

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
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*The Mythical Dimension in Ben Okri's The Famished Road and Its Contribution in
the Construction of African Identity*

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Presented by :

Teggar Toufik

Supervised by :

Dr. Touhami Ibtissam

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Dedication

To the soul of my grand father , my master and my dearest person .

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First and foremost , thanks for allah for all his graces and provision . Second , I would like to express my sincere gratitude to this thesis advisor Doctor Touhami Ibtissam for the continous support and encouragement in this related research . She allowed for this paper to exist , I could not have imagined having a better instructor and advisor for this master's thesis .

Abstract

Ben Okri's novel entitled *The Famished Road* is not a mere literary work that includes imageries and metaphors , It surpasses the limitations of its cover to represent an allegory of nationalism and a main component of African identity . Since the appearance of this novel, Many questions took place on Its literary value along with different perspectives that discussed the novelistict treatment of the different issues implied between the lines of the story . This Booker prize winner novel took a cosmopolitan dimension after the prize , the global literary scene witnessed the rise of dawn from the western part of the dark Africa As a result , this dissertation aspires to provide key definitions to some significant concepts in order to serve as a background to understand the mythical aspects in the novel and how the author attempted to pass some moral lessons throughout the story . Furthermore, this paper tries to highlight the link between the novel and the African longing for an independent identity. As newly independent nation, Okri tend to awaken the popular masses in this crucial moment to increase their awareness of the sensitivity of that historical phase . Eventually, this dissertation will demonstrate the deepness of the African culture in the society and the authoritative role of the myth in shaping the social context .

Résumé

Le roman de Ben Okri intitulé *The Famished Road* n'est pas une simple œuvre littéraire incluant des images et des métaphores. Il dépasse les limites de sa couverture pour représenter une allégorie du nationalisme et une composante principale de l'identité africaine. Depuis l'apparition de ce roman, de nombreuses questions ont été posées sur sa valeur littéraire, ainsi que sur différentes perspectives qui traitaient du traitement novateur des différentes questions impliquées entre les lignes de l'histoire. Ce roman gagnant du prix Booker a pris une dimension cosmopolite après le prix, la scène littéraire mondiale a été marquée par l'aube naissante de la partie occidentale de l'Afrique sombre. Cette thèse vise donc à fournir des définitions clés de certains concepts importants pour servir un arrière-plan pour comprendre les aspects mythiques du roman et comment l'auteur a tenté de transmettre certaines leçons morales tout au long de l'histoire. De plus, cet article tente de mettre en évidence le lien entre le roman et le désir africain d'une identité indépendante. En tant que nation nouvellement indépendante, Okri a tendance à réveiller les masses populaires en ce moment crucial pour les sensibiliser à la sensibilité de cette phase historique. À terme, cette thèse démontrera la profondeur de la culture africaine dans la société et le rôle autoritaire du mythe dans la formation du contexte social.

ملخص

إن رواية بن أوكري المعنونة "الطريق المجوع" ليست مجرد عمل أدبي يتضمن صورًا واستعارات ، بل إنها تفوق قيود غلافها لتمثل رمزًا للقومية ومكوّنًا أساسيًا للهوية الأفريقية. منذ ظهور هذه الرواية ، ظهرت العديد من التساؤلات حول قيمتها الأدبية إلى جانب وجهات نظر مختلفة ناقشت طريقة معالجة الرواية للقضايا المختلفة المندسة ضمن خطوط الحكمة في القصة. هذه الرواية الفائزة بجائزة بوكر أخذت بعدًا عالميًا بعد تتويجها بهاته الجائزة ، شهد المشهد الأدبي العالمي بزوغ أولى خطوط الفجر من الجزء الغربي من أفريقيا المظلمة. وكرد فعل لذلك ، تطمح هذه الرسالة إلى تقديم تعريفات أساسية لبعض المفاهيم الهامة من أجل انجاز خلفية فكرية لفهم الجوانب الأسطورية في الرواية وكيف حاول المؤلف تمرير بعض الدروس الأخلاقية طوال القصة. علاوة على ذلك ، يحاول هذا البحث إبراز العلاقة بين الرواية وحنين الأفارقة لهوية مستقلة. وكدولة مستقلة حديثًا ، اخذ أوكري على عاتقه إيقاظ الجماهير الشعبية في هذه اللحظة الحاسمة لزيادة وعيهم بحساسية تلك المرحلة التاريخية. في نهاية المطاف ، سوف تظهر هذه الرسالة عمق الثقافة الأفريقية في المجتمع والدور الحاسم للأسطورة في تحديد الهيكل الاجتماعي.

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General Introduction

The literary school of post colonial fiction in Africa gathered under its umbrella an elite of authors and thinkers who devoted their pens to serve the different issues that confronted their countries in a crucial period of time . Ben Okri is one of those writers who dedicate their intellectual effort to introduce Nigeria to the western world who was misled by tenebrous stories about savage people or by falsified history that ignores the humanism of the African man and doubted his identity . The works of Okri paved the way for the western world to alter his preformed conception of the African society which can takes only the image of barbarous group . The booker prize winner entitled *The Famished Road* is considered one of Okri's creative works that achieved a wide cosmopolitan echo . Due to its popularity , the novel was studied from different perspectives which varied from historical , literary and socio-political views . the story bears between its pages one of the major cultural aspect that constitutes the African identity which is mythology . In this novel , Okri defines many social traditions and religious rituals by refering them to the mythological background of the African people . The introduction of the African myths can help the reader to perceive the unfamiliarity of many aspects of the life in Africa .

The study of the mythological dimensions of the novel and its influential role in understanding the successive events that occurred in a magical world give the impression of relevance but away from the definition of the notion of the myth as a philosophical , social and psychological phenomenon . Magical realism literature was the driving force behind this proposed research , in order to study the African myth and its relevance in such world class work of Ben okri , It is to discover the secret behind its popularity and how it could be received welcomingly in the western world as a response to the unfair typical image about Arica and Africans . The myth as a main component of the African identity and Its

contribution to the construction of identity . This novelistic approach that is applied in the unreal world serve to reveal the human psyche and the impact of the myth to be a main factor that controlled this psyche and helped to build a national identity .

The mythology of the African society mentioned in the novel surpasses the limits of literary notions of metaphor and allegory , It is the history of nation , It is the cultural heritage of a distinctive ethnic community . In this vein , the main research question is what are the mythical aspects in the novel and how does the myth contributed to the construction of African identity ?

Beside the main research question and Through this study , many sub research questions are investigated as they are listed below :

- what is myth ?
- what does it mean ?
- how does it develop throughout the time and how It used its verbal form to transmit from generation to another to become a cultural heritage ?
- what is the relation between the myth and literature ?
- what is its relation with ritual and religion ?
- in what extent does it emerge with the human psychology ?
- how does the myth could be influential in the social hierarchy and what are the main hypothesis that links the myth with anthropology ?
- and eventually what are the main myths in the novel and how Okri managed to include them in the story ?

These crucial research questions are to be analyzed and answered in this research paper to reach the goals of this study .

Therefore , the topic of this proposed research deals with the definition of the myth in different fields of knowledge and how this notion alters from one perspective to another . It discussed the contribution of the myth in the formation of the African personality in addition to its role in shaping the social life with a superior function of rediscovering the landmarks of the African identity which suffered from the colonial oppression which persisted to deform It throughout decades .

The mythical dimension in Okri's *The Famished Road* represents a central issue that touches many aspects of life , It clarifies the secret behind many incomprehensible events and creates familiarity with unusual characters , this dimension embodies the magical realm of supernatural and shifts it into an earthy plot of ordinary people . with this tendency , Okri introduces an African version of magical realism .

Many scholars and researchers have dealt with *The Famished Road* , they discussed the novel from different perspectives that produced different analysis and results .

Bill Ashcroft , Gareth Griffiths and Hellen Tiffin's *Post Colonial Studies : the Key Concepts* and Abiola Irele's *the Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* saw the novel as a postcolonial discourse and they refer to the myth as a counter civilized weapon of decolonization . Another book entitled *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* written by Brenda Cooper attempted to reveal the relation between the magic and history , Cooper investigated Okri's goals when he choose to write with this tendency towards myth and dreams , She answered the question that how did Okri succeed to transfer those indigenous beliefs into such creative literary piece ? hence , this proposed research will attempt to reveal another dimension that is the definig of the myth as a scientific notion and how does it occurred in the novel as an attitude of the protagonist and how does it constitute a major pillar of the African community . Therefore , this study will try to examine the existence of the

myth in the novel and relate it to its specific domain of human science because of the valuable usage of this notion to introduce a whole nation in the figure of little child . Eventually , we will provide a full background of the myth in the social , historical and literary contexts and identify the mythological events and characters in the novel to analyze them according to the different fields of the mythological studies .

In order to answer the main and the sub research questions and in order to investigate the validity of the hypothesis, this research adopts an analytical descriptive approach , so It must follow some particular tools to help to conform with the goals of this study . This research paper is formed mainly from three chapters ; in the first chapter there will be a full background of the myth by facilitating the perception of the term by inserting the necessary definitions . Subsequently , the second chapter will adopt an inductive method that helped in the involvement the search for pattern and the development of the previous explanations and definitons introduced in the previous chapter . Eventually , the third chapter will employ an analytical method to detect the relationships that exixt between the theoretical frame work of the previous chapters and the Ben Okri's novel *the Famished Road* .

Chapter One :
Background to
Myth and
Mythology

Introduction

From the earliest human civilizations on earth till now , the man lived with the collection of his gods , his symbols and his myths . This collection is the cultural heritage of the human race. In the anthropological studies , Mythology is considered as a primary field of study that is categorized among the oldest aspects of human culture , the anthropologists were facing an obvious reliance on myths to justify many cultural orientations (Johnston 16) . Moreover , the archeologists believed that the creation and the use of the mythological Symbols as human experience findings can be seen as a tool of measurement that distinguish human from non human (ibid) . This device of human recognition assures that the man tendency towards spirituality is very ancient as it can be traced back to the primitive man who tend to belief in his own gods and his own myths related to divinity .

The present chapter is an attempt to give a theoretical background about the notion of myth from several perspectives . First , this chapter provides definition of myth along with the historical development of the notion throughout three main phases . Secondly , It explores the nature of the relation between myth and ritual from one hand, and the literary usage of myth from the other hand. It attempts also to clarify the myth role in the social context by introducing the main theories of prominent anthropologists who dealt with myth as a main component of identity of the society . The final section develops two main ideas , the first one will explain the effects of mythical representation on the human psychology and the other idea presents the myth as an archetype and investigates how it can be considered as an entrance to the collective unconscious .

I.1. Definition of Myth

Myth in its genuine meaning refers to the fables of gods and supernatural phenomena inherited from the ancient generations.

In his book *creative writers and day dreaming*, Freud defines myth as the source of the nationalist pride and history of a whole nation , and the the discreet dreams of humanity (152) . In the national scale , the collection of myths is the popular culture of the nation as Freud confirms that culture is derived from the mythical heritage (ibid) . An other definition of Kirk who refers to myths as inherited stories that had been transfered throughout the successive generations (282) . Morford and Lenardon say that the myth is human cultural phenomenon that was created to reunite what was seperated and made it more credible (4).

The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms defines myth as a traditional anonymous story , originaly religious in nature ,tolad by a particular cultural group in order to explain a natural or cosmic phenomenon . Myths generally offer supernatural explanations for the creation of the world and humanity as well as for death , judgement and the afterlife .

Myth or "mythos" in Greek refers to the plot or narrative that can be the background of artistic inspiration. This mythical affection of creativity can be found in the ancient tales which tells mythical legendary stories (person et al. 39) . The study of myth is the path to understand more about the history and the psychology of the human being throughout generations of development . The myth is a factor that can explain the mode of life for any nation in any given point of time.

Vico Giambattista , in his book entitled *The New Science* states that the study of the myth is a priority , he said that the study of mythology should be learned first by understanding the notions of the different myths as they are the genuine stories that reveal the early history of any nation (31) . His claim comes from his belief of the credibility of the myth and its importance as a leading thought within the dawn of the humanity , He argues that all the

myths were true in the time of the establishment of nations and only the long time that separated the man from such historical beginning of his existence affected the meaning of those myths to be more complicated to understand (ibid).

I.2. Historical Development of Myth

I.2.1. The Premodern World Mythology

The myth is a main civilization component that traced back to the early stages of humanity in its attempt to go beyond every day experience . Myths tell the stories of ancestors and the origin of the human existence in the world , it also contributes in explaining the physical phenomena and natural incidents . This categorical diversity of myth maintains the fact that myths and mythology express a culture's worldview , that is the popular conceptions and assumptions about mankind's place in nature and the universe , and the limits and workings of the natural and spiritual world .

The early hints of the existence of a human culture supported by mythological beliefs are found in the archeological sites where there plenty of engraved remains of animal , objects and tools which are considered proofs of beliefs for those extinct civilizations . Heinrich schliemann , in the late nineteenth century , was guided by Homer to dig at the sites mentionned in The illiad and The Odyssey , and was thus predisposed towards relating these sites to the culture represented in the poems . It was logical that the founded instruments and reaminings were buried for traditional reasons (Manning 117). The burial ceremonies and the grave content reflects the primitive human awareness of his mortality and in the other hand , it shows the belief in spirituality and metaphysics by preparing the dead for the afterlife .

therefore , the early myths were about the death and the unknown spiritual world , It was a time when mythology was indistuingishable from religious rituals . In this early stage of

humanity, the gods were not seen as supernatural powers because the myth was the representation of personal experiences .This idea was reinforced by Karen Armstrong , in his book *A Short History Of Myth* , he notes that mythology helps the humanity to find the meaning of its existence , It guided the man to contextualize his life in this world (6) . The early civilizations had dealt with the myth as a credible event that bears a hidden meaning , as Armstrong suggested that mythology is an artistic activity that reveals the human reality despite the historical falsification (ibid) .

In the premodern world , the myth took its importance because it helped firstly to give a value to the human existence and secondly it uncovered the human being psyche . In this context , the myth was primary version of psychology (ibid) . The early stages of the human being evolution witnessed the man attachment to the spiritual world. This early attachment can be prevailed in one of the most common myths that every culture believes in which is the divine paradise . At the same timeline , the creation myth appeared to justify the existence of the universe .The man start to create his own god and goddess , he created his own mythology to complete his own belief in major forces that rule the world . The myth in the early times of human existence was an attempt to teach people how to see beyond the real world . therefore , it can be summed up that the myth was a formative component in the human being evolution .

I.2.2. The Urbanized Myth

Urban life had influenced the myth to be more urbanized one , the god status were seem unbalanced , the ancient mythological stories could not afford a new frame for the new life and people started to have such rupture with the holy tales and beliefs that were adopted by their ancestors (Armstrong 31) . In that era , the myth knew a radical transformation due to the new urbanization culture and the social consciousness . in other scale , The invention of writing succeeded by the appearance of art announced the dawn of new recording age .

The man recognized his ability to confront the nature and to exploit its resources for his own benefit (ibid) . It is an understanding of reality which enables human beings to explain all their relevant experiences and which controls their thinking and gives the rationale for acting the way they do . The mindset we have today is generally attributed to the results of three great revolutions in human history .The capitalist revolution which started in the fifteenth century , the industrial or technological revolution which started in the late eighteenth century and the ideological revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Guinness 284) . In that time , the human being mind was in constant progress , he developed his logical operations where he reached the idea of cause and effect and became more aware of his entourage . Science and freedom were the great factors of civilization , or of progress in every kind of conceptions , sentiments and social conditions :the first dissolved and destroyed the matrix of myth inwhich the intelligence was at first enveloped , and liberty which was wholly due to science made a steady progress a matter of certainty (Vignoli 97).

The newly spread self consciousness of the human ability declined the spirit status , the new city civilization seperated the human from his beliefs and the urbanized myths became dominant .With the centuries succession , myths were examined suspiciously because of the new religious movement that was characterized by the re-evaluation of the old spiritual system . People were dealing with their ancestors' gods and rituals doubtly , the ancient mythology was in question .In that era , all the mythical heritage was examined with caution because of the new religious movement that made the the human consciousness more selective for any external input . Although this sharp view to the myth , it could not be possible to neglect mythology because there was no reference to understand the human psyche except the myth .

I.2.3. The Modern World Mythology

With the emergence of the most significant revolutionary event by the 19 century , the world witnessed the collapse of the mythological values . In the book of Joseph Campbell *The Power of Myth*, he says that one of our problems today is that we are not acquainted with the literature of the spirit (13) . Mythology was partly dropped from the educational systems and consequently from the individual baggage of values .

This ungratitude towards such science cancelled many aspects of the human attitudes which were based on values of story and the wisdom extracted from these old stories . The long process of modernisation , which took Europe some three centuries , involved a serie of profound changes : industrialization , the transformation of agriculture , political and social revolutions to reorganize society to meet the new conditions , and an intellectual ' enlightenment ' that denigrated myth as useless , false and outmoded (Armstrong 46) . The new world is based on the scientific proof where the myths are not reliable sources of knowledge because of the absence of the materialized proof .Now , the world believes on the practical experience to explain a tangible phenomenon . This process gives birth to a world with pragmatic rules . For that , the heroic conception shifted from spiritual creatures to the new technological and industrial inventions . With this scientific tendancy which comes up with unprecedented discoveries , the human long standing attachement to the divine power witnessed now a spiritual vacuum because the human loses the collection of the values which provided him once with the sense of his life . The human ability to control his environment makes him feel his supremacy over the nature , this feeling of supremacy leads to the conclusion that the man is his own destiny creator .

Many intellectual publications assaults the religious beliefs and the spiritual myths ,the writers of those publications claim that religion as myth , both prevent the development of humanity. First , and in socialist view , Karl Marx argues that the religion is merely harmful , he considered the existence of the religion in the society as an indication of the latter illness .

Then it is that Charles Darwin book *On the Origin of Species* had more impact on the scientific scale . Darwinism gave more insights about the creation and the human development , his theories replaced the ancient myths of creation and people were more doubtful about those myths credibility . Also Friedrich Nietzsche in an atheist view claimed that god is dead . With this declaration , a public invitation was sent to the humanity to break up her relation with the its old myth . As Thomas Huxely opened the doors for a fight between the myth and the science .

This intellectual revolution helped in advancing the humanity in one side but It neglected a great part of the human psyche . That is to say that in terms of technology , the humanity surpassed many stages of development and prosperity , but spiritually the humanity preserved its constant state from the middle ages .

Despite the intellectual and industrial revolutions occurred through the human kind history , the nature impose its rules over the man and that what has been clear in many natural catastrophes in the history . In addition to that , the new technological inventions specially in the military field became the source of destruction , wars and terrorism . All these factors pushed the humanity for a major reevaluation of one of the pillars of its existence , the man kind faced the obligation to return to highlight the forgotten mythological dimension . The humanity missed a crucial circle in its development which is the mythological religion .

I.3. Myth and Literature

The relationship between the myth and literature began with the usage of the classical mythology and biblical themes in the literary works . This relationship authenticity is accompanied with the intense usage of those themes by many writers from Petrarch and Shakespeare till Joyce and Eliot . Segal affirms that a standard theme in literature courses has been the tracing of classical figures ,events and themes in western literature (79) .

The relation between myth and literature witnessed the transformation from the insertion of mythology in literature to the quest for the mythological origin of literature . In his book *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye aimed to convince the reader that literature is the result of derivation from myth . This derivation from myth in all literary genres is crucial in the thematic side with the belief in the autonomy of literature . Frye captured the nature of this relation , he argues that we have associated archetypes and myths particularly with primitive and popular literature .In fact we could almost define popular literature ,admittedly in a rather circular way ,as literature which affords an unobstructed view of archetypes . We can find this quality on every level of literature : in fairy tales and folk tales , in Shakespeare , in the Bible ,in Bunyan ,in Richardson , in Dickens ,in Poe and of course in a vast amount of ephemeral rubbish as well (116) . This association between myth and literature did not prevent Frye from giving the literature its autonomy , He refused to reduce literature to myth , he continues his passage by insisting that there is still the danger of reduction or assuming that literature is essentially primitive and popular (ibid) . The clear invitation to view literature as a separate entity became clearer when we stand on the fact that we have to assume that literature is a total form , and not simply the name given to the aggregate of existing literary works (ibid) .

in continuity of Frye's idea on the thematic derivation of literature from myth , René Girard criticized the existed Aristotle theory that was based on excluding tragic literature from its mythological origin . This division of labor harks back to Aristotle who declares that the competent tragic poet will avoid manipulating the myths and limit his borrowings from them to certain subjects .this interdict of Aristotle still stands in the way of our confronting the symmetrical quality of tragedy and the mythical concern with differences which protects literature from mythology (Girard 73) .

We can conclude about this relation that we can not ignore the relevance of the mythical themes in all genres of literary works . This accordance is marked by the the autonomy of literature as an entity with its own principles ,rules and limitations .

I.4. Myth and Ritual

In the other hand , the relation between myth and ritual was introduced mainly by the scottish scolar William Smith who brought the myth ritualist theorie into light .

Smith claimed that the myth is a mere explanation of the ritual . Where ritual is central for the primitive society ,the myth can be perceived only if it passed through the ritual . Segal pointed out that myth itself was secondary .Where ritual was obligatory ,myth was optional (qtd in smith 62) . This theorie was developed later by James Frazer who suggested two versions of this theorie , the first version contradicted Smith's idea of ritual priority , Segal said about the opposing idea that myth gives ritual its original and sole meaning (67) . By this claim , the first version of Frazer theorie saw the myth as an explanation of the world not just for ritual . Additionally , the second version is a scenario from the primitive societies about killing the king to inherit his soul for his successors .

I.5. The Contribution of Myth in Forming the Sociocultural Identity

I.5.1. Edward Tylor Theory

Tylor viewed the myth as a physical phenomenon that is the production of the human mind . For any culture those myths are forming a sacred history . He argued that the myth can be tested by historians taking into account the intellectual stage of the society reproducing this myth . He says that it is an indispensable qualification of the true historian that he shall be

able to look dispassionately on myth as a natural and regular product of the human mind (405).

I.5.2. Malinovsky Works

This exclusive view of the myth as a physical phenomenon was contrasted later by Bronislaw Malinovsky who annexed the myth with its social pattern .

In his book *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, Malinovsky claims that the myth comes into play when rite , ceremony or a social or moral rule demands justification , warrant of antiquity ,reality , and sanctity (107) . According to Malinovsky theorie , The myth is a persuasive tool that creates distinction among the public mass to obtain the social ranking .

By this definition , Malinovsky gives myth more pragmatic and functional role in the social scale . He refered this role to the function of the myth in the primitive society as the expressive device of beliefs and the supreme legitimizing of social codes . moreover , He annexed the myth to civilization by considering it not just a fairy tale but as an active force in constructing this civilization .

Malinovsky arrived to a conclusion that each myth bears a social charter that organizes , classifies and adjusts the shape of the community . He tend to study the myth as a lived reality , not just a told story . He insisted on characterizing the myth as an experience . This experince which gives the sociological function of the myth and made it the bridge between the founders of the myth and the modern society .

I.5.3. The Synchronic Dimension of Myth

The synchronic dimension of the myth was greatly developed by Claude Lévi-strauss who is known for his intellectualist view to myth and primitive societies that opposes the

practical view of Malinovsky . Lévi-strauss works aims to confirm that the primitive societies think differently from modern ones and that is the reason behind the emergence of the myth . Thus , He referred to the myth as the epitome of the primitive thinking and he considered the myth as a science , which he named ” the science of the concrete ” .

In his book *Myth and Meaning*, Lévi-strauss notes that there is really not a kind of divorce between mythology and science . It is only the present state of scientific thought that gives us the ability to understand what is in this myth , to which we remained completely blind before the idea of binary operations become familiar to us (8) . In an other paper of his *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-strauss states that myth is language : to be known , myth has to be told ; it is a part of human speech . In order to preserve its specificity we must be able to show that it is both the same thing as language , and also something different from it (ibid) .

Strauss theories continued to deal with the myth in linguistic frame where he claims that the value of the myth is still conserved despite the bad translation . This hypothesis came from Strauss belief that we can recognize the myth by intuition (ibid) .

Strauss argues that in order to understand what a myth really is , we must choose between platitude and sophism , some claim that human societies merely express , through their mythology , fundamental feelings common to the whole of mankind , such as love , hate or revenge or that they try to provide some kind of explanations for phenomena which they can not otherwise understand , astronomical, meteorological and the like . But why should these societies do it in such elaborate and devious ways , when all of them are also acquainted with empirical explanations ? (ibid) .

In the other hand , Lévi-strauss structural study of the myth was not totally accepted among many thinkers , it was criticized by many of the , It was a main subject in Andrew Von Henty's book *The Modern Construction of Myth* . This structural view claims that the myth

can be perceived through its core by avoiding the search for the authentic version of the myth, it is a very important corollary to his proposition that a myth is defined by its gist of translatable meaning rather than by its plot (Von Hendy 235). This claim consequently supported another idea of his which is valorizing the myth in a synchronic point rather than observing its development through time. Von Hendy illustrates more this idea when he mentioned that he is maintaining, rather, that myth is distinguished from other genres of narrative by the fact that it commands a different sort of time. The primary feature of the mythological time is that real meaning inheres not all in the diachronic dimension of performance, but only in a synchronic dimension in which the structural invariants that underlie all performances can be determined by synthetic comparison (ibid).

Lévi-Strauss's tendency to understand myth by representing it in algebraic formula makes him the target of many accusations of scientific coldness as Clifford Geertz suggested that it is aloof, closed, cold, airless, cerebral—all the epithets that collect around any sort of literary absolutism collect around it. Neither picturing lives nor evoking them, neither interpreting them nor explaining them, but rather arranging and rearranging the materials the lives have somehow left behind into formal systems of correspondences. His book seems to exist behind glass, self-sealing discourses into which jaguars, semen and rotting meat are admitted to become oppositions, inversions, isomorphism (48).

Although Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory was not welcomingly received because it dealt with the myth as a scientific enterprise, his contribution in this field can not be denied.

Strauss depends on the binary nature of the human mind to perceive the massive amount of myth collected from all cultures. Structuralism introduced by Strauss is a way to sort out the different patterns of a myth, it suggested many interpretations of a myth and rebuild it logically. Due to the mythemes which are the pieces of any myth that can be separated and

rearranged in multiple ways to create distinct stories . This diversity in the formulation of myth was submitted by Lévi-Strauss to more scientific regulations which were mathematically disposed .

I.6. The Uniqueness of the Human Psyche

Each society has its own mythology which can be seen as the collection of the human experiences through the time . All existed mythologies are universal in terms of tracing back the primitive society and the primitive human state of mind . In psychoanalytical view , the myth is an expression of the human repressed needs and desires. Sigmund Freud , Otto Rank and Carl.G Jung works on myth are the most notable in the psychoanalysis field .

Freud insists on the importance of the myth to better understand the human nature, In other words , He tends to discover the human psyche by studying the primitive cultures . In his book *Totem And Taboo* released in 1913 , Freud attempts to find psychological explanation for some traditions found in primitive societies . This claim is declared In the first chapter of this book when he insisted on the comprehension of primitive human psyche when he says that their mental life must have a peculiar interest for us if we are right in seeing in it a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our development (1) .

Freud based his scientific method ; which detects the similarities and differences between those primitive societies and the modern ones , on the principle of the uniqueness of the human psyche . He reinforced his idea by adding that if that supposition is correct , a comparison between the psychology of primitive peoples , as it is taught by social anthropology and the psychology of neurotics , as it has been revealed by psycho-analysis , will be bound to show numerous points of agreement and will throw new light upon familiar facts in both sciences (ibid) .

Freud's interest was mainly on the Greek religious mythology, the Oedipus complex in ancient Greek mythology constitutes the basics of explaining human psychosexuality. In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud says that this discovery is confirmed by a legend that has come down to us from classical antiquity: a legend whose profound and universal power to move can only be understood if the hypothesis I have put forward in regard to the psychology of children has an equally universal validity. What I have in mind in the legend of King Oedipus and Sophocles' drama which bears his name (278). Freud believed that the sexual drive is the most prevailing desire in the human psyche, so the myth is just the expression of those taboo desires which are buried in the human mind.

He further explained that King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfillment of our own childhood wishes. But, more fortunate than he, we have meanwhile succeeded, in so far as we have not become psychoneurotics, in detaching our sexual impulse from our mothers and in forgetting our jealousy of our fathers (ibid). In terms of representation and meaning, Freud affirmed the universality of the myth in contrast to the dreams which remain symbolically personal, he asserted that on that point there is this to be said: this symbolism is not peculiar to dreams, but is characteristic of unconscious ideation, in particular among the people, and it is to be found in folklore, and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes, to a more complete extent than in dreams (ibid).

I.6.1. The Mythical Male Hero

In continuation of his teacher's works, Otto Rank concentrated on dreams and myths as Freud did before. The main interest of Rank was the detailed study of myths, especially those which are their subject about the male heroes. The view of Rank on heroism marked by the primeval part of the human being's life from his birth till his young adulthood. This period in

the human being life attracted Rank for its image as a preparatory phase into the self-sufficiency realized by finding a job and having a partner .

In his book *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* , Rank insisted on inevitable study of this early period , the fact has also been pointed out that this imaginative faculty is found in its active and unchecked exuberance only in childhood . Therefore , the imaginative life of the child should first be studied , in order to facilitate the understanding of the far more complex and also more handicapped mythical and artistic imagination in general (121) .

Rank tried to give a detailed portrayal about the hero and how he is different from ordinary children , the hero is child of the most distinguished parents ; usually the son of a king . His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence ,or prolonged barrenness , or secret intercourse of the parents , due to external prohibition or obstacles (ibid) . Besides this portrayal , Rank marked the notion of heroism with a behavioral disorder towards parents and he tried to figure out the background of such unbalanced relation by putting about thirty heroes in study . He assumed that the normal relations of the hero towards his father and his mother regularly appearing impaired in all these myths , as shown by the schedule , there is reason to assume that something in the nature of the hero must account for such a disturbance , and motives of this kind are not very difficult to discover (ibid) . In Rank's commentary works on the oedipus rex , the hero is not any more a neurotic . He is a "pervert " who can not get rid of his romantic fantasies . The hero himself as shown by his detachment from the parents , begins his career in opposition to the old generation ; he is at once a rebel , a renovator , and a revolutionary . However , every revolutionary is originally a disobedient son , a rebel against the father (ibid) .

While Freud neurotic hero tries to find an other outlet for his impulses , Rank hero acts according to them. The latter declared that the truly heroic element then consists only in the

real justice or even necessity of the act, which is therefore generally endorsed and admired (ibid) .

I.6.2. The Psychoanalysis of Myth-Making

Jung theories have great impact on the field of the psychoanalysis of the myth . Unlike Freud , Jung believed that heroism occurs in the whole cycle of the human being life and he related the heroism in the first half not just with parental rapport but even more with the unconsciousness. These ideas appeared in his book *Man and his Symbols* , when he wrote that It had so far been referring to the complete hero myth, inwhich the whole cycle from birth to death is elaborately described . But it is essential to recognize that at each of the stages in this cycle there are forms of the hero study that apply to the particular point reached by the individual in the development of his ego-consciousness , and to the specific problem confronting him at a given moment . That is to say ,the image of the hero evolves in a manner that reflects each stage of the evolution of the human personality (112) .

The unconsciousness for Jung is a hereditary trait contrasting Freud who believed on the formation of this psyche division. To confirm this idea , Jung describes the unconsciousness that is the part of the psyche that retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind (ibid) . Jung's view to the human psyche is based on the balance between consciousness and unconsciousness , a valid cycle life of human being depends on preserving the childhood psychological achievements in the second half of human life . It is consciousness that holds key to the values of the unconscious , and that therefore plays the decisive part . Consciousness alone is competent to determine the meaning of the images and and to recognize their significance for man here and now , in the concrete reality of the present . Only in an interplay of consciousness and the unconscious can the unconscious prove its value ,and perhaps even show a way to overcome the melancholy of the

void. If the unconscious once in action ,is left to itself ,there is a risk that its contents will become overpowering or will manifest their negative , destructive side (ibid) .

The psychological theories of myth are still in progress and many theories appeared as a result of this incessant development .Among those theories , the structural myth theorie which emphasized the duality in the human mind. The human nature is shaped by two aspects , the good and the bad one. All the previous theories share the same vision of the importance of the myth to explore the depth of the human psyche . The human psyche can misled the researcher because of its obscurity , the latter faced the compulsory need of guiding milestones. Besides the need of guidance , the need to restrict the study scope is an obligation by taking into consideration the vastness of the subject. Freud , Jung ,Rank and other scholars adopted the myth to be their milestone , a common cultural factor and a main human psyche device .

I.7. The Archetypes and Collective Unconscious

Carl Jung continues his mythical studies in relation to psychology in a more profound manner. In 1909 and in his trip to clarck university , Jung had a dream about a house and his layers , this dream interpretetaion was the beginning of the collective unconscious theory .

It is significant that in interpreting the dream Jung readily assumed that the seemingly historical layers of the dream referred to genetically inherited material and the existence of innate structured layers in the brain (Lewin 112). Jung introduced his idea of collective conscious and how the myth is related to subconscious parts of the human psyche . This interpreted dream gradually became the frame of the collective unconscious theorie defined by Jung as the part of the psyche that retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind (Jung 107). In order to understand this psychological part , Jung claims that the archetypes are the keys to go beyond shallowness . So , it is necessary to

determine those archetypes and define them to be able to understand the collective unconscious concept of Jung .

According to Jung , An archetype is derived from the greek term "arché" that means "root" while "typos" refers to "model". Those archetypes are representing in myths , rituals , taboos , totem and other social motifs . Jung refers to these archetypes as the clues to attain the self-recognition in any given cultural phenomenon . The archetypes are authoritative over the unconscious . The unconscious, however, seems to be guided chiefly by instinctive trends ,represented by corresponding thought forms that is , by the archetypes (ibid) . Jung used this term in a more accurate way to give it his own meaning by defining the archetype as a cultural symbol which conceive the human deeds and his mind mechanism . The storage of the archetypes in the human being occurs at the level of the collective unconscious which gather all human beings despite their personal tendencies .

This Jungian concept was detailed by Lewin when he says that there were the individual life experiences that had filtered down into the personal unconscious and those factors were common to humanity as a whole , which he called the collective unconscious (ibid) . The myths are the outcome of the collective unconscious which is psychologically inherited through the generations . Jung considers the myth as the tool that can explore the hidden truth stored in the collective unconscious . His theorie of the collective unconscious reflects the role of the myth as a social , historical and psychological phenomenon . The myth is the projection of collective unawareness which is typically the same for all human beings , It is the expression of encoded wisdom and morality .The myth universality and the similarities found between the different cultures is due to the collective unconscious .

Jung resumed his ideas by finding a mythological resemblance between the socialist and capitalist societies although their distant ideologies , Jung assumed that we even support

it by our own childishness, for our civilization is in the grip of the same mythology . Unconsciously , we cherish the same prejudices , hopes and expectations .We too believe in the welfare state ,in universal peace ,in the equality of man, in his eternal human rights, in justice, truth and (do not say it too loudly) in the kingdom of God on earth (ibid) .

Conclusion

It can be seen that the myth is a main component of the social identity of any human community . It is obvious that the myth also is the cultural human heritage that accumulated from the ancient times. This vision to myth is accompanied with the psychological theories that considered the myth as a device to understand the human psyche by studying his medieval nature . therefore , the study of mythology can deliver promising insights on the most obscure phases of human history , hand in hand with the knowledge of the human psychological and mental development .

This chapter concluded that the myth is a crucial item in the humanity cycle , it is a vast used notion in all the sciences of humanities. In psychology , in social science and in literature (African literature as an illustration) as will be discussed in the second chapter . That is to say that the myth intervenes in many scientific and human fields of study because of its importance as a historical compass and psychoanalytical tool of individuals and nations .

Chapter Two :
Ben Okri's The
Famished Road

Introduction

This second chapter will provide detailed evaluation of the novel as a piece of work that belongs to an independent literary fiction that is ruled by temporary circumstances of emergence and has its own special characteristics. It begins with highlighting the novel synopsis and the identification of the main character who is the narrator and the pivotal part in the events sequence. Then there will define literary background of *The Famished Road* as a magical realism work and how this kind of fiction is introduced in the novel by identifying its main characteristics and applying it on the novel. This section will demonstrate the socio-political dimensions of this novel to confirm that it's a piece of art that works as a reflection of the social conditions of Nigerian people and how it is utilized by Okri as a decolonizing context in the political scene.

The chapter also will provide a detailed description of the setting and how the cultural environment affects the novel by defining and showing the main Yoruba myths, traditions and religious rituals mentioned in the novel. The final section in this chapter will define the Abiku phenomenon in the Yoruba culture and what it means to be an Abiku child, this section reveals the importance of this myth in the development of the events in the novel.

II.1. The Novel Synopsis

The Famished Road plot is divided between the real world and the world of spirits which is named by the author "the land of beginnings" where spirits are born, come back after death and transform to anything they want to be. The main character Azaro is an Abiku child who is destined to die several times before his birth. In the Abiku spiritual world, Azaro made many friendships and promised his spirit friends to come back from the real world. His

nature as an abiku child give the narrator Abiku the abilities to read minds , understand the language of animals and to predict the future events .

In an unmentioned place in Africa where the story occurred most likely in Nigeria , Azaro refused to come back to his spiritual friends who tempt him to fulfill his promise and return to the spiritual world , but Azaro chose to live . Azaro's choice was not received welcomingly by his spiritual mates who attempted to trick him and send him back to their world , they lured him with a deadly water causing to him a harmful illness which kills him . During his funeral , Azaro fantastically revives to prove that his attachment to life was too strong , immediately , his parents named him Lazaro due to his resemblance to Lazarus the biblical figure whom Jesus raised from the death . later , his name was shortened by his mother to become Azaro . When Azaro was child , an enormous fire blew up and all the neighborhood broke down , the owner came with the police force and the riot was everywhere , in this messy situation , Azaro was abducted by some witches who took him away to an isolated island . There he was warned by a cat that he will be a victim of bloody ritual and he should flee , so he could escape and return to the main land where he was adopted by a police officer who suggested to take care of him until the appearance of his parents . during this two adventure , many visions crossed the head of Azaro and he decided to call his mother who appeared in the front door and retake her son . With his return to the new home of family , Azaro's family was dropped in debt and the creditors were coming each day to demand their money . His father's work was not so beneficial and his mother's illness made their troubles bigger and bigger . Madame Koto , the owner of the bar suggested to help the family in one condition that Azaro spends all his time in the bar as she thought that he is a good luck amulet.

Meanwhile , the forest had been changed , the houses were in place of trees and the electrical cable was passing through , urbanization was conquering the forest . The political

scene was active too , there were campaigns in all the country between the two parties , the poor party and the rich one . The parties were seeking the people votes by all the ways by cutting the promises of a prosperous life. the distribution of the powdered milk was a strategie followed by the rich poor who were accused of massive accident in one of the campaigns of milk distribution and they were insulted and kicked off by the angry masses . The photographer who published the photos of the accident was hidden in Azaro's home , this just worsen the family situation when the house owner impose on the family to vote for the rich party and they refused to , the rent get higher and the mom was ejected by the marketplace owner who blames her for not voting for his party . Azaro was tricked by his spiritual friends and broke a window of an old man who came next day to demand a payment , Azaro's dad was angry and beat him . After this incident , Azaro was tempted by his spiritual friend that he will have a happier life in the other world , he refused to eat and became weaker and weaker till he has almostly died when three herbalists intervned to rescue him .

Azaro's father was a strong boxer , he was called " the black tyger " , in one of his fights against a apirit with supernatural powers , he was teared off and he slept for three days with ultimate wounds . In his sleep time , he could redream the world and tell his family when he awoke that the conflict in the spiritual world is affecting the real world .He thought that one man could make a difference in this world . The novel ends with Azaro conclusion that there is no limitations between the two worlds and he emphysized on the importance of the spiritual world .

II.2. The Famished Road Literary Background

The Famished Road is Ben Okri's novel that is categorised literary as a magical realism work . In the west side of Africa , this literary genre found an encouraging environment where fiction was the outlet from colonial and post colonial oppression . Brenda

Cooper supports the belonging of Okri's fiction to the magical realism genre ,she argues that is clear , notwithstanding the labyrinth within which the road symbolism is constructed is that Okri's society is the bizarre product of both new and old , tradition and burgeoning change . It is one of the unevenly developed societies that spawns magical realism (80) . This society is situated In the culturally enriched west Africa where the Yoruba mythologies and beliefs in particular have provided material for other African writers such as Ben Okri and Amos Tutuola (Bowers 53) .

By defining the magical realism genre as the transformation of the unreal and myth into the everyday life to create supernatural events , the characters remain ordinary and no wonder if we see the story events run many recognizable places . In terms of setting , The road is a main one of three where the story took place . there is also the wild forest in which the spirits ,witches ,monsters and ghosts find dark and dense safe-cover . then there is the road ,which clears and encroaches on this bush and brings western technology and "progress" ,while exposing and thereby annihilating the hidden spirits .Thriving on the borders between road and bush is Madame Koto's bar ,through which pass new politicians and old witches ,electricity and ghosts ,a gramophone ,a motor car and malevolent Abiku spirits (Cooper 68) .

But The road in ben okri novel has a different notion that existed in Wole Soyinka and other Nigerian writers' works . it is a different road that is meant to take you from one place to another ,on a journey ,towards a destination (Wilkinson 77) .

In an other issue , the historical context of the story is the post colonial era ,in the time that political conflicts and the social concerns were at the peak . The Nigerians were suffering a sharp poverty while many developments were occurring around them . The novel is set in the historical reality of nigeria at a very specific moment-independence looms ,along with the construction of modern communications ,of roads and cars, photography and electricity

(Cooper 68) . Situated in a moment preceding the corruption within the nation's internal leaderships, its civil war (the Biafran war of 1967-70) , and border disputes ,the narrative unfolds at the dawning of the nation's independence (Sasser 71). This historical introduction is just a background of the time of the story writing and it does not describe Okri's interest on history as a main component of the story construction . And this leads alternatively to assume one of Okri's fictional characteristics which is vastly dissimilar from the magical realisms of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie who both essentially rely on forms of allegory to address historical concerns in most of their novels (Mathuray 115) .

At an other level of study ,the protagonist representation must discussed in seeing the novel as a magical realism work ,is the main character Azaro who lives between the two worlds of life and death. This acceptance of the mythological theme in the story is a main characteristic of any magical realism work. Azaro is the protagonist who lives with his guide spirit and know all the life's details , this ordinary description of metaphysical phenomenon what adds magic to the story . In an other view , it is impossible for a character like that who sees that there are no divisions really in life, just a constant flow ,forming and reforming ,and who is looking at other characters ,not to see that they themselves knowingly and unknowingly are flowing and reflowing ,forming and reforming (Wilkinson 84) .

Okri 's protagonist Azaro is his way to the reality encrypted in the story title " the road " , Newell says that Azaro consciousness exemplifies the postcolonial complementarity of the famished road :multiple worlds and realities coexist with equal validity as Azaro shuttles rapidly between different planes .these planes of reality are strongly reminiscent of the worlds of the living ,the unborn ,and the ancestors if African traditional religions (207) .

Azaro journeys between the worlds is a mere aspect of the magical realism fiction that insists on the complementarity between the settings . Thus okri tends to create a composed

atmosphere of realism and fantasy by joining the mythical tales and religious beliefs to the social chart of traditions and rituals of the Nigerian people .

In his book *On the Sacred in African Literature* , Mark Mathuray reveals that magical realism which initially referred to certain Latin American novels that combined the literary and discursive strategies of realism and fantasy has come to identify almost any novel that contains mythical or fantastical elements . Like the king of the road in Okri's *The Famished Road* , this generic categorie seems to have an insatiable appetite , devouring everything in its path to achieve identification with it (116) . To justify this literary tendency in the magical realism of Ben Okri , Abdul R JanMohamed in his *Manichean Aesthetics* specifies that the ideological function of the novels similar to *The Famished Road* as acts is to avoid the pain of colonial subjugation by retreating into a mythic universe , into a fantasy world where problems can be solved by divine intervention (274) . Furthermore , Isabel Allende comes out with a more general claim that magical realism is a literary device or a way of seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world : dreams , legends , myths , emotion passion , history .All these forces find a place in the absurd , unexplainable aspects of magical realism It is the capacity to see and to write about all the dimensions of reality (54) . Jacques Alexis maintains that the myth , the marvelous can , if they are understood in a materialist sense ,become powerful leavenings for a realistic art and literature , for the transformation of the world (3) .

At last , an other main feature of the magical realism fiction appeared in *the Famished Road* is the emphasis on the use of details to highlight the work uniqueness as Wendy B. Faris argues that its descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world . This is the realism in the magical realism , distuinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory . it appears in several ways . realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in , often by extensive use of detail (14) .

II.3. The Famished Road Socio-Political Background

The post colonial fiction joins to its literary value , a political interpretation as one of this fiction popular themes and it works further as a mechanism to evaluate the precedent historical era . The first view presents the thematic construction of any piece of writing of this fiction which is theoretically defined by some scholars as writing back to the colonial era , in their book entitled *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft , Griffiths and Tiffin shares this perspective and states that each of the post colonial literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre (15). Secondly , this fiction fosters the political dimensions of the representation of the African life and society . Aijaz Ahmed criticizes Jameson theory of otherness in his book *In Theories : Nations ,Classes ,Literatures* . He argues that since Jameson defines the so-called third world in terms of its experience of colonialism and imperialism ,the political category that necessarily follows from this exclusive emphasis is that of the nation ,with nationalism as the peculiarly valorized ideology ;and ,because of this privileging of the nationalist ideology , it is then theoretically posited that all third world texts are necessarily to be read as national allegories (98) .

Our novel *The Famished Road* belongs to the African post colonial fiction which can be better described by Ato Quayson who suggests in his *Postcolonialism Theory, Practice or Process ?* that the dominant forms of political discourse have operated mainly in a quasi metaphysical language of good v. evil and of chaos v. order (94) . Quayson affirms that one is even tempted to run through a typology of political literature to show the various ways in which culture heroism is thematized and then linked to the imagining of a liberatory politics

(ibid) . Through the novel ,The political dimension is represented by the two adult charecters , Azaro's father and the bar owner madame Koto who tend to mobilize people in favor of different political fronts . Quayson continues to claim that the trajectory of the development of the two charecters is further complicated by being linked to growing political consciousness (ibid) .The novel itself is set in a vaguely defined periode before independence , Quayson sees the most relevant is the fact that two political parties vie for the votes of the people . these are respectively the party of the rich and the party of the poor .both parties are highly allegorized and there is no doubt that they are essentialized expressions of the political impulses of exploitation on the one hand and social welfare on the other . however , it is the alliance of the Black Tyger with the party of the poor , and Madame Koto with the party of the rich , that gives conclusiv evidence that the two characters are being scripted according to an overarching moral economy . this moral economy identifies the local bourgeoisie with exploitation ,and the wretched of the earth with social improvement (ibid) . The main character Azaro himself represents the Nigerian political malaise through his unstable ontological transition between the spiritual and the real world . Azaro 's continuous births and deaths symbolyze the political history of Nigeria , he is on his fifth round to the earth , a parallel to the five eras of government in Nigeria : colonial , first republic , military rule , second republic , military rule (Oka Moh 90) .

Okri uses Azaro as a tool to emphasize the transitional phase which Nigeria went through from the colonial period to the independence first years and the chaotic curccunstances that surrounded that era . This function of Azaro surpasses the geographic zone of the story setting , it is not only a symbol of Nigeria but even of Africa as a whole (Elder11). *The Famished Road* as a postcolonial piece of art narrates the sociopolitical aspects of African society in a crucial point of time , Okri attempts to reveal that the traumatic condition of Nigeria was the result of the conflict between corrupted politicians . In *the*

European Journal of Language and Literature , the author says that The novel reveals outrageous experiences as such as the failure of Nigeria as an independent nation state ,poversty ,famine ,violence ,social and political corruption,militarism ,dictatorship and domestic neocolonialism . while carrying his novel from the traumatic atmosphere of postcolonial Nigeria to optimistic dreams of the future ,Okri's main concerns become myth , history and politics . these three concepts go hand in hand in Okri's philosophy and function as inseparable organizing principles throughout the novel . if history means suffering of the people in Okri's understanding , then myth becomes the best remedy for the Nigerian African people's sufferings (Elif 94) . She points out that in *The Famished Road* ,the postcolonial Nigerian society is searched through the Yoruba myths of the Abiku child and the road :Azaro and Ade as spirit children serve as the representatives of Nigeria ,and by extension of Africa and the road becomes the symbol of Nigeria's struggles to survive .through these myths Okri attempts to investigate Africa's past histories and to give moral lessons to African people . however , it is also the African people who can satisfy their hunger by rediscovering the possibilities of imagination and spirituality buried in the unbroken African consciousness. African people have to think in a different way ,overcome their forgetfulness and cowardness and redream their past to heal their future . for Okri ,this is the only way of solving the crises of democracy in Nigeria ,Africa and moreover ,throughout the modern world (ibid) .

II.4. The Setting and The Yoruba Culture in the Novel

II.4.1. The Setting

Okri is among the postcolonial writers who made their fiction an interface to define their homeland to the world and to introduce the cultural and historical background of their societies. In *The Famished Road* and In a steady succession of events , the author intentionally tends to exhibit the Nigerian local community culture and traditions in the story .

The story took place most likely in Nigeria where the Yoruba people and their culture constitute a majority . In this setting of new born Nigeria after decades under the colonial oppression , the story saw the light to be a reflection of the national identity .

Nigeria is a country in the western part of Africa ,bordered to the west by Benin ,to the north by Niger , th the east by cameroon while to the south it rests on the shore of the bight of Benin and Biafra on the golf of Guinea in the Atlantic ocean . In their book entitled *A History of Nigeria* , Falola and Heaton depict that the country has a considerable amount of land mass roughly three times the size of the United Kingdom (2). As a former british colony , Nigeria gained independence on october 1st 1960 . It became a republic in 1963 and assumed the full name Federal Republic of Nigeria . The lagos city in the novel was the capital of Nigeria from 1914 after the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria by the British untill 1991 when the new capital switched into Abuja . The former capital of Lagos is considered the most populous city in Nigeria . It is a Yoruba speaking territory whose indigenous settlers are the Awori people and the site called oko (village) later became known as Eko the present local name used to refer to lagos . As a major Yoruba city that has become multi cultural , Lagos was destined to play a vital role in Nigeria cultural history and development . The main factors that made Lagos a vintage point for Nigeria's cultural development are its history , position and proximity to the coast making it a place of early contact with the Europeens. The popular cultures originating from Lagos based on the above factors have always been absorbed into the mainstream as representing the country's cultural identity . Lagos being a Yoruba city , the Yoruba culture and language always leave an indelible mark on most of the Nigerian cultural and fictional texts .

II.4.2. The Yoruba Culture

Yoruba refers to an ethno-linguistic group that inhabits the south western part of Nigeria as well the language used by this group as a means of communication. The Yoruba people who can be also found in the present Benin Republic and Republic of Togo both to the west of the Nigerian border , are actually a legacy of the british colonialist who created the divisions and the boundaries for administrative purposes without considerations for ethnic and linguistic affinities . The origin of this ethnic group can be traced back to the creation mythology which is a belief among the Yoruba people , this myth credited Ife as the ancestral home of all Yoruba people. According to Adejumo , the Yoruba cosmogony Ile-Ife commonly referred to as Ife was where oduduwa known as Father of Yoruba descended from heaven and established the first human settlement (135) . This creation myth is one of the rich Yoruba mythology heritage that is rooted in the religious belief which is grounded in the existence of the Supreme Being and the relation between this being called Oludumare and the man . This is manifested in the strong conviction of the Yoruba about life after death and the belief that to die is just to engage in a journey. Drewal affirms that in the Yoruba thought the other worldly domain coexists with the phenomenal world of people , animals ,plants and things . the other world includes a pantheon of countable deities , the ancestors and spirits both helpful and harmful .the world and the other world are always in close proximity and both human and other spirits travel back and forth between the two (26) .

The Yoruba culture is not for mere aesthetic purposes but it serves a religious function and is symbolic of the deities for which it is made . It is often sacred and serves as a link between the mortal and immortal , commissioned by the priests or king and involving sacrifices at different stages of work . Adejumo affirms that the traditional culture of the Yoruba is diverse as the number of deities or orisas that influence their content . They are fashioned in various media by Yoruba artists whose patrons range from obas to religious cult . As a result of this pattern of patronage , the survival of traditional Yoruba art has somewhat

depended on the continuous existence of Yoruba religious institutions and related cults (ibid) . To conclude , it is fair to say that most of cultural contexts that imerged into being the mainstream actually originated out of the Yoruba traditional culture .

II.5. The Abiku Trilogy

The Yoruba culture in the Western part of Nigeria is mainly based on the mythical tales and religious beliefs that make the spirituality a general pattern of this society. Among the rooted myths in the Yoruba society and which is essentially introduced in Okri's *The Famished Road* is the Abiku phenomenon . Okri justifies this literary tendency in which he linked the events sequence to the myth of Abiku child as a background of the story . He states that there 's been too much attribution of power to the effect of colonialism on our consciousness , a true invasion takes place not when a society has been taken over by another society in terms of its infrastructure , but in terms of its mind and its dreams and its myths , and its perception of reality . There are certain areas of the African consciousness which will remain inviolate (qtd in Wilkinson 86).

Literally Abiku means born to die , born for premature death what can be seen tragic and mysterious . in the Yoruba culture , an Abiku child is a child who believed to have been born and has died but reincarnation several times and being born each time by the same mother or another depending on circumstances. Therefore , when a woman loses her infant children several times consequently not long after birth ,It is believed that it is the same child that has come to the world several times . This belief in reincarnation is reinforced if the new child bears resemblance to the dead , in his book *African Traditional Religion* , Idowu refers to the Abiku child that there is a strong belief about another curious category of spirits . It is not certain whether these began as spirits of deceased persons or not . But they are the spirits known to the Yoruba as Abiku or to the Igbo as Ogbanje : that is spirits born to die . the belief

here is that there are wandering spirits who specialize in the sadistic mischief of finding the way into wombs to be born in order to die (175) . This prominent definition of the Abiku child insists that the latter is not just a mythical tale that can be examined by credibility of logic, it is more than that , it is a part of the Yoruba religious beliefs . Maduka explains that the child who is generally a paragon of beauty constitutes a constant source of anxiety to his/her parents because of his/her idiosyncratic behaviour , which may manifest itself in any form of mental or physical illness .The parents make frantic effort to perform rituals (normally supervised by specialist priests/doctors) in order to break the bond on kinship of the Abiku and the kindred spirits (17) . This shows that Abiku have a pact , an agreement with their families , that they will in a certain period bring suffering into the lives of their parents in the visible world , have an accident , fall ill , disappointment , committing a suicide or dying because of diseases . Wenger also precises that Abiku are children who are so emphatically concerned with their experience of their playmates in heaven (their distracted subconscious emotional complexity) that they mostly die young , so as to return to them . But they do so only to long again for their earthly parents , allowing them to give birth to them again ,only to desert them soon again . One performs the ritual to the sacred central instance of gb , where with one may find the remedy for this calamity . One also inflicts scares on the little dead body , whith which they are often reborn (as a fact) . These scars then help as a psychic focus in the forthcoming ceremonies , destined to make the mischievous angel stay (58) . Abimbola cites that when a mother loses her young children , one after the other , she is believed to be troubled by a certain kind of wicked children who are born only to die sooner or later , such children are known as Abiku (57) .

This Abiku's mythological definition is merged with other definitions to show the special ability of this children represented in birth , death and rebirth in a circular sequence of ontological phases full of sufferances and tragedies . In *The Famished Road* , Azaro the

protagonist is an Abiku child who witnessed a severe passage through those phases of life and death , who lives in two realms , who brings misery to his parents . Okri maintain this myth in this novel to define the Yoruba culture and to reach a kind of self recognition that differentiates the Yoruba people from their colonizer , it is a message that emphasizes that there is something worthy to write about Africa . This takes us to assume that the myth itself is a way of decolonizing , it is the mind that must be decolonized by moral lessons taught in spiritual world of ethics . Hawley states that the widespread notion of the Abiku in Nigerian culture says volumes about the heartrending deaths of countless newborns throughout the region's history .It also testifies to a belief in the permeability of the membrane separating the spirit world from our world (30) . The Abiku surpasses the status of a mythical tale to be a part of the religious rituals followed in the Nigerian society .

Conclusion

As It was seen above in this chapter , the social , the political and the cultural aspects of *The Famished Road* are discussed in the frame of the mythological heritage of the Yoruba community . Primarily , the first section in this chapter is devoted to the novel synopsis and defining the main events and characters that are influential in the story . Those events are narrated in a fascinating way by a magical real character who can provide the reader with a detailed depiction of the daily events and characters in the story due to his extrahuman powers. In addition to the story synopsis , this chapter included the literary post colonial and magical realist background of Ben Okri and how It is appearant in the novel by identifying the main characteristics of this literary school in *The Famished Road* .

Finally , this chapter discussed the main mythological tale that marks the protagonist life , the Abiku phenomenon and how Okri was inspired by this local tale to write his novel , the story

did not go beyond the borders of values and traditions of the author's own community in order to add a sense of fantasy through implying a parallel magical plot .

Chapter Three :
The Mythical
Aspects in the
Novel

Introduction

The myth is a pertinent notion that occurs from the beginning of the novel till the end with the remark that It emerged in the majority of the life aspects . This chapter is an attempt to detect the main aspects that are influenced by the previous seen myths . The first aspect is the social one where the myth is considered as a main component of the social tissue which allow , prevent and impose many moral values that are executed in a ceremonial reunions . the introduced chapter will provide also an intense depiction of the spirit world and how It reacts with the real world in the novel in the scene of mingled realms that co-existed together . In addition to that , this chapter will reveal the new colonial aspect that hitted Nigeria in the post colonial era and how the imperialism seized the financial and economic plot with reference to the conflicted political forces that seeks power . Moreover , the chapter will detect the relation between the spiritual protagonist and his homeland and how the author succeeded to convey the national sufferance in the form of unreal attitude of the protagonist .Eventually , this will help in creating a profound understanding about the novel and how It meets with the mythological tales of the concerned society .

III.1. The Myth in the Social Context

the social setting where the Famished Road attempted to reveal the African popular values , can be depicted as transitional scenes of good and evil that marks the era of destruction of social identity and national components . this society was ruled by its own laws , beliefs and myths which allow him to survive from cultural extermination . The novel belongs to the African mythology literature inwhich Okri introduced the Nigerian myths in the story . To argue that tendancy , the narrator mentions that these are the myths of the beginnings , these are stories and moods deep in those who are seeded in rich lands , who still believe in mysteries (Okri 3) .

Chapter Three : The Mythical Aspects in the Novel

In the social context , the family connections are revealed as a main pillar in the society , the novel reflects the suffering of the parents who has an Abiku child from one hand , and ensures the social collapse of values at a specific moment of national history . Azaro confirms that in not wanting to stay , they caused much pain to mothers , their pain grew heavier with each return . Their anguish became for them an added spiritual weight which quickens the cycle of rebirth (*ibid*) . He added that with passionate ritual offerings , their parents always tried to induce them to live . They also tried to get them to reveal where they had hidden the spirit tokens that bound them to the other world . They disdained the offerings and kept their tokens a fierce secret , and the remained indifferent to the long joyless parturition of mothers (*ibid*) . In the novel , the sufferings of the low social classes is obvious and the financial crise that Azaro's family was passing through , is a mere sample of poor society who fight to live , Azaro says that when he recovered , however his parents had already spent too much money on him , they were in debt (*ibid*) . The land owners were the controllers of the people lives , the debtors were asking for their money as a pressure tool to impose their own rules .

As a successor of the colonial oppression , a new kind of governing had emerged to made the society weaker , the rich was get richer and the poor get poorer , and that was a main cause of the Abiku child refusal to stay in the real world , they saw suuferings evey where . The river is not the same river any more and the forest had destroyed , electricity came to enlighten the village but the human heart get darker . When Azaro's family rescued the photographer from the people who attempted to kill him , Azaro claimed that it became a small representation of what powerful forces in society can do if any one speaks out against their corruptions (103) . The social conditions in the novel are perceived by the Abiku child Azaro who had the power to read the minds and foretell the future , He described how people were living in poverty and how the successive events reinforced the misery . The Abiku

children were in each family , Azaro's family is an example of what the other families were suffering , Azaro and his spiritual friends were hesitating to come back to their families because of the unknown destiny that waited for them . The myth of the Abiku child served as a background of the Nigerian society after independence . Suffering , pain and anguish were in every family , the parents were desperate to hug their unborn children despite the ugly life they were living . The parents of the Abiku child were paying for ceremonies to make their children back despite the sharp need of the money , every one in that society was living for himself except the parents who sacrificed for their children . Okri usage of this myth was to reveal that the relative connections in the family are considered as the faint light which gives hope of better life in such society .

Azaro describes the society through his father's eyes who dreamed in his three days coma of better world , Azaro says that his father saw the world in which black people always suffered and he didn't like it . He saw a world in which human beings suffered so needlessly from Antipodes to Equator , and he didn't like it either . He saw his people drowning in poverty , in famine , drought in divisiveness and the blood of war . He saw his people always preyed upon by other powers , manipulated by the western world , their history and achievements rigged out of existence (270) . He continued to speak on the tongue of his father , Azaro copies that his father saw the rich of their country , he saw the array of their politicians , how corruptible they were , how blind to their future , how greedy they became , how deaf to the cries of the people , how stony their hearts were , how short sighted their dreams of power (ibid) . Azaro claims that his father saw the divisions in their society , the lack of unity , he saw the widening pit between those who have and those who don't , he saw it all very clearly ,he saw the women of the country , of the markets and villages , always dogged by incubi and butterflies ; he saw all the women , inheritors of the miracle of forbearance , he saw the hungry eating toads , he saw the wars in advance . he saw the

economic boom in advance , saw its orgiastic squander , the suffering to follow , the exile to strange lands , the depleting of the people's will for transformation , he saw the emergence of the tyrants who always seem to be born from the extremities of the crisis (ibid) .

III.2. The Mythological World of Spirits in the Novel

The abiku child journey between the two worlds of reality and magic took a great part in the novel of Okri *The Famished Road* . Okri tend to give specific details about the spiritual world where those children lived in , this description is based on the cultural background of the Yoruba people . Those journeys allows the reader to go behind the physical world of us to form a detailed image of the magical dimension in the story .

Azaro the narrator began with insights on the other world , He claims that in the land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn , they could assume numerous forms , many of them were birds . they knew no boundaries . there was much feasting , playing and sorrowing . they feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity , they played much because they were free and they sorrowed much because there were always those among them who had just returned from the world of the living . they had returned inconsolable for all the love they had left behind , all the suffering they hadn't redeemed , all that they hadn't understood , and for all that they had barely begun to learn before they were drawn back to the land of origins (Okri 1) . Azaro reinsisted on the horror that exists in the world of the living , He argues that there was not one amongst them who looked forward to being born , they dislike the rigours of existence , the unfulfilled longings , the enshrined injustices of the world , the labyrinths of love , the ignorance of parents , the fact of dying , and the amazing indifference of the living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe , they feared the heartlessness of human beings , all of whom are born blind , few of whom ever learn to see (ibid) .

The narrator affirms the existence of order which rules over the spirits , this order constructs the spiritual world in the form of hierarchy that includes a governor spirit and governed spirits . Azaro tend to describe this supreme power , He assures that their king was a wonderful personage who sometimes appeared in the form of a great cat , he had a red beard and eyes of greenish sapphire . He had been born uncountable times and was a legend in all worlds , known by a hundred different names .It never mattered into what circumstances he was born . He always lived the most extraordinary of lives . One could pore over the invisible books of lifetimes and recognize his genius through the recorded and the unrecorded ages . Sometimes a man , sometimes a woman , he wrought incomparable achievements from every life . If there is anything common to all of his lives , the essence of his genius , it might well be the love of transformation , and the transformation of love into higher realities (ibid) . This depiction of the spirits king by Azao is accompanied with his desire of being among his spiritual friends who attempted later to convince him to return into their world . Azaro inserts that with his spirit companions , the ones with whom they had a special affinity , they were happy most of the time because they floated on the aquamarine air of love , they played with the fauns , the fairies and the beautiful beings . Tender sibyls , benign sprites , and the serene presences of their ancestors were always with them , bathing them in the radiance of their diverse rainbows . There are many reasons why babies cry when they are born , and one of them is the sudden separation from the world of pure dreams , where all things are made of enchantment and where there is no suffering (2) .

In the same context , to be an Abiku child is well defined by Azaro who says that the happier they were , the closer was their birth . As they approached another incarnation they made pacts that they would return to the spirit world at the first opportunity . they made these vows in fields of intense flowers and in the sweet tasting moonlight of that world . Those of them who made such vows were known among the living as Abiku , spirit-children . Not all

people recognized them , they were the ones who kept coming and going , unwilling to come to terms with life . They had the ability to will their deaths . Their pacts were binding (ibid). Azaro added that those who broke their pacts were assailed by hallucinations and hunted by their companions . They would only find consolation when they returned to the world of the unborn , the place of fountains , where their loved ones would be waiting for them silently (ibid) . This happy life of the Abiku child in the world of dreams came into challenge when it get confronted by the parental seduction to the child to stay with them , here , an enormous transformation shocked the happy life of the unborn child , It is a decisive moment when the child had to choose between the misery of the real world or the intangible happiness of the dreams . Azaro depicts that those of them who lingered in the world , seduced by the annunciation of wonderful events , went through life with beautiful and fated eyes , carrying with us the music of a lovely and tragic mythology , their mouths utter obscure prophecies , their minds are invaded by images of the future . They are the strange ones , with half of their beings always in the spirit world , they were often recognized and their flesh marked with razor incisions . When they were born again to the same parents the marks , lingering on their new flesh , branded their souls in advance . Then the world would spin a web of fate around their lives . those of them who wined while still children tried to erase these marks , by making beauty spots or interesting discolorations of them . If they didn't succeed , and were recognized , they were greeted with howls of dread and the weeping of mothers (ibid) .

III.3. The Colonial Representation of Madame Koto Figure

Madame koto is a main character in Okri's *The Famished Road* , she is a landlord and the bar owner who is considered the best imperial example after her success in collecting wealth in a very short time . Her appearance in the such poor society came with many stories that indigenous narrate about her , It is said that she had buried three husbands and seven

children and that she was a witch who ate her babies when they were still in her womb . They said that she was the real reason why the children in the area don't grow , why they were always ill , why the men never got promotions , and why the women in the area suffered miscarriages (Okri 55). Azaro tells more stories about Madame Koto , they said that she was a bewitcher of husbands and a seducer of young boys and a poisoner of children . They said she had a charmed beard and that she plucked one hair out every day and dropped it into the palm wine she sold and into the pepper soup she made so that the men would spend all their money in her bar and not care about their starving families . They said she made men go insane at night and that she belonged to a secret society that flies about in the air when the moon is out (ibid) .

Azaro spent a lot of time in the bar as a response to Madame Koto request who thought that Azaro is an amulet of luck which his presence attracted more clients . In the bar , Azaro noticed that the clientele of Madame Koto were not just humans , she gained her fortune by dealing with humans and spirits . Azaro says that he made an instant discovery , he realized for the first time that many of the customers were not human beings . Their deformations were too staggering and they seemed unaffected by their blindness and their eyelessness , their hunched backs and toothless mouths . Their expressions and movements were at odds with their bodies . They seemed a confused assortment of different human parts . It occurred to him that they were spirits who had borrowed bits of human beings to partake of human reality (ibid) . This description of the spiritual clientele of Madame koto pushed Azaro to justify the reason behind their coming into this human place . Azaro affirms that they do it because they get tired of being just spirits , they want to taste human things , pain , drunkenness , laughter and sex . Sometimes they do it to spread mischief and sometimes to seduce grown ups or abduct children into their realm . The moment he saw them as spirits , drinking palm wine without getting drunk , confused about the natural configuration of the

human body , everything made sense , and then he became certain that Madame Koto's fetish had somehow attracting them (ibid) .

The bar had changed after Azaro had stolen the fetish and buried it , It was obvious that Madame Koto re-estimated her strategy of gaining money . She had substituted the Fetish with more pragmatic tool of supporting the rich party in their electoral campaign . Madame Koto's belief of her own myth of the fetish that attracted more clients declined when the imperial party of the rich offered more money . Azaro was amazed that the bar had changed again , there were two almanacs of the rich party on the walls , He says that it was surprisingly crowded for that time of the afternoon . there were normal , decent-looking people , as well as men with scars , women with bracelets that weighed down their arms , men with dark glasses . Arguments reverberated in the heated place . They discussed politics and scandals in loud , passionate voices (133) .

This transition from the mythical belief of the fetish to the increase of the economic income putted the Yoruba beliefs into doubt , but shortly the myth re-emerged when Azaro discoverd that Madame Koto was pregnant of three Abiku children . He saw that Madame koto was pregnant with three strange children , two of them sat upright and the third was upside down in her womb . One of them had a little beard , the second had fully formed teeth and the third had wicked eyes . They were all mischievous , they kicked and tugged at their cords , they were the worst type of spirit-children and they had no intention of being born (ibid) . Madame Koto greed to the profitable buisness didn' prevent her from putting a fetish in the bar to attract more spiritual clients , she was the best example of the post colonial imperialists who were in the track of pursuit of the fortune with no limitations . Her pursuit of money ended by cursing her with the worst kind of the Abiku children who refused to come to the world where they witnessed the ugly aspect of life even if they were still in their mother's womb .

III.4. The Mythological Origin of the Road

The opening paragraph of the novel bears a philosophical sense that links the river of the dreams with the newly constructed road . The river is considered as a mythological notion that is related to the world of the spirit-children who were baptised on Its shores . Azaro started the novel with an introduction about the river and the road , He states that In the beginning there was a river , the river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world and because the road was once a river It was always hungry (1) . The narrator Azaro expressed his longing to the magical setting where he enjoyed the life with his friends , He says that they longed for an early homecoming , to play by the river ,in the grasslands , and in the magic caves , they longed to meditate on sunlight and precious stones and to be joyful in the eternal dew of the spirit (ibid) .

Azaro's longing to the river from one side and his fear from stepping in the road made him intent to never be born , the life was conceptualized as a road which was tarred with evil . In his conversation with the king of the spirits , the latter warned Azaro that He has to travel many roads before he finds the river of his destiny (ibid) . Azaro unwillingness to come to life had boosted , according to Azaro himself who states that one of the reasons he didn't want to be born became clear to him after he had come into the world , He was still very young when in a daze He saw his father swallowed up by a hole in the road (ibid) . When Azaro was lost , he couldn't recognize the place where he was , in this moment he met a giant turtle who told him that he was in the stomach of the road , Azaro froze in his place and the phrase of the turtle didn't leave his head . The road became a continuous nightmare for Azaro who lived each day of the real life with the fear that one day the road will eat him , He knew that He had to fight to find the magical river of bright destiny .

In the chaotic newly independent Nigeria , not just Azaro suffered from the phobia about the unknown road , all the nation feared that road , all the nation hoped to find Its river . Every one aimed to find his own river and Okri tried to enlightened the way to reach the river , He used Azaro to exemplify the manner inwhich a man would realized his destiny , Azaro fought for his river and every one should do so . This idea was expressed by the words of Madame Koto who came to Azaro home to tell him that the road will never swallow him , the river of his destiny will always overcome evil . He may understand his fate , suffering will never destroy him but will make him stronger (ibid) . She added that success will never confuse him or scatter his spirit , but will make him fly higher into the good sunlight and life will always surprise him (ibid) . This attitude of sticking to life accompagnied Azaro in his life journey when he was about to die and reborn again , his parents and all the village celebrated Azaro's miraculous rebirth with a famous ritual among the Yoruba people . It was a prouve of Madame Koto's speech that related the man destiny with his attitudes and how much he can resist the successive hardships , The road didn't eat Azaro as he thought once , He found his river in the intimacy of his family .

III.5. Nigeria the Abiku Nation

The myth of the Abiku in the novel didn't limited to the spirit-children who suffered to come to life or even died before they were born , Okri used this familiar myth to refer to his Nigeria as an Abiku nation that sacrificed and still fighting for her wellness . The social and the political scenes portrayed in the novel with a conformity to Azaro's sufferance help the reader to perceive the birth throes that occured to seize a place for the new independent Nigeria in the international map .

Okri generalised Azaro's experience as an Abiku child to determine that his country was a mythical Abiku nation . First Azaro describes the spirit child who lived inside him , he

says that the spirit child is an unwilling adventurer into chaos and sunlight , into the dreams of the living and the dead , things that are not ready , not willing to be born or to become , things for which adequate preparations have not been made to sustain their momentous births , things that are not resolved , things bound up with failure and with fear of being , they all keep recurring , keep coming back , and in themselves partake of the spirit-child's condition . They keep coming and going till their time is right . History itself fully demonstrates how things of the world partake of the condition of the spirit-child (Okri 269) . This detailed description of the spirit-child myth was followed by the recognition of the country as an Abiku nation . Azaro claims that there are many who are of this condition and do not know it , there are many nations , civilizations , ideas , half-discoveries , revolutions , loves , art forms , experiments and historical events that are of this condition and do not know it . There are many people too , they do not all have the marks of their recurrence , often they seem normal , often they are perceived of as new , often they are serene with the familiarity of death's embrace , they all carry strange gifts in their souls , they are all part time dwellers in their own secret moonlight , they all yearn to make of themselves a beautiful sacrifice , a difficult sacrifice , to bring transformation , and to die shedding light within this life , setting the matter ready for their true beginnings to cry into being , scorched by the strange ecstasy of the will ascending to say yes to destiny and illumination (ibid) . This general judge made by Azaro meets the approval of his father who was in spiritual journey of dreams , Azaro says that his father found that all nations are children ; It shocked him that theirs was an Abiku nation , a spirit-child nation , one that keeps being reborn and after each birth come blood and betrayals , and the child of their will refuses to stay till they have made propitious sacrifice and displayed their serious intent to bear the weight of a unique destiny (ibid) .

Azaro and his father's nation was an Abiku nation that was struggling for its destiny , for its survival . Although the corruption and the immorality stroke the nation , there was a

little hope of better future of this nation –child . Azaro claims that he understood that conflicting forces were fighting for the future of their country in the air , at night , in their dreams , riding invisible white horses and whipping them , sapping their will while they slept (ibid) . The nation was seriously wounded and this Abiku nation sufferance was extreme , the narrator exemplified with the corruption of the politicians who were pushing this nation-child into miscarriage after her born from the womb of the colonizer . He ensures that the political parties waged their battles in the spirit spaces , beyond the realm of their earthly worries , they fought and hurled counter-mythologies at one another . Herbalists , sorcerers , wizards and witches took sides and as the trucks fought for votes in the streets they fought for supremacy in the world of spirits (ibid) .

Conclusion

Through the main points that have been previously tackled , the present chapter aimed at presenting the conformity aspects between the cultural heritage of the myths and the novel of Ben Okri . In order to meet such end , the chapter was divided into four sections . In the first one , I displayed the occurrence of the myth in the social context as one of the forming factors of the social identity . The second section was devoted to the spiritual world fantasies and how the author made the metaphysical phenomena an ordinary event that appeared in the daily life of the characters .

Moreover , the third section captured the mythical image of the colonial remains that ruled Nigeria even after Its independance . Eventually , in the third and last part , I presented the microscopic image of Nigeria that was introduced by the author as a small child that lived in a continuous struggle for his survival with the hope that It will reborn again and find Its road.

General Conclusion

The present study dealt mainly with the investigation of the mythical aspects in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and the impact of the myth in shaping the daily life of the African communities and its role in the construction of the latter's identity. The study's main interests were to shed the light on the definitions of the myth on different scientific and literary contexts and how did the author managed to show its relevance in the events as well as in the characters themselves.

This research began with an introduction to myth along with the demonstration of the different definitions and uses of the term. The first chapter attempted to provide a general definition to the term along with elucidating the different perspectives of its notion in different fields of study. A large part of this chapter was devoted to examine the significance of the myth in literary studies.

The historical and the literary background of *The Famished Road* as a post colonial novel from one hand and as a piece of magical realism from the other hand in addition to investigating how the novel depicts the social and the political scenes in the newly independent Nigeria, and the vision of the author to his community and his cultural heritage are the tackled aspects in the second chapter. In order to realize the crucial role of the cultural allegories in shaping the personal and national identity, Okri used his local mythology in his novel. Hence, this chapter ended with a section that explained the Abiku trilogy and illustrated the origins of the Abiku phenomenon.

The dissertation ended with the presentation of the myth in the novel. Firstly, how did it appear in the social context of the story and its importance in the determination of the social order along with an entrance to the magical world of spirits in the story and how did it mingle with the real world. The third chapter also contributed to reveal the mythical aspect that was given to the imperial colonizer who was represented in Madame Koto figure. finally

, this chapter ended with an attempt to detect the mythical usage of the philosophical notion of the Road and the literary representation of Nigeria as an Abiku child .

Hence , this work displayed the different aspects of the myth that appeared in Ben Okri's novel entitled *The Famished Road* and Its importance on the personal and national scales as a main component of identity , as an ideological instrument of decolonizing and as a conservatory element of history and culture .

We hope this research has somehow contributed to a better understanding of the mythical dimension in this novel *The Famished Road* . We believe It will highlight an obscure aspect of African culture and Its significance in the construction of African identity . African researchers are recommended to unveil the obscurity of this continent's cultural beliefs and to shed the light on the importance of the myth in the formation of an independent identity .

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