Magical Realism: A Technique to Reconstruct the World from beyond the Valley of the Dead

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Introduction

Does Life terminally end in death? Could the dead return back to life? These have been major existentialist questions that have preoccupied philosophers, theologians, creative writers, scientists from time immemorial. The prominent philosopher Martin Heidegger, for example, totally denying the possibility of resurrection, believes that "our being is a being towards death" (1962, 24). Suspicions concerning the infeasibility of this return are succinctly expressed in Hamlet's conclusion upon pondering on death as "the unknown country from whose bourn no traveller returns" (Act III, scene I, lines 79-80). However, the absolute nihilism suggested by these is counterbalanced by a contrary perspective or belief expressed in religious and literary works. Biblical and Quranic stories address the same issue in order to achieve religious targets of manifesting God's infinite, miraculous powers. The Gospel of John, for example, narrates the rising of Lazarus four days after his death. Two Quranic stories refer to the same theme to assert resurrection by providing proof. Surat *al Baqara* (The Cow) recounts Lazarus' miraculous resurrection thus:

"أو كالذي مر علي قرية وهي خاوية علي عروشها قال أني يحي هذه الله بعد موتها فأماته الله مائة عام ثم بعثه قال كم لبثت قال لبثت يوما أو بعض يوم قال بل لبثت مائة عام" (سورة البقرة، آية ٢٥٩).

"Or take the one who passed by a ruined town. He said: how will God give this life when it has died?' So, God made him die for a hundred years, and then raised him up, saying 'How long did you stay like that? 'He answered 'A day or part of a day.' God said,' No, you stayed like that for a hundred years'" (The Quran, *The Cow*, verse 259). Surat *al Kahf* (The Cave) narrates the story of an unidentified number of believers who escape to a cave to avoid the tyrannical pagan ruler's persecution. After experiencing a death-like sleep for 309 years, they are resurrected from their death-like-sleep:

"فضربنا علي آذانهم في الكهف سنين عددا، ثم بعثناهم لنعلم أي الحزبين أحصي لما لبثوا أمدا" (سورة الكهف، آيات ١١-١٢).

"We sealed their ears [with sleep]in the cave for years. Then We woke them" (verses 11- 12).

"وكذلك بعثناهم ليتساءلوا بينهم قال قائل منهم كم لبثتم قالوا لبثنا يوما أو بعض يوم" (آية ١١-١٢).

"In time We woke them, and they began to question one another, 'How long have you been here?' and [some answered,] 'A Day or part of a day' (verse 19). As proof of God's miraculous power of resurrecting the dead, the number of years of the

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sleepers is disclosed as probably 309 years "The sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years,' some added nine more. Say [Prophet],' God knows best how long they stayed'" (verses 25-26).

This paper attempts to fathom the rationale of deploying the seemingly bizarre idea of the return of the dead which binds three literary texts, affiliated to three remotely different cultures, religious backgrounds, and historical periods. First, *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham, aw Fatra Min al-Zaman* (1907), by the Egyptian writer Muhammad Al-Muwaylihi, was written and published serially at the end of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century. Translated by Roger Allen as *What ʿĪsā ibn Hishām Told Us,* or *A Period in Time* (1918), it depicts the adventures of the deceased/resurrected El Meneikly Pasha, former Minister of War during the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha. Second, *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), by Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, was written to celebrate a post-independence Nigeria. The play depicts the resurrected dead who judge and incriminate the living. Third, *The Freedom of the City (*1973*)* was written by the prominent Irish dramatist Brian Friel as a reaction to the events of Bloody Sunday (1970) where the deceased victims, shot dead in Act One, are seen in Act Two attending the farcical tribunal set by the occupying British forces. This paper aims at a new reading of the three selected texts by examining them from a magical realist lens, a reading which I contend has not been ventured into before.

Review of literature

The selected texts have been examined from totally different perspectives from what I propose. Critics dealing with *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham* have approached it from two major angles. Some critics have been interested in exploring the significance of *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham* as a revival of the ancient form of the *maqamat*, a form of rhythmic prose writing deployed by writers such as Badeei' El Zaman Al Hamathani (4th century Hijra-circa 1000AD) or Abu Al Qassem Al Hariry (1054-1122) in *Maqamat Al Hariry.* Roger Allen*,* the translator of this voluminous text, states that "Muhammad Al-Muwaylihi replicates the prosimetric tradition of the pre-modern *maqamah* genre (490), relegating it to "the more episodic model of the classical *maqamah* genre" (2008, xxxvii). Other critics were mainly interested in proving that this text, first published serially between 1898 and 1903 in *Misbah al Sharq* magazine, and later published in book form in 1907, aroused the controversy about it as probably the first Egyptian novel, before Mohammed Hussein Heikal's novel *Zainab (*1913) came into being. Prominent Egyptian critics, Abd Al Mohsen Taha Badr (1963, 69-73), and Sayed Al Bahrawy (2012, 9-18), uphold this view. Likewise, Youssry Abdallah believes that the text is "the first Arabic novel" (باكورة), while a critic describes it as "a meandering tale that isn't constructed and doesn't proceed anywhere near a typical novel" (Orthofer 2015). Probably the only critic who makes a remote, unelaborated reference to the magical realist element in this text briefly states that it is "a reality in a fantasy dress, not that it is a fantasy cast in the form of truth" (Al-Rubaie 2006).

Soyinka's play *A Dance of the Forests* has been primarily approached for the rich ritual nature of the play. Christopher Balme states that "Soyinka effects a complete shift in the dominant structure of dialogue-based drama" (1999, 80). Soyinka himself draws attention to the utmost importance of rituals in this play, "In a play like *A Dance of the Forests*, … I tried to use a lot of rites, which I tried to use to interpret a theme which is quite completely remote from the source of its particular idiom" (qtd in Duerden and Pieterse 1970, 170). Another critic upholds it for its "dramaturgic distinctiveness" due to its "entire compass of dramatic action…[which]is elaborately constructed around …ritual performance modes" (Jeyifo 2004, 121-122). Brian Crow has described Soyinka's theatre as "of ritual vision". Other critics argue that by deploying indigenous Nigerian Yoruba rituals in a post-independence Nigeria, Soyinka among other African writers, was attempting to break loose from Western dramatic forms with the aim of decolonizing the African stage. Thus, "Soyinka experimented with a number of [indigenous] masking functions. The central idea of the play, the action of the humans and the ancestors, is itself predicated on a basic notion of *Egungun* masking" (Balme 1999, 184).

Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973) was described as Friel's "polemical" play which had received a hostile press reception in Britain (Grene 1999, 34-35). In an interview with Friel, he labels it as "an ill-considered play because it was written out of the kind of anger at the Bloody Sunday events in Derry" (Murray 1999, 123-134). It aimed at uncovering the false allegations of the subsequent British Widgery Tribunal held, ironically, to incriminate the peaceful victimized Irish protestors. Totally overlooking the magical realistic element in the play, O'Brien describes the play as "unique amongst Friel's dramatic work" (1990, 78) without offering further explanations. Elmer Andrews highlights the dysfunctional relationship between private and public discourse and the play's verbal discontinuities which create and embody an unbridgeable gap between the three civil rights victims (1995, 129-138). Noteworthy, these notable critics have not alluded to, or explored the implications of the victims' return back to life.

Argument and Queries

This paper is mainly concerned with attempting to fathom the rationale of deploying the seemingly bizarre theme of the return of the dead in the selected texts. The striking feature is the dominant co-presence of the resurrected dead who walk, talk, and behave normally among the living human beings who are not in the least perturbed by their presence. Throughout the three texts, these resurrected people engage in discussions, make suggestions, launch their critiques…etc., in a way which ultimately makes them reconstruct the world of the living humans. This paper was triggered by the observation that the selected texts deploy the same technique of smoothly blending the fantastical or magical and the mundane and purely realistic —a technique, which I argue, qualifies the texts to be classified under "magical realism". Hence, the texts will be examined from the lens of "magical realism" to prove that this technique, "which deliberately disorients readers exactly in order to

make them more aware of their world and to strengthen their sense of belonging in it" (Arva 2008, 78), has social, cultural, and political functions. The queries raised in this paper essentially revolve round the following: For what purpose did these writers depict the bizarre notion of the return of the dead? What are the objectives attained by deploying magical realism? Is magical realism "a genre of the times" as La Campa suggests? This paper seeks to prove that this theme depicted by magical realism is not deployed for any religious purposes, but ultimately fulfils different social, political, cultural functions.

Defining "Magical Realism"

"Magical Realism" is a controversial term, "an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly of fantasy" (Slemon in Zamora and Faris 2000, 409). It is "a chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction" (*Britannica*). Although "magical realism has been deployed mainly by Latin American writers such as Borges, Carpentier, Gabriel Marquez, it is not limited to Latin American writers. I contend that some writers from other parts of the world deployed this technique to achieve diverse purposes.

One of the working definitions of "magical realism" is that "The supernatural is not simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence-admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalizing (Zamora and Faris 2000, 3). Maggie Bowers concurs with this definition by elaborating that it "relies upon the full acceptance of the veracity of the fiction during the reading experience, no matter how different this perspective may be to the reader's non-reading opinions and judgements" (2004, 4). She elaborates that magical [or marvellous] realist literature and art expresses "the seemingly opposed perspectives of a pragmatic, practical, and tangible approach to reality and an acceptance of magic and superstition within different cultures" (2004, 2-3). Salman Rushdie (2014), himself a practitioner and adopter of magical realism in some of his novels, warns of focusing only on the magical and overlooking the realistic: The trouble with the term "magical realism" (*el realismo magico*) is that when people say or hear it they are really hearing or saying only half of it, "magic", without paying attention to the other half, "realism." But if magic realism were just magic, it wouldn't matter. It would be mere whimsy – writing in which anything can happen, nothing has effect. He further clarifies that the magic, deeply rooted in realism, is the source of its power: "It's because *the magic in magic realism has deep roots in the real*, *because it grows out of the real and illuminates it in beautiful and unexpected ways*, *that it works"*.

Explaining the logic behind using magical realism, Eugene L. Arva states that "magical realist authors turn to illusion and magic as a matter of survival in a civilization priding itself on scientific accomplishments, positivist thinking and the metaphysical banishment of death" (Arva 2008, 61). In compliance with Rushdie's

view (2014), Zamora proposes that the ultimate end of magical realism is to “subvert the ‘common sense. … Magical realist texts *question the nature of reality and the nature of its representation of daylight consciousness*. … Magical realism’s unsettling of generic and ontological assumptions calls new attention to old questions” (500; emphasisadded). Thus, the ultimate aim of using magic in magical realist texts is not an end in itself, but as a means to revisit and reconsider reality. This, I contend, manifests itself clearly in the selected texts.

Elements of Magical Realism in the Selected Texts

This section aims at exploring magical realism in the selected texts where elements of the magical or the fantastical, are deeply engrafted in and intertwined with realism. I contend that the writers of the selected texts have chosen the most convenient technique. Furthermore, I believe that such an approach to the analysis of the texts has not been adopted before. Exploring the magical realist elements in the selected texts is done with the aim of justifying the diverse functions of deploying this technique in the selected texts. *What ‘Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* starts with the narrator ‘Isa Ibn Hisham, in a dream like manner, strolling in *El Shafe’ei* cemetery in Old Cairo to meditate on death as the inevitable fate of humanity, when the deceased minister of war during Mohammed Aly Pasha’s reign, covered in his shrouds, breaks out from his tomb, and emerges from it to the utter amazement of the narrator/beholder:

> حدثنا عيسى بن هشام قال: رأيت في المنام، كأني في صحراء الإمام، أمشي بين القبور والرجام ... كنت أحدث نفسي بين تلك القبور، وفوق هاتيك الصخور بغرور الإنسان وكبره، وشموخه بمجده وفخره ... وبينما أنا في هذه المواعظ والعبر وتلك الخواطر والفكر ... إذا برجة عنيفة من خلفي، كادت تقضي بحتفي، فالتفت التفاتة الخائف المذعور، فرأيت قبرا انشق من تلك القبور، وقد خرج منه رجل طويل القامة، عليه الهامة وبهاء المهابة والجلالة، فصعقت من هول الوهل والوجل، صعقة موسى يوم دك الجبل. ولما أفقت من غشيتي، وانتبهت من دهشتي، أخذت أسرع في مشيتي. (٩-١٠)
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> ’Isa Ibn Hisham told us: In a dream, I saw myself walking among the tombs and gravestones in the Imam Shafi’i cemetery …As I stood there amid the graves atop the tombstones, I contemplated man’s arrogance and conceit, his sense of his own glory, his pride, his total obsession with his own pretensions, his excessive desires, his sense of self-aggrandizement, …. Deep in thought about the extraordinary things which fate brings about, I was trying to probe the secrets of resurrection. Suddenly there was a violent tremor behind me which almost brought my life to an end. In terror I looked behind me. I discovered that one of the graves had opened, and a man had appeared. He was tall and imposing. … I felt as stunned and terrified as Moses on the day when the mountain was destroyed. Once I had recovered from the shock, I noticed that he was walking toward me. (2018, 20-23)

One of the most essential requirements in responding to magical realist texts is "the complicity of the reader" which is "a *sine qua non* condition of the magical realist effect" (Arva 2008, 78) to decide whether readers and/or interlocutors would accept to give credibility to the narrative or refuse to do so. To this effect, Lois Parkinson Zamora (2000, 500) states that, "Whereas conventional narrative realism constructs the illusion of a fictional world that is continuous with the readers (and whose ontological status is, therefore, naturalized, transparent), magical realism foregrounds the illusionary status of the fictional world by requiring that the reader follow its dislocations and permutations".

Throughout this epic-dimensional text, Al-Muwaylihi (1907, 108) elicits that while there are "complicit readers" and interlocutors who accept such magical events as normal without any suspicions, another group totally rejects them. He writes, "I explained how the Pasha had emerged from the grave. Some of them believed me, others did not". Ibn Hisham, representing the major complicit interlocutor, accepts with utmost credibility the magical events as normal and realistic. In order to assert that the events have *not* taken place in a hallucinatory fit or a nightmare, but in actual reality, the narrator/interlocutor Ibn-Hisham, frequently refers to the deceased Pasha's coming back to life from the valley of the Dead in a totally unsuspecting, matter of fact tone. Prominent critic Abdel Mohsen Taha Badr (1963, 70) points that "the author resorted at first to the dream to justify the Pasha's resurrection, for this phenomenon cannot possibly take place in reality, then the *author totally forgot* everything that has to do with *dreams"*. One such reference and acceptance of the Pasha's resurrection takes place when the resurrected Pasha, totally rejecting the trickstery of the donkeyman, attacks him in an attempt to kill him and proudly resists the policeman, is consequently dragged to prison. Totally accepting the fact that the resurrected Pasha has an existence and materiality like ordinary living humans, and not a ghost-like presence, Ibn Hisham feels guilty and restless for leaving his companion in prison. He states, "I was so worried at the way fate had struck the Pasha down with such a succession of blows. There he was, utterly baffled and bewildered, unaware that time had passed. He was completely unfamiliar with the present state of affairs" (Allen 1918, 34). This could be interpreted in the light of the central hypothesis of *Mirrors of Passing*: *Unlocking the Mysteries* of *Death* that "our human awareness of death and/or awareness of time are deeply connected" (Seebach and Willerslev 2018, 5). However, in the resurrected Pasha's case, though he is fully conscious and accepting of his own death and resurrection, his connection with time is totally absent. This causes his continuous trauma and bewilderment at the totally changed situation and the discrepancy between the past and the present that he cannot grapple with. Ironically, it is the resurrected Pasha, and not any of his interlocutors, who is constantly traumatized by the incomprehensible vicissitudes and mutations that time has brought about.

It is only logical that the main interlocutor, Ibn Hisham, from whose perspective events are narrated would repeatedly assert his absolute belief in the Pasha's physical presence in countless instances in order to indicate that he is not in the least sceptical about the veracity and truth of the Pasha's resurrection. He listens most attentively

to the resurrected Pasha's very detailed, anguished eye-witness testimony about the horrendous epidemic plague that stormed Egypt in the mid-19th century, leaving thousands dead. The Pasha narrates how

> [t]he plague wreaks tremendous havoc in Egypt; it's enough to melt your very eyelids and split your heart in two. ... It's one of Egypt's endemic diseases…. People become alarmed and start panicking. Their faculties dwindle, and they become utterly confused. It attacks and destroys, its course unhampered and unimpeded by any obstacle….The plague began in Rajab1205, causing a huge panic among the populace. Countless people died - babies, young men, girls, slaves, Mamluks, soldiers, scouts and *amirs*. The governors of twelve provinces died…. So many people died that they used to dig pits in Giza … and throw all the bodies into them. (Allen 2018, 179)

Having listened to this eye witness' testimony, Ibn Hisham responds jestingly: "The scene that you've been describing sounds to me like one of the halting spots on the Day of Judgement, or one of the horrors of the Day of Resurrection which you yourself have witnessed (Allen 2018, 180). As his interlocutor, Ibn Hisham does not only accept the deceased's narrative, but engages in light-hearted commentary on it.

Another complicit interlocutor who gives credibility to this magical realist event is the Pasha's former groom during his former life who instantly recognizes the resemblances between the resurrected Pasha and his late master. This further enhances the acceptance of the Pasha's resurrection as a magical act, yet a totally normal one. The former groom, at first, in bewilderment, contemplates, "If it weren't for the fact that death is a thick and impenetrable screen separating the surface from interior of the earth, I would have said that you were my master and *amir*" (Allen 2018, 93). To verify his actual existence, the Pasha uncovers his leg with a scar on it that he got in one of his battles, which the groom instantly recognizes as belonging to his former master. Although the groom "was so amazed that he fell to the ground," he accepts it instantly as an unquestionable truth; "he started kissing the Pasha's foot, tears cascading from his eyes", then contemplates, "How can there be life after death? You're a miracle indeed! Even so, I'm not surprised by what I see. In my lifespan I witnessed remarkable transformations and alterations which pens cannot describe, nor notebooks contain within their covers" (Allen 2018, 93). This miraculous coming back to life is authenticated, not only by one single person, but several people, not least the groom who knew him for long. Although he is at first incredulously shocked, the groom quickly adjusts to this notion and accepts it as an unquestionable reality. Other characters, like the Shaykh assert their complicity and acceptance declaring "Indeed, there are no limits to miracles and supernatural phenomena, nor should you entertain any doubts about man's return to life after death; to do so is to display a lack of conviction concerning the resurrection of buried men" (Allen 2018, 108).

Frequent assertions are made of the uncontested acceptance of the notion of the dead who come back to life and, ironically, undergo the same feelings, illnesses, and frailties that the living is prone to. Traumatized by the social and moral decline in the modern world of the living that he returned to, the deceased/resurrected Pasha becomes depressed, showing psychosomatic symptoms like those of the living, which make him "fall sick". To increase the dose of magical realism in the scene, the Pasha's physical existence is asserted when he receives medical attention: "The doctor then went over, felt his pulse, tapped his chest then put his hand on his forehead (Allen 2018, 154), declaring that he "doesn't have some hidden disease or chronic illness. It is the events that have happened to him that have a negative psychological effect on him" (154).

In another scene, the deceased Pasha tells his interlocutors, Ibn Hisham and others, about the invaluable experience and the moral lessons that he has gleaned after his burial and departure to the afterlife in a way which endowed him with clairvoyance:

> During my own life here on earth, I too was deceived by the very same things which are now deceiving you. Before I died I too listened to the kind of things this Shaykh has been saying…. However, when the mighty omniscient God sent me to my death and I became an inhabitant of the grave, I learned things which I didn't know before. All my prayers, fasts, and supplications did not spare me from God's judgement at all. The only thing which alleviated the terrors of the grave and made the angels' interrogation easier to bear was a single act of charity. (Allen 2018, 111)

During the resurrected Pasha's recalling of his posthumous memories, Ibn Hisham as his interlocutor does not in the least indicate any signs of disbelief, fright, or scepticism. Contrastingly, the Shaykh, representing the official religious institution which is being jeopardized by such liberal ideas, quickly denounces him as "Satan in human form, else a heretic masquerading as someone who has risen from the dead" (Allen 2018, 112). Though this anecdote is replete with overt didacticism, this element is coated with the humorous scene of the bickering between the liberal ideas and conventional modes of thought. The realistic tone of the narrative throughout the text, along with the intriguing and thought-provoking magical realist technique, alleviates the didactic tone. To make the magic all the more credible, the realistic touch is enhanced when Ibn Hisham, as the narrator, accompanies the resurrected Pasha to Paris on their "odyssey of rediscovery" (Golia 2008, xxi) to visit the Exhibition Expo1900. This journey is particularly significant as it brings the Oriental Self into an encounter with the Western Other. This inconceivable journey of the resurrected Pasha asserts Salman Rushdie's view that full attention should be given to "realism" because "if magic realism were just magic, it wouldn't matter" as its main concern is reality, not magic. Though fascinated by the progress Frenchman attained, both the Pasha and Ibn Hisham had "a mixture of feelings: praise, criticism, and outright condemnation" (Allen 2018, 470). The Pasha

concludes: “I can only assert in the strongest terms that you’ve reached a level of decadence that negates all the finery, creativity, and splendour with which you previously dazzled the world” (Allen 2018, 472). With each new experience, The Pasha becomes increasingly endowed with a clearer vision and a penchant for cultural and political criticism of self and other.

However, it is only the callous, unfeeling people who do not believe the magical return of the Pasha to life. Longing to see his progeny whom he had not actually met and seen in an earlier existence, the Pasha is shocked by their “sarcastic barbs” (Allen 2018, 98) when his grandson sneeringly tells Ibn Hisham, “I am not one of those people who’s going to believe such fairy stories or give credence to made- up tales. I’m someone who’s learned to deny the possibility of resurrection after death” (Allen 2018, 98). This is a clear application of what Arva proposes that “the complicity of the reader” (Arva 2008, 78) is an indispensable condition which gives credibility to the magical narrative, thus making it credible and acceptable as a realistic narrative.

Wole Soyinka, Nobel Laureate and author of *A Dance of the Forests,* has been hailed in the citation for the prize as one “who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones, fashions the drama of existence.” (The Nobel Prize in Literature 1986) This citation succinctly defines Soyinka’s main concern with issues of existence, despite the calamitous circumstances in a post-independence Nigeria. The play was described as “one of his most pessimistic in his dramatic corpus” (Jeyifo 2004, 120) because it “derives from a historical event or crisis…. of forging a nation out of diverse peoples and communities…the central action of the play revolves around the ‘gathering of the tribes’…[which] turns into an unanticipated encounter with monstrous evils in the past and present life of the community” (Jeyifo 2004, 120-121). It was also described as “a beautiful play…[whose]dynamic is the conflict between the desire of the dead for judgement and the desire of the living to avoid it” (Times Literary Supplement, *Dance*, front page). This implies that the ancestors express their discontent with present day corruption and seek justice and atonement from wrongdoers. This part will be mainly concerned with how Soyinka deploys magic to reflect upon a defective, calamitous post-independence Nigerian reality. Intertwined with this is Soyinka’s belief that the audience play the role of the chorus who give the protagonist strength in the “symbolic struggle with the chthonic presences” (*Myth, Ritual and African World 38*), a view which resonates with the notion of “the complicity of the spectator or/and reader” that Zamora stipulates in reading a magical realist text to endow magical events with credibility. Although the characters are divided into “The Town Dwellers,” representing the everyday realistic level, and the “The Forest Dwellers,” representing the magical level, both levels merge and are mutually reflective of one another.

The play opens on a very potent theatrical image, a magical event, yet framed in a factual, realistic manner: “An empty clearing in the forest. Suddenly the soil appears to be breaking and the head of the Dead Woman pushes its way up. Some distance from her, another head begins to appear, that of a man…They both come up slowly…They come up, appear to listen. They do not seem to see each other (1981,

3). Drawing upon his indigenous Yoruba beliefs and myths which he shares with his countrymen, Soyinka depends on the complicity of his audience in accepting this magical event as normal, everyday reality. This is part of Soyinka seeing "the use of the stage space as *affective*, not merely effective, because it *affects* the audience in certain emotional and physical ways" (Figueiredo 2011, 105; emphasis original).

The magical realist element is enhanced by the realistic movements of the Dead Man and Dead Woman who act naturally and are likewise accepted by others. Moreover, they behave as though they were living human beings when they urge Adenbi, the Council Orator, to "take their case", i.e., to restore to them their lost rights, thus alluding to their grievances in a manner similar to that of the living human beings who act in seeking legal counselling and solutions. When Adenbi shuns them, the Dead Woman complains that she "was summoned. What is it to them from whom I descended - if that is why they shun me now? The world is big, but the dead are bigger. We've been dying since the beginning" (1981, 4). She further complains that "it is a hard thing to carry this child [the unborn child] for a hundred generations…it is a hard thing to lie with the living in your grave" (5). In the pre-trial scene, the Dirge Man chants about the expected return of the dead, "A touch of that rounded moment of the night /And the dead return to life" (40). The Dead Man and Woman return to life in order to attend" the gathering of the tribes" which aims to settle and put an end to all tribal disputes. One of those gathered in the forest says: "Two of the dead spoke to four people, they wanted human advocates" (37).

The trial is initially set for the Dead Woman who is charged by the Questioner of killing her own unborn child: "What made you deaf /To the life that begged within you/Had he no claim? ... You should have lived for him. Did you dare snatch death from those that gasped for death?" (1981, 69). Metamorphosed as the castrated soldier in a previous life, the Dead Man complains: "When I died/And still they would not let my body rest;/When I lived, and they would not let me be /The man I felt, cutting my manhood, first/With a knife next with words and the dark/Spite of contempt" (70). This trial turns into a counter trial which becomes an indictment of present-day spite and corruption. In a following scene the Dead Woman enters "*unpregnant*, leading the Half Child by the hand" (73) who laments that "I who await a mother/Feel this dread/I who flee from womb/To branded womb, cry it now? I'll be born dead? I'll be born dead" (74). Clearly referring to the aborted dreams in a post-independence Nigeria, the half, aborted child indicts the corrupt, unfulfilling present.

The Freedom of the City by the prominent Irish dramatist Brian Friel offers a counter colonial narrative by exposing the horrific consequences of Bloody Sunday (1970) between the peaceful Northern Irish civil rights' protestors and the occupying British troops. Friel depicts the farcical Widgery Tribunal which judges the victims posthumously. To my belief, magical realism is deployed by Friel here to avoid flagrant anti-British, patriotic sentiments and to offer a counter narrative to the false colonial one. The play opens on a "Kafkaesque setting (Pine 1990, 113), a grotesquely morbid scene of three peaceful protestors who are lying dead after being

shot by British troops during the civil rights' protests on Bloody Sunday: "*The stage is in darkness except for the apron which is lit in cold blue. Three bodies lie grotesquely across the front of the stage"* (1973, 107). To verify their death, a memorial service is held for "the repose of the souls of three people. … [who] died for their beliefs. They died for their fellow citizens. They died because they could endure no longer the injuries and injustices and indignities that have been their lot for too many years. They sacrificed their lives so that you and I and thousands like us might be rid of this iniquitous yoke" (1973*,* 24-125).

This anti-British discourse is closely followed by the colonial discourse which represents them as "a band of [armed] terrorists [who] took possession of a portion of the Guildhall. They gained access during a civil disturbance" (1973, 127). Closely after the brief press conference, the three victims rise from death to pass judgement on the previous events and verdict. Twenty-two-year-old activist Michael perceptively concludes that colonial British acts of violence will lead to more anti-British resistance: "they're bringing more and more people out on the streets-that's fine; but they're also the hooligan element an excuse to retaliate-and that's where the danger lies" (127). To accentuate the resurrection of these victims, in Act 2, "they stand beside the positions they had at the opening of Act One. They do not move" (148) to attend their posthumous/resurrected tribunal which seeks to incriminate them as occupying the Guildhall as "their act of defiance" by bearing arms which "the *deceased* were alleged to have used against the [British colonial] army" (149; emphasis added). To discriminate between the ordinary speech rhythms and intonation that the living use and that of the deceased, Friel points in stage directions, "*When Michael*, *Lily and Skinner speak*, *they speak calmly*, *without emotion*, *in neutral accents*" (149). The three narrate their emotions on the moment of being shot dead. Michael says, "I became very agitated, not because I was dying … And that is how I died - in disbelief, in astonishment, in shock. It was a foolish way for a man to die" (149). Skinner, meeting death in a flippant way, briefly recounts his last moments after being fatally shot: "then everything melted and fused in a great roaring heat. And my last thought was: if you're going to decide to take them on, you've got to mend your ways. So, I died, as I lived, in defensive flippancy" (150). It is Lily, mother of eleven children, whom she supports single-handedly who expresses her posthumous, agonized epiphany her death:

> The moment we stepped outside the front door I knew I was going to die, instinctively…A second of panic -no more -no more. Because it was succeeded, overtaken, overwhelmed by a tidal wave of regret, not for myself or my family, but that life had somehow eluded me. And now it was finished; … And in the silence before my body disintegrated in a purple convulsion, I thought I had glimpsed a tiny truth: that life had eluded me…. And the fact that this, my last experience, was defined by this perception, this was the culmination of sorrow. In a way, I died of grief. (*Freedom* 150)

Magical Realism's Social, Moral, Political Functions

This section is mainly concerned with attempting to fathom the rationale of deploying magical realism in the selected texts. Some critics believe that this technique seeks to create an alternative world which aims at correcting the reality of established viewpoints.

> Magical realism also [like realism] functions ideologically, but…less hegemonically, for its program is not centralizing but eccentric; It creates space for interactions of diversity. In magical realist texts, *ontological disruptions serves the purpose of political* and *cultural disruption: magic is often given a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality and motivation.* (Zamora and Faris 2000, 3; emphasis added)

I here contend that these "ontological disruptions" represented in the miraculous resurrection of the dead in the three selected texts aim at performing political, social and cultural objectives, for these "disruptions" have a "cultural corrective" function. Hence, there is a strong belief that magical realist texts are basically subversive and revolutionary against dominant powers. Theo D'Haen, for example, argues that this urge to bring about change or disruption aims at "decentring privileged centres" for it aims to "create an alternative world *correcting* so called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this 'reality' depends upon. Magical realism thus reveals itself as a *ruse* to invade and take over dominant discourse(s)" (2000, 195). Thus, the attempt to shake off the existing defective, dominant structures in the present world is done in order to reconstruct it on solid, healthy basis.

These "ontological disruptions", witnessed in the deceased Pasha's resurrection after decades-long death, lead to the uncovering of moral, social, and political defects and has a clear "cultural corrective" objective. This can be seen in *What 'Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* which depicts in a hilariously comic, realistic manner the magical or fantastical event of the miraculous return of the Pasha from the dead. The Pasha's lashing, satirical critique of present-day status quo results from the stark discrepancy and contradictions between a glorious past that witnessed Al-Manikli Pasha as one of its outstanding heroic military icons and a present that suffers from moral decadence, social injustice, and newly imposed British colonization. The text uncovers social and moral defects in different specimens of society, such as bribery which the petty lawyer's assistant unashamedly asks for when the Pasha seeks to retrieve his lost property in *al awqaf* (The Department of Endowments). It is, thus, not surprising that the writer, whose main aim is "corrective and reformative" (Badr 1963, 69), would start with the clash between the Pasha and his interlocutor, on the one hand, and the symbols of authority, the police and law, on the other. Moreover, the critique of the manipulative, corrupt lawyer (Allen 2018, 42-44) is closely linked to the bureaucratic procedures which the Pasha suffers from in the Courts of Justice in order to restore his lost property, in a way which makes him keep "dragging his

feet and choking back his tears" (Allen 2018, 61). This clearly shows that nothing less than the miraculous return of the deceased pasha can expose and possibly shake off the corruption and indifference of the living. The shocking recognition that the *'umdah,* once an icon of respectability, is now entrenched in all vices by frequenting vulgar taverns and leading a dissipated life (Allen 2018, 296-313).

The Pasha's encounter with the greedy physicians who do not offer proper medical service due to their ignorance or lucrativeness makes him hurl his harsh criticism at the greedy physicians who abandoned their humanitarian, sacred mission (Allen 2018, 150-165). The journey to Paris offers a great chance for both the deceased Pasha, and the narrator 'Isa Ibn Hisham, to discover both the Oriental self and the Western other, uphold the positive values underlying Western civilization and progress, and denounce the backward Oriental/Egyptian self. This discrepancy between Western progress and Oriental backwardness makes Ibn Hisham critical of Oriental people for their subjugation and their lethargy, for "we remain stuck in our profound slumber, happy to remain recumbent in the caves of lassitude and apathy? They do the talking and we listen. They give the orders, and we obey" (Allen 2018, 397). His social criticism concludes that these abominable qualities have led to the tragic colonization of Egypt, "They apportion our livelihoods for us, and we're duly grateful. They purloin our lands, and we give thanks. They occupy our territories, and we accept it all (Allen 2018, 397-398).

Ironically, *A Dance of the Forests*, specifically written to be performed in Nigerian independence celebrations, uncovers corrupt moral, political, and social practices in a post-independence period. Such was Soyinka's harsh criticism that it ignited official authorities' discontent. Violation of social structures is revealed to seek "corrective" measures and atonement. Rola, the prostitute in the present, is a metamorphosed figure of Madame Tortoise, the tyrant's courtesan in another, previous life. However, Rola's moral corruption is nothing in comparison with the tyrant's abuse of power (1963, 20). The magical element represented in the metamorphosed tyrant, symbolic of political corruption is depicted in a realistic manner to imply the perpetuation of political corruption.

Moreover, I contend that Soyinka's deployment of the magical realist technique is done to draw attention to ecological issues and hazards that result from the totally unacceptable practices of the living human beings. Ironically, this critique of the present is done by the dead who have come back to life in order to reconstruct a better habitat for the living. This is exemplified in different instances; for example, despite the fact that Demoke is hailed as the highly venerated artist who carves totems, he is, nonetheless, accused of ecological trespass by pulling down the sacred *araba* trees which constitute part of the Nigerian ecological culture (Soyinka 1963, 49). Another instance, in the master trial scene, Soyinka incriminates the violation against nature. He conjures different ecological representatives to express their ecological grievances, such as the Spirit of the Rivers, the Spirit of the Sun, Spirit of the volcanoes. Murette, the tree imp, retaliates for the felling of the trees stating, "We have claimed our victims, for every tree that is felled or every beast that is

slaughtered, there is recompense, given or forced" (46). Another character warns of the ants' retaliation against humans on the charge of threatening biodiversity: "Four hundred of their [ants'] dead will crush the humans in a load of guilt. Four hundred million callously smoked to death. Since when was the forest so weak that humans could smoke out the owners and sleep after? (46). Anxiety over ecological violation is expressed through making elements of nature retaliate to take their revenge.

I argue that magical realism as a technique in *The Freedom of the City* is deployed for a double function; for postcolonial purposes, as Stephen Slemon suggests in his article with the aim of creating a counter discourse and to distance and critique colonizing power. Magical realism aims "to write ex-centrically… or from the margin, implies displacing this [privileged] discourse (D'Haen 2000, 195). The colonial British powers assert and reiterate their false colonial discourse throughout the play, specifically in the farcical tribunal scene which turns the victims into culprits. In his final speech, the British colonial Judge sums up his conclusions that ban all acts of resistance, confirming "that there would have been no death in Londonderry had the ban on the march been respected, and had the speakers on the platform not incited the mob to such a fever" (Friel 1973, 168), and that the three deceased were armed with lethal weapons which they used to attack the security forces (168). However, the presence of the three resurrected victims who are formerly shot dead by the colonizing British troops decentralizes the powerful colonial discourse and creates a counter discourse to the Widgery tribunal which aims at incriminating the victims. This may probably explain the "hostile press reaction in Britain where it was viewed as agit-prop" (Grene 1999, 167). The resurrected victims' testimonies act as a counter colonial discourse to the report of colonial Widgery Tribunal. Closely following the passing of the false verdicts of the Widgery Tribunal which ironically blamed and incriminated the victims, the deceased victims appear, metamorphosed-like to make a potent, non-verbal comment on the falsity of the Tribunal's accusations of carrying arms to attack British security forces: "*the three stand as before, staring out*, their *hands above their heads*" (Friel 1973, 169). This brief non-verbal act attains efficacy as a counter colonial narrative.

The second function of magical realism as a technique is to critique social injustice and poverty that these colonized indigenous Catholic victims suffer from at the hands of the colonizing British and the privileged Irish class. Through the magical resurrection of these victims, they are posthumously given voice to express their grievances and complain of their dire poverty and difficult living conditions. Skinner explains that Lily's reasons for joining the civil rights' march, is because "you live with eleven kids and a sick husband in two rooms that aren't fit for animals. Because you exist on a state subsistence that's about enough to keep you alive... Because for the first time in your life you grumbled and someone else grumbled…It's about us-the poor-the majority" (Friel 1973, 154). The grotesqueness of the situation is underpinned by the three victims who lived their lives devoid of dignity but are given a "dignified funeral" (167) attended by Irish dignitaries. This technique highlights all the more the social injustice that the common Northern Irish suffers

from under the double yoke of British colonial rule and social inequality and deprivation.

Conclusion

Recapitulating on the proposed assumptions at the outset of this paper, I conclude that magical realism as a most unconventional technique was deployed to tackle a highly imaginative, indeed fantastical theme of the resurrection of the dead with the aim of reconstructing their world by creating" an amplified version of the past in order to create a better future" (Chandler 2020, 2). I contend that this was a response to highly significant, complex historical moments and crucial turning points in the respective writers' histories. I propose that magical realism is used to create "an alternative world" (Zamora 2000, 500), a sort of shock tactic which "disorients readers in order to make them more aware of their world" (Arva 2008, 78), leading to a "call for action" (Chandler 2020, 57), and ultimately to setting right dysfunctional conditions.

I argue that *What* '*Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* was triggered by the ramifications of the traumatizing abortion of '*Urabi* revolution in1882 which Muhamad al Muwayilihi took part in. Following the failure of the revolution, he was charged with high treason and a death sentence was passed which he miraculously escaped. The modified verdict against him was his heart-breaking banishment from Egypt. His engagement with nationalist politics, his close connections with ant-British figures like Gamal Al din Al-Afghani to whom he dedicated this text, were instrumental in exposing the traumatic impact of British colonization of Egypt (1882). This was especially scathing, for it came as an anti-climax to a rich and promising era of the Egyptian Renaissance or *Nahda* (1798-1882), which made Egypt shift from the Medieval ages to modern times. My belief is that the disastrous ramifications of the British colonization of Egypt, shocking on the personal and national levels, unbridled Al-Muwaylihi's imaginative faculties to use this magical realist technique to criticize present day conditions and to conjure Al-Manikali Pasha, a national military hero and an icon of resistance in bleak times.

A Dance *of the Forests* was triggered by the agonizing frustration brought about by social injustice, moral decadence and political dictatorship in a post-independence Nigeria, a new era which promised Nigerians political freedom and social justice. Soyinka, taking recourse in his indigenous Yoruba rituals and beliefs further manipulated them in a most unconventional way by deploying magical realism as an artistic and effective tool to address such highly significant issues as social corruption and political dictatorship. Besides exposing such defects, Soyinka, to my belief, aimed at reconstructing the world anew, devoid of all these social and political defects.

The Freedom of the *City* was written as a reaction to the ongoing British colonization of Northern Ireland, the only white British colony in the contemporary world. The insufferable consequences of British colonization, represented in ridiculously subjugating the indigenous Irish to deprivation, social and political

injustice in a contemporary world nominally free of colonialism, required that these defects would be addressed in an unconventional technique of magical realism. Magic, not being an entertaining end in itself, is used to “recuperate the real, that is, to reconstruct histories that have been obscured or erased by political and social injustice” (Zamora 2000, 9). This is very pertinent in exposing the ridiculously obnoxious British colonialism of Ireland and the urgent need to end it.

Heidegger’s notion that life is a one-way journey towards death could be refuted by borrowing Henrik Ibsen’s words from his swan song *When We Dead Awaken* that “We see the irretrievable only when we dead awaken” (Ibsen 2010). Thus, the highly imaginative idea of a second life, allows not only for second chances, viewing matters with clairvoyance, but essentially aims at reconstructing an alternative world devoid of dysfunctional social, moral, and colonial defects.

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