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Whose Magic? Whose Realism? Reflections on Magic Realism in Ben Okri's The Famished Road.

When discussing British Nigerian writer Ben Okri's famous novel *The Famished Road*, some critics have maintained that the question of whether the mythological aspect is considered to be real or magical depends strongly on the cultural context of the reader, the point being that if the reader lives within a cultural context where magical happenings of the type portrayed in the novel are considered to be a possible aspect of reality and not magical at all, then the reader may not recognize the magical realist element of the narrative.

That type of statement seems to me to give rise to several questions, for instance:

1. Is not the notion that supernatural events are not considered magical by people living in cultures where there are no clear borders between the real and the supernatural at the very root of magic realism? Why should African magic realism be different from, say, Latin American or Indian magic realism in this respect?
2. Are not the reactions of the characters in the story, and/or the attitude of the narrator, to supernatural events of greater importance when it comes to deciding whether or not a text is representative of the magic realist mode than the supposed reactions of a supposed reader?
3. What reasons have we to assume that the novel is chiefly, or exclusively, intended for West African readers only superficially influenced by colonialism? And even if this were the case – does it matter?
4. What arguments can be presented in favor of regarding *The Famished Road* as a magic realist text? How convincing are these arguments when compared to the arguments against?

These are the issues that will be discussed in my paper.