with British soldiers, the men remarked. They seemed to forget that it was for the gunpowder that was saving the amaXhosa nation from utter defeat that the women were prostituting themselves.
(Mda 21)

Prostitution thus becomes a symbol of the degradation of the amaXhosa nation due to colonialism, while the 20th century Qukezwa becomes "the figure of Mother Africa, which is regarded as a symbol of national recovery" (Pires 148-149). Samuelson stresses that in both *The Heart of Redness* and in *Ways of Dying* women's bodies reflect the story:

The story told through these women's bodies follows a linear structure, untangling narrative temporality and rearranging it into a teleological formation that stretches from colonial loss to post-colonial recovery.
(Samuelson 241)

The shift from prostitute to virgin-mother that we find in *The Heart of Redness* is one from the nation penetrated by foreign incursion to the nation redeemed through its recovery of an authentic cultural tradition.
(Samuelson 241)

However, Qukezwa also reflects Mda's hope for change in South Africa. In general, Mda has a tendency to apply magical realism to slightly mock people and old traditions, but this only shows the seriousness behind his work and his real message: the need for reconciliation (see Warnes 89)

Reconciliation is also an important topic as far as NomaRussia is concerned. NomaRussia once had an affair with Zim, but was found out by his wife NoEngland, who cursed her. When NomaRussia later suffers from cervical cancer and severe bleedings, she thinks this has been caused by her betrayal. She therefore comes to see Zim shortly before his death because she wants him to ask NoEngland for forgiveness on her behalf:

NoEngland contrived to steal a pair of the girl's panties, and gave it to the igqirha. He 'worked it' with his medicine.
Since that day the girl has never been able to have another tryst with anyone. Lovers have run away from her because whenever she tries to know a man – in the biblical sense, that is – she sees the moon. Things come in gushes, like water from a stream.
(Mda 41)

'Do you think just because white doctors have a name for the sickness that it was not caused by NoEngland?'
'No one can cause someone else to have a cancer.' [...]
'You have a lot to learn, doctor.'
(Mda 265)

Samuelson argues that the present-day NomaRussia embodies the death-bringing prophetess Nongqawuse as her illness is an allegory to the failed prophecies (see Samuelson 239).

Taking the gender perspective into account, it can be argued that NomaRussia symbolizes women's inability to exercise control over their body, Samuelson even compares her to a "leaking vessel" (Samuelson 243) and further claims that NomaRussia's sexual incontinence can be linked to Nongqawuse's "verbal incontinence" (Samuelson 244), which finally leads to the destruction of the amaXhosa people. Moreover, NomaRussia's body is also infertile – a stark contrast to Qukezwa who not only carries and bears Heitsi, but also Mda's wish for change and reconciliation so that South Africa can have a blooming future (see Samuelson 245):

There is no doubt that for this country to survive and prosper, reconciliation is absolutely essential. But true reconciliation will only come when we are big enough to confront what happened yesterday, without bitterness. We cannot just sweep it under the carpet, and hope that all of a sudden we shall live in brotherly or sisterly love, in a state of blissful amnesia. For us who were the victims of this holocaust it is important that we do not forget. [...] We must never forget, but of course this does not mean that we must cling to the past, and wrap it around us, and live for it, and be perpetual victims who wallow in a masochistic memory of our national humiliation. We must get out of that rut, and get on with the business of reconstructing our lives. The future is beckoning.
(Mda, www.csvr.org.za)

Qukezwa's partner in constructing this future full of new possibilities is Camagu, who although not a magical realist character in himself, in the end rather positions himself on the *Believers'* than on the *Unbelievers'* side.

11.5.3 From Capitalist to *Believer*: Camagu

As Pires points out, there are numerous parallels between Zakes Mda's and Camagu's life, which cannot be but intentional (see Pires 129). Camagu is highly educated, has spent many years in the United States and is a specialist in communications technology (see Pires 129). And both are deceived by the corruption which still reigns in South Africa (see Pires 129). At the beginning of the novel, Camagu, in spite of his education, cannot find an adequate job in the new South Africa as he refuses to lobby and wants to be considered solely because of his knowledge and not because of the people he is acquainted with. He thus represents, as Peeters states the "disappointed and disaffected intellectual" (Peeters 30). Unlike Bhonco, Camagu respects and values Xhosa traditions and has no problem with the Xhosa's *redness*, i.e. women using red ochre to

colour their bodies as well as clothes (see Pires 133). Although Camagu does not possess any magic skills like Zim or Qukezwa, he undergoes a great (inward) transformation, a key feature of magical realism. When Camagu arrives in Qolorha, he is immediately attracted by Xoliswa Ximiya who like himself is educated and appreciates the Western lifestyle. Only after having more contact with Qukezwa, he starts to rethink his position as Qukezwa's "knowledge and appreciation of the Xhosa and Koikhoi cultures captivate Camagu" (Pires 138). In fact, it is Qukezwa who "increase[s] his appreciation of traditional values and the local natural environment" (Pires 138) so that in the end Camagu not only becomes involved in a cooperative project, but also helps the people of Qolorha to bring ecotourism to their region from which they should eventually be able to live (see Pires 138).

11.6 Final Thoughts on *The Heart of Redness*

Although Zakes Mda would not call himself a *magical realist writer* – most likely because writers do not like labels – magical realism is an integral part of his work and one of the most important features in *The Heart of Redness*. Just like in the case of Latin American writers (whom some critics regard as the prototype magical realist writers), Mda's magical realism is connected to postcolonial trauma. It seems that magical realism as a genre permits Mda to write against trauma and to give voice to the inexpressible. However, as the abaThwa who are demanding back their dance charmingly show, Mda's work is not primarily about reliving past pain. The painful past, as Mda said himself need never be forgotten, but what South Africa needs most is reconciliation. This is of course also reflected in the structure of *The Heart of Redness*: Nongqawuse's false prophecy and the resulting cattle killing has had a strong influence on the next generations and there is only one means to tackle the problems of the present: reconciliation.

12. SONG FOR NIGHT (CHRIS ABANI)

[...] [T]rauma has afflicted individual identities and has left enduring scars on entire cultures. (Arva ch. 1)

[...] [B]elow me it happens, it happens that night bright as day, but I cannot name it, those things that happened while I watched and I cannot speak something that was never in words, speak of things I cannot imagine, could never have seen even as I saw it, and I hide [...] (Abani 33).



(Fig. 4: Photo of Chris Abani, www.poetryfoundation.org)

12.1 Short Summary

Song for Night is about a boy soldier called *My Luck* and the atrocities he experienced during the Biafran War. *My Luck* serves in the rebel troops as mine detector and diffuser and has just been involved in a mine blast. When he comes back to consciousness, the rest of his platoon has left because they thought he was dead and he is now trying to catch up with them. During his journey, *My Luck*, whose vocal chords have been cut, communicates with the reader in an inner monologue and shares his thoughts about the past and present and the war atrocities he experienced. However, indications of time soon become diffuse, just like the places the protagonist travels to and the people he meets on his way get more and more bizarre. As Dalley points out, the title of the book *Song for Night* already shows that *My Luck* is troubled by his memories because he cannot find rest and is unable to recall the soothing song his grandfather taught him (see Dalley 446). And finally it will dawn on the reader that

My Luck did not survive the blast and that his confused ghost is haunted by war memories he has to relive before he can finally reach redemption.

12.2 Biography of the Author

Chris(topher) Abani was born on 27 December 1966 in Afikpo, one of the largest towns in the South of Nigeria. His mother is English and his father Nigerian. In 1967, the Biafran War broke out and in 1968, two-year-old Chris together with his mother and siblings fled to England, while the father who worked for the Red Cross, stayed in Nigeria. After three years in England, the family returned to Nigeria and at the age of 16, Abani, who had always loved writing, published his first novel *Masters of the Board*. The book is about a former Nazi officer who tries to take over power in Nigeria. To the Nigerian government, the book was so dangerous that they sent Abani to prison for six months. After his imprisonment, Abani continued his political activism, which meant that he was in total imprisoned three times between 1985 and 1991. In 1990, after a performance of his play *Song of a Broken Flute*, in which he criticized the human rights violations of the Nigerian government, Abani was sentenced to death. It was due to the "financial intervention" (Tunca, *About Chris Abani*, <http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be>) of his wealthy friends that Abani was finally released. He left Nigeria for London and then moved to Los Angeles.

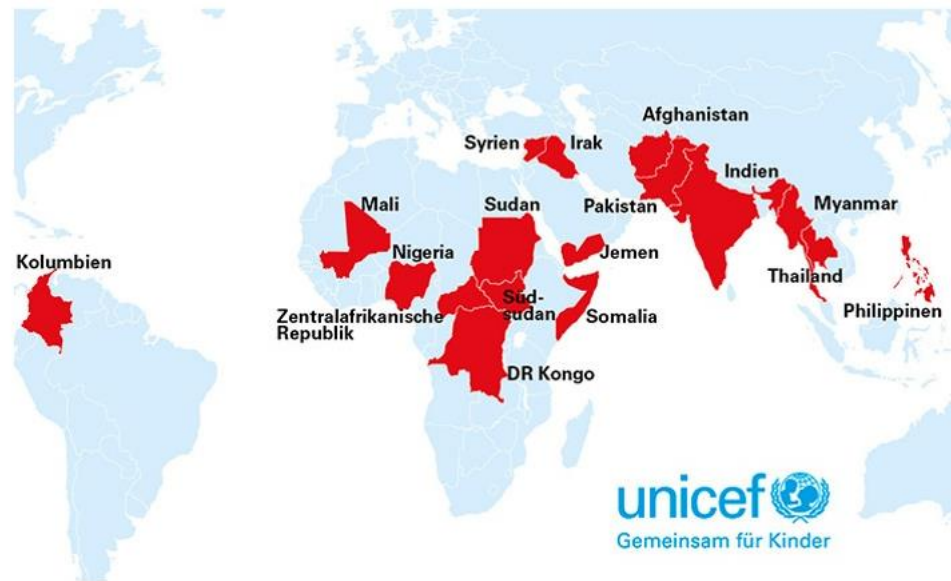
(See Tunca, *About Chris Abani*, <http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be>)

From 1991 onwards, Abani started an academic career and from 2007 – 2012 was professor of creative writing at the University of California at Riverside (see Anonymous, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 24). Currently, Abani lives in Chicago and is a Board of Trustees Professor of English at Northwestern University (see Northwestern University, <http://www.english.northwestern.edu>).

In 2001, he published a collection of poems, amongst them *Kalakuta Republic*, in which he addresses the trauma he suffered in prison. His best-known novels are *GraceLand* (2004), *Becoming Abigail* (2006) and *Song for Night* (2007).

(See Northwestern University, <http://www.english.northwestern.edu>)

12.3 Children at War



(Fig. 5: UNICEF. *Children and armed conflict. Report of the Secretary-General*, 2014)

Unicef estimates that currently about 250,000 boys and girls under the age of 18 are abused as child soldiers in armed conflicts in different parts of the world. A large number of those children are forced to fight; others actively seek to become soldiers because they live in desperate poverty or want to take revenge for their family having been killed. Such children are usually easy targets for the recruiters as they are mostly badly educated and neither understand the dangers they are exposing themselves to, nor what it means to be a soldier.

(See Unicef Fact Sheet *Children Associated with Armed Groups and Forces. Central Africa*)

Nigeria, unfortunately, is one of the countries where children have been abused as child soldiers for decades. Colonial interests and the greed for oil formerly unified Nigeria on the political map (see Atofarati, www.africamasterweb.com). Its people, however could not be more different: In the North of the country lives the Hausa tribe (Muslims), in the south-west the Yoruba tribe (Christians and Muslims) and in the south-east the Igbo tribe (Christians) (see Ekwe-Ekwe, <https://combatgenocide.org>). It was under British rule that North and South Nigeria were unified in 1914. When independence was finally reached in 1960, Nigeria became a federation, but this had

no unifying effect. In 1967, when the south of Nigeria wanted to become independent and proclaimed itself as independent state of Biafra, which was not accepted by the North, civil war broke out. In December 1969, after Biafra had been enveloped and besieged by the federal troops, Lt. Col. Ojukwu, the head of state of Biafra fled and Biafra surrendered to the federal troops.

(See Atofarati, www.africamasterweb.com)

About two million people died in the civil war. The majority of them belonged to the Igbo tribe and were civilians: women, children and old people – most of them starved to death (see Ekwe-Ekwe, <https://combatgenocide.org>). In a BBC documentary, talking about his traumatic experiences, Ben Okafor, an eye-witness, concluded his statement with the words: "I'm not angry I just feel ... [pause] ... pain" (Okafor, www.bbc.co.uk).

12.4 What Do We Mean if We Talk about *Trauma*?

The term *trauma* derives from Greek *traumatizo* which means *to wound* and it was only in the 19th century, after the Crimean and the American Civil War that trauma was scientifically studied (see Arva ch. 1). Today, particularly in psychiatry, the term is mostly "understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 3). Caruth argues that unlike a wound inflicted on the body, trauma "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). In his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud argues that human beings constantly try to avoid whatever causes us negative feelings (see Freud, *On Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'* 7). Our psyche possesses a device which Freud describes as "shield" (Freud, *On Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'* 28) and which aims at protecting us from negative stimuli (see Freud, *On Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'* 28). However, there are traumata that hit us so strongly that they will certainly have a negative impact on our psyche and break through this defence mechanism (see Freud, *On Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'* 29). Freud classifies traumatic events in the following way:

We describe as "traumatic" any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. [...] [T]he concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. [...] There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead – the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can be disposed of.
(Freud, *On Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'* 29-30)

Arva argues that if a person suffers a trauma "specific responses [are] triggered by that condition – which ultimately make it recognizable as a psychological disorder" (Arva ch. 1) and Caruth explains *trauma* as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur [...]" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 91). In the 1980s, after the horrors of the Vietnam War, the *American Psychiatric Association* coined the term "post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (American Psychological Association (APA), www.apa.org). PTSD is defined as "an anxiety problem that develops in some people after extremely traumatic events, such as combat, crime, an accident or natural disaster" (American Psychological Association (APA), www.apa.org). A person suffering from PTSD will typically have nightmares or relive the traumatic event in the form of flashbacks which are triggered by anything that reminds them of what happened. The person feels the urge to relive the trauma as "a substitute for that which cannot be represented" (Arva ch. 1). It is, however, possible to express trauma in an artistic way through, for example, acting out or writing (see Arva ch. 1).

12.5 Can Writing Help to Cope with Trauma?

Arva stresses that "[w]riting, in trauma literature and in magical realist fiction, may be both an unconscious way of acting out trauma as well as a conscious struggle to work through it" (Arva ch. 1). In this context, Caruth considers that we cannot escape reliving traumatic situations because "[t]he traumatized, [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth, *Trauma* 5). As a consequence, traumatized persons are possessed by their traumata which can surface at any time "insistently and against

their will" (Caruth, *Trauma* 6). This view is challenged by Mengel who argues that if trauma remains a latent part of us which constantly haunts us "there is no way of escaping from this dilemma, and there would be no way of healing" (Mengel 144). Mengel further stresses that a distinction needs to be made between "traumatic memory" (Mengel 144) and "narrative memory" (Mengel 144). When the traumatized person manages "to 'translate' traumatic memory into narrative memory with the help of an empathic listener, [...] [they can] reclaim formerly 'unclaimed' experience" (Mengel 144). Arva, who is convinced that artistic expression like writing helps to process trauma, further points to the fact that the relationship between time and space in writing trauma is often infringed, a state which Arva terms "shock chronotope" (Arva ch. 1). Arva defines "shock chronotope" (Arva ch. 1) as "time-spaces marked by events whose violence has rendered them resistant to rationalization and adequate representation" (Arva ch. 1). This is clearly the case in *Song for Night*. The protagonist, My Luck, is completely lost in time and space. He always tries to tell things in a linear order, but constantly loses track of time and gets confused. This also shows that no matter how hard the person writing about trauma tries, "representation can never replace the experience" (Arva ch. 1), which means that objectivity can never be reached and that the narrator, as a consequence, is unreliable.

What writing about trauma really seems to do is help people to live with the traumata and the suffering they had to go through (see Arva ch. 1). Arva (see ch. 1) considers that even though writing about trauma may not heal the wounds inflicted, it helps expressing that which could not be told before and to make it part of the "community's collective memory" (Arva ch. 1). Thinking of the fairy tale *Rumpelstiltskin* this would mean calling that which cannot be named by its name. And maybe it takes a bit of magic to confront the monsters haunting us.

12.6 What Role Does Magical Realism Play in Writing Trauma?

Everybody knows how difficult it can be to describe feelings as they are not tangible like objects. Reflecting on magical realism in writing trauma, Hill stated that "[...] [m]agical realism is like a balm to an anguished spirit" (Hill, <https://anzlitlovers.com>) and according to Arva, the role of magical realism is "to turn that which resists representation into a new and more tangible reality" (Arva ch. 3). Often, it is

impossible for people to describe the atrocities they suffered as they themselves could not have imagined them in their worst nightmares (see Arva, Conclusion).

Still, they need to process what has happened to them so that the wounds inflicted on the mind can heal and this is where magical realism can be of great help. Arva points to the fact that in the process of remembering, facts are less important than emotions (see Arva 3). It is important for the person who suffered a trauma to be able to reconnect to the traumatic event and to reinterpret what happened (see Arva 3). With the help of magical realism it is possible to create a "hybrid reality" (Arva ch. 3) in which events can be reprocessed (see Arva 3). This means that elements of the traumatizing event are transferred into a different reality (see Arva ch. 3).

Maybe the most important thing that magical realism can do for traumatized persons is to "allow them to keep (or create) a safe distance that can guarantee at least a temporary avoidance of psychic wounding" (Arva, Conclusion). However, what magical realism cannot do is replace therapy. What it really helps to do is "acknowledge[e] the trauma induced" (Arva, Conclusion), which is a step towards "learning how to live with it" (Arva, Conclusion).

12.7 Overall Structure of *Song for Night*

The structure of *Song for Night* can be compared to *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and basically is a quest, while some critics like Schultheis Moore and Swanson Goldberg describe it "as an incomplete *Bildungsroman*" (Schultheis Moore and Swanson Goldberg 67). Although Abani never explicitly points to the fact, the story is set during the (end of the) Biafran War, to which numerous allusions like for example the river *Cross*, point (see Dalley 446). Generally, there are thirty-six chapters referring to the sign language My Luck uses (see Knox, <http://www.smh.com.au>), which at a first glance makes the reader curious and is already the first indication of trauma as the person concerned needs to use sign language because he cannot articulate himself unimpeded. The story is told from the point of view of a first person narrator in the form of an inner monologue. It is interesting to note that time-wise My Luck's memory covers the past three years – the duration of the Biafran War – and although the reader

at first thinks that the protagonist is moving from one location to the next, he in truth is only moving from memory to memory.

12.8 We Die Only Once, and for Such a Long Time⁸

In *Song for Night* as well as in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the protagonists are on a seemingly endless journey towards death. My Luck wants to find and reintegrate his platoon, whereas the palm-wine drinkard wishes to bring back his dead tapster and both of them fail to do so. However, this does not mean that the journey itself is a failure as the protagonists learn an important lesson: Death is a natural part of life which must be accepted. Tunca also points to the fact that both citations at the front page of *Song for Night* are about travelling (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 132):

We die only once, and for such a long time. (Molière, *Dépit amoureux*. V.3, 129)

[...] on any path that may have a heart. There I travel, [...] (Carlos Castaneda 137)

As Tunca remarks, unlike the French version – "On ne meurt qu'une fois et c'est pour si longtemps" (Molière, *Le Dépit amoureux*. V, 3) – the English translation of Molière is ambiguous (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 132). It could either mean that we should enjoy life because it is so short or "that the process of dying is very slow" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 132). The second possible meaning could be the key to understanding *Song for Night* (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 132) because it implies "that death can be regarded as a long journey" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 132). In *Song for Night*, the protagonist's soul cannot find peace and My Luck is convinced that he is still alive as his own explanation about grenade explosions show:

The rule of thumb is that if you hear the explosion, you survived the blast. Like lightning and thunder. I heard the click and I heard the explosion even though I was lifted into the air. But the aftershock can do that. Drop you a few feet from where you began. When I came to, everyone was gone. They must have thought I was dead and so set off without me [...].
(Abani 12)

⁸ Molière (cited by Abani in *Song for Night*, front page). *Dépit amoureux* (1656). V.3, 129.

As logic as the argument might appear, and thus make the reader believe that he is a reliable narrator, My Luck is wrong. In this context, Tunca points out that the argument is erroneous "for the young soldiers cannot possibly know whether those who died did not hear the explosion too" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 133). My Luck, and as it turns out at the end of the book, also the rest of his platoon, were blown up in the grenade explosion and the protagonist's soul wanders around confusedly and revisits the places – in fact memories – where My Luck experienced war trauma. This links back to the second quotation of the front page "on any path that may have a heart. There I travel" (Castaneda 137) as My Luck's soul has to travel from one haunting memory to the next and tell his story to an "empathic listener" (Mengel 144), the reader, before he can find peace. So, there is no "movement in space" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 133) as the reader at first presumes, but rather a passage from life to death (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 133).

12.9 Time Is fleeting

Apart from the fact that My Luck travels from one traumatic memory to the next (which become weirder and weirder), there are other indications that the story cannot be situated in the real world, no matter how hard the narrator tries to convince us that this is the fact. *Time* plays a decisive role in this context and is apart from *space* another major indicator of magical realism as boundaries of "time, space, and identity" (Faris 173) are blurred. Schultheis Moore and Swanson Goldberg highlight that "temporal distinctions grow dimmer as the novella progresses" (Schultheis Moore and Swanson Goldberg 68) and Krishnan observes that the narration is marked "by its absence of voice, on the one hand, and the absence of time, on the other [...]" (Krishnan 39). Krishnan cynically adds that "Even the war, in its narrative presentation, is characterized by the absence of cause" (Krishnan 39). At the very beginning of the book, My Luck still tries to tell events in the correct order. He for example corrects himself, which makes the reader presume that he is a reliable narrator: "We would later nickname him John Wayne, but I am getting ahead of myself" (Abani 22).

Dalley even describes My Luck as "obsessed with time" (Dalley 450) and displaying a "(hyper) concern for accuracy" (Dalley 450). The passage which shows this most

clearly is when My Luck claims that his disillusionment multiplies "different dating systems" (Dalley 450), but a clear point of orientation is missing:

I have not spoken in three years: not since I left boot camp. It has been three years of a senseless war [...]. It is a strange place to be at fifteen, bereft of hope and very nearly of your humanity. [...] I joined up at twelve. [...] If you are anything like Ijeoma you will say that I sound too old for my age. She always said that: said, because [...] she died young, a year ago, aged fourteen. (Abani 9)

Another example of the importance of time is the watch he inherited from his father. It is broken, no longer shows the correct time and a hand has fallen off:

Time is standing still – literally. My watch, an old Timex that belonged to my father, is fucked. Already broken when he died, it was the only thing of his that my uncle let me inherit. [...] Since I have had it, the second and hour hands have fallen off, both nestling like tired armatures in the bottom of the cracked glass case. My life it turns out is a series of minutes. [...] I look at my broken watch and think, *One more hour*.
(Abani 43)

The further My Luck continues with his story, the clearer it becomes to the reader that the boundaries of time are flawed. All through the story, the protagonist smokes cigarettes from a package which never empties. This not only shows to the reader that the narrator is unreliable, but is also the first indication that the novel is magical realist:

I wake to darkness. Breathing heavily I fumble for a cigarette and stick one in my mouth. In a fleeting kind of way, I wonder how come this pack never seems to run out, but then a deeper thought takes hold. I need to find that town and my platoon.
(Abani 80)

What is interesting about this quotation is that the protagonist himself has no explanation why the package of cigarettes constantly refills or remains full. My Luck seems to be trapped in a kind of time loop and although he tries to catch up with his platoon, he is actually not going anywhere. A bit later in the story, My Luck meets an old man who when My Luck does not answer him complains that even the dead ignore him. The protagonist later offers the old man a cigarette, which the man willingly

accepts. This can be interpreted in two ways: It is either an indication that the boundaries between the living and the dead are fluid or that the old man is also a ghost.

I look in at the soldiers and realize that somewhere along the line, somewhere in this war, I have lost my appetite for it. I want nothing more than to return to the safety of my platoon and to outlive this madness. I am tired. I sink onto the floor of the porch, not too far from the old man who spoke earlier, and I wonder if he just grew tired too. I light a cigarette, turning to offer one to the old man. He takes it greedily and lights up from the match I hold out to him. The price of coming this far has been too much.
(Abani 85)

Smoking a cigarette also allows My Luck moments of self-reflection and to take a rest from the memories which are haunting him so that he can calm down.

I do what I always do in moments of doubt, I light a cigarette. (Abani 144)

I light another cigarette from my never-ending pack and inhale deeply, the harsh smell cracking the beauty which reminds me of my childhood; [...] (Abani 110)

The package of cigarettes or the smoking of cigarettes is a well-known motif. Mostly, however, it indicates that time passes in a linear way: Somebody for example asks for a last cigarette. In Carné's famous movie *Daybreak* (original title: *Le Jour se Lève*), the working class hero is trapped in his own apartment smoking, while memories come to him in flashbacks and when he has finished his package of cigarettes, the audience knows he is going to die (see Carné, *Le Jour se Lève* 1939). So what the examples have in common is that the protagonists are heading towards death. In *Song for Night*, My Luck is already dead, but still needs to accept it.

12.10 A Voiceless Narrator

My Luck has lost his voice. His vocal chords were cut through in the boot camp, where he was trained as a mine diffuser. All mine diffusers in My Luck's troop had to undergo the procedure because if they cannot scream, they will not upset and distract the rest of their troop in case they step on a mine and are blown up.

A week before graduation he [Major Essien] took us all into the doctor's office. One by one we were led into surgery. It was exciting to think that we were becoming bionic men and women. I thought it odd that there was no anesthetic when I was laid out on a table, my arms and legs tied down with rough hemp. [...] I stared at the peculiar cruel glint of the scalpel while the doctor, with a gentle and swift cut, severed my vocal chords.
(Abani 25)

Tuca observes that due to the fact that My Luck is mute, there are "two levels of reality" (Tuca 134) in the text. From an objective point of view My Luck cannot verbally communicate his thoughts and thus has to invent a kind of sign language to interact with his troop. The reader, however, is privileged and can follow his inner monologue (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 134). Tunca also highlights the "deep symbolic significance" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 135) of My Luck's muteness, which "stand[s] for the metaphorical voicelessness of all casualties of history" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 135). In this context, it is worth noting that there is one episode which has traumatized My Luck so much that he is not even able to find words for it in his inner monologue:

[...] [B]elow me it happens, it happens that night bright as day, but I cannot name it, those things that happened while I watched and I cannot speak something that was never in words, speak of things I cannot imagine, could never have seen even as I saw it, and I hide and am grateful for my smell crouched like an animal in that dark hot space.
(Abani 33)

The trauma of having to watch his beloved mother being murdered is so overwhelming that the protagonist cannot find words for an atrocity which he could never have imagined to happen (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 135).

Apart from sign language and inner monologue, My Luck uses yet another way of communication: his body (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 137). He carves a cross on his left forearm for every person he loved and lost in the war as well as for every person he killed and liked it (see Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 137). According to Tunca, this "blurr[s] the lines between innocence and guilt" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 137), which is intended by Abani. In an interview with Goyal he states:

[...] [*Song for Night*] concerns itself with questions not about the simple politics of war, but about our relationship to guilt and blame even in circumstances when we have been forced to commit atrocities. It questions everything sentimental about war and boy soldiers and the kinds of ways in which we infantilize ourselves and our children so as not to confront our own pain and guilt.
(Abani interviewed by Goyal 236)

Abani deliberately seeks to confront pain and trauma, but at the same time he wants "to suspend absolute judgement" (Abani interviewed by Paine and Lodge 2). According to Abani, what *Song for Night* really is about is "[t]o accept someone's humanity" (Abani interviewed by Paine and Lodge 3) and shocks Lodge with the following statement about his characters (primarily alluding to *Becoming Abigail* and human trafficking): "[...] perhaps if the conditions were right, and I had a different upbringing, perhaps if no one was looking, that I might be able to do the same thing to somebody" (Abani interviewed by Paine and Lodge 3).

Abani's wish not to represent his characters in a sentimental way was also one of the reasons why he decided that *My Luck* should be mute:

I chose to give him no voice because children, and particularly children like him, always have others speaking for them. I chose to take away his voice to force the reader into a visceral journey with him rather than the spectacle of watching his suffering. I chose to take away his voice to force myself to not be able to take credit for speaking for him, or others in such situations. I took away his voice because it has been a practice in certain wars. I took away his voice so the readers couldn't speak for him and thus distance themselves.
(Abani interviewed by Goyal 236)

Abani thus wants the reader to listen to *My Luck*'s inner monologue and to give the protagonist the chance to tell his own story. Abani does not want to judge, but to show that a person can still possess humanity, even if circumstances forced them to murder. It is the reader who needs to decide whether war made a monster or a victim out of *My Luck*.

12.11 Examples of Magical Realism in *Song for Night*

Having read the first couple of pages of *Song for Night*, it is very likely that the average reader at first believes that the narrator is reliable. Just like Tutuola loves to play with

numbers, My Luck also uses figures to pretend to put things into chronological order: He gives his and Ijeoma's age (when they became child soldiers and how long they have been fighting) and makes guesses what time in the day it could be. Still, there is always confusion and the narrator has difficulty to orientate himself: "I look up, thinking perhaps the stars will guide me, but there are hardly any [...]" (Abani 16). The watch My Luck is wearing also stresses that confusion. As already indicated above, only the minute hand is still working, so that the protagonist never knows what time it is. Describing his watch, My Luck states: "My life it turns out is a series of minutes" (Abani 43). And he is right, the story consists of a series of memories or flashbacks My Luck relives, but which are not clearly situated in time and become more and more bizarre during My Luck's journey. The magical realist events in the novel can thus be divided into three categories:

12.11.1 Events Only Later Understood as Magical Realist

Particularly at the beginning of the novel, the average reader will believe that My Luck is still alive and that the confusion in his narration stems from the shock he suffered when he was injured in the blast. As a consequence, the reader is not surprised that My Luck is disoriented and seems to be hallucinating. Adami states that My Luck is constantly trying to rationally explain any bizarre situation, so that "readers will have to keep deciphering clues and signs that continually mark the text" (Adami 191). However, already after the blast there are indications that the protagonist rather finds himself in a dream world than in reality and My Luck himself reflects on his condition in the following way:

It is a curious experience – to be inside your dream and outside it, lucid and yet sleeping deeply. But in this war so much has happened to make even this seem normal.
(Abani 49)

My Luck also frequently dreams of Ijeoma, whose brutal death haunts him just like the death of his mother. In this context, Byrne highlights the power of women figures in *Song for Night*: "To summon the strength to go on, My Luck continues to conjure her [Ijeoma] up in memory, much as he does his dead mother, also a figure of

generosity and sacrifice" (Byrne 3). Ijeoma even appears to My Luck in what he interprets as dream and tells him that he is dead and reliving memories. She also insists on the fact that My Luck needs to accept what happened so that he can leave darkness behind him:

[Ijeoma] smiles sadly and says: "You aren't dreaming, My Luck, my love. These are memories. Before we can move from here, we have to relive and release our darkness." I have no idea what she means. Does she mean I am going to die? Or that I am dead? I am pretty sure I'm not dead though, because that would make me a ghost, and I am pretty sure I would know if I was. There are known methods for determining things like this, I think. When I pinch myself it hurts, so I know I am not a ghost.
(Abani 96)

Even though Ijeoma finds clear words to explain to My Luck his situation, he is not able yet to accept that he is dead and believes that feeling pain when he pinches himself or the fact that he heard a blast are proofs that he survived. At the same time, he can describe very clearly what a person who died a sudden death feels like, but is unable to draw any conclusions from it: "Here we believe that when a person dies in a sudden and hard way, their spirit wanders confused looking for its body. Confused because they don't realize they are dead" (Abani 101).

It is worth noting that although Abani claims that he wants to stay impartial and avoid judging his characters, in the episode cited above, the reader can feel the author speak through Ijeoma. In fact, what Ijeoma tells her former lover very closely reflects what Abani, asked in an interview about the importance of forgiveness in his novels, explained:

[...], the whole point of this is to see how much darkness a person can hold and still be able to allow light in. So forgiveness for a lot of people is, is the erasure of the darkness. It's the erasure of the trauma, it's to make, render, that invisible. [...] What I try to do is figure out ... it's more an Ibo way of seeing the world. It's more to do with the idea that healing or recuperation, or even the idea of happiness, is not about erasing trauma, but, in fact, it often requires you to recall that trauma as a way to prevent yourself from enacting trauma to somebody else. So healing becomes a way to live with the damaged self. And that ultimately is forgiveness.
(Abani interviewed by Paine and Lodge 4)

But before My Luck can reach redemption, he still has to relive painful memories. And the more he progresses in his narration, the more it becomes magical realist.

12.11.2 Events Strongly Pointing towards Magical Realism

The farther My Luck travels, the more confused he seems to get and he starts to realize that his interaction with the people he meets is strange. They either seem to ignore him or are afraid – just as if they had seen a ghost. And it is the confusion of this lonely, wandering spirit which Abani stresses throughout the novel:

I look around a little confused that there is no evidence of the bombing. The forest is lush and green. Is it possible that it grew back so fully so quickly? Things are off and I can't quite place why.
(Abani 48)

Although the soldier My Luck knows that the forest has been bombarded, in his memory it suddenly is fresh and green again, just as if nothing could harm it. On the one hand, this could be ascribed to the confusion of My Luck's wandering ghost, but on the other hand, it could also be interpreted as an indicator of reconciliation. The soul wants to make peace and return to the environment it has known before the cruelties of war, unharmed and peaceful. Still, it takes My Luck quite a long time to find peace as there are memories which are constantly haunting him, in particular the death of his mother.

There is a road behind the woman and I can't tell if this is the one from yesterday or if I have drifted back to the bank with the roadblock. Nothing looks familiar. The woman gives me one final look, makes the sign of the cross, and goes back to fishing for corpses as though she has dismissed me, as though with that token sign she has somehow rendered me invisible. "Mother, where am I?" (Abani 76)

The strange woman fishing corpses out of the river could be seen as Death collecting the victims of the war. Again, My Luck is completely confused, nothing is familiar to him. When he asks the woman where he is – respectfully addressing her as *mother* – she makes the sign of the cross, just like a superstitious person would do after having seen a ghost. The importance of the mother-figure and My Luck's painful memories of having been forced to watch his mother being killed, span throughout the novel (see

Dalley 453). My Luck's mother thereby becomes the symbol of the boy's guilt (see Dalley 453):

I tell myself that this is only the shape of my guilt: guilt for all the lives I've lost or taken, guilt for letting my platoon down, guilt for losing my mother, for leaving her to die for me while I hid in the ceiling like a little coward.
(Abani 144-145)

Apart from the woman fishing for corpses, other strange women cross My Luck's way:

Ahead of me, a woman walks, a coffin balanced precariously on her head, her hips swaying with the effort, and yet poised, graceful even.
Mother?
(Abani 145)
[...] Grace opens the coffin and pulls out a pot and some cooking ingredients.
[...] (Abani 152)
[...] When I wake, she is gone. Like the rain and the bamboo grove. In fact, I wake up in the coffin beside the river, quite a distance from the grove. I leap out. She must have moved me, but how, and why? What kind of sorcery is this?
(Abani 154)

Bizarrely enough, the woman, of whom My Luck suddenly thinks it is his mother, is carrying around a coffin because she wants to be ready for her funeral at any time and meanwhile uses the coffin to store her cooking utensils. Again, this symbolizes that My Luck is (comparable to the palm-wine drinkard) travelling on "Deads' road" (Tutuola 106) and is not going anywhere. The women he meets on his journey – one of them fishing corpses from the river, the other one permanently carrying around a coffin – symbolize death. Harrow notes that "death is a beautiful young woman, or sometimes an old woman, witch, or goddess, sometimes Mami Wata, sometimes Idemilli" (Harrow 16). Thus, the only thing My Luck is approaching is the end of his existence and the coffin in truth is his own one. He will later use it as a boat in which he crosses the river and enters the land of the dead.

Indications that My Luck could already be dead can be found throughout the novel, but become more and more concrete towards the end:

Finally, an older man, graying, stands up and approaches me. He hands me his chicken. I am so clumsy, I let it fall. As I stoop to pick it up, he asks me if I have

come for him. I shake my head, not understanding what he means. "You are not a demon?" he asks. [...] I wonder why he thinks I am a ghost. How do ghosts appear?
(Abani 92)

A worn sign announces: Die Hard Motel and Eatery. I make to enter, but lying across the threshold, dry, brown, dead, and molting, is a lizard. I hesitate. Lizards are sometimes seen as symbols of rebirth, but every rebirth requires a death. I hover on the porch and an old man hunched in the corner sees the lizard and me, and smiling says: "Faith is not a gift. It is earned." I don't know what he means, so I ignore him. He spits into the night: "Tufia! Even the dead ignore me!"
(Abani 82)

Maybe these encounters should really have made My Luck understand that he is a ghost: A man fearing that a demon has come to get him and wanting to appease him by giving away a chicken and a dead lizard at the entry of a motel – with the self-speaking name "Die Hard Motel [...]" (Abani 82). Inside the motel, an old man complains that even the dead are not interested in a conversation with him. It is interesting to note that he calls My Luck *Tufia*, "the old word for banishing spirits or bad things" (Abani 76). Dalley argues that "[My Luck's] encounters with other people subsequently undermine this explanation of his confusion, providing clues to his true ontological status as he is consistently greeted as a ghost" (Dalley 451).

Towards the end of the book, *My Luck* meets a catechist called Peter, with whom he can communicate via telepathy. He tells Peter that he is trying to catch up with his platoon. Peter tells My Luck that his friends have already *passed* which most likely means died together with My Luck on the minefield. In retrospect, re-reading the passage, it also becomes clear that Peter must be a ghost, too because just like the *Ferryman of the Dead*, he will later offer My Luck to take a seat in his canoe and to cross the river:

"I am trying to find my comrades, my platoon. I am not a deserter, not a coward."
"I know," he replies. "Your friends are not far."
"You saw them?"
"They passed before you came onto the battlefield," he says, but there is something in his tone that makes me suspicious.
"Why is this river called the Cross?" I ask, since I can't put my finger on what is bothering me.
"Because we all have to cross it someday," he replies. [...]
"Your journey is almost over," he says gently. "You will need a boat."
(Abani 105-106)

All the above-mentioned episodes already point very clearly towards magical realism. In spite of that, a reader not acquainted with magical realism could – just like My Luck – realize that situations and encounters are becoming increasingly strange, but still ignore that the protagonist is dead. However, towards the end of the novel, magical realism occurs in such an obvious way that even somebody who has never heard of it will come to the conclusion that magic is in play.

12.11.3 Events Undeniably Magical Realist

One of the key magical realist events is the episode, where My Luck suddenly finds himself on a battlefield together with ghost soldiers. One of them, about My Luck's age, is fatally wounded, but has to relive his own death again and again:

As I watch, I see phantom soldiers walking with bent heads, rifles across their backs. One soldier, perhaps sixteen, is shot in the stomach, a deep gash that spills his guts like sausages strung up in a butcher's window. He falls and I run to him, but a hail of bullets pushes me back. As I turn away, I see the boy stagger up and collect his intestines in an untidy heap, cradled like a baby in his arms. He then takes off, running. Desperate zigzag steps that send him crashing into the ground repeatedly, but he gets up every time. The shooting stops and I realize that it is phantom fire, and it isn't aimed at me. The ghosts are firing at each other – the rebels on one side and the federal troops on the other. But then everybody stops shooting and watches the boy; even the enemy. Twenty feet on, he just stops and sags, hitting the ground in a gentle droop. The backs of his legs are stained by his fear, but he still cradles his guts in his arms. He dies, mouth open. (Abani 101)

The scene itself, which My Luck must have seen before (and maybe experienced more than once), as it is one of the memories haunting him, is extremely cruel. Strangely enough, the boy soldier, already deadly wounded gets up again and again and tries to flee. My Luck wants to help him, but cannot reach him, which shows how powerless he feels being confronted with an atrocity like this. It is also worth noting that suddenly both the rebels and the federal troops stop fighting because both sides are so shocked at the boy's sight, who finally and bizarrely dies. The boy soldier being killed in such a brutal way could be interpreted as representing the collective trauma which the civil war caused. The boy, as a young person, therefore could be understood as representing the Biafran hopes for the future which find a brutal end in an armed conflict. In this context, Dalley argues that "Song for Night is [...] part of a corpus of writing exploring a national trauma that retains its political volatility" (Dalley 447).

A bit later, My Luck meets (as already mentioned above) a man called Peter, a catechist. Peter wants to find out whether My Luck is a ghost and draws a sign on the ground:

"I am not the enemy, you know," I say [...] He nods and squats. "We'll see about that," he says, drawing a sign in the dirt. "If you are a ghost, if you are dead, you cannot step over this sign." It is an invitation, a command almost. I smile and think this is just mumbo jumbo, but as hard as I try, I can't move. I don't know what to make of it.
(Abani 104)

The fact that My Luck is unable to step across the sign, will finally convince the reader that he is a ghost. As Dalley highlights, Peter then explains to My Luck that if a person is blown up by a bomb, it can happen that they wake up so far away from their dead body that they do not realize they are dead and wander around confusedly (see Dalley 451). Dalley argues that this falsifies My Luck's assumption that he is still alive because firstly he heard the detonation and secondly feels pain when he pinches himself (see Dalley 451). Dalley concludes that "[t]his narrative invokes elements of Nigerian civil war discourse in which ghosts represent the conflict's status as an unresolved trauma" (Dalley 451) which has not yet been "exorcised" (Dalley 451). In relation to ghosts, Dalley also points out that My Luck could be an *ogbanje* (see Dalley 452). An *ogbanje* can be compared to an *abiku* in the Yoruba belief system (see chapter on The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar) and describes "people who are believed to cycle rapidly and repeatedly through birth and death" (Ilechukwu 239). Dalley (452) argues that this cycle of life and death can be connected to trauma, which is characterised by a "compulsion to repeat" (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 26). Apart from the fact that My Luck is the only child that survived, he also returns to his mother at the end of the book and thus has completed another cycle.

But before he can do so, he has to relive his memories of war atrocities and together with the boundaries of reality, the boundaries of time become so blurred that they can only make sense in a magical realist setting. The most striking example is My Luck's train journey to catch up with his platoon:

The train begins to slow and pulls to a stop in a deserted station. Dawn is just ripping night's fabric, stars dropping as dew. A flickering storm lantern sways gently from the station-master's quarters, its light already diffused by the birthing sun. I know I have to get off here.

In the fragile sunlight, a woman is standing on the platform, scrutinizing the train. Her head jerks every time a door opens, but she turns away when she sees me and makes the sign of the cross.

I step from the platform onto the dusty road littered with tank carcasses like an elephant graveyard. When I turn back to look at the station, by some trick of the light the train has rusted over, the station fallen into ruin, and the bombed-out track coiled in on itself like spaghetti and covered in vegetation that crawls everywhere in a rush of green. I know it can't be true though, I just came from there.

Mirages are common here, I think, shaking it off.

(Abani 140-141)

When My Luck gets off at his station, he sees a woman who, like most of the people he met on his journey, immediately makes the sign of a cross because she feels he is a ghost. Then, within the twinkling of an eye, years have gone by: the station has fallen apart and all that is left is ruins: the station as well as the railroad tracks have been bombed and the train is old and rusted. The station mirrors the state of the war-torn country and of My Luck, too. Just like the station has been bombed, My Luck was killed in a mine blast. All that is left is death and decay, but My Luck still refuses to accept it: "Mirages are common here, I think, shaking it off" (Abani 141). Dalley remarks that "[t]ime becomes increasingly perplexing as My Luck's journey proceeds and the past disturbs the surface of the present" (Dalley 451) and argues further that such hallucinatory experiences undermine the hope that a universal dating system could contain My Luck's memories" (Dalley 451). And it is true, it is impossible to integrate this episode on a linear time-line as My Luck is hurrying from memory to memory – or is it rather the memories intruding on him?

One memory, which undeniably haunts My Luck throughout the book, is his dead mother. And in the end, after his difficult journey towards death, My Luck is reunited with his beloved mother:

There is a house on the bank and all the lights are burning. I drop my gun and my bayonet and my machete. I am too tired, I can't do this anymore. If death is what awaits me, I want to face it without fear. I've had enough of that.

There is a woman sitting on the veranda on a porch swing. She is young and smiling and happy. As I approach, I realize who she is. It can't be, but it is.

My mother looks toward me and holds out her arms. I stumble into them and she pats me on the back.

"My Luck, My Luck," she says. "You are home."

I pull back and look at her. I am trying to make sense of it, to think, but I can't focus.

"Mother," I say, and my voice has returned.

(Abani 158)

Dalley takes the view that *My Luck* is literally obsessed with his mother (see Dalley 453). His thoughts return to her every couple of pages and he sees her in the women he encounters on his journey and all of whom he addresses as *mother*. He does so partly out of respect, but in the case of Grace he is for a moment literally convinced to see his mother walking down the street. It is thus telling that the last word *My Luck* pronounces in the novel is *mother* and that at the same time he manages to find her and return home, he has reached reconciliation and retrieves his voice (see Dalley 455). He has overcome the "grief and guilt for the traumatic event" (Dalley 454) of his mother's killing which throughout the story made it impossible for him "to speak something that was never in words" (Abani 33). *My Luck* has in fact "re-examine[d] the meaning of his life through memory" (Dalley 454) and thus followed Ijeoma's advice, who explained to him in a dream that "[b]efore we can move on from here, we have to relive and release our darkness" (Abani 96).

12.12 Final Thoughts on *Song for Night*

Song for Night is a complex story describing the life of a young man which many people would call *wasted*. Circumstances made a soldier out of a 12-year-old boy who, instead of running around happily and playing football with his friends, was turned into a killer and forced to commit atrocities. Still, most readers will feel empathy for *My Luck* as his inner monologue allows the reader to access his innermost thoughts and to learn about the boy he used to be before the war started. Harrow notes that "[w]hat the child-soldier narrative seeks to convey is the human face of the inhumanity of the soldier-child [...]" (Harrow 5).

So, in the midst of all the darkness of war, there still remains light in *My Luck*, war has not succeed in turning him into a monster. One key element of the story – typical for magical realist narrations – is transformation. In *My Luck*'s case, it is not a

transformation of the body, but of the heart. He, a child like millions of others, is drawn into darkness by civil war, but in the end, after having worked through the memories haunting him, returns to the light and turns into a happy child again. In this context, it would be interesting to explore the role of women in closer detail because it is his mother and Ijeoma who prevent him from being completely corrupted by war.

Apart from transformation, the novel also addresses the question of "[...] man's capacity to cross moral boundaries in extreme situations" (Tunca, *Approaching Trauma* 129). Obviously, it is shocking for the reader to be confronted with war atrocities – and they are all examples of what happened in real life, but as Abani himself stresses, the unspeakable needs to be called by its name:

If we are to regain any kind of internal moral landscape, there can be nothing that is not [to] be confronted.
(Chris Abani interviewed in the film *Voices of Wartime*, <http://voicesinwartime.org>)

13. CONCLUSION

The aim of this diploma thesis was to find out more about the role of magical realism in Anglo-African fiction. It is a fact that magical realism as a genre is most commonly not perceived as a natural component of Anglo-African literature. When an interviewer, for example, asked Mda if he understood himself as a magical realist writer, Mda was irritated, as authors generally (and understandably) become reserved when being classified. But is it really the author who can decide to which genre his work belongs? The main problem with magical realism as a genre seems to be that it is a difficult concept, which lacks a clear-cut definition. Still, Faris developed key characteristics, to which all of the four novels presented in this thesis conform. They undeniably all contain an "element of magic" (Faris 167) just as well as a "near-merging of two realms/two worlds" (Faris 172), which becomes especially clear in the interactions of the living and the dead. In all four novels, the dead influence the protagonists' reality. The palm-wine drinkard quite naturally sets out on a quest to bring his dead tapster back home and finds it quite natural to discover him and have a chat with him in "Deads' Town" (Tutuola 96). In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, the bones of his dead father talk to Sebastian Cromantine and the ghost of a dead woman appears to help his wife Jeanette through the pains of childbirth. But also in *The Heart of Redness*, the dead and past trauma still affect present-day reality and in *Song for Night*, My Luck is dead from the very beginning of the book onwards, but is completely unaware that he was killed by a landmine.

And there are even parallels within the novels in the way they create this effect of "near-merging of [...] two worlds" (Faris 172). Both in *Song for Night* and in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the protagonists undertake a journey towards death, only to learn that they eventually have to accept it in order to be able to make their peace.

Another characteristic of magical realism which all four novels share, is that boundaries of "time, space, and identity" (Faris 173) are blurred. This feature is particularly prominent in Abani's *Song for Night*, where the protagonist My Luck seems to be in search of his platoon, but in truth his journey does not lead anywhere neither in time nor in space, as it is a mere revisiting of traumatic memories. Also in

The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar, General Massimiara is in fact remembering the history of Malagueta, imprisoned in a cave and awaiting his execution.

Another prominent feature of magical realism present in all four novels are "metamorphoses" (Faris 178). The palm-wine drinkard merely takes any shape (animal or element) at his discretion, Fatmatta (*The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*) changes into a bird just as easily as into an angel-like figure, while in *The Heart of Redness* a modern version of the middle generation seems to be reincarnated in the present-day inhabitants of Qolorha-by-Sea and in *Song for Night*, My Luck reappears to tell his story as a ghost without being conscious that he is dead.

Yet another characteristic of magical realism running through the stories like a thread is the "rural setting[...]" (Faris 182). The palm-wine drinkard's journey takes him through the wilderness and a dark forest, in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* the settlers conquer a new continent and establish a settlement, in *The Heart of Redness* the rural Qolorha-by-Sea stands in sharp contrast to Johannesburg and the United States, which the Believers mistakenly fancy as representing the ultimate goal of civilisation and in *Song for Night*, My Luck merely travels through the wilderness or "rural settings" (Faris 182).

Moreover, the connecting element between the novels (which is not explicitly mentioned as a characteristic of magical realism by Faris) is trauma. The palm-wine drinkard at the bottom of his heart is an unhappy person, as at the beginning of the novel his only occupation is to do nothing and to spend every day aimlessly drinking palm-wine, which could be understood as an analogy to Tutuola's situation who, working as a messenger for many years, spent most of the day waiting for orders and thus chose writing as a means to escape the *tristesse* of his everyday life and to confront colonialism. In *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, the settlers not only try to overcome the trauma inflicted by slavery, but also constantly have to fight for their freedom as the British colonial forces, just as they have successfully established their new settlement, once again try to make them their subjects. And trauma also constitutes a key feature of *The Heart of Redness* and *Song for Night*. The trauma the Xhosa people suffered has remained unresolved and the wounds of the past are literally

carried over into the present and apart from a few happy childhood memories, My Luck seems to embody trauma, which also the scars he inflicted upon himself show.

So, even though all four novels certainly are inscribed in African (oral folktale) tradition – which Mda describes as a "world [...] which hasn't got that line of demarcation between the supernatural on one hand and what [Western society] would call objective reality on the other hand" (Mda interviewed by Kachuba, <http://www.africaspeaks.com>) – this does not automatically signify that they are not magical realist. In fact, the African oral folktale tradition and magical realism do not oppose each other at all, as the story of the *Complete Gentleman*, which is taken up by Tutuola and Syl Cheney-Coker, shows. Obviously, when ascribing an author's work to a certain genre, it cannot be the author who decides, but it needs to be looked at in how far the criteria of a certain genre are fulfilled. In the case of the four novels taken a closer look at in this diploma thesis, the criteria established by Faris for magical realism are clearly fulfilled.

A question which would be interesting to investigate in greater detail is the role trauma plays in magical realism. It seems that in the novels discussed, magical realism is used as means to *write trauma* as it obviously helps the authors to put into words things that are unspeakable or as Heyns puts it "writing it down may make it somehow more manageable" (Heyns 273). It might therefore be argued that additional to Faris' definition, writing about or against trauma is another characteristic of magical realism. However, this assumption would need to be studied on a larger scale than it has been possible in this thesis.

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14.3 Illustrations

Figure 1: Photo of Amos Tutuola. 4 April 2017. <<http://weirdfictionreview.com/2013/01/amos-tutuola-an-interview-with-yinka-tutuola-by-jeff-vandermeer/>>.

Figure 2: Photo of Syl Cheney-Coker. 30 March 2017. <<http://d19lga30codh7.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Syl-Coker.jpg>>.

Figure 3: Photo of Zakes Mda. 17 March 2017. <http://www.penguinrandomhouse.co.za/sites/penguinbooks.co.za/files/styles/author_photo/public/Zakes%20Mda.jpg?itok=JW-6N0Tt>.

Figure 4: UNICEF. "Children and armed conflict. Report of the Secretary-General", 2014. 11 March 2017. <<http://www.unicef.de/informieren/blog/2015/kin-der-soldaten-erzaehlen/72156>>.

Figure 5: Photo of Chris Abani (copyright Claus Gretter), 2017. 18 March 2017.
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15. APPENDIX

15.1 Abstract

Magical realism is most often associated with Latin American storytelling. However, it really is an international phenomenon, as for example the works of Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*), André Brink (*The Other Side of Silence*) or Franz Kafka (*Metamorphosis*) show. In this diploma thesis, the role of magical realism in Anglo-African Novels of the 20th century will be explored by taking a closer look at four contemporary Anglo-African novels: *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Amos Tutuola), *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (Syl Cheney-Coker), *The Heart of Redness* (Zakes Mda) and *Song for Night* (Chris Abani). First, an overview of the development of magical realism as a genre – which really is a troubled concept – will be given and its main characteristics described. Then, the most prominent magical realist episodes in the four novels will be analysed in detail, drawing parallels between the novels if possible. Also the importance of employing magical realism in describing traumatic events and thus putting the unspeakable into words will be pointed out.

15.2 Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Magischer Realismus wird oft primär mit lateinamerikanischer Literatur assoziiert. Bei näherer Betrachtung wird jedoch schnell klar, dass es sich um ein internationales Phänomen handelt, wie die Werke von Salman Rushdie (*Mitternachtskinder*), André Brink (*Die andere Seite der Stille*) und Kafka (*Die Verwandlung*) veranschaulichen. In dieser Diplomarbeit soll die Rolle des magischen Realismus in anglo-afrikanischen Romanen des 20. Jahrhunderts untersucht werden. Folgende vier Romane wurden näher analysiert: *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Amos Tutuola), *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (Syl Cheney-Coker), *The Heart of Redness* (Zakes Mda) und *Song for Night* (Chris Abani). Hierzu wird zuerst eine Übersicht über die Entwicklung des Genres *magischer Realismus* gegeben und aufgezeigt, wie schwierig es ist, den Begriff klar zu definieren. Darüber hinaus werden die Hauptcharakteristika des Genres vorgestellt. Im Anschluss daran folgt eine detaillierte Analyse derjenigen Textstellen in den vier Romanen, welche dem magischen Realismus zuzuordnen sind. Wann immer möglich, werden Parallelen zwischen den Werken gezogen und es wird darüber

hinaus aufgezeigt, dass dem magischen Realismus als Genre eine große Bedeutung bei der Bewältigung von Traumata zukommen kann, da er es ermöglicht, das Unausprechliche in Worte zu fassen.