Vernacular Critique, Deleuzo-Guattarian Theory and Cultural Historicism in West African and Southern African Literatures

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
School of English

September 2014

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Brendon Nicholls for his invaluable assistance as my supervisor. He has been a truly great teacher and mentor. His critiques, insight and advice have immeasurably strengthened my thinking and writing. I am also very grateful to him for his logistical and moral support. Rigorous, kind and humane, he has been the best supervisor I could have asked for.

It is impossible to adequately thank my parents, Drs John and Pamela Rooks, for their love, help and inspiration. They are the reason that I have always wanted to undertake a PhD, and I would not have been able to do it without them. I am terribly grateful to Dad in particular for following me on this intellectual journey, even though he has never actually enjoyed *A Question of Power.* It has been ridiculously enjoyable to share this material with you. Thank you, Mom, for your eagle-eyed proofreading and attention to formatting; if there are any mistakes in this dissertation, they are my fault and not yours. It was also your idea, all those years ago, to compare *A Question of Power* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. If you had not suggested such a fertile idea for that undergraduate essay, I do not know where I would be today.150

I must also thank Ash Edge, my dearest friend, not only for the delight of his company, conversation and help, but for introducing me to Alan Watts: you opened vast horizons to me, and it has been so much fun to watch the galaxy-rise with you. When we talk, ideas catch light, and you help me see the world anew. Thank you for being the best housemate I could hope for and for staying by me through the dark.

Abstract

In this thesis I use concepts from Deleuzo-Guattarian theory, combined with a vernacular theoretical understanding, to perform cultural historicist readings of texts that lack clear contextual referents, as I demonstrate with an extended close reading of Amos Tutuola's problematic classic *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*; I then demonstrate the approach's versatility by using it to read a very different text, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power.*

Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* draws on vernacular theories of the bush common across West Africa, in which the bush is a discursive space for exploring personal and social traumas. Tutuola's Bush of Ghosts, I argue, engages with the Yoruba Wars, the slave trade, and colonial capitalist development of Nigeria to the mid-twentieth century. I demonstrate not only how Tutuola uses ghosts as critical historical tools, but how he develops a peculiarly open textual space which serves as an alternative and a challenge to developmental trends.

From history enacted across ghostly landscape I move to politics as a highly personal nightmare in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*. From communal vernacular theoretical traditions, I move to Head's 'schizophrenic' vernacular theories. I argue that this text speaks to contexts far beyond Head's personal experience of Apartheid. I read it as a schizohistory of Botswana's developmental and political history, and as a lament of authoritarian tendencies across Africa a decade after independence. Head combines politics with mysticism, drawing on Hinduism to forge a politics of interconnectedness.

Texts like Tutuola's and Head's become far more accessible through historicist readings, and these readings become possible once we are equipped with a theoretical vocabulary flexible enough to translate across a wide variety of discursive spheres. The approach I demonstrate encourages and facilitates a more interdisciplinary and contextually-grounded approach to African literature, clarifying formerly obscure texts.

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Introduction

This thesis demonstrates the benefits of reading texts contextually even when the relevant contexts are obscure or hidden. It develops a methodology which facilitates such readings. The approach I employ consists of a cultural historicist approach rooted in the idea of vernacular theory and enriched with concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Deleuzo-Guattarian thought offers us an extraordinarily versatile and agile theoretical vocabulary, allowing us a variety of approaches to cryptic and elliptical texts, and enabling us to move between diverse discursive realms.

I initiate this approach through a deep reading of one of the most notoriously intractable texts in African literature: *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola, published in 1952. I begin by establishing the cultural historical context from which Tutuola's text emerges: the vernacular theoretical matrix that is the West African bush. Having detailed varying vernacular theoretical engagements with the bush, I examine the particular historical situation from which Tutuola writes: the recent history of Yorubaland, marked by a century of civil war as well as social and cultural transformations. Having established both the vernacular theoretical tradition within which Tutuola operates and the historical situation from which he writes, I then perform an extensively detailed close-reading of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. I examine this text in such detail because of its extreme obscurity—an obscurity which is largely removed, I believe, through my reading. I believe that my reading renders the text accessible and should allow renewed critical engagement with this seminal text.

I then go on to demonstrate the potential scope of my theoretical approach by engaging more briefly with another difficult yet apparently very

different African novel, *A Question of Power* by Bessie Head, published in 1973. Where Tutuola's tale seems traditional and naïve, Head's novel is obviously cosmopolitan and complex. Unlike Tutuola's text, *A Question of Power* has received extensive contextual readings. I will argue, however, that Head's contextual field has been defined far too narrowly. *A Question of Power* shares with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* a baffling symbolic opacity: like Tutuola's text, Head's novel swarms with strange imagery that seems symbolic yet frustrates easy interpretation. Applying my methodology to *A Question of Power* requires us to engage with a very different kind of vernacular theory, one developed by an individual rather than by a regional community. Fortunately, however, Deleuzo-Guattarian theory is flexible enough to allow us to adapt to Head's very different text and situation.

Both *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *A Question of Power* take the form of a journey 'to hell', journeys out of the normal world into unseen, frequently nightmarish worlds beyond. Not only do Tutuola and Head narrate such journeys, the texts themselves engage the readers in a complementary movement beyond the bounds of normal textual experience. They draw the reader away from familiar conventions of narrative, characterisation, and grammar. These journeys away from the ordinary world are not about leaving it behind, however, but about seeing it anew, engaging with it from a different perspective and with a new freedom. The Drinkard's Bush of Ghosts is populated by his demons and by the spirits of his times. Elizabeth suffers from the world's madness through the cruelties she has internalised. The Drinkard's journey to the land of the dead is extensive while Elizabeth's 'soul-journey,' as Head called it, is intensive. Correspondingly, Tutuola's text plays with folklore

and communal understandings, while Head's text engages with the world
through a highly idiosyncratic recombination of traditions.

In any traditional sense, both texts are non-realist. Tutuola is reworking
folktales, but the folktales have a purpose and meaning beyond traditional moral
instruction. Anthropologists such as Michael Taussig and Rosalind Shaw suggest
that folklore and superstitions can encode important historical memories and
political commentary. Indeed, the material encoded in this manner may be some
of the most charged and significant. Folklore can offer a way of handling
material which is too difficult or important to discuss directly. Anthropologists
provide ample evidence of West Africans using folkloric beliefs to engage with
the slave trade, war, imperialism, and contemporary injustices. Thus I will argue
that when Tutuola engages with Yoruba folklore, he is not simply preserving
inert cultural artifacts; he is participating in a widely established vernacular
theory of history.

If Head is using *A Question of Power* to discuss her own sufferings and
breakdowns, we might reasonably ask how she herself understood her
breakdowns and what discourses she drew on to frame these understandings.
Head's intellectual and emotional life extends a good deal further than her
parentage and childhood. Through Eilersen's biography, *Thunder Behind Her
Ears*, we learn that Head describes her own breakdowns in terms of politics,
history and reincarnation—and these frames of reference make sense when we
understand her engagement with Pan-Africanism, the politics and theory of
agricultural development, and with the teachings of Hindu mystic Sri
Ramakrishna. Some of Head's principle delusions concerned the president of
Botswana, Seretse Khama; and these beliefs closely echo Elizabeth's beliefs about

Sello. If we follow these threads, it then becomes possible to read *A Question of Power* as an engagement with African politics and with Hindu understandings of reality.

Finally, we must remember one further characteristic shared by *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *A Question of Power*: both texts are excessive. Their texts are densely populated with densely detailed fantastic imagery. Head and Tutuola provide dizzying profusions of grotesqueries. In this thesis, I will demonstrate that many of these strange images can be better understood in connection with relevant contexts, it is important not to lose sight of their fundamentally excessive nature. Tutuola and Head present their readers with a strangeness, wildness and diversity that overflows categories of identity, classification and rational understanding. Read in conjunction with the appropriate contextual material, these texts remain, nevertheless, essentially excessive and overwhelming. It is not possible, nor is it desirable, to 'read' and understand every element of these texts' imagery. Rather, we should appreciate and participate in their riotous imaginative extravagance.

Before we begin this theoretical, cultural materialist and literary undertaking, let us pause for a moment to map our route. In Chapter 1, we will examine the main theoretical tools that we will be working with, including the concept of vernacular theory and key concepts from Deleuzo-Guattarian thought.

In Chapter 2, we will explore the bush as a from a cultural materialist perspective. We will begin by asking what function the Bush of Ghosts plays in Tutuola's texts, and we will then go on to ask what function the bush plays in West African practical and vernacular theoretical understandings. We will then

examine the bush as a site of madness and social threat within colonialist

discourses by studying the history of sleeping sickness, or trypanosomiasis.

In Chapter 3, having understood Tutuola's broad cultural context in terms

of the bush, we will look more closely into the historical contexts that animate

The Palm-Wine Drinkard. In particular, we will look at the Yoruba Wars, a series

of civil wars which dominated the nineteenth century. We will also look at the

ways in which these wars influenced Yoruba development before and during

British colonial rule.

In Chapter 4, we will engage in a thorough close-reading of *The Palm-*

Wine Drinkard. This detailed examination of Tutuola's text will provide us with

varied opportunities to test the usefulness of a Deleuzo-Guattarian approach to a

non-realist text. We will see the different ways in which Tutuola's text connects

to historical and cultural contexts; and we will also use Deleuzo-Guattarian

theory to engage with the text's peculiar texture.

In Chapter 5, we will transition to a very different reading of a very

different text, *A Question of Power*. From a communally-rooted vernacular

theory of the bush, we will move to a highly idiosyncratic vernacular theorisation

of power, history and the cosmos. This chapter demonstrates the versatility and

range of my theoretical methodology.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we will ask why it has been necessary to employ

Deleuzo-Guattarian theory in what might seem like a simple historicist project.

Why have the cultural materialist contexts of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *A*

Question of Power been so difficult to recognise? The answer, I will argue, is

fundamental to the nature of vernacular theory as a theory operating beyond

dominant discourses.

Chapter 1
Deleuzo-Guattarian Theory and Vernacular Theory

1.1 Vernacular Theory as Cultural Matrix

It will be useful here to introduce some of the concepts which I will use to read these discourses. As Luise White proposes in her *Speaking with Vampires*, "the supposedly superstitious and the supposedly scientific" can all be read as history, literature and theory (212). In this cross-grained reading, we will use the concept of 'vernacular theory', developed by Houston A. Baker, Henry Louis Gates and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. These writers argue that when people talk about their world, they are theorising it; the theories thus formed are 'vernacular theories.' Vernacular theories are as varied and varying as the communities and individuals that produce them. They include, of course, a fair admixture of superstitions, rumours and prejudices. As Thomas McLaughlin puts it, vernacular theory is "theory that would never think of itself as 'theory'" (5). Engagement with vernacular theories assumes that "individuals who *do not* come out of a tradition of philosophical critique are capable of raising questions about dominant cultural assumptions" (5). Baker uses the term vernacular theory to refer particularly to what we might term 'outsider theory': "the practices of those who lack cultural power and who speak a critical language grounded in local concerns." Nevertheless, as McLaughlin notes, *every* theory is situated, embedded in the matrix of its milieu, whether in rural Ghana or British humanities departments (5-6). Thus he argues that "all theories are 'vernacular' in the sense that they never transcend their local origins" (10). Using this concept, we can understand that even notions which may seem most traditional and 'bush' (in the sense of backwater isolation) can be actively analytical and

critical. The authoritative colonial discourses of scientific and anthropological research will also be read as historical phenomena and as theoretical (rather than objective) engagements with the bush—as partial attempts to striate its smooth space. When we engage with vernacular theory, beliefs become theory and theories, for their part, are shown to be beliefs.

1.2 The Smooth and the Striated

As a cultural matrix within which vernacular theories operate, the bush has been put to many different uses by West African communities. The bush can be figured as agrarian, rural or wild; as a site of historical trauma or of potential enrichment; as a source of inspiration or of possible madness. Practical interactions with the bush become entangled with theoretical and imaginative understandings: it is simultaneously the space within which one farms and a space which is haunted by ghosts of slavers. This layering is characteristic of many informally developed vernacular theories, and it is certainly true of the schizophrenic vernacular theory that Head develops in *A Question of Power*, in which a single figure may simultaneously assume mythological, personal and political significances.

To work with the multiple meanings within these cultural histories and texts, we must have to hand a theoretical vocabulary attuned to analogy, flux and mixing. To this purpose, I will introduce several concepts developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. These concepts allow us to translate phenomena and concepts from any sphere into dynamics and flows. Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts are particularly useful for considering the tensions between control and freedom, order and disorder, movement and stasis. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, almost everything, from

geology to culture, can be expressed as the movement of flows, their decoding and recoding.

This concept of 'flows' is an abstraction which yields rich particulars. It can be used to understand the body, desire, rock formation, language, or systems of power. For example, rather than defining the body as a package of discrete organs, they emphasise its flows of blood, air, faeces, hormones, electricity; its experienced intensities of cold, pain, pleasure. This experiential body—a collective of permeable cells, bacteria and viruses; the body of intensities rather than of 'organ-ised' identity—they call the Body without Organs. The Body without Organs need not be a human body, however: it is a surface, an area, a matrix. It can be "any number of things, anything" (33)—a couple, a house, a desert, the bush, or a text. 'The Body without Organs' is a deceptive term, for it need not be empty at all: "The desert is populous. Thus the Body without Organs is opposed less to organs as such than to the organization of the organs insofar as it composes an organism. The Body without Organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization" (34). Flows of energy connect the body to other bodies, to the earth, the sun. Thus, a plant is a "chlorophyll- or a photosynthesis-machine" which recodes sunlight, water and oxygen into sugars (*Anti-Oedipus* 2). When a plant or animal is eaten, digestion decodes its structures, plugging them into the universal process of cellular respiration, through which sugars are recoded into useable energy packets which allow cells to live and reproduce. Introducing the implications of this theoretical understanding at the beginning of *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari write, "Producing-machines, desiring-machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self,

outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever" (*Anti-Oedipus* 2).

This quote points to the affinity between their philosophy and animist

worldviews, which lies in dissolving separate and stable identities, seeing

instead transformation and connection.

We could also think of what the autonomist Marxist John Holloway terms

"the social flow of doing": one person's doing contributes to another's in a fluid

chain, on and on (*Change the World* 25). Objects and identities dissolve within

this understanding of the social flow of doing. An object or identity simply

represents a moment within the social flow of doing; the 'done' is constantly

swept back into the flow, where it is once again set in motion and transformed

(27). Holloway argues, however, that capitalism introduces a series of blockages

into this social flow of doing. Through commodification and the ideology of

individuality, capitalism disrupts the flow of doing, unravelling "the we-ness

which [social doing] braids," and producing instead fragmented individuals and

commodified things (*Change the World* 33). To illustrate, I can borrow and adapt

one of Holloway's examples. As I write, I am involved not only in a flow of

thought connecting me and the writers with whom I engage, but also in a vast

web of other processes, such as those by which my laptop was produced. That

process thus involves me in the exploitation of coltan in the Democratic Republic

of Congo and in the conflicts driven by this mineral wealth ("Coltan"). The

laptop's smooth exterior, however, betrays no hint of its origins: it appears as an

isolated thing, an object which could have materialised in the shop ready-

formed. I can easily choose to know nothing of its origins, and I can be equally

ignorant of the source of the electricity which powers it, or the provenance of the

tea I drink and the clothes I wear. The sense of myself as engaged in isolated,

solitary activity is easily maintained. A world which seems to be composed of things and identities rather than of flows is what we might call a 'real illusion,' the result of social systems based on abstraction, concealment and forgetting. As Holloway writes, "Thing-ness is crystallised amnesia" (*Change the World* 34). Apparent solidity temporarily masks, but cannot completely block, the flows of creativity, use and decay. Deleuze and Guattari call these processes by which flows are controlled or break free reterritorialization and deterritorialization, respectively.

The construction of these words—reterritorialization and deterritorialization—emphasises the importance of territory, of space, to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding. Flows circulate upon, across or within spaces (whether physical or conceptual), and their different movements constitute different kinds of space. Striated space is the space of reterritorialization; smooth space is that of deterritorialization. The immense, seething liquidity of the Earth beneath its thin crust is a potent image within Deleuze and Guattari. As they put it, "the Earth—the Deterritorialized...—is a Body without Organs....permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 45). Upon the Body without Organs of the Earth, strata form. These strata "consist of giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems." This stratification is "the entire system of the judgement of God"—from which the earth "flees and becomes destratified, decoded, deterritorialized" (45). Deleuze and Guattari also use this phrase—"the judgement of God"—to describe the imposition of the organism upon the Body without Organs (176), and in their usage, the phrase refers to

apparently natural, timeless orders while also denaturalising these. After all, we might say that time immemorial is simply history submerged. Their use of the term 'stratification' is related to but distinct from their use of 'striation'. More current or historical processes are referred to as striation rather than stratification. Thus, while both terms refer to the imposition of order on flows, stratification refers to geological processes such as the sedimentation of rock, while striation designates actions such as the gridding of streets. Our discussion will be more concerned with striation.

Very roughly, striated space is the city, and the bush is smooth space. Similarly, although smooth and striated space are not primarily anthropological terms, we can understand them in connection with social models: different ways of living create different kinds of space. Smooth space is created by nomads, whether they be Fulani cattle herders or metaphorically 'nomadic' thinkers. The state imposes striated space as a function of its authority. Striated space is a function of property laws, of social stability. This means that to be effective striation must be a psychological and social phenomenon just as it is a spatial one..

The idea of striated space conjures an image of a city with its network of streets, its rows of shops and houses. This is a culturally specific image, however, and not one which applies to many West African towns. To demonstrate this, let us suppose that we use the website Google Maps to look at Abeokuta, Tutuola's home-town. The website generates a map that shows almost nothing: on a grey background, a few yellow roads cross, and a tiny number of smaller roads branch off of these. Some primary schools are marked; a handful of churches dot the landscape. It looks like a rural junction. A team of

American researchers described the city's layout in 1964. Nine roads cross the city, four of which are paved; however, these "do not slice across the city in a grid pattern but instead converge in several centres of congested activity like uneven wedges of pie. Within the wedges, there is an irregular arrangement of houses and paths" (Leighton 275). If, then, we return to Google Maps and our map of Abeokuta, with its bare network of roads and its scattering of marked buildings, and switch to satellite imagery, the city suddenly appears: a bustling and jumbled city, with buildings arranged in clusters and rings and rows. As Leighton and his team observed, the arrangement of houses and buildings shows no linear patterning, no sense of front or back. Most strikingly of all, these varied clusterings are not arranged along or connected to any roads, even unpaved roads. Houses may be gathered around a water hydrant or a shady tree: they are arranged according to lived experience rather than abstract patterning. Away from the rush of traffic circulating on the few main roads, Abeokuta is a city of pedestrians, and the only paths are those made by walking (Leighton 297). Ungridded and swarming, this is a city which cannot easily be abstracted into maps. Such a city requires us to understand the mixing of smooth and striated spaces. On the other hand, as John Protevi notes, even wildernesses of "forest and unusable scrub" can be "overcoded" as striated space by categorising them as nature reserves or by mapping them for future development (81).

It is worth pausing here to address some difficulties presented by shortcomings in Deleuze and Guattari's approach. Within *A Thousand Plateaus*, Christopher Miller has found deep marks of "a violently representational, colonial ethnography" despite Deleuze and Guattari's claims to be "anti-colonial, anti-anthropological and non-representational" (13). Noting the dearth of non-

Western sources cited (10) and a reliance on old-fashioned or positively

disreputable anthropological studies (22), Miller claims that Deleuze and

Guattari use authoritarian tools to carry out an anti-authoritarian project (20),

meaning that they end up reproducing those discourses they seek to destroy

(30). Theirs, Miller states, is "an intellectual nomadism and nomadism for

intellectuals" (10). We turn to Deleuze and Guattari, however, *not* for

scholarship but for inspiration, stimulation and provocation. Any reader who

has tried to identify the many unfootnoted quotations in *A Thousand Plateaus*

will know that their use of source material is evasive, slippery and opaque.

Miller judges this to be a side-stepping of responsibility (20), and this is precisely

the case: their text flags itself as unreliable; Deleuze and Guattari undermine

their own authority. Whether or not this is deliberate, the effect is the same:

they are not to be taken too seriously, and the hammer does not have a

deterministic influence on the construction project. Nevertheless, their concepts

are genuinely useful, opening up dynamics and relations which simply cannot be

addressed using a standard critical vocabulary.

Smooth and striated space do not exist in isolation or as absolutes,

however, only in combinations. They constantly cross and transform one

another (*A Thousand Plateaus* 524). Bearing this in mind, it will nevertheless be

helpful to begin by considering these concepts separately. Fabric woven with

warp and woof, a shuttling back and forth across a limited space, is one of

Deleuze and Guattari's models for striated space (524)—as, of course, is the city

(551) with its rows of streets and buildings, its controlled allocations and

enclosures of space (530). Smooth space, on the other hand, is the radiating

webs of crochet or the "anti-fabric" of felt, which is made through microscopic

entanglements and is "in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every

direction…it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a

continuous variation" (525). Relevant for the idea of smooth and striated *textual*

spaces is Deleuze and Guattari's contrasting of "Embroidery, with its central

theme or motif, and patchwork, with its piece-by-piece construction…" (525).

The image of smooth space as patchwork is particularly useful for correcting a

potential misunderstanding that springs quite naturally from their choice of

terms: smooth space is not homogenous (526). Although the desert and

savannah can be smooth spaces, so too can the forest, or even the fields of

subsistence farmers, who may be more attuned to the wilderness than the city

(531). Smooth space is "Heterogeneous, in continuous variation" (533). Without

fixed markers or absolute orientations, movement must be guided by "symptoms

and evaluations rather than measures and properties. That is why smooth space

is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces…." These intensities flow

across smooth space as they circulate on the Body without Organs (528).

Having equipped ourselves with this terminology, our task, as Deleuze

and Guattari define it, is to examine the "passages or combination: how the

forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its

striation it develops other forces and emits smooth spaces" (*A Thousand Plateaus*

551). Navigational technology eventually allowed the net of longitude and

latitude to be cast over the sea, radar has gridded the sky, and satellites have

turned outer space into the supreme cartographical vantage point. The

undetectable passages of nuclear submarines, stealth jets and unmanned drones

smooth sea and air again, "but in the strangest of reversals, it is for the purpose

of controlling striated spaces more completely. …the smooth itself can be drawn

and occupied by the diabolical powers of *organization*…" (530).

Of course, as Deleuze and Guattari caution, "Smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory," (*A Thousand Plateaus* 551). Smooth and striated space are not a new dichotomy, and we must resist the reflexive temptation to assign them fixed moral values. A surprising demonstration of this comes from the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), which has enthusiastically incorporated postmodern theory into its strategic thinking (Weizman 54).[1] The concepts of smooth and striated space underlined the IDF's 2002 assault on Nablus, in which units entirely avoided roads, alleys, stairs and doors—instead soldiers blasted through interior walls, floors and ceilings (53). Shimon Naveh, one of the leading proponents of adapting Deleuze and Guattari to military purposes, told Weizman, "In the IDF we now often use the term 'to smooth out space' when we want to refer to operation in a space as if it had no borders. … 'Transgressing boundaries' is the definition of the condition of 'smoothness'" (59). Ominously, he extends 'smooth space' to justify an end to the occupation: the border can be anywhere "as long as I can cross this fence. What we need is not to be there, but…to act there…" (60-1). Weizman notes, however, that Israeli 'smoothing' of Palestinian space depends on the prior existence of a fierce, comprehensive

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[1] These theories have by no means been universally accepted within military circles. Milan Vego of the United States Marines, for example, has argued that such "elitist" language results in operational confusion, which he blames for Israel's defeat against Lebanon in 2006 (72-3). He has a particularly low opinion of Deleuze and Guattari, whose "language is designed to be unintelligible to conceal an absence of honest thought" (71).

striation of Palestine by Israeli checkpoints, fences, settlements and border controls (63). The 'smooth spaces' created by Israeli soldiers moving through walls were, for the residents of Nablus, an eruptive and traumatically intimate extension of the already tight grid of striation upon which the Israeli occupation depends.[2]

The use of smooth space to facilitate ever greater striation and of striation to spread smooth space is intrinsic to the double act of state and capital and the paradoxical, unequal worlds they create. Simply stated, it is the old game of freedom for the powerful and control for the weak; of 'flexibility' and precariousness for the poor and security for the rich. To return to Holloway's terminology, capitalism breaks the social flow of doing and replaces it with value: rather than specific and social relations, we have money, a deterritorialized universal abstraction, which "tears our lives apart and sticks the fragments back together in a cracked whole" (Holloway *Change the World* 34). Within cracked and fragmenting social situations, then, cracked and fragmentary texts such as *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *A Question of Power* can be understood as critical reflections of social distress.

Spaces crazed with cracks, then, can represent the particular smooth spaces of capitalism. Tutuola's Bush of Ghosts, for instance, is a dense network of boundaries and limits across which the ghosts cannot pass; yet the Drinkard,

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[2] For a detailed elaboration of the Israeli occupation's "matrix of control" see Jeff Halper's book *Obstacles to Peace*, which illustrates interlocking military and bureaucratic controls with a chilling series of maps showing the West Bank divided into tiny, isolated pockets by Israeli roads, settlements and checkpoints.

driven by his excessive desire and desire for excess, moves across these boundaries effortlessly, like capital. Nevertheless, his unbounded movements are not frictionless: he wreaks tremendous damage and can easily be seen as the most devastating force in the monstrous bush.

The smooth, chaotic space of capitalism is the result of separations which those within capitalist societies enact and suffer from continuously, resulting in what Deleuze and Guattari term "an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy" (*Anti-Oedipus* 37). The energy is 'schizophrenic' because it results from separations.[3] This schizophrenic social charge must then be controlled, not just by money, but also through forces of identification (nation, race) and repression. These are the pincer movements of capitalism: "deterritorializing flows on the one hand and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other" (*Anti-Oedipus* 37). This pincer movement and the damage it causes are explored by Head in *A Question of Power*.

1.3 Vernacular Theories of Smooth Space

Smooth spaces are characterised by intensities, but these intensities need not be natural. Perception in a smooth space, *Deleuze* and Guattari write, is "based on symptoms and evaluations rather than measures and properties. That is why smooth space is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities…" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 528). What they do not mention are the supernatural intensities that may mark a smooth space, as with

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[3] As Heinz von Foerster remarks, "The essential idea of [the Indo-European root word] *ski* is to separate.…Look, 'science', 'schizophrenia,' 'schism,' 'shit,' etc., they all belong to the same category of separation" (152).

spirits in the bush. Anthropologist Rosalind Shaw, who worked in Sierra Leone from 1977 to 1992, described the fear with which villagers regarded the bush and bush roads, even during the day. "Neither looked dangerous to my European gaze: the tarred or laterite roads, often with houses spread along them…and the bush was secondary growth that was not usually very thick." A man told her about meeting a spirit on the road at night. It looked like an ordinary man, but the villager felt weak in his body, and it was this weakness that told him that his fellow-traveller was a spirit (49)—the spirit is known through symptoms. As well as creating individual bodily responses, spirits may themselves be symptomatic of conditions within the body politic, as in this suggestive *prècis* by Shaw:

> So while bush spirits raided towns and roamed the bush and roads, 'seizing' unlucky and unprotected victims, and light-skinned water spirits bestowed money and commodities upon men in Faustian (and ultimately life-depleting) exchanges, the ancestors and town spirits defended the town as invisible warriors. (52)

Vernacular theories of the bush as a hostile, dangerous and frightening place—along with the rituals designed to protect those who live within it—are, Shaw argues, traumatic reverberations of "the violence of the slave trade and colonialism." These histories were not spoken of casually; referring to them explicitly was the privilege of older men (50). For most of society most of the time, the histories had shifted to "the more tacit apprehensions of practical memory," a realm which includes "social practices, ritual processes and embodied experiences" (7). In other words, collective memory in this context manifests as a social symptom.

Monstrous spirits may be manifestations of historical trauma, but they can also, counter intuitively, be a sign of social vitality and health. Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber notes that elaborate, frightening "nightworlds" often appear as the spectral counterparts of egalitarian societies: "it's the most peaceful societies which are the most haunted, in their imaginative constructions of the cosmos, by constant spectres of perennial war" (25). This, he argues, is due to the acute awareness of conflict which results from processes of consensus decision making—such as the democratic meetings glimpsed in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. The acknowledgement and resolution of conflicts is a powerful force of social creativity, and it leads to an understanding of people's potential for "inner violence" while also managing to banish that violence to another realm (Graeber 26). Further, he argues that these invisible worlds form part of what James C. Scott terms the "hidden transcript" of resistance—the shared understandings and everyday affinities that, while they may seem apolitical, form the matrix within which overt resistance may form. The "spectral zones" of bush and fantasy are, for Graeber, safe zones for social analysis, critiques of power, and theories of transformation. "Invisible, most of all, to power," they form a "creative reservoir" from which insurrectionary potential can emerge, as if from thin air (34). The intensities filling the bush are not necessarily *historical* ghosts, and those surrounded by them are not only traumatised victims: rather, it is possible that the energies crackling in the bush are the result of societies actively engaged in understanding and dealing with their own current tensions and divisions.

Before elaborating upon the ways in which these dynamics of practical memory and social critique can help us to work with specific instances of beliefs,

we should pause to identify a risk with this analysis. When the bush is identified as a space of trauma and social conflict, it can seem to become a society's unconscious, creating a temptation to engage in cultural psychoanalysis. This has been a marked trend within imperialist responses to African beliefs. Historian of Gold Coast witchcraft, John Parker, notes that the intense popular interest in anti-witchcraft cults in the southern part of the colony in the early twentieth century was taken by ethnographers as a sign of social neurosis, probably resulting from the strains of too-rapid development (355). A more radical pronouncement was made in 1939 by the ethnopsychiatrist J. C. Carothers, based in Kenya: although "the normal African is not schizophrenic…the step is but a short and easy one" (qtd. in McCulloch 52). Like the European schizophrenic, the typical African projects his emotions onto his environment, obliterating objectivity and personal responsibility. Carothers continues: the African "sees no sharply defined aspects of reality: wish and truth, possible and impossible, dream and waking thoughts, phantasy and reality are one to him" (82). These are gross examples, but they provide an apposite warning as we begin to engage in Deleuzian skips between terrain, psyche and society. Smooth spaces may throb with symptoms, but that does not justify diagnostic authority.

Chapter 2
The Bush: Trauma, Disease and Critique

2.1 The Bush and its Ghosts

What is the Bush of Ghosts in Tutuola's narratives? How does it relate to the bush in general? The bush plays a complex, multifaceted role in West African thought and practice. It restores the fertility of farmland and it renews religious practice. It is the home of beneficent and malevolent spirits, the haunt of witches, and a lure to lunatics. It throbs with violent histories of slave raids and wars. It crackles with the disorienting energies of capitalism and modernity. It is alive with possible alternatives.

The Bush of Ghosts is, like all the bush, multiple. The Bush of Ghosts encompasses everything beyond the home village. In it we find predatory raiding parties, wild animals, slavers and employers, merchants, markets, cities, kings and bureaucracies. There are forests, villages, and cities like Abeokuta and Ibadan, and the colonial capital Lagos. The Bush of Ghosts is pre-colonial Nigeria and it is colonial Nigeria nearing independence. The Bush of Ghosts is a palimpsest on which we can read traces of the region's fractious developments.

Who are the spirits who inhabit the Bush of Ghosts? The spirits are everyone who is not from the home village; they are every bizarre, incomprehensible stranger. They may enter the 'human' world of the village, cheating and preying upon its unworldly inhabitants. The spirits are also, however, representative of the destructive energies or intensities that characterise these 'home' spaces. In Tutuola, the spirits' monstrous bodies usually manifest intensities of greed or violence, although we also encounter the powerful celebratory forces of Song, Dance, Drum and Laugh (*The Palm-Wine*

Drinkard 220, 227, 264, 293). Even these apparently positive intensities, however, often betray a sinister power: ghost music is irresistible and aligned with madness (*Witch Herbalist* 49, *My Life* 51), exhaustion (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 294) and pain (*My Life* 50). The denizens of the Bush of Ghosts are the spirits of their times, of their place—as well as the spirits of everything strange, foreign and threatening.

For a potent example of a spirit as a manifestation of the bush (which is itself a manifestation of society), let us look at a spirit in *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts*: a sixteen-headed ghost who has on each of his heads "a town in which many kinds of creatures lived" as well as "wild beasts" and "poisonous creatures." This spirit is marching with his many-headed hoard (each presumably carrying their own towns and bushes on their heads) along the road from the hunter's town (50-1). The spirit is an assemblage of multiplicities, composed of bushes and towns. He is an entire region, and he seems to be the hunter's *own* region, deterritorialized, taken down the road on the spirits' heads like goods to market: the place has let itself 'get carried away' by this spirit. The hydra-headed conurbation devours then excretes the hunter. The hunter then becomes a ram (52), and he is promptly captured, beaten and taken to market (53-6). The spirit of the times, here, is a roving, greedy, urban thing which—if you cannot stay outside of it or keep on top of it—will eat you and excrete you, dehumanised and ready for commodification.

Who are the dead? The dead are the departed: those who have left home forever. They may have been enslaved, or they may be escaped servants. They may be migrant labourers. They may be those who went to school and got a job in the city. The dead have cut their ties with home, voluntarily or not, and they

have their own distinct ways (*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* 152, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 275). Deads' Town, in *My Life of the Bush of Ghosts*, bears a resemblance to Lagos, and is instrumental in aiding the modernisation of the 10th Town of Ghosts, providing "medicines with apparatus for the hospitals;" "religious books, education books and stationery" (150); and training in "how to judge cases, as police and also all the branches of the court works" (152). Just as the Bush of Ghosts may be a cosmopolitan space, so the dead may be more sophisticated than the living, lost to them culturally.

Ghosts may also be those who leave and then return, irrevocably transformed. In this sense, the dead are linked to the history of the Westernised freed or 'recaptured' slaves, known as Saros, who in the 1830s returned to the Yoruba region from the Atlantic slave trade via Sierra Leone and Liberia. This cultural experience of departure and return continues through the twentieth century, as veterans of the Second World War and colonially-educated 'been-tos' return to Nigeria. These cycles of repeated loss and precarious restitution animate traditions of *abiku* and *ogbanjes*, the born-and-die babies. We might also place Tutuola's protagonists in this tradition: they disappear into the strange world beyond the village, and when they return many years later, their homecomings often seem deliberately uncertain and unsettling. In Chikwenye Ogunyemi's reading, *abiku* and *ogbanje* beliefs contain within them an uneasy questioning of home and community: the spirit-children's refusal to settle subverts stability and questions coherence (664). She also suggests that the writer may function as an *abiku*, "negotiating between the ordinary and imagined worlds" and drawing readers into this multiple vision (667). Tutuola's ghosts, then, are the departed and the unsatisfyingly returned; they are the

element of unease within a community; and they are the imaginative vision which surpasses everyday reality.

The Bush of Ghosts is the world beyond home, but the opposite is also true. As Cohen writes in "Monster Culture," the monster and monstrous geographies are "an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but which originate Within" (7). Let us test this assertion with a summary examination of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Tutuola's second published text. In this text, the schizohistorical traces of war and slavery are easier to see. In *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts,* as in his other texts, Tutuola's Bush of Ghosts echoes the protagonists' home world: the Bush of Ghosts is shaped by domestic tensions and personal demons. In this sense, of course, Tutuola's Bush of Ghosts is serving a familiar vernacular theoretical function.

Tutuola offers indications that the protagonists' adventures in the bush resonate with, mirror, or are affected by events at home. This aspect of the bush becomes particularly clear in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* through a series of plot parallels, in which events that befall the boy in the bush also happen to his mother and brother in the human world. When he is enslaved by the Smelling Ghost (30), his mother and brother are captured as slaves (172). The Smelling Ghost rides him as a horse (37) while his mother is forced to carry her master on her back (173). His rise to ghostly prominence (152) coincides with their rising fortunes (173). Upon returning to the human world, the protagonist is immediately captured by two "slave-traders because the slave trade was then still existing" (167). This is not simply "*then* still existing," indicating the 'bad old

days' but 'then *still* existing', a devastating recognition that nothing back home

has changed or improved in the twenty years since the beginning of the text.

There is not simply a continuity between the 'real' world and the bush,

things may even be worse back home: from being a powerful magician (157) and

chief justice (152), the protagonist is knocked back into slavery. The events in

this section of renewed enslavement explicitly parallel those of an early episode

he spent trapped in cow-form. Language differences alienate him from the other

slaves and the cows, causing these fellow captives to abuse him as a misfit (43,

170). Both sets of captors take him to market twice, where they cannot sell him

because of his poor physical condition; and both times, they threaten to kill him

after the third trip to market because he is "useless" (45, 168)—but he is bought

on the third trip by someone intending to make a bargain sacrifice (45, 169).

Accumulating these obvious parallels in the final section, Tutuola is trying to

make clear the links between home and the bush, inviting us to read 'real world'

events back onto the Bush of Ghosts. The narrator's home is riven with war and

exploitative power relations—and so is the Bush of Ghosts which this place and

time have produced. Fantastic worlds are not escapes from home but

continuations of it and the tensions and intensities which dominate it.

In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the Drinkard is driven into the bush by his

huge appetites, and his Bush of Ghosts is dominated by insatiable spirits. In his

home town, the Drinkard consumes 225 kegs of palm-wine in a day (191). His

journeys through the bush are punctuated by creatures that echo and parody his

(now unsated) desires. There is his monstrous son who eats food as fast as it is

prepared (216); the "greedy" bush which smells of delicious food but where no

satisfaction is possible (233); the Invisible-Pawn who devours a town's crops in

a night (268); and the "hungry-creature" which "could not satisfy with any food in this world, and he might eat the whole food in this world but he would be still feeling hungry as if he had not tasted anything for a year" (286). Much of the Drinkard's Bush of Ghosts is composed of images of his own limitless consumption. He wanders in his own personal hell: no matter how bizarre the spirits' forms may be, their nature is intimately familiar.

Through these links between the bush and the home world, Tutuola is playing several different games. How could it be otherwise, given the multiplicities that 'the bush' contains? Not only is the bush a system of diverse ecologies subject to multiple uses and multiple readings, Tutuola's Bush of Ghosts has its own extreme internal diversity. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the bush can be used as a space for encrypting local/domestic tensions and personal distress or dysfunction. Tutuola also allows the Bush of Ghosts to blend with the 'bush' village, the home which one leaves for the city (which is also the Bush of Ghosts): the departed return to a 'home' made alien and terrible through war (*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*) or famine (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*). Their journeys have made no difference at home—unless, perhaps, they have somehow made things worse.

We might particularly note the narrator of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, whose honours vanish when he returns home. This is not simply a comic case of the village not recognising city achievements, it is rather that his efforts in establishing ghostly courts, police and jails have had no impact on the urgent, fundamental injustices which wrack his home. Indeed, despite his entire family's personal sufferings as slaves, they themselves become slave-holders. The protagonist's return home resolves nothing. Through these parallels, Tutuola

blurs boundaries between the human world and the Bush of Ghosts, the internal and external worlds, denying a neat division between self and other. For a project of collapsing such distinctions, ghosts and monsters are a particularly useful tool: as Cohen writes, the monstrous resists binaries, collapsing 'either/or' into "a kind of reasoning closer to 'and/or' (7). Tutuola subverts the possibility of neat resolutions, because home is not sweet. Through the Bush of Ghosts, home becomes, in Freud's terms, *unheimlich*—'unhomely' or uncanny (Freud 933) and the self becomes monstrous. Tutuola's characters and societies produce their own monsters.

2.2 The Bush as a Cultural Matrix

Deleuze and Guattari tell us that "a book is an assemblage…it is a multiplicity." Therefore, they continue,

> We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we
>
> will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it
>
> functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does
>
> not transmit intensities….A book exists only through the outside and
>
> on the outside. (A Thousand *Plateaus* 4)

They invite us to approach texts as spaces across which we as readers may range. They invite us to consider texts in connection with other things, other cultural assemblages. For reading Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, one of the most crucial cultural assemblages to understand is the bush.

'The bush,' even in its most prosaic, geographical sense, is a singular form containing multiplicities. Whether jungle, savannah or the sahel, the bush is not only a wild terrain but is also, as Helen Oyeyemi calls it, a "wilderness of the mind" (200). The bush is shaped and peopled by a cacophony of discourses and

practices: from the Ghanaian farmer driven mad by fairies in the wilderness to

the colonial cartographers struggling to map Nigerian forests for the developers.

These discourses tangle, grapple and merge—in the process, they embed

themselves in and help to create the matrix of the Bush. I am using 'matrix' here

to suggest a ground for planting; a fertile, receptive cultural space in which

discursive patterns can spread rhizomatically—but it also suggests a net or web,

in which pressure at any one point sets all the strands vibrating.[4] Houston A.

Baker, writing about the role of the blues in African American culture, defines the

matrix as "a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting,

crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit." For Baker, the blues is a

matrix of African American culture, its 'always already,' (2230). Similarly, I

argue that the bush is a matrix of African culture, a space for doing the

imaginative and critical work of vernacular theory. Tutuola's texts are

embedded in this bush matrix and draw on the vernacular theories rooted in it.

With this understanding, it becomes clear that in order to operate with Tutuola's

texts, we must first enter the bush, exploring it through vernacular theories and

colonial interventions. The matrix of the bush in West African culture serves, we

might say, as a social or cultural fallows: it is a space and a setting where

troubling aspects of social or personal life can be worked through critically and

imaginatively. The bush in this sense is constituted in part by popular or

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[4] This usage is taken from the Austrian cybernetician, Heinz von Foerster. Referring
to Gregory Bateson's concept of "the pattern which connects," Foerster suggests that
such patterns require "the matrix which embeds," ensuring that "that the pattern falls
on fruitful ground in which it can blossom, thrive and spread itself" (135).

vernacular theories of magic and madness, which resonate with transfigured memories of traumatic histories; by the hegemonic discourses of administrators, anthropologists and scientists; and by texts such as those of Tutuola.

2.2 The Bush as a Physical Resource

Before proceeding to the imaginative and theoretical functions of the bush, it is important to understand the practical economic functions of the bush, both for West African farmers and for European imperialists. For subsistence farmers practicing shifting cultivation, the bush as an actual wild space was absolutely crucial for the support of human life: farmers moved their farms each season, allowing land periods of rest as bush fallows. In mid-twentieth century Nigeria, a colonial report notes that there was no mechanical agriculture, and that "periodical bush fallows" were used to maintain the soil's fertility (Colonial Office 56). Indeed, by Colonial Office's reckoning, in their 1951 *Economic Survey*, at any one time there were only 30,000 square miles of cultivated land to 270,000 square miles of "recuperating fallow reserve" (35). This meant that for every year it was used as farmland, the land needed to spend nine years as bush to return to productivity.

This system linked agriculture to wilderness in slow cycles of transformation and regeneration. Not only was the bush absolutely necessary, it was also necessary that there be vastly more bush than cultivated land. This situation did not match colonial doctrines of development. From a capitalist perspective, the bush represented both an opportunity and an obstacle, and efforts were made to striate the smooth spaces of the bush in order to incorporate them into the global smooth spaces of capitalism. The bush—and its clearance—yielded some of Nigeria's most valuable early exports. Before the

discovery of oil, 'forest products,' including palm oil, palm kernels and timber, were among Nigeria's leading exports (Colonial Office 58-9). The vast expanses of bush impeded transport: building roads was key to economic penetration and transformation, as well as for political control. These roads, markets and money that attended these transformations are tightly associated with bush spirits— bringing us to a vernacular theory of capitalism which uses frightening images of witchcraft and predation to draw links with the slave trade and recodes the bush as an urban, modern space.

The bush as a source of valuable raw resources was key to the British colonisation of Nigeria. Indeed, the British became involved in Nigeria through the activities of the Royal Niger Company and its trade in palm oil, initially sourced from wild oil-palms. These wild oil-palms growing in the forest were replaced by vast oil-palm plantations, a clear image of colonial efforts to striate smooth spaces. By 1951, cultivated oil-palms occupied 2.6 million acres, an area exceeded only by groundnuts (Colonial Office 55). Exports of palm oil and palm kernels totalled £28.2 million (groundnut exports, the next highest category, totalled £15 million). The prices of palm products spiked in the years following the Second World War, to the extent that the government feared inflation. A ton of palm kernels fetched £5 in 1939, but in 1952 the price of kernels was £65/ton. The price of palm oil had increased even more, shooting up from £4/ton in 1939 to £71/ton in 1950 (57). This post-war spike in the prices of palm products provided a powerful incentive for replacing forests with palm plantations, a move which would have major consequences not only for the ecosystem but also for subsistence farmers, who lost their bush fallows. Nigeria was shifting from

subsistence agriculture towards a capitalist economy dominated by cash crop monoculture.

The palm oil boom coincides, not incidentally, with the publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1951, and it throws new light on the novel's opening passages. The young Drinkard's father gives him a huge "palm-tree farm which was nine miles square and it contained 560,000 palm-tees" (7). Palm-wine is produced from the same trees as palm oil and palm kernels, and I will argue that we can read the Drinkard's massive planation an image of the intoxicating effects of Nigeria's post-war palm products boom, and more generally as an image of unproductive, uncontrolled consumption.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard begins on nine miles squared, or 81 square miles, of striated homogeneity. These rows of palm-trees are the antithesis of the "thick bushes and forests" that the Drinkard soon enters (193), but it is his desire to exploit the farm that drives the Drinkard into the bush. The oil-palm is an ambiguous sign whose significance has changed dramatically since the exports of palm products began. Palm products have a long history of human usage as oil, food and drink. Until the emergence of plantation agriculture, the oil-palm could represent a harmonious comingling of human and wild spaces. Oil-palms are a liminal species which thrive at the intersections between human settlements and the bush, forming semi-wild groves around villages, farms and along pathways, springing up wherever palm products are used.

The oil-palm is so deeply synergistic with humans that, as Corley and Tinker write, it is even difficult to know what their "natural, original habitat" might be. Primary forest is too dense, and savannah is too dry—but the bush fallows left by shifting cultivation, where the forest has been thinned enough for

the palms to get sunlight, are the ideal habitat. The oil-palm frustrates efforts to place a firm division between the human and the natural, to set humanity at a remove from ecosystems. Instead, the oil-palm testifies to a deep history of participatory, mutual transformations. Thus, as shifting cultivation moved in its slow cyclical rounds through the forest—forests becoming fields as fields became forests—the oil-palms spread, marking farmers' tracks through the bush and changing that bush in people's favour (Corley and Tinker 2). Palm groves are densest where human populations were densest, farming most intensive and bush fallows shortest. Corley and Tinker take this correlation between densities of humans and palms to demonstrate "the essential interaction between humans and the oil-palm" (3). Oil-palms sprang up without deliberate cultivation, a effortless by-product of food production. The palm groves of West Africa "provided the raw material of a major world industry, with little prior investment" (21). The lazy Drinkard, drunk on wealth he has not needed to work for, may be an image of those who profited from the easy natural riches offered by oil-palms.

The oil-palm, growing at the crossings between people and the bush, was historically a sign of harmonious integration with the landscape, and a symbol of the fruits which such integration will bear. The economic and ecological position of the oil-palm begins to change, however, with the shift from local consumption to global export. Susan Martin argues that, initially, because oil-palms involved no radical changes in existing patterns of land use, the export of palm products allowed Nigeria a singularly painless introduction to global markets, one which did not "involve farmers in the invidious cycle of expansion, debt and recovery" (47, 49). Although this was true to a certain extent, as palm oil greased the

wheels of industrialisation, the relentless scale of market demand *did* change

patterns of land use: the Drinkard's thirst cannot be sated except through full-

time exploitation of a large plantation, and neither could the market's demand

for palm-products.

Local needs were easily satisfied and exceeded by semi-wild groves. Food

crops were also grown in palm groves, in a varied and balanced use of land. As

Jonathan Highfield writes, this is forest as "a mixed-use space, a space of nature

and culture, agroforestry existing within a larger and more lightly managed

space" (143). This kind of heterogeneous land use leads, however, to "yield

levels [which] are pitifully small by modern plantation standards" (Corley and

Tinker 5), and it is here that we find the Drinkard: as a child, he would have

drunk wine tapped from wild palms, but as he grows and his demands increase,

he can only be satisfied through plantation monoculture. The Drinkard's growth

is the industry's growth and the market's growth: the market does no work; it is

satisfied through others' labour.

The monocultural oil-palm plantations are the antithesis of the mixed-use

spaces referenced by Highfield. When plantations become dominant, Corley and

Tinker write, "there is no economic place for the wholly or half-wild plant or

animal" (21). The oil-palm once signified the inseparable tangle of interactions

between human and wild spaces, and they represented an easy natural bounty

available for local consumption. Market demand, however, required that the

interactions between human and oil-palms be striated and reterritorialized onto

the single-purpose efficiency of the plantation. This capitalist instrumentalising

of nature also led to a drastic reduction of diversity: traditionally, humans have

used and interacted with more than a thousand species of oil-palm, but

plantation agriculture cultivates only two species (Highfield 144). From the

liminal groves which emerged from the shifting lines between human and wild

spaces, we have moved into the palm plantation, where the oil-palm has become

a sign of nature denatured.

2.3 The Haunted Bush

For all that the bush is a valuable space and one with which people

regularly interact, it is also a consistently haunted space. Many of the spirits

inhabiting the bush can be understood in terms of vernacular theories of trauma,

particularly historical trauma. In Sierra Leone, short, violent people would

emerge from the bush at times of political unrest—such as elections—to attack

travellers (Shaw 49). Their origins were explained to Shaw in a story told,

reluctantly and following strong ritual precautions, by Pa Kaper Bana. They

were the inhabitants of the 'First World,' "an angry world" wracked with terror,

raids and war. It was ended with an earthquake, and the world was turned

upside down. The first people, who were "short, short, short, short, short," came

back to "trouble the world" (qtd. in Shaw 65): they are the spirits of their times,

and their reappearance represents the eruption of these past patterns of

violence into present-day life.

In another example, some of the most dangerous bush-dwellers of Asante

cosmology are the sasabonsam,[5] hairy monsters with sharp teeth, apes' bodies,

scaly bellies and bats' wings. This kind of jumbled chimera is, of course,

reminiscent of the monsters that Tutuola specialises in, such as the man-hippo

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[5] *Sasa* means 'the spirit surviving after death,' while a *bonsam* is a male witch,

making *sasabonsam* something like a 'ghost witch' (Rattray 27).

Spirit of Prey (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 54) or the 'red-fish' with a huge tortoise

head, thirty horns, and snaky bat's body (79). Although McCaskie reads the

sasabonsam's catalogue of body parts as signifying "the promiscuous anarchy of

the natural world" (118), the sasabonsam's monstrosity seems to have less to do

with nature than humanity. Sasabonsam are said to live in families and

communities, and they are strongly associated with witchcraft, a human and

intimately communal evil (119). McCaskie notes that they are characterised by

"selfish excess and uncontrolled quiddity" (118), and while this may well be "in

direct contrast to the precepts of social order" (119), we can easily recognise the

sasabonsam as a commentary on the dark realities of social malpractice. They

are not society's opposite but its reflection, embodying not nature's monstrosity

but humanity's. Shaw offers a complementary interpretation of their

grotesquery: inhuman deeds are represented by inhuman forms. The cruelties of

slavers, tyrants or perhaps selfish neighbours are "registered in the body itself,

which takes on animal qualities appropriate to the bush" (66). As Daniel Punday

writes, monsters can reveal "social disunity through bodily multiplicity" (803).

Chaotically chimeric monsters like the sasabonsam or like Tutuola's many bush

spirits represent social violations of natural harmony.

Just as imagined bodies can register vernacular theories of social discord,

cosmological geography can be used to chart very specific histories of violence

onto the landscape. The physical geography may be overlaid with a spiritual

geography which functions as a map of practical memory. Shaw's informants

demonstrate the long historical reach of practical memories by recounting

vernacular theories of the bush passed across many generations. A more

immediate recoding can be observed in a belief recorded by A. W. Cardinall, one

of the first generation of British administrators in the Northern Territories of the

Gold Coast. Further, Cardinall's report hints at links between geographically

specific vernacular theory and Tutuola's deterritorialized textual encodings.

Cardinall wrote that locals could point out 'ghost roads' which led to the Land of

the Dead—and these roads led to towns such as Salaga which had, until a few

years before, been the sites of large slave markets to which those souls taken in

slave raids actually did disappear (Parker 368). Of course, this resonates

strongly with Shaw's readings of Sierra Leonean beliefs; indeed, it shows that the

recoding of the slave trade was a contemporary phenomenon as well as a

function of historic practical memory. These kinds of spirit-based vernacular

theories were used to encode current suffering as well as historical disasters.

Cardinall then reported what happened once British control made it possible for

people to start traveling these ghost roads. The identification of Salaga with the

Land of the Dead gradually diminished, but in the meantime, some of those who

went to Salaga reported meeting and being entertained by dead relatives (Parker

368). What was happening? It seems very likely that these meetings with the

dead were, in fact, reunions with 'the departed,' meetings with those who had

been sold into slavery.

From our perspective, what is most striking is the surprisingly literal

enactment of the Drinkard's journey: in the early twentieth century, people were

able to journey to the Land of the Dead and return. They could go in search of

'the departed' and meet them. Spaces which raids and wars had made

inaccessible, distances telescoped by danger, suddenly became crossable and

possible. The leap from the Gold Coast to Nigeria here is one of suggestion and

analogy. Although we do not know whether Egba Yoruba belief specifically

contained similarly specific 'ghost roads,' in the next chapter I will argue in greater detail that the Yoruba Wars, and Abeokuta's origin as a shelter for refugees from those wars, are histories that reverberate throughout Tutuola's Bush of the Ghosts.

2.4 "Running to Bush": The Bush and Madness

Vernacular theories of madness posited a strong connection between madness and the bush, which manifested itself in fairies, evil trees and stones, and in the behaviours of the mad themselves. This is a spatial conception of madness as a place one goes to and from which one might return, and also a landscape which can become intertwined with a person's inner state. Talking about the land can become a way of talking about psychology. At the same time, the wild spaces of madness have also been understood to be potential sites of religious inspiration: the difference lies in the handling of spiritual intensities.

The link between internal and external spaces—or, rather, the blurring and even abolition of any boundary between internal and external space, mind and world—is key to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of schizophrenia. There is, Deleuze and Guattari insist, a deep affinity between schizophrenia and smooth space that can result in strange, productive journeys. The schizophrenic's experience is not static or isolated, they argue; rather, "It is a matter of relationships of intensities through which the subject passes on the Body without Organs, a process that engages him in becomings, rises and falls, migrations and displacements" (*Anti-Oedipus* 93). These migrations and displacements were often literal in West African experiences of mental distress: the onset of madness typically involved the sufferer running in terror into the bush. This 'running to bush' was taken so much for granted, according to

ethnopsychiatrist Margaret Field, that she took "almost a whole tour to cotton on" because none of her Ghanaian informants bothered to mention it ('Papers of Meyer Fortes' Add.8405/1/18/25).

The flight of the mad into the bush is strikingly similar to the possession of those about to embark on religious careers. If ritual offers a means of channelling and harnessing other-worldly flows, those who go mad might be understood as being flooded by these forces, unable to cope with the spiritual powers at work. This perceived connection between inspiration and madness resurfaces in a different form in Head's thinking, as we will see in Section 5.8.2, in which we explore the apparent suggestion that mystical discipline may offer a possible response to schizophrenic breakdown.

The initiation and training of *okomfo*, which can be loosely translated as 'priests,' in Ghanaian Twi culture required that they spend long periods alone in the bush. They might be chosen by their god through possession or 'mounting', a state which looked very much like madness (McCaskie 110).[6] They continued to mark themselves as outsiders throughout their practice: they lived on the edge of villages (a very dangerous place, as Shaw notes [49]), and they wore their hair in a dirty, matted style called 'I do not like it at all' which was also worn by state executioners and lunatics (120). Religion, deadly state force and derangement are thus brought into alignment. *Okomfo* must negotiate an uneasy balance between authority and madness. It is a role which could transform lunatic

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[6] 'Mounting' as a term for spirit possession sheds light on the pun behind episodes in Fagunwa and Tutuola in which spirits capture the protagonists and literally ride them like horses (Fagunwa 39; Tutuola *My Life* 37).

behaviours into power, and the possibility of finding new gods in the bush or of importing them from other cultures meant that ritual served as a sphere which allowed innovation and ambition. Anthropologist Jack Goody describes northern Ghanaian shrines which were neither ancestral nor purchased but which had been inspired by fairies (94). Thus "beings of the wild" (91) could become the "instruments of...structural as well as organisational change" (101). Religion becomes, like madness, another means of passing between wild and domestic spaces: the bush serves as a fluid, experimental space which incubates and contains new and unusual ideas and modes of being.

Ritual innovation and madness were both connected with the ubiquitous fairies inhabiting the West African bush, and this commonality indicates the similarity that vernacular theory saw between the two states.[7] Fairies speak to the delicacy of people's negotiations with the bush—and with the more inexplicable or unsettling aspects of human existence. Fairies were so much a part of everyday belief that colonial administrators in Asante asked R. S. Rattray, the Government Anthropologist, to investigate reports of a pygmy race living in the forests (Rattray 25). Throughout West Africa, there is a strong association

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[7] Ethnopsychiatrist Geoffrey Tooth, commenting on different regional attitudes towards madness in the Gold Coast, noted that in the less Westernised Northern Territories, animist frameworks accorded the mad "universal respect," whereas in the coastal regions which had been more thoroughly influenced by British attitudes, madness had become shameful. Tooth uses this as evidence of ordered cultural evolution, although he wishes northerners might be made modern without first becoming Victorian (31).

between fairies and madness. Those who offend or disturb fairies are driven mad and taken to live with them. Assistant District Commissioner Blair, in his ethnographic report on the Dagomba, reported that going mad is a process of becoming fairy-like: "The fairies are all said to talk in the queer jerky way of a mad person, and all their qualities are those generally attributed to 'naturals'" (Blair 39). Those taken to live with the fairies would not be harmed, but they were at risk of suicide. If the wanderers managed to come home, they would probably recover but remained at risk of recurring "fits of depression or madness" (40). One man, a chief and doctor, reported to Geoffrey Tooth that as a young man he had become mad and spent a year living in the bush with fairies (Tooth 30). As his experience demonstrated, it was possible to recover and even learn from such experiences: the fairies could be a source of inspiration and catalysts for growth.

Anthropologists have also noted the role that territorial forces such as evil trees or stones play in madness. These form part of a larger "moral topography" as described by Adeline Masquelier. In several traditions, inhabitants could secure their position on a territory by offering sacrifices to the spirit inhabitants of stones, trees and anthills. These spirits might become local protective gods. Spirits could also be reterritorialized within "homes" such as stones: beneficial spirits could thus be taken into compounds, while dangerous spirits could be "anchored" to stones out in the bush (25). Evil forces within the landscape could strike at random, but they might also assume human form, appearing either as strangers or kin and punishing those who did not receive them with the proper hospitality (Fortes and Mayer 13-4). Their evil is also linked to witchcraft practices: witches gather at evil stones or trees to feast on victims' souls (Parker

361). Human evil is thus anchored to the landscape, as it might be with a haunted house, for example (Shaw 46).

Geoffrey Tooth, in his Colonial Office booklet *Studies in Mental Illness in the Gold Coast*, tells of a farmer who fell mad after cutting down trees which Tooth describes as "sacred." He was also "being troubled by a certain sacred hill." His family knew something was wrong when he began making clay figures of fairies—he reported that he could see them, although they vanished if he looked at them directly (47). His madness is signalled by a change in his relationship to the land, a shift from farmer to artist, from productivity to creativity. He allows striated space to become smooth. The internal and external come together in a mental landscape. While the formal, ritualised "moral topography" of communities described by Masquelier territorializes a community's identity and historical sense of self (25), ideas of territorial madness open the possibility of a more personal, shifting connection between psychological and physical space. The mind and the bush can become not only linked but merged.

The role of spirits in schizophrenic cultural recodings is shown particularly clearly in a father/son case study recounted by Tooth. The son, an educated man in good employment, became mad shortly after receiving a promotion—he attributed this to being poisoned by a rival. Radios controlled his thoughts, which were then projected as in a cinema. A machine called a 'scintillator' was pumping air through his body. As well as his work rival, he suspected the telephone operator, postmaster, and the government. It was a sensation of being thoroughly and excessively plugged in to modernity.

His father, for his part, was connected to the world of spirits in a manner which began as prestigious but became disruptive. At first his communications with the dead were voluntary, but they had started to manifest as increasingly disruptive trances: the sprits controlled his thoughts, and he tried to fight them off with a stick. While speaking to Tooth, father and son fell to arguing about the cause of each others' afflictions, each trying to recode the other's madness in their own terms: the father said his son was plagued with spirits, while the son insisted his father was controlled by the radio. Both claimed to be able to read each other's minds (38). The obvious dichotomy here is between modernity and tradition, but what it is most interesting is the similarities, particularly the grammar of substitutions that takes place in their delusions: the place of spirits is, for the son, occupied by the modern communications infrastructure. In Tutuola, too, the 'place' of spirits can be interchangeable with places of modernity and bureaucracy, as in the efficient, urban Hell of *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts*. Modern networks of connection and authority seem to feel as uncontrollable, as disembodied yet intimate as the world of spirits and ancestors. The spirits and the state function as similarly intrusive 'other worlds' which encroach upon both father and son's ability to work and to integrate themselves into their communities.

2.5 The Bush and Disease

2.5.1 Sleeping Sickness and Uncertainty

It must strike us as an astonishing coincidence that causative links between the bush and madness were also promulgated by colonial officials themselves, in the form of the tsetse fly. The fly was the vector of trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness, "probably the commonest cause of mental

derangement throughout large areas of West Africa" (Tooth 1). The tsetse fly's habitats in the bush were the objects of anti-sleeping sickness public health campaigns as often as the flies themselves. Infected and infectious, the bush became an object of and obstacle to development. Anti-trypanosomiasis work required that colonial administrations try to clear or control the bush to protect health and sanity: there was a fear of smooth space spreading, not only across the land but within the body and mind. Large areas of West Africa were depopulated as a result of trypanosomiasis, leaving abandoned villages which had become overgrown by the time of colonization. Thus as bodies were destroyed by disease, the bush spread, and administrators were haunted by visions of these ruined, abandoned villages reverting to bush. Controlling the spread of the trypanosomiasis required not only control of fly habitats but also public sanitation within villages and towns. Bodies had to be organised into an orderly body politic: the colonial health officers translated sanitation into straight roads, square corners, and settling the nomads. Disease control measures thus became attempts to control populations and manage the bush. The resulting interventions into people's lives, spaces and cultural practices were often unwelcome. Some of this feeling can be caught in vernacular theories which refigure medical officers and their African assistants, tramping through the bush, as blood-thirsty spirits waiting to ensnare the unwary traveller.

Trypanosomiasis is a parasitic infection, borne by protozoa which spread through the host's bloodstream and affecting every organ system, transforming them into a ravaged Body without Organs, subject to a wide and unpredictable range of symptoms. Tooth attempts to group these symptoms into stages, but even as he tries to schematise the disease, he emphasises that the most notable

feature of the disease's presentation is its fluidity (Tooth 3). Sleeping sickness

can easily be mistaken for malaria or yaws, and there is no sure way to diagnose

the disease without examining the patients' cerebrospinal fluid under a

microscope, meaning that it could not be definitively diagnosed in 'bush'

conditions. At its most severe, trypanosomiasis causes mania, dementia, and the

characteristic abnormal sleeping—at this point, the disease is fatal (3). Those

afflicted with trypanosomiasis dementia, however, might survive with it for

many years, although they would remain unresponsive to treatment (4). In

advanced cases, researcher T. A. M. Nash was struck by "the expressionless,

soulless look in the face" (*Africa's Bane* 178). These neurological symptoms of

trypanosomiasis challenged and sometimes confounded Western diagnostic

criteria: it could be almost impossible to distinguish psychoses caused by

sleeping sickness from 'real' mental illness (4).

In fact, Tooth goes further, hypothesising that undiagnosed

trypanosomiasis could be an insidious, and indeed unverifiable, force of social

disorder in West African cities, contributing to divorce, crime, child delinquency

and vagrancy (2). Tooth thus recodes urban problems as corruption spreading

from the bush, as well as recoding the social and cultural as both biological and

pathological. This hypothesis, to some extent, acquits urbanisation—and

colonialism and capitalism—of having created social disorder or psychological

distress. By pathologizing social disruption as, in fact, symptoms of bush-borne

infections (and untreatable symptoms at that), these problems are not only

morally neutralised, they are in fact transformed into an argument for further

colonial intervention in the form of hygiene programs. This suits Tooth's liberal

vision of social evolution by which the Gold Coast ought to be helped towards an expedient modernity (31).

Colonial public health campaigns against trypanosomiasis were never solely concerned with individual bodies: these campaigns constituted extended attempts to control the bush, populations, and the interactions between people and their environment (White 215). Methods varied across the continent, from bush clearance and pesticide to limits on cattle herding and control of agricultural techniques (Grischow, "Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis" 12-3; Davies 390). The scope and success of these campaigns were, however, inevitably partial. Writing in 1950, after the disease had largely been brought under control in the Gold Coast, Tooth nevertheless warned that "there is a virtually uncontrollable migration of persons across its borders, which are only arbitrarily defined, so that, until Tryps. [sic] has been eradicated from Tropical Africa as a whole, epidemics and sporadic cases are bound to occur" (2). Fear about disease becomes an anxiety about migration, colonial authority, the nature of colonial borders, and perhaps even the politically unsettling Pan-Africanism which was becoming such a powerful force in the Gold Coast and across "Tropical Africa as a whole."

2.5.2 History of Trypanosomiasis

Sleeping sickness had been active in West Africa for five hundred years: first recorded as killing a 14th century Malian king, it was watched for by Atlantic slavers. Colonial-era tsetse researcher T. A. M. Nash quotes an eighteenth century description of the treatment for this disease: "pulling, drubbing, or whipping, wil scarce stir up Sense and Power enough to move; and the Moment you cease beating, the Smart is forgot, and they fall again into a State of

Insensibility, drivelling constantly from the Mouth…" (qtd. in Nash *Africa's Bane* 26). Nash compares this aggressive treatment to 1920s Tanzanian treatment of lunatics—many of whom may, indeed, have been suffering from trypanosomiasis: they were "forced to dance at spear-point until they fell exhausted, as it was believed that acute bodily discomfort would expel the causative devil" (26). The ways people responded to the disease would match the ways that they exercised authority. The slavers violently attacked the sufferers' bodies, while colonial officials sought to police the body, reform the culture or reshape the spaces.

A severe outbreak of trypanosomiasis swept along the Black Volta River in the late 19th century, contributing to substantial depopulation of swathes of fertile land. During the same period, wars and slave raids caused some communities to seek to defend themselves by building villages deep in the forests—this tactic, however, brought them into closer contact with the flies (Nash *Africa's Bane* 173). Conversely, in other areas, peace meant that families felt confident enough to strike out on their own, establishing small settlements in the bush where their low numbers left their settlements particularly vulnerable to the disease (184). From slavery to war to peaceful development, trypanosomiasis moulded itself to West African history.

The social impact was heavy, but the cause of its spread was unknown. In southern Africa, another form of sleeping sickness, which affected cattle but not humans, had long been associated with tsetse flies—in Setswana, in fact, 'tsetse' means "a fly destructive of cattle." This form of sleeping sickness, known as 'nagana,' made cattle herding impossible in some regions, as well as severely limiting the use of horses (Nash *Africa's Bane* 18). Africans and Europeans alike,

however, assumed that nagana was caused by venom of the tsetse fly itself,

although one 1864 observer was puzzled that the bites themselves, even on

severely ill cattle, showed only 'the smallest swelling' (22-3). Insects were only

discovered to carry parasites in 1877, when mosquitoes were discovered as

vectors in elephantiasis (24). The role of trypanosome protozoa was first

demonstrated in 1894 by Surgeon Major Bruce in Zululand, who experimented

by infecting dogs and horses (24-5).

Shortly after this, the disease appeared for the first time in eastern and

central Africa (Grischow, "Tsetse" 3-4). The precise role of imperialism in the

outbreak of trypanosomiasis in previously unaffected regions is not entirely

clear. The historical and geographical patterns suggest tsetse flies and their

protozoa being carried along by the deterritorializations of colonialism,

following explorers forcing their way up rivers and through jungles. As neat as

this correlation would be, however, the situation is complicated by differences in

the Western and eastern forms of trypanosomiasis (Mullen 295). Nevertheless,

it seems clear that the ruptures, displacements and strains caused by colonialism

at least made populations newly vulnerable to disease (Steverding). Indeed, as

the Harvard Working Group on New and Resurgent Diseases' paper

"Globalisation, Development and the Spread of Disease" notes, epidemics are

caused by "a complex dialectic between a pathogen and its environment." This

dynamic is so central to understanding disease, they argue, that environmental,

economic and social changes can be said to "*create*" diseases. Whatever the

precise causes and effects, eastern and central Africa were struck by "epidemics

of apocalyptic proportions," frightening the European empires into action:

governments commissioned studies and piloted eradication programs (White 213).

European concern with trypanosomiasis was influenced from the start by microbiological germ theory. We might contrast this to earlier European theories of malarial miasmas (White 114). Nineteenth century travel writer Mary Kingsley, for example, writes of the "breath of malarial mud, laden with fever" which one can watch "becoming incarnate, creeping and crawling and gliding…laying itself upon the river, stretching and rolling in a kind of grim play, and finally crawling up the side of the ship to come on board" (Kingsley 51). Kingsley is writing from within an 'anti-contagionist' discourse, in which disease is spread not by contact but by unclean environments. Such anti-contagionist understandings lie at the root of nineteenth century concerns with public sanitation (Lin 156). The horror in Kingsley's description of the monstrous "incarnate" miasma comes from a fear that the contaminating affects of this swamp cannot be controlled or contained, the sense that this place is too impure to be sanitised.

Although White states that microbiological germ theory broke the causal relations between land and disease (213), Wan-Shuan Lin argues that in effect contagionist and anti-contagionist discourses were closely intertwined, both stressing "the imperative to separate purity from danger" on the levels of the body and the environment (156). This is evident in British encounters with trypanosomiasis. While French colonial officials focused on mass-treatment, British campaigns focused on the tsetse flies' environment, the bush (Nash *Africa's Bane* 181).

In the Gold Coast, the British colony most affected by trypanosomiasis, tsetse research was launched in 1912 when flies were first found in Accra. James A. Simpson, from the Imperial Bureau of Entomology, reasoned that they must have come on trains and lorries, so he "set off on a wide arc following the roads and railroads" up to the northern savannahs where the disease was endemic (Grischow "Tsetse" 5-6). His research and that of his successors linked the disease to the passages of humans and cattle across the bush. Tsetse densities were highest "along rivers and roads and especially at their intersection."

Indeed, tsetse densities matched the densities of people and cattle—at their points of intersection with the bush. Cases of infection also tracked south along the routes taken by migrant labourers travelling to work on cocoa farms and in mines (Grischow "Tsetse" 8). Further south, outbreaks were "confined to villages along the trade routes and major market towns" (18). By the 1930s, these maps of infection patterns led colonial officials to fear that their goal of integrating the north more closely into a cash economy could increase the threat of epidemics, especially in Asante where trypanosomiasis was not endemic (9).

2.5.3 'Going Back to Bush': Trypanosomiasis and Ruins

In the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, administrators were disturbed to find the ruins of abandoned villages in fertile regions, while nearby highlands were so densely populated that food supplies were threatened. Some two hundred square miles were completely depopulated (Grischow "Tsetse" 10). Medical Officer Mark Hughes came upon a village with only thirty people, none over fifty, ruled by a ten year old headman. Areas of uncultivated bush had sprung up around their compounds, and wild animals grazed there undisturbed—no one had the energy to hunt: "It seemed that the people of the

river valley had lost their battle with the forces of nature and stood poised on the brink of extinction" (Grischow 2).

One morning in 1940, Assistant District Commissioner H. W. Amherst was woken at 4 a.m. "by an entirely dirty little girl of about seven" (Amherst 354). Inquiries revealed that she was an orphan of trypanosomiasis and that "her family had turned her away for 'becoming a devil.'" He had a policeman carry her to a Catholic mission on his bicycle. Wondering about "how many other children have been set adrift this way," he felt that the available apparatuses of European order were too flimsy to confront "this kind of inhuman—or too human superstition" (Amherst 354). The girl's family seem to have translated the strains of sleeping sickness into malevolent forces of the wild, which they have stamped upon the body of this vulnerable burden. Responding to this labelling of the girl as a devil, Amherst in his turn mystified the process by invoking timeless, reified "superstition." In so doing, he not only ignored a clear instance of belief responding to situational pressures, he also temporarily displaced responsibility from the administration onto the missions, "the only Agency likely effectively to counter it" (Amherst 354).

Population density emerged as a key statistic in trypanosomiasis policy: there had to be enough people to clear the bush and control the flies (White 221). Below this critical mass, according to entomologist K. R. S. Morris, "attempts to colonise new areas were literally beaten back by the flies and the villages remained depopulated" (qtd. in Grischow "Tsetse" 9). Morris elides British desire to expand into these fertile regions—in hope of making a poor region pay its way—into locals' own frustrated desires. Colonising thus becomes the project of Lawra farmers, not the British. Morris' statement can also be

compared with researcher Howell Davies' use of military imagery in assessing

Nigerian tsetse eradication: he speaks of a fly belt "advancing...at an average rate

of 10 miles each year on a front of about 60 miles" so that it "now threatens the

southern flank of the projects further north" (401).

Military metaphors have, of course, become a deeply enmeshed in

Western understandings of disease, from the level of public health campaigns to

our immune systems defending vulnerable bodies from invasion. Such imagery

creates a narrative of what we might call a 'clash of kingdoms.' Microorganisms

become the ultimate Others, "on a mission to colonize the human, to render the

human body an extension of bacterial and viral interests" (Waldby qtd. in Lin

178). Thus, if as Catherine Waldby puts it, "declarations of epidemics are

declarations of war," military metaphors of disease can be used to justify

repressive measures in the name of public health (Lin 180).

In the case of West African anti-trypanosomiasis measures, military

imagery is used to suggest a united front against tsetse flies in the push for

"planned development," although it might also whisper of the potential violence

underlying development goals and indirect rule. The administration hoped that

planned development, including anti-tsetse sanitary measures, would transform

wastelands into productive, economically viable colonies by creating a healthy

workforce, opening up new areas to agriculture, and allowing an expansion of

cattle herding (Grischow "Tsetse" 21). Public health was thus crucial to efforts to

introduce new models of working and living which would utterly transform

people's relationship to their activity, their communities, the land and

themselves.

2.5.3 Bush Clearance and Bush Control

The relationship between populations and the bush was the crux of British West African anti-trypanosomiasis campaigns. Trypanosomiasis epidemics were very much products of social disruption and shifting balances between people and the bush—products of regions depopulated by wars and slave raids, of roads built by colonisers, of the new trade that flowed along these roads, of labour migration. The disease must be understood through networks and ecologies. Someone infected with trypanosomiasis in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, for example, would enter into an assemblage of flies, protozoa, rivers, trees and reeds, roads, sacred groves, markets, nineteenth century Asante raids, and British development schemes.

The initial British response, urged on by Medical Officers, Veterinary Directors and administrators was wholesale clearance of bush vegetation. Although the disease had long been endemic in the north, colonial rule increased traffic between the north and south and thus heightened the risk of a full-blown outbreak in the more affluent Asante region. By the 1920s, research had already revealed that infection not only tracked along rivers and roads, it followed the routes taken by northern migrant labourers travelling south to labour on cocoa farms (Grischow 8). In the worst affected areas of Asante, the Chief Commissioner T. E. Fell ordered bush clearances of 700-800 yards around European quarters, villages, water-holes and river crossings. Morris led a campaign of total vegetation clearance of 200 yards around roads, villages and ferry crossings, and Veterinary Director J. L. Stewart convinced the Dagomba Native Authority to fund complete clearance of a river valley. These policies reveal a certain level of understanding yet an inability to translate it into

sustainable action. These clearances were particularly absurd and

unmanageable in Asante, where the 'bush' was in fact rainforest (16). Alarm

grew over the soil erosion being caused by this deforestation, especially in

northern savannah regions, but administrators felt unable to stop the policy

while the epidemic remained uncontrolled (14).

Bush clearance was a policy born of ignorance and urgency, a blunt and

radical transformation of the physical landscape that echoed contemporaneous

manglings of the social fabric. The British only attained military control of the

Northern Territories in 1911 (Allman 65), and their attempts to establish

indirect rule in this area were marked by "confusion, division and

ineffectiveness" (73). Most of the region's communities were acephalous and

loosely organised, bearing no resemblance to the concept of 'tribes' upon which

indirect rule hinged (Lentz 137). This smooth social space would be impossible

to administer, so early officials created 'white men's chiefs,' choosing local

'strong men' whose power was itself highly deterritorialized, based on "personal

networks but no territory" (146-7). By the 1930s, a new generation of

administrators reacted with horror to these hastily instituted transformations:

they found 'despotic' chiefs ruling over communities dissolving under pressures

from 'premature Westernisation' (Grischow "Corruptions" 141). Control

established too rashly was eroding the social fabric as well as the soil.

Knowledge, the administrators hoped, could be power. The reform of

anti-trypanosomiasis measures was more straightforward and successful than

the political reforms—tsetse flies being easier to study than societies distorted

by decades of rapid transformation. Nevertheless, the means and ends of this

research were focused on striation, engaging with the bush to divide, isolate and

control it. This bears comparison with anthropological methods, and the collaboration between anthropologists and administrators.

By the 1940s, Morris had managed to identify the plant species which made up the 'permanent fly-belts' to which tsetse retreated in the dry season. Selective clearing could thus be carried out, enabling sustainable and permanent land reclamation (Grischow "Tsetse" 15). Control of sleeping sickness and social control were intertwined. Successful bush clearance depended upon the command of local labour by headmen and chiefs, as did the construction and maintenance of roads, schools, courts and administrative rest houses (Lentz 147). These were the mechanisms of striation that began the economic, political and social integration of the savannah back-country into the larger colonial system.

2.5.3 Resettlement and Striation

To permanently reclaim land from sleeping sickness and the bush, colonial officials engineered several resettlement projects. Resettlement was not an exclusively colonial response to sleeping sickness. In 1935, near a Tanzanian village where half the population was affected by trypanosomiasis, Nash describes seeing two ruined town walls, "one much larger and older than the other." A village headman explained that he had seen old Rikochi. When the sickness came, people fled over a stream to escape the evil spirits, then moved a mile further on, "but still we die." Four years later, they were resettled in a tsetse-free area (Nash *Africa's Bane* 28).

The first large-scale resettlement was that of old and new Anchau, carried out in northern Nigeria in 1938 (Neisser 358). One in three people in old Anchau was infected with sleeping sickness, and there were areas of incredible

population density (21,200/mi²) (Jones 161-2). The colonial government chose

a "healthy area surveyed for water supply, bush clearance, [and] soil condition"

(Neisser 358) and built a new town and sixteen new villages for the resettlement

of 60,000 people. These new sites were equipped with wells and pit latrines and

18,500 citrus and shade trees. Residents were encouraged to take up pig-

breeding, tobacco farming and sugar-cane processing. There was also an anti-

rinderpest inoculation camp to encourage traffic from nomadic Fulani herdsmen,

whose cattle would supply manure (Jones 162). Resettlement projects seemed

to offer colonial authorities a *tabula rasa*, facilitating efforts at wholesale

revision of communities and social space. Targeted anti-trypanosomiasis

campaigns rendered the bush open to striation in accordance with British

notions of 'proper' African life, which included not only hygiene reforms but also

market-oriented agricultural developments and attempts to settle the nomads.

Perhaps the strangest resettlement project was that managed by the

semi-privatised Gonja Development Company in the Northern Territories of the

Gold Coast. This project exemplifies the potential links that officials envisaged

between anti-trypanosomiasis measures and profitable development—while

also illustrating the pitfalls of such schemes. In the 1940s, the Gonja

Development Company was given massive government funding to resettle

80,000 subsistence farmers onto 30,000 acres of uninhabited land (Grischow

"Corruptions" 151). Guided by an amalgamation of Fabian and Soviet

development principles, this project was supposed to set up farming collectives,

producing groundnuts for export while maintaining 'tribal groups.' "The GDC

would take the place of the village market, with the Unit Manager acting as the

land priest" (152). When collectivisation proved unprofitable, the GDC

transformed itself into a huge plantation before eventually, wholly

deterritorialized by the search for profits, becoming a road construction and soil

conservation company (153).

2.5.4 Nomadism and Contamination

Trypanosomiasis and nomadism presented intertwined problems for

Nigerian colonial officers hoping to maximise and control cattle flows. Efforts to

control nagana, the veterinary form of sleeping sickness, were linked to

ideological policies attempting to reterritorialize the Fulani. Nagana made it

difficult for herders in the north to get their animals to southern markets.

Although Fulani herders understood that certain areas were dangerous for

grazing, they attributed this to poisoned water and thus might still pass through

fly-belts while driving their herds to southern markets; this resulting in diseased

animals which would have to be slaughtered (Nash *Tsetse* 13-4). Nash proposed

concentrating the cattle routes into a few major paths which could be monitored

by veterinary checkpoints (15)—presumably this would also facilitate counting

the herds for taxation purposes.

Nagana imposed major restrictions on agriculture in regions across Africa

because "it bans large, well-watered areas of good grazing from the cattle

owners" (12). Without access to manure, farmers in tsetse belts had to rely more

heavily on shifting cultivation and bush fallows to restore the land's fertility (15),

an agricultural technique which could break down under pressure from

increased population (Colonial Office 56). The Nigerian Veterinary Services

hoped to use bush clearance and insecticide spraying to reclaim land for cattle,

but the corollary to this plan was an ideological push to settle the nomadic

Fulani. Simmons, Director of Veterinary Services, put it bluntly: "In the march of

progress there can be no permanent place…for purely nomadic peoples, who use land and water merely to their own advantage….” Instead, the colonial government must encourage “the more progressive individuals” to “adopt more settled customs.” In time, there could be “limits set to the uncontrolled movement of stock throughout the country” (qtd. in Nash *Tsetse* 14).

The convergences and exchanges between vernacular and scientific or administrative theories of the bush are suggestive. Working on the same ground, these divergent discourses nevertheless both take the bush as a site of anxiety and social disruptions, as well as of transformation, infection and derangement. Thinking about the bush, this surrounding *terra incognito*, can be a way of thinking about otherness. Yet while vernacular theories take the bush as an imaginative, critical space for working through terrors and conflict, western administrative and scientific discourses tend to act upon the bush *itself*, approaching it as a problem to be solved, striating the smooth spaces of vernacular theory (striations carried out in the interests of expanding capitalist smooth space). The discursive matrix of the bush is created from this dialectic of vernacular and priviledged understandings, this convergence and divergence of beliefs, much as plants are themselves turned over and incorporated into the soil from which they grew.

2.6 The Market as the Bush and the Bush as the Market

We have seen how vernacular theories of history, society and psychology use the bush as a critical tool. We have also seen the importance of the bush for capitalist and colonial development schemes. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the bush features centrally in vernacular critiques of capitalism, modernity and urbanism. This section will focus on two tropes which feature strongly both in vernacular theories of the bush and in the works of Tutuola: that is, the fondness of bush spirits and witches for markets, and the imagining of the bush as a cosmopolitan space. I will argue that these beliefs constitute a nuanced theory of fetishism and alienation. My argument here is akin to Taussig's in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, in which he views "certain fantastic and magical reactions to our non-fantastic reality as part of a critique of our modern mode of production" (10). Spirits and magic have been recurrent themes in African encounters with capitalism, poetically capturing the strange dynamics of commodification and the transformative powers of money. I will explore this association between spirits, markets and money in relation to stories about the origin of cowry currency, unease about colonial marketization, and contemporary witchcraft fears.

Associations between money and magic are by no means exclusive to African contexts, and they are a particularly striking feature of Western Marxist discourse, as we will see. This imagery of the magical responds to the startling disjuncture between something's existence as an object made and used by people and its abstraction into a good for sale: a commodity's use-value versus its exchange-value. As Marx writes, "Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the

coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects" (138). The values of commodities are "all expressions of a single social substance, human labour"—yet through value, human labour becomes invisible, hidden within the commodity, and abstracted into monetary value (138).

This process—the process of commodity fetishisation—means that in the market we encounter commodities as things which "have sprung *ex nihilo* into the world like magical beings, glowing and animate with a wondrous spirit all their own" (Snodgrass 626). Thus commodities seem to have their own spirit-lives, a dimension of existence beyond "the motley natural forms of their use-values" (Marx 139). Money is the medium through which commodities seem to gain their spirits; and through the fluid, amoral abstractions of fetishisation, commodities can become universally equivalent, one thing morphing into another through the formless realms of money.

When our activity, our doing, becomes primarily oriented towards and dependent upon money—when exchange-value eclipses use-value—then our lives have been deeply penetrated and interpellated by fetishisation. Typically, of course, Marxist theory examines this process through wage labour, the direct commodification of a person's doing. For our purposes, however, we will focus not on the dynamics of wage labour but on money and markets. This is because wage labour was not nearly so ubiquitous in Africa during the early and mid-twentieth century as it had become in the West by the nineteenth century. Many people would mix wage labour, cash cropping and petty trading with subsistence farming, for example. The complexity of people's relations with capitalism is evident in A. R. Prest's frank report, *The National Income of Nigeria, 1950-51*:

> We have no means at all of grappling with the myriad small farmers,
> petty traders, women dealers, and the hundred and one minor
> professions (drum throwers, praisers, rainmakers, cattle fatteners,
> sword makers, money changers, native herbalists, calabash cutters,
> palm-wine tappers, beggars-cum-clowns, charm makers, horse
> tetherers, to select a few). (57)

Nevertheless, despite colonial economists' inability to grapple meaningfully with "this swarm of small economic units" (57), during the twentieth century—and in coastal regions, even earlier—money became a driving force in people's lives, causing their activity to become increasingly market-oriented.

In demonstrating this, I will be examining responses to money and markets at several moments over the centuries. This extremely broad historical range is due to the very different histories of coastal and inland West Africa: whereas the Atlantic slave trade involved coastal regions in global capitalism by the eighteenth century, areas further inland were only opened to markets during the twentieth century.

In West Africa, the association between money and power has been particularly strong due to the history of the cowry currency. Cowry shells served as regional currency from the seventeenth century (Ogundiran 439), and in some regions their use persisted well into the twentieth century (Masquelier 14). They were not a neutral currency. Often called 'slave money' (Ogundiran 440), the shells were obtained through the Atlantic slave trade, and their usage was imposed by widely unpopular kings, such as those of Dahomey, seeking to impose and consolidate their power (Gregory 196).

Let us examine a number of interrelated stories connected to the origins

of money and the distribution of power. Akinwumi Ogundiran notes that "official

Benin oral tradition" links cowries with the reign of Oba Eresogun, 1735-37, a

period of increasing European trade and increasing royal power. This tale

relates a fight between Oba Eresogun and Olokun, the god of the sea. Because

the Europeans arrived by sea, Olokun was sometimes used to represent them.

Indeed, through association with cowry shells and the Atlantic trade, the sea god

Olokun became the god of wealth, with an iconography dependent on imported

goods, much like Mammywata (Ogundiran 442). Eresogun traps Olokun so that

he cannot get back to the sea. After a palm-wine tapper acts as go-between,

Eresogun agrees to free Olokun, and Olokun thanks him by heaping cowries to

the sky (Ogundiran 441). This legend clearly belongs to the same tradition as

that which ends *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, one basic version of which is

transcribed by Harold Lowlander:

> Earth and Sky
>
> Went hunting.
>
> They killed a bush rat.
>
> Earth claimed to be the elder,
>
> Sky also claimed to be the elder.
>
> The sky-owner moved away.
>
> The yam roots stopped growing…
>
> Mothers went searching for water,
>
> Babies became faint and cried.

The crisis is resolved, in this telling, when the vulture, despised by all the other

birds, carries the bush rat to the Sky (1). In Tutuola's telling, a slave is sent to

carry the sacrifice to Heaven. The palm-wine tapper in the elite Benin telling occupies an equivalent social position, as this was a typically low-status and dangerous occupation (Corley and Tinker 5). The vulture, the palm-wine tapper, and the slave: marginal mediators become pawns in the kings' or gods' power struggles. Yet in the elite oral tradition, the conflict has no consequences for ordinary people. Instead, the tale glorifies Oba Eresogun's power: he is capable of holding back the tide, and, by implication, the kings of Benin had the upper hand in their dealings with Europeans.

Another tale of cowries' origins, from the inland Ondo Yoruba region, recounts that when the first market was set up, people sent the vulture—again—to take a sacrifice to the goddess of trade. She sent him back with cowries. In gratitude for his role in the transaction, people made the vulture sacred and forbade anyone to kill it (Ogundiran 444). Despite this, the vulture's consumption of dead bodies still caused it to be associated with greed and ruthlessness, leading Ogundiran to suggest that the vulture, as bringer of cowries, may here suggest slave traders and raiders or even local elites (445). We have already seen the vernacular theoretical association between enslavement and death, and in this tale, the sacrifice that the vulture carries may well represent the people sacrificed to the slave trade, to the market. Enslaved captives are sent away, and cowries come back in return, fuelling the markets.

Working along similar theoretical lines, a Nigerian retelling of the cowry currency's origin encodes such a potent analysis that it is worth quoting at length:

In the beginning of the world we had the forge and we forged things,
we had weaving-looms and we wove our clothes, we had oracle huts

where we consulted the oracle, and we had boats from which we

caught fish. We had no guns. We had no money-money. … If you

went to market you took beans in order to exchange them for sweet

potatoes. You exchanged something specific for something else.

Then the king brought the money-money. …He caught people and

broke their legs and their arms. Then he built a hut in a banana

plantation, put the people in it, and fed them banana until they

became big and fat. The king killed the people and he gave orders to

his servants to attach strings to their bodies and throw them into the

sea where the shells-shells lived. When the shells-shells started to

eat the corpses they pulled them in, collected the shells, and put the

cowries in hot water to kill them. This is how cowry money came to

exist. (CeCe qtd. in Gregory 195)

Money here is revealed, graphically, as dead labour. The captives' broken limbs

symbolise the lost agency not only of the prisoners but of the entire society: by

implication, the cowry money has taken their forges, their looms, and their

collective creative and productive power. The society has been crippled by

money, which contains and is derived from murderous coercive power. As in the

elite legend, the Europeans have been transformed into the ocean: they and their

slave economies form the corrosive medium which dissolves captives' bodies

and from which cowry money grows. Yet while the royal myth represents the

Europeans as Olokun, an individualised entity capable of holding a grudge,

CeCe's tale regards the Europeans as an implacable and inhuman force: this

creates a sharp, accusatory focus on the king of Dahomey's villainous agency.

When retelling this myth to anthropologists, the elders of the village where it

originated stated explicitly that "that the kings of Dahomey were not their beloved rulers" and that their violence was motivated by greed—"as if aware," Gregory writes, "that anthropologists have a tendency to over-interpret the myth and miss its simple message" (196). As CeCe tells the tale, it is unambiguously a vernacular economic and political theory: the 'simple message' is its critical theoretical thrust linking money to exploitation and death.

We have seen how elite and popular vernacular theories comment on the origins of the cowry currency, linking it to the sea (the Atlantic slave trade) and to sacrifice. Markets are also the subject of densely clustered vernacular theories, many of which link the market to the bush via spirits and witches. As Masquelier notes, it is said that when spirits are not in the bush, they are at the market (18). Just as the legends surrounding cowry currency prevent it from being wholly subsumed into familiarity, beliefs linking the bush to the market signal the ineradicable strangeness of this staple institution. I will argue that these beliefs constitute a vernacular theory of capitalism. Even as they encode people's ambitions of integrating themselves with regional and global economies, they also form a hidden transcript of alienation from and resistance to market domination of life.

The meaning of the market within a society is not stable or unified: people's differing and changing situations will obviously influence their relationship to trade. Stories and interpretative frameworks circulate through communities, and people move between stories and frameworks according to circumstance, preference and need (Snodgrass 619). Accordingly, there are several very different, even contradictory ways of reading the association between bush spirits, witches and markets. In one sense, the belief addresses

concerns about the markets' fortunes and allows people to gain a sense of control over these by sacrifices to spirits. Spirits can also embody the disruptive, disconcerting and transformative powers of money and fetishisation. In the competitive marketplace, the 'law of the jungle' erupts into the centre of social life. Spirits and the bush represent the a-social powers of capitalism. At the same time, however, spirits in the marketplace represent all that which cannot be contained within capitalist logic. They represent the excessive, overflowing energies of life which cannot be translated into money. Spirits and the bush can speak, all at once, to people's desire for success within capitalism, their fear of capitalism's effects, and their refusal to be contained by capitalism. Similarly, the bush both is and is not the market. It represents the market's dark side, *and* it represents an imaginative alternative to the market. As Taussig reminds us, spirits "are as dynamic and ever changing as the network of social relations that encompasses the believers and their meaning mediates those changes" (231). The contradictory possible meanings of market spirits alert us to the extraordinary flexibility and range of vernacular theories, as well as to the difficulties of reading them from outside. Imagery and belief are versatile and slippery theoretical tools.

We will begin by examining spirits as possible routes to market success and as a means of integrating markets into local beliefs. Markets are, Masquelier writes, "where wealth, in the form of goods, animals, people, spirits, and information, converges in a seemingly inexhaustible flux" (20). The flows of wealth through markets are, of course, not inexhaustible, and they are notoriously unpredictable. For those involved in and dependent on trade, there is an anxious, unsatisfiable desire to control the markets' flows. Masquelier

describes the careful divination used to determine the location of new markets:

stones and trees belonging to spirits must not be disturbed, and spirits must be

involved in the new market (17). One of her informants tells her, "The market is

the people's, but it belongs to the spirits also. If you give them alms, you please

their hearts, then they settle down and cause men to come with their loads, they

draw people and draw people—lots of people" (18). The hope is that, through

spirits, markets can be incorporated into local moral and ritual topographies.

Spirits provide a means of reterritorializing the market's flows by connecting

them to local cultural landscapes. Spirits become potential allies for those

hoping to succeed within a market economy.

This courting of spirits, the attempt to win their beneficence and

cooperation, may also relate to the degree of agency which subsistence societies

may exercise when engaging with markets. Hugh-Jones encourages us not to fall

into the "deceptively straight-forward" parable of innocents "seduced by

worthless trinkets…who begin by losing their heads, and end up by losing their

autonomy and culture as well" (qtd. in Godoy 158). According to this argument,

during certain transitional periods, people may negotiate their participation in

markets with a high degree of savvy, and where subsistence farming continues to

exist, they can choose to "step into or out of the market economy" (159). These

circumstances represent a limited, unusual moment in which two economies co-

exist; in which a person may move across two very different 'worlds'.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand such individual economic

negotiations in relation to the global market and governmental forces which

circumscribe them.

The decision to engage with the market entails risks beyond the merely financial. Markets can break down existing social networks and productive patterns. As imported goods replace local production, the desire or need for money increasingly shapes people's lives. Rather than growing food for local consumption, farmers begin to concentrate on cash crops for export—a trend supported by colonial and postcolonial agricultural policies (Highfield 142). Wanting to earn money, young men may travel long distances to work on cocoa farms, in mines or on road construction. These flows of migrant labour not only break up families, the absence of young men can also put a strain on subsistence farming, endangering food security. Sometimes, Masquelier writes, "the market absorbed not simply surpluses but also what was indispensable to the cyclical reproduction of labour and resources." Money, which was emblematic of and instrumental to these dynamics, was "feared as much as it was coveted" (Masquelier 16). Particularly unsettling is money's insubstantial, fleeting, almost spectral nature. As a man from a relatively recently monetised region in Niger put it, "We prefer millet to money. Money gets spent right away; millet is kept in our gullet" (qtd. in Masquelier 16).

For example, by the 1880s Abeokuta had become heavily involved in international trade, and cowries had been almost completely replaced by cash (Byefield 57). The city produced one third of goods exported through Lagos, and it consumed a quarter of goods imported into Lagos (53). The city had been thrown open to the free market, and the whole trading system was based on unregulated credit. African traders struggled in direct competition with European businessmen, but both local and colonial authorities refused to

implement protections. The roaring trade with Lagos left many of Abeokuta's traders in debt or bankrupted (57-9).

These economic and social issues are reflected on and critiqued through the association between markets, the bush, spirits and witches. The bush functions as an extension of the marketplace, a distillation of its most dangerous characteristics. These dangerous characteristics are the forces operating within a marketplace which most threaten social coherence: the forces of alienation, of fetishisation. These are dynamics by which people are torn from what they do, separated from one another, and split within themselves. These are the forces of pure capitalism—of 'the Market' understood as an abstracted force with an invisible hand—and these are the spirits of this forest.

West African marketplaces are social centres, so they are never wholly or solely of 'the Market'—they are also *places* in Tuan's sense, in which "places are centres of felt value," endowed with social, cultural and personal significance (4). The marketplace functions as a centre of social life, so much so that "the need to make a purchase is irrelevant to whether or not someone will go to the market" (Masquelier 17). The malign spirits, to whom markets are particularly attractive, take advantage of this gregarious spirit and corrupt it. This is the paradox of the marketplace: it is simultaneously social and anti-social. It is commonly believed that those one meets at market—friends, family or attractive strangers—may be bush spirits in disguise, as with Tutuola's complete gentleman, who will be discussed in detail in Section 4.2.3. The bush represents the dangers of pure capitalism, the 'Market' which works within and lies beyond the marketplace. The marketplace is at least partially territorialized: it is a concrete *place*,

associated with a town, with roads, and with social life. In contrast, the Market is a smooth space and a force of radical deterritorialization.

The critical and imaginative links between capitalism and magic are made explicit in numerous beliefs which imagine commodification and labour in terms of witchcraft, and urban spaces in terms of spirit worlds. The magic of commodity fetishism is graphically imagined in the northern Ghanaian rumour from the 1990s, recounted by Susan Drucker-Brown, that the bushmeat sold at markets might be witches' victims. Previously, witches had been believed to transform *themselves* into animals and to share their victims' souls at communal witch-feasts. Modern witches, however, were hungry for cash. Rather than eating victims, they changed them into animals and grain to transport and sell at market. The shift in the witches' behaviour mirrors the shift in locals' economic activity, as subsistence agriculture gave way to cash economy through involvement in national and global capitalist systems. Crops and meat which would previously have been consumed locally were now increasingly sold at market in wealthier southern Ghana (Drucker-Brown 539-540).

These parallels formed between the world of witches and the world of capitalism constitute a critique at once visceral and subtle. Witches can be, Shaw writes, "embodiments of predation and the 'cannibalistic' production of human productive and reproductive potential," allowing witchcraft discourse to "crystallise perceptions of the alienation of labour under (post) colonial capitalism….and the dislocations of boom-and-bust cycles to which communities and regions are subject through integration into global markets" (Shaw 203). Here it is important to remember that witchcraft operates between souls, and it posits a separation between soul-activity and conscious activity. A witch's soul

attacks her victim's soul. A victim's body will suffer as a result, but the witch herself will be unaware of her role until it is revealed through divination. The witch is often acting against kin: the intimacy of this violence may reflect domestic spite, but it can also mean that to be a witch is to act against one's own feelings and desires.

Witchcraft can be read as a critique of labour, or more broadly, of human activity as determined by capitalism. Holloway writes, "Labour, as alienated labour, is a separating of ourselves from ourselves, a tearing asunder of ourselves and our activities" (*Crack Capitalism* 88). Witchcraft is a person's alienated activity, which attacks social ties. Love is alienated into appetite, and intimates become meat to sell and consume. Witchcraft is the witch's doing-against-herself, to use Holloway's terminology. When people's energies become focused on markets, they may do damage which they neither intend nor are even aware of—and yet their profits may depend upon this damage.

The witches' victims, transformed into market wares, reflect another aspect of alienation: the objectification that people suffer in market systems. If fetishisation imbues commodities with a magical social independence, it reduces humans to a material existence. A person's 'conscious life-activity' confirms their agency and weaves them into society. However, when conscious life-activity is abstracted into labour, then it does the opposite: a person's life and autonomy are transferred to the products of their labour. Fetishisation transforms a person's energy into commodities as witchcraft magics a victim's *soul* into meat, livestock and seeds. Most horribly, the abstraction of activity into labour is unconscious and unwilled: as "the negation of…self-determination" it can be read as "human self-annihilation" (*Crack Capitalism* 95).

As well as translating the intimate consequences of alienation, witchcraft

discourse can theorise the social dislocations wrought by globalised capitalist

urbanisation.[8] One potent example is noted by Taussig as well as Geschiere and

Nyamnjoh. In the 1960s, Cameroonians were pressured to work in banana

plantations. For the most part, people responded with the "indifference or

outright hostility" to wage labour and the market economy which has been

repeatedly noted, with entrepreneurial exasperation, the world over (Taussig

19). Those who did work for the plantations became wealthier, offending local

egalitarian values (20). They were "reputed not to eat their victims as in older

forms of witchcraft, but to transform them into zombies who can be put to work"

(Geschiere 74). These enslaved family members might drive lorries, pick coffee

or sell street food. Moreover, the zombies laboured not in the ordinary human

world but in an invisible world where the witches lived in a modern city (Taussig

20, Geschiere 74). Such an urban witch-world was repeatedly described to Shaw

by her Sierra Leonean informants in the 1990s. It is a fantasy of modern

prosperity with sinister details:

> skyscrapers adjoin houses of gold and diamonds; Mercedes-Benzes
>
> are driven down fine roads; street vendors roast 'beefsticks'
>
> (kebabs) of human meat; boutiques sell stylish 'witch-gowns' that
>
> transform their wearers into animal predators in the human world;
>
> electronics stores sell tape recorders and televisions (and more
>
> recently, VCRs and computers) and witch airports despatch witch-

---

[8] Not all urbanisation belongs to the world of capitalist modernity, of course. The

Yoruba in particular have been urbanised for centuries (Krapf-Askari 4).

planes…so fast… that 'they can fly to London and back within an

hour—.' (202)

The witch-city is clearly related to the familiar fantasy town where 'the streets

are paved with gold', but in Sierra Leone it is clear that the flash and dazzle of

urban luxury is based on predation. Furthermore, it occupies a wholly different

plane of existence from ordinary human reality: globalised modernity is no place

for people (Shaw 202).

Tutuola's Bush of Ghosts also features surprising oases of pleasure and

luxury. This is used several times for deadpan comic effect in *My Life in the Bush*

of Ghosts: when overwhelmed by the luxuriousness of a "bed which was specially

decorated with expensive clothes" or a "soap which had a sweet and lofty smell,"

the narrator says that "of course it is only in the Bush of Ghosts such a bed could

be found" and "of course, it is in the Bush of Ghosts such soap could be found"

(145, 121). However, the episode which most closely resonates with the beliefs

we have been examining, particularly the Sierra Leonean witch-city, is found in

his 1981 text *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*. As usual, the traveller

comes to the end of the path and must travel "on and on in this wild jungle which

belonged to only wild, cruel, etc. people who were living together with the

immortal beings of the wild jungles" (41). Before losing the path, he has already

battled the self-explanatory "Brutal Ape" (28) and the "Abnormal Squatting Man

of the Jungle" who, with his hair the colour of dry grass, resembles the bush itself

and who tricks victims by "pretending to be motley" or laughing "as if he was

mad" (37). These adversaries represent the obvious dangers of the bush: wild

animals, predatory spirits, and madness.

Once the traveller loses the path, however, becoming truly deterritorialized onto the smooth spaces of the wild jungle, the first danger he faces is a glitzy, cosmopolitan nightclub. As night falls, the sounds of a stream become "lovely noises which were just like multi-music….In this music, all kinds of this-worldly instruments such as harps, bands, guitars, etc. were included. Also, all kinds of the songs which were sung in the whole world's languages were included" (43). On the stream, lit up with "multi-coloured floodlights" (44), he sees musicians and, sitting around tables on stools of gold and silver, the "wealthy wild people." Wealth and wildness are allied: wealth might temporarily conceal wildness, but it is a product of that wildness. The narrator "wondered greatly that the fast-flowing water did not carry them away or even shake them" (45). The "wealthy wild people" live on the flows—of capital and culture—which traverse the smooth space of globalisation. To borrow the language of the current economic crisis, they are the 1%, finding stability in instability, supremely undisturbed by the market fluctuations and crises which overwhelm the rest of humanity.

I have argued that the bush, as well as the magical beings and powers associated with it, can be read as encoding the social disarticulation caused by capitalism. This disarticulation is known as fetishisation, and it operates through money (Holloway *Change the World* 183). Capitalism fragments society and fragments human activity—and in so doing, it also fragments power-relations, creating a certain kind of freedom for labour, which manifests as "restlessness, mobility, liquidity, flux" (182). Holloway argues that this restless freedom—which moves within and against capitalist fragmentation—represents that which is uncontrollable in society. Capitalist fetishisation is a process which

no one controls—and which no one can control. Power has only been

maintained through loss of control, and "the cost of subjugating the power of

labour was to introduce chaos into the very heart of the society" (*Change the*

World 185). Bush-intensities are the chaos of capitalism: they are the

fragmentation of social order, money's transubstantiations, and the market's

violent invisible hands. Bush-intensities flow through markets and cities—but

then they flow out again.

People's life-activity and their social interconnectedness exist, through

capitalism, in alienated, fetishised forms—they exist in negation, and they

manifest themselves as tension (Holloway *Crack Capitalism* 216). As Holloway

argues, "To say that something exists in the form of something else means that it

exists in that form but is not contained in it without remainder: it overflows from

the form, or exists in-against-and-beyond the form" (*Crack Capitalism* 98). In

Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, we might think of this as the relationship between the

Body without Organs and the organism, or between smooth and striated space:

there must be a body to be organised and a smooth space to be striated, and

there is a constant tension between these modes of existence. These energies

exist in disguise, "as menace, as potential: a shadowy figure, but

crucially…distinct from the form in which it exists, the character mask it wears"

(*Crack Capitalism* 216). People in the market, apparently rational self-interested

economic units, may also at the same time be bush spirits in disguise. In-against-

and-beyond the market is the bush: those human and natural energies which

exist in excess of capitalist need and cannot be translated into profit.

Shaw argues that the bush resonates with practical memories of historical

trauma. Conversely, Greaber argues that the terrifying violence of invisible

worlds may be the crackling of creative social energies. Using Marcuse's idea of

"the truth value of memory," we might synthesise these ideas with regards to the

relationship between the bush and the market. Memory, Marcuse writes, can

"preserve promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed…"

(qtd. in Hollway *Crack Capitalism* 169-70). When one way of life is driven out by

another, it may live on in the wilderness as a magical force (170). Therefore,

bush-intensities may be practical memories not only of trauma but also of

alternative patterns of life, of betrayed possibilities. That woman in the market

is not just a petty trader with her wares: she is also a strange creature with

unknown, terrible powers, a spirit only tenuously and temporarily contained by

the form within which it appears. Holloway refers to this existence 'in-against-

and-beyond' as 'ecstatic', drawing on its root meaning of "standing out-beyond"

(*Change the World* 99). In these terms, the bush is not only a tool for theorising

and critiquing capitalism; the bush is also the ecstasy of capitalism, of urbanism,

of modernity.

2.7 The Unmappable Bush

In Tutuola's texts, the bush is an unfathomable expanse, a space of

fantastic threats, an alarmingly fertile source of variation. As we have seen, this

vision resonates strongly with vernacular imaginings, but also with colonial

apprehensions. When considering the bush as a formidable smooth space, it is

worth emphasising just how astonishingly unknowable the bush proved to

modern cartography: as late as 1979, there were no accurate topographical maps

of most of Nigeria, and it was precisely the economically tempting southern

forests which were the hardest to map (Parry 265). Cloud cover made aerial

photography almost useless, and surveyors had to journey through the bush on

foot or by boat, moving with torturous slowness (Morley 179). In the 1970s, at

the request of Obasanjo's military government, eager to exploit its timber

reserves more fully, D. E. Parry's team undertook to map Nigeria using radar.

Although radar could penetrate cloud and tree cover, the team sometimes still

found itself adrift in a mass of unintelligible images. "Cultural areas are

particularly difficult to interpret, since in general neither roads nor railways can

be identified; villages in some areas are equally hard to define…" (Parry 270).

This ambiguity and confusion serve to remind us of the bush's multivalent

character.

The bush is a geographical multiplicity which invites and frustrates

mapping by those looking to make a profit. For subsistence agriculture it is a

necessary reservoir of fertility. In vernacular theory and the literary

imagination, it becomes a critical but unmappable cultural or internal space, the

contents of which cannot be neatly reduced to symbols or analytic content. It is

also a theoretical tool for situating texts and reading their strategies of freedom

and control. With all of this in mind, we can now venture into Tutuola's own

particular Bush of the Ghosts.

Chapter 3
Yoruba Schizohistories

3.1 Vernacular History and Schizohistory

In the previous chapters we examined the bush as a space upon which a dense, shifting network of connections can be formed, and I argued that Tutuola should be read within this cultural matrix of economics, memory and belief. The bush is a multiplicity and an assemblage. It is a vital wild space within which farmers moved, in a dance of cultivation and fallows. Export-oriented plantations disrupted that dance, rooting the farms and stringing roads and railways across the bush. The bush is a space for personal stories and for vast histories, a space which has allowed imaginative and critical engagement with issues which are too complex or painful to look at directly. The bush is a wild space upon which cultural operations of practical memory and vernacular theorisation can be performed. It is a space for thinking about intimate discord, disintegrating sanity, the ravages of the slave trade, and the dazzling transformations wrought by cash economies.

When Tutuola writes about the bush, he is calling up all of these ways in which the bush has been used. He is opening his texts to connections with farming and war, with methods for dealing with trauma, with vernacular theorisations and critiques of social transformation. When I argue that Tutuola's texts should be read in connection with the cultural/natural matrix of the bush, I am arguing that his texts should be read as *engaged with and participating in the world.* Tutuola's texts are unworldly so that they may become worldly. This, fundamentally, is what has been missing from critical readings of Tutuola for the past sixty years: an attentiveness to the sheer range of connections which

Tutuola has been forming, a willingness to engage with the historical and cultural multiplicities from which his texts are assembled. Particularly relevant to reading Tutuola, I will argue, are the nineteenth century histories of trade and war which prepared the way for British colonial consolidation in south-Western Nigeria.

Such a cultural materialist reading can only take us so far, however. The problem is that it is an approach which seeks to explain and decode. Tutuola's texts are resistant to this, however; they are furiously baffling, overloaded with slippery language, excessive bodies, and fragmentary narrative arcs. Tutuola has not simply encrypted his histories: he has distorted and abstracted them, overlaid them with riotous detail, and set them running across disorienting textual spaces. He has created texts in which it is difficult to find and keep one's bearings, even after repeated rereadings. To acknowledge, work with and celebrate these difficulties is to engage with the texts as smooth spaces, to find the bodies without organs of these books. To do this we will have to move from cultural materialism into a Deleuzo-Guattarian reading informed by vernacular theory. We will examine the ways in which contextual situations have entered and passed through Tutuola's texts, as "lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification," which have produced these particular assemblages (A Thousand *Plateaus* 4).

Of course, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* are not novels about the Yoruba Wars or the trade in oil-palm products. They are texts about grotesquely distorted dynamics of greed and domination. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is primarily concerned with unbalanced cycles of consumption

and production, while *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* tracks various permutations of power. Readings of Tutuola need not be informed by historical awareness, nor is Tutuola writing in order to instil any such awareness. The wars and the economic, social and colonial situation which they fostered do constitute the situation from which Tutuola wrote, however. If we do read his novels in that context, this illuminates obscurities within the texts and unravels apparent tangles. Placed in conversation with regional history, Tutuola's texts are not just wilfully strange adventures. They become reflections on the challenge of analysing a multi-dimensional reality in prose fiction, while fashioning an available language into a usable one. Tutuola's multi-dimensional reality considers the region's complex and contradictory experiences of politics, war, slavery, economic transformations, Christianity, modernisation, and cultural layering. His texts suggest that a fixed reality cannot be described; instead, realities must be transformed into dynamic intensities which play across the novel-as-bush, creating a textual smooth space, which can in turn perhaps become its own deterritorializing force.

Tracking contextual traces in Tutuola, we will encounter three different levels of historical engagement. The first level is that of straightforward historical fact: dates, names, and figures which point directly to historical referents. Tutuola rarely operates at this level except to scatter details; these details, however, serve as clues to indicate the relevant contexts. The second level is crypto-historical, representing history in recognisable but encoded forms. The third level—the deepest down or farthest out—is that of schizohistory, in which the context has become so abstracted that it has moved beyond encryption to atmosphere and patterns of intensities. This is the level at

which we will be operating throughout most of our readings. It is a mode which allows the greatest possible flexibility, enabling the author to engage with several different historical moments simultaneously.

In this chapter, I will further demonstrate that a cultural materialist reading of Tutuola is a powerfully illuminating yet ultimately limited approach. The bush is a space for encoding histories, and once we direct our attention to the relevant contexts, we can begin unravelling the coded histories in Tutuola. This process will demonstrate Tutuola's contextual connectedness and will reveal that his texts contain sharp historical and social commentaries. Our cultural materialist reading will focus on two broad areas: the Yoruba Wars of the 1820s-1890s and the economic developments in this region from the nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries. These broad historical sections will help to illuminate themes of violence, alienation and greed within Tutuola's texts.

Having argued for the need to read Tutuola in his historical context, we have come to the point where it is necessary to explain this context. On one level, this is a simple matter: we must take a look at the Yoruba Wars of the nineteenth century and at the cultural and economic transformations which were simultaneously taking place across this region. Beyond this, however, the task becomes more challenging because of the nature of Tutuola's historical engagement: he tears context out of context. He engages with atmospheres, textures, common references and obscure details, all of which have been deterritorialized onto the Bush of Ghosts. We encounter a palm tree plantation which is exactly right but all wrong; precise currency conversions from 1908; ghostly versions of colonial modernisation; and a narrative trajectory which

sounds strangely like a journey taken by a frightened and confused missionary in the 1860s.

Tutuola is, of course, engaging with non-academic and unofficial history—vernacular history and practical memory—which means that the perspectives are fragmented, the details haphazard, and the narrative incomplete. It is history with a general sense of atmosphere and a sharp eye for incident and specifics, history with the tight focus of the anecdotal. History shatters into shards of stories, which may only ever fit loosely within broader narrative or analytical frameworks. In this chapter, part of what we will be doing is reading Tutuola's texts as historical maps, locating the landmarks and tracing the contours of historical planes. These are not maps of academic history, of course, but of crypto- and schizohistories, of personal and collective memories which have been encoded, transformed and abstracted. We must remember that there is an inevitable gap between this perspective and those preserved in the documentary record, which is skewed heavily towards elite oral sources and the accounts of missionaries or colonial officials.

3.2 The Yoruba Wars: A Century of Violence

The Yoruba Wars were "*the* central experience of Yoruba-speaking peoples during the nineteenth century" (Watson 43). Fought between 1820 and 1893, the wars were a period of furious social, political and economic ferment in the gap between the Oyo empire's disintegration and the British empire's assumption of regional dominance. In the following sections, I will first sketch in the basic contours of the Yoruba nineteenth century, and then, adopting a thematic approach, I will more closely examine the historical situation as it relates to Tutuola's texts. These sections will provide historical perspectives on

themes which are driving dynamics within both Tutuola's texts and the Yoruba

nineteenth century: fragmentation, hostility and violence. Each of these sections

will be introduced with a brief consideration of that theme within Tutuola's

texts, primarily *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, and

will proceed to examine aspects of Yoruba and colonial Nigerian history. Further

specific historical detail—as well as further consideration of these dynamics as

manifested in Tutuola's writing—will be discussed in my detailed analysis of *The*

Palm-Wine Drinkard which will follow.

The Yoruba Wars began with the collapse of the Oyo empire, an event

which resulted from and further revealed the many divisions within Yorubaland.

Although the Yoruba had never been an organically unified people, for several

centuries the Oyo empire's dominance had prevented major wars and sheltered

the region from the brunt of the slave trade (Ajayi 63). By the early nineteenth

century, however, Oyo was critically weakened by internal revolts, and it was

conquered by Fulani and Dahomey invaders. Chaos followed, producing huge

movements of refugees, some of whom became predatory raiders in their turn,

destroying towns and villages they encountered in their flight (Law 275).

The diverse Yoruba communities formerly bound by Oyo's authority

turned on one another, each seeking—and failing to gain—decisive military and

political ascendance, an ascendance which was eventually won by the British

empire (Smith 11). From Oyo's collapse, new walled cities arose, each of which

became the nucleus of its own miniature empire, bringing surrounding towns

and villages under their control and exacting tribute. Between these scattered

centres of power, joined in shifting alliances, there developed a cyclical, self-

sustaining logic of war, "which provides in each war a reason for another" (Ajayi

65). War, moreover, was profitable: as well as the capture of slaves and plunder, the Yoruba Wars saw the development of an extremely lucrative arms trade through British Lagos. Battles provided opportunities to win military titles which gave decisive power to those who held them (Ajayi 65). Quite simply, during this period, war came to be a defining dynamic of Yoruba political, social and economic life, creating unprecedented wealth and power for some, while dispossessing and traumatising many more.

Cities were destroyed and created: Abeokuta was founded by refugees; Ibadan was established by their attackers; and Ijaye was reduced to "blackened ruins, the homes of wild beasts of the forest" (Stone 200). Vast numbers of people were displaced in a variety of ways: as refugees fleeing to cities or hiding in the bush (Ajayi 53); as prisoners enslaved either regionally or sold abroad (39); or as migrants seeking military or economic advancement in new cities where old social restrictions had been renegotiated (Falola "From Hospitality to Hostility" 52). The wars led to widespread "devastation and depopulation" caused by famine and "unprovoked slaughter." While we lack firm estimates of casualties, it is likely that deaths of non-combatants were as high as those of combatants, an estimate which does not even factor in the toll of slavery (Ajayi 51-3).

At the same time, the warring cities engaged in radical reshapings of Yoruba society. Ibadan "jettisoned royalty…in preference for military republicanism" oriented towards aggressive expansion and enrichment through plunder, tribute and slaves (Falola "From Hospitality to Hostility" 52-5). The development of its rival, Abeokuta, was heavily influenced by generations of Christian Saro 'modernizers,' who promoted a cash-economy and by the early

twentieth century had established a bureaucratic government consisting of "a secretariat, treasury, audit office, customs department, judicial department, public works department, medical and sanitary department, police, prison, printing office, post office, forest and agricultural office, and an education department," as well as central and village courts (Parrinder-Law 76). In the later nineteenth century, using its by-then limited autonomy, the city government tried—in the face of British colonial opposition—to use tolls from trade to establish an economic basis for structural modernisation (70, 75), including water-works, road-building and street-lighting projects, initiatives which were halted and reversed when the British finally gained full control in 1914 (79).

Lagos hovers on the periphery of the wars—decisively important, yet distanced. Its coastal location had made it a key port in the Atlantic slave trade (Waterman 30), and it therefore quickly came under attack when, in the mid-nineteenth century, the British began to use anti-slavery treaties as pretexts for military intervention in the region (Falola *Violence* 3). After the abolition of the slave trade, Lagos would begin to play a key role in the European quest for oil-palm products, cotton and cocoa. Lagos' strategic importance in these emerging export markets led to "an aggressive push on the city" by British traders; the justification for the use of military force was provided by the continued export of slaves from the port city (Falola *Violence* 3). Under pressure from traders, the British government exploited local rivalries to insert themselves into Lagosian politics. When they attacked the city, they were able to claim they had been, in Falola's words, "invited by the king to intervene, allegedly to end the slave trade."

The British seized the city "following two artillery battles and 'the burning of a large portion of Lagos'" (4).

The Yoruba Wars raging just inland from Lagos provided another lucrative market. The arms trade became a thoroughly integrated aspect of colonial Lagos' commercial activities (Ajayi 20), and the British colonial power used embargoes and even military intervention to open and maintain the flows of arms, cotton and palm products from war-torn Yorubaland to the coast (11). The city prospered, and by the late nineteenth century, in addition to the Europeans, Lagos was ruled by a prominent Saro elite, comprising "upper-level civil servants, missionaries, doctors, lawyers or merchants representing European interests" (Ajayi 33). This population harboured romantic notions about "authentic" Yoruba culture, but at the same time they held themselves aloof from the Lagos indigenes, who in turn referred to them as "Black Europeans" (33). These divided cultural understandings are reflected in Tutuola's two very different idylls, the agrarian Wraith-Island and the metropolitan white tree.

3.3 Fragmentation

Fragments pieced together in jagged, overloaded assemblages: this is the sense conveyed by Tutuola's episodic narratives, the bodies of his monsters, and his sentences. Fragmentation is an unmissable feature of Tutuola's writing, and it has been widely commented on, most commonly as it manifests in his episodic narrative structures. Put simply, things keep happening, and the Drinkard keeps moving—but the events hardly matter, and neither does the journey. Fragmentation precludes development, and beneath the text's furious, joyful energy, the reader may become aware of a futility, a frustration, a sense of the

nothingness which underlies this excess. Critics have been reluctant, however, to read Tutuola's fragmentations as anything other than stylistic flaws. Eldred Jones writes that "All the energy is spent on the individual episodes which are loosely strung together. There is no attempt at any meaningful inter-connection or over-all point of view" (113). Similarly, Bernth Lindfors likens the Drinkard's adventures, which are "independent units joined with a minimum of apparatus and set in a seemingly random and interchangeable order," to "boxcars on a freight train" (283). The image has a fitting, if unintentional, resonance in a colonial historical context, and one that also conveys the dynamism, speed and power of Tutuola's writing. Lindfors catches Tutuola's hints at futility and nothingness—but he seems to read these as indications that critical endeavour is futile in the face of Tutuola's shallow artistic activity: "To search for an orderly system or well-developed artistic pattern in the succession of disjointed episodes…is to search for symmetry in chaos, for deliberate design in chance" (283). Despite the dismissive tone of his remarks, Lindfors is nevertheless right to argue against imposing critical systems on texts which have an undeniable chaotic element—particularly if we take chaos in its mathematical sense, of resisting formulaic systemisations. The chaotic, fragmented character of Tutuola's texts, however, is not a product of artistic carelessness, but serves a critical purpose.

Before considering the schizohistorical implications of Tutuola's broken narratives and patchwork monsters, however, it will also be useful to consider one more perspective on the fragmentary density of his texts, offered by Armstrong. The rapid succession of disconnected and images, Armstrong suggests, can be compared to drum beats: "Thus episodicism is to be seen as the

affecting desire to achieve continuity by means of a density of discrete elements"
(234). Tutuola's writing is rhythmic, a unity of fragments held together by
speed, density and shared intensity. This rhythmic aspect of Tutuola's style, and
its connetion to the spirits of Drum, Song and Dance, will be discussed in greater
detail below in Section 4.2.5.

The narrative fragmentation in Tutuola is clearly a function of a
fragmented landscape: the Bush of Ghosts is divided by borders, lines that block
communication and passage, and that breed hostility towards strangers. The
forest is impossibly dense and the grass is razor-sharp; there are no roads, and
where there are, the roads are the most dangerous places of all. The fragmented
bush and the fragmented narrative to which it gives rise are rooted in the
profoundly fragmented history of the Yoruba region. Furthermore, this
traumatic fragmentation was, by the mid-twentieth century, being concealed
beneath nationalist narratives of unity.

As Robert July writes, nineteenth century Yorubaland was marked by
"warfare, isolation and separatism" (July 177). Without the centrifugal force of
Oyo's authority, the region flew apart. Fleeing the Muslim Fulani invaders from
the Sokoto region, the refugees of Oyo streamed towards the southern forests.
They then moved into what had been the semi-autonomous Egba region of the
Oyo empire (Ajayi 11). There, the refugee-warriors burned and destroyed every
Egba town, village and settlement, before finally occupying as a military camp
the former Egba village of Ibadan (Falola "From Hospitality to Hostility" 52).
Years later, the missionary Anna Hinderer, based in Ibadan, commented that the
landscape was littered with the ruins of the one hundred and forty-five

decimated Egba towns, "the sites of which have since been overrun by the bush, so that all traces of their existence have disappeared" (Hinderer 215).

The Egba refugees gathered themselves in a sheltered, rocky outcrop, where they founded the city of Abeokuta, Tutuola's home town. The refugee city grew rapidly, so that by the 1850s its population was estimated at between 60,000 and 100,000 (Bascom 447, Phillips 118), making it at least twice as populous as Lagos, which at the time had only 30,000 inhabitants (Cole 8). The city was a remarkably patchwork polity, marked by division and fine distinctions between familial and community subgroups. The refugees gathered for defense without surrendering their distinct identities: the city was never a unified civic body but rather "a recreation of old Egba towns on contiguous sites" within defensive walls (Parrinder-Law 67). Each distinct diasporic community was governed over by its own chiefs or elders: the city consisted of 150 largely autonomous townships (Phillips 118). Abeokuta, then, is a remarkable example of singular multiplicity or multiple singularity.

Having briefly examined the history of the Yoruba Wars, and the evidence of profound social divisions which preceded and were exacerbated by those wars, we might now pause to ask what is meant by 'the Yoruba' and how they came to be spoken of as a single body. In 1891, the British observer Alvon Millson wrote that the twelve million inhabitants of the region were "divided by racial and intertribal slave wars into almost innumerable subdivisions" (579). He was, of course, mistaken, as the wars did not create but rather highlighted and exacerbated earlier divisions, translating distinction into violence.

The term 'Yoruba' was coined and applied by missionaries "searching for a standard Yoruba to reduce to writing" (Diké 2). To find a 'standard Yoruba',

they first had to invent it. They chose to designate as 'standard' the Oyo dialect of *Anago*, called 'Yoöba' (Diké 4). Having renamed *Anago* 'Yoruba', the missionaries then used this term to refer to the speakers of the language (2). As Deleuze and Guattari write, "The unity of language is fundamentally political. There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language…" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 112). In a series of metonymic steps, a fallen empire's dialect became—through cultural imperialist intervention—a language, and the language became the people.

Written Yoruba was solidified by the publication activities of literate elites, mostly the "bilingual, bicultural" Saro, in Lagos and Abeokuta from the 1880s to the 1930s (Barber 32). In newspapers, pamphlets and books, they hoped to collect and preserve Yoruba history, proverbs and riddles, thus creating a national literature which could form the "foundations of a modern civilisation," in the words of a collector of proverbs, S. A. Allen (Barber 33). The urge to form a unified tradition, and thus also to draw a clear line between tradition and modernity, emerged precisely from the history of discord and discontinuity. Many of the elites were returned slaves and their descendents, and thus shared a history of violent displacement and dispossession from their communities and cultures. The Yorubaland they returned to was riven by war. Many of their home villages would have been obliterated. The political and physical landscapes had been irrevocably altered. Thus we can understand their desire to preserve, create and form a Yoruba culture, and ultimately a Yoruba 'nation,' as an imaginative act of return intended to cement and hold their troubled physical return.

One of the masterworks of this period was Samuel Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas*. Yet, as Ato Quayson points out, this is a patriotism which creates its own object: Johnson is participating in "the spectacular production of a notion of nationness" out of and in reaction to the "state of perplexing fluidity and constant flux that *The History* so painfully details" (Quayson 36, 38). Johnson "maps an integrated homogeneity across splintering identities" and "does not allow the violent contradictions among the Yoruba people to act as an interruptive factor" (39). Tutuola's texts, by contrast, foreground—almost rejoice in—splintering, violent contradictions and interruptions. The term 'Yoruba' is a palimpsest of imperial powers, and, like 'the bush', it is a singular term containing multiplicities. These sublimated divisions and hostilities, these inconvenient histories, are key to Tutuola's texts.

3.4 Hostility and Violence

From fragmentation's jagged lines of self/other, hostility and violence easily follow. Tutuola's protagonists are confronted with endless permutations of otherness, and are themselves relentlessly identified and persecuted as other: as stranger, unknown creature, as an 'alive', as a 'town person'. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the bush bristles with predators who ambush, pursue and try to devour the travellers, while the ghostly cities and markets operate through capture, torture and sacrifice. In *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Tutuola explores the shibboleths of acculturation, as the protagonist is repeatedly absorbed into and expelled from ghost societies. He assumes and sheds the roles of slave, entertainer, god, ward, convert, husband, and finally judge. Temporary settling and acceptance may be possible—as they were for Yoruba migrants, or even slaves—but rejection and even violence remain open possibilities.

Not only is this dynamic clearly evident in the Yoruba nineteenth century, it has remained a dangerous problem across Nigeria to the present day. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, communal conflicts have claimed 13,500 lives. Analysing the Jos riots, Krause finds that the tension between 'strangers' and indigenes is prevalent across Nigeria:

> The constitution privileges local descent over residency. Those who leave their state of origin risk becoming 'second-rate citizens' in another part of the federation. Within a country of more than 250 ethnic groups, the discrimination against non-indigenes in all six geopolitical zones threatens to tear the country apart. (2)

Indigene rights were one of the main causes of riots in Jos, Plateau State, in which, since 2001, nearly 4,000 people have died and hundreds of thousands have been displaced (Krause 1). The divisions and tensions manifested within Tutuola's fictions—and ignored within nationalist rhetoric—were genuine, persistent and dangerous.

When Tutuola writes landscapes and social formations which are defined by and function primarily through violence, we can feel the reverberations of the Yoruba Wars, wars which profoundly reshaped and permeated social processes. This is most evident in the history of Ibadan, a city which began as the camp of deterritorialized bands of warriors. In Ibadan, civil power was won on the battlefield, and public space was regularly transformed into a battleground by rowdy, undisciplined warriors (Watson 47). War defined civil society, but in ways which weakened and undermined it.

To understand the history of Ibadan—and, more generally, the destabilising effect of violence on Yoruba civil society as felt in Tutuola's

writing—we will make use of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the opposition between the war machine and the state apparatus. These are, they theorise, two radically different modes of social functioning: the state is striating, vertical, and fixated on continuity (*A Thousand Plateaus* 397); while the war machine "seems to be irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere." The war machine, a nomadic force of smooth space, is fundamentally opposed to stability and hierarchy, "like a pure and immeasurable multiplicity, a pack, an irruption of the ephemeral and the power of metamorphosis" (388). 'Becoming' is so fundamental to the war machine—far more fundamental, indeed, than war or violence of any kind—that Paul Patton has suggested it should be more appropriately called the 'metamorphosis machine' (Robinson).

The metamorphic aspect of the war machine became a defining characteristic of nineteenth century Ibadan, in which the civic community "was continually recreated through warfare—both inside and outside Ibadan city," as the city expanded its imperial reach and warriors scrambled for advancement and authority (Watson 48). The war machine is external to the state and opposed to the state—but states are machines of appropriation, and thus they are able to 'capture' war machines, transforming them into armies (Robinson). In Ibadan, we find a moment of strange tension: a war machine incompletely captured by a state apparatus, or perhaps even a state apparatus partially captured by a war machine. Nineteenth century Ibadan was a violently self-contradictory assemblage: as soon as the warriors settled, they manifested an impulse towards state-formation, continuity, and striation—yet in this military republic, civil power was constantly contested, both by military rivals and by the

population at large, who might band together to "hound an overly powerful chief to suicide" (Watson 47).

As a war machine city-state, Ibadan resisted stability and civil striation: it retained something violent, nomadic and disorderly at its core for its first decades of existence. Its condition is summed up in the Yoruba dictum, which Ruth Watson takes as the title of her history: "Civil disorder is the disease of Ibadan." As Falola summarises, Ibadan "was essentially a military state, with a military-oriented system of government and an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy. At Ibadan, rules…were relaxed to accommodate the eccentricities of war-chiefs and the excesses of common soldiers" ("From Hospitality to Hostility" 53). This riotous excess was incorporated into the rhythms of Ibadan life, as indicated in a passage from Samuel Johnson, purporting to quote a warrior rousing his troops for battle:

> He used to remind them…that it is the bravest who will be
> honoured, who can break the laws with impunity. "Remember the
> bazaars, the Ibu market, what pleasures you often enjoy there,
> pleasures bordering on crime. Now is the time to atone for them if
> you will enjoy yourself again…. (qtd. in Watson 46)

As Watson notes, commenting on this passage, battle becomes a means of expiating "street violence…in order to engage in it again" (47). Violence abroad legitimates violence at home, while violence at home necessitates further violence abroad. Johnson draws lines of continuity between the battlefield and the market, and lines of causality between civil strife and warfare. The marketplace becomes another battlefield, another smooth space open for disorderly domination by the war machine. Both markets and the war machine

resist containment and instead require constantly renewed deterritorializations. As the trader must travel, as their goods and money must circulate, so the warrior must set out to battle again and again. The city was not—could not—be truly settled as long as its affairs were dictated by endless cycles of warfare. Expressing this sense of a nomadic war machine barely contained by its guise as a city, Johnson writes:

> Although they seemed to be now settled, yet they really lived by plunder and rapine…the people were so much given to slave hunting that they could not grow corn enough for home consumption….At home, violence, oppression, robbery, man-stealing were the order of the day. (qtd. inWatson 45)

The Ibadan Johnson describes is a hive of crime and cruelty, devoted to lawless violence to an extent reminiscent of Tutuola's Unreturnable-Heavens' Town. Intensely engaged in enrichment through destruction, Ibadan seems to drive itself along a cliff edge of annihilation. Slave-hunting is predatory consumption, which feeds upon but is antithetical to others' productive labours. The city of Ibadan, in Johnson's description, is a war machine straining against the superficial striations of city existence—a city which is *not* "settled" but nomadic, fundamentally opposed to the reterritorializations of either agriculture or state authority.

After the imposition of peace by the British, these restless social formations were submerged and suppressed—but they did not disappear. Among the first British actions in Ibadan were the construction of a court and a jail (Watson 70). The new regime was guarded by hunters: while formerly they might have been hunters, now they became policemen—although, like warriors,

their armed indiscipline could make them more of a hazard than a protection (76).

In Tutuola, we sense a place in which violence has been sublimated and transmogrified, but not carefully channelled and certainly not resolved. The wars ended, but they were never settled. They were simply stopped by the imposition of superior external force, a force which pressed the already fragmented social body into new moulds of centralised authority and intensified market engagement. The Yoruba Wars became an uncomfortable memory, an inconvenient history devoid of moral value. It was a useless story, not worth telling and better to forget. Tutuola's texts crackle with the intensities of these unedifying histories, but if these energies have been detected they have not been welcomed by Nigerian elites. As Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie wrote in 1970, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* "does not embody the Yoruba nation's conception of its own history…nor is it intended to express the collective consciousness of a group" (146). The history of the Yoruba Wars and the histories within Tutuola's texts are, like the slave trade, histories which are difficult to look at directly: they are histories of guilt, histories of internecine violence and histories which seem to whisper of future violence.

Chapter 4
A Close Reading of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*

In this chapter, we will move through the smooth spaces of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard.* We will examine the text's schizohistorical traces, which will connect us not only to the Yoruba Wars but also to music, economics and folktales. In this reading, I will demonstrate the usefulness of a Deleuzo-Guattarian approach not only for elucidating historical resonances, but also for helping us to understand how and why this text functions as it does.

4.1 Reading Palms and the Palm Economy

As I have suggested previously, it is possible to read the opening passages of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as presenting an oil-palm plantation, while the palm-wine represents the profitable palm-oil and palm-kernels. Tutuola opens the text by informing us that "in those days we did not know other money, except COWRIES…and my father was the richest man in our town" (191). Stripped of context, this statement seems to place us in a vague, magical African past, with the phrase "we did not know other money" setting up a sense of primitive ignorance or naivety. The "COWRIES," however, capitalised for emphasis, locate us in the nineteenth or early twentieth century at the latest, and they locate us within a slave economy. The father's wealth, held in cowries, is quite likely to be profit from the slave trade. The father uses this wealth to procure a massive "palm-tree farm which was nine miles square and it contained 560,000 palm-trees" (191). These figures have never been read except, as Robert Armstrong has it, as another instance of Tutuola's "propensity towards…very funny precision, particularly in matters of quantity, size and price" (224).

Surprisingly, however, the figures Tutuola provides for the Drinkard's'

plantation are actually agriculturally accurate. The Drinkard's father has created

an absolutely real palm plantation—using wealth held in 'slave-currency.' The

precise agricultural detail which Tutuola has employed here is striking, and we

should note it in detail. The Drinkard's farm, which is nine miles square, or 81

square miles, comprises 51,840 acres or 20,979 hectares. In thick groves or on

plantations, palms grow at a density of six to ten trees per acre (Martin 96). This

makes the figure of 560,000 trees in 51,840 acres only a very slight over-farming

of the land.

Oil-palm farms in excess of 1,000 hectares are defined as plantations (22),

making the Drinkard's farm an extraordinarily large plantation. Thus the

father's wealth, derived in all probability from the slave trade, has been

translated into palm trees, just as the region's economy shifted from the export

of slaves to the export of palm products harvested and transported by slaves.

Very subtly, Tutuola has suggested a century's economic transformations, while

also implying a continuity in privilege.

Given the background presence of the slave trade in these opening pages,

we should perhaps wonder about the status of the "expert palm-wine tapster"

(*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 191). Tutuola does not specify whether he is a wage

labourer, a slave, or an indentured servant (called a pawn) paid in cowries,

standing at the border between slavery and wage labour (Ogundiran 447, Byfield

66). Whatever his precise status, however, palm-wine tappers are the

emblematic low-status workers, largely because theirs is such a difficult,

dangerous profession (Corley and Tinker 5)—and of course, the tapster does fall

from a palm-tree, and it is his death upon which the whole novel relies (192).

Achebe reads the tapster as being unambiguously a slave, forced into "socially-useless work," an embodiment of the exploitative foundations and dire social consequences of the Drinkard's hedonism (*Hopes and Impediments* 257).

The tapster dies, but then throughout the text, the Drinkard is shown pursuing him across the bush, trying to catch him and bring him back to work: the narrative lurking ghost-like in the back of this novel is that of the escaped slave travelling through the bush towards a haven in Lagos. Many slaves and pawns did escape their masters throughout the nineteenth century, in such numbers that it created a labour shortage. They fled into the bush, so that just as the bush had previously become synonymous with the capture of slaves, it also became a space of escape and potential freedom. Not only could escaped slaves and servants pass through the bush to make new lives for themselves in Lagos, they also established free villages in the bush (Byfield 65-6). The Drinkard finds the tapster in Deads' Town, in which "both white and black deads were living"—clearly an image of the cosmopolitan colonial capital. There the tapster is able to greet his former master as a confident, fully-qualified dead man, secure in the knowledge that his recapture is impossible (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 278).

I have argued that palm-wine represents the profits from the trade in palm-products, while the Drinkard represents the market's insatiability, the addiction to excess which such profits bring, and so it does—but not completely. The palm-wine is still palm-wine; it cannot be completely contained within a symbolic reading—otherwise, why bother with the symbolism at all? Why not simply represent the rich son of a plantation owner? The joke here, perhaps, is that the Drinkard's father establishes this large plantation *not* to profit from the export of palm oil and kernels, but simply to keep his lazy son supplied with

drink. There is also a crucial distinction between palm-wine and the other palm

products such as palm oil and kernels, a quality which places it in a completely

different economic category: palm-wine is highly perishable, and therefore

impossible to export. Because of this, Prest's economic survey of Nigeria

categorises palm-wine as "forest produce" rather than "palm produce." The

market in forest produce is so informal, so extremely localised that Prest cannot

measure it accurately, estimating its value with a fifty per cent margin of error,

so that the sector might be miniscule or might be more valuable than transport

and distribution (Prest 61). The local market for palm-wine could be highly

profitable—"at one time…[revenue from] palm-wine was said to be higher than

that from palm oil or palm kernels" (Corley 465).

Palm-wine is that which cannot be deterritorialized. It is a local pleasure,

a home comfort. The intoxicating flows of palm-wine cannot be abstracted into

the flows of the global market. Palm-wine belongs to the territorialized, specific

smooth space of the forest and its semi-wild palm groves, rather than to the

generalised, global smooth space of capitalism. Palm-wine appears resistant to

the market because it is resistant to deterritorialization. Bearing this in mind, it

is also worth noting that however lucrative local sales of palm-wine may be, no

one in Tutuola's text ever thinks to sell it. The Drinkard at the beginning of the

text is an immensely greedy man—but he is also a generous one, sharing his

palm-wine with "uncountable" friends (191) (whose affection for him, of course,

is transparently self-interested [192]). To see such a high level of hospitality in a

character who is being established as a person of dangerous appetites may be an

indication of just how far the market has *not* penetrated the world portrayed by

Tutuola.

The tapster may be an image of a labour force in flight: escaped slaves, disobedient pawns, migrant labourers seeking better fortune in the big city. He is also the labour which is required to unlock potential riches: without him, the palm plantation is unproductive, like a factory during a strike. From this, we can move towards a more abstracted reading of the tapster as a force which can unblock flows. Not only is he "an expert palm-wine tapster," he later gives the Drinkard a marvellously productive egg and expedites the couple's journey home (279). Without him, the Drinkard's flows become hopelessly blocked, and the Drinkard's search for the tapster is also a quest to restore the flows. Mbembe recognises this sense of blocked flows, reading the tapster's death as the Drinkard's castration, which brings to an end "the coupling of seminal liquid and narcissistic power" (*Life, Sovereignty and Terror* 7-8). Mbembe's implication that the palm-wine represents creative potential—which the Drinkard is squandering on non-productive self-indulgence—seems persuasive, although to equate the tapster with the Drinkard's testicles denies the tapster the agency and autonomy which the tapster so resolutely claims.

The tapster's death results in the Drinkard's social exclusion, to the extent that he himself becomes ghostlike: when he greets a friend, "he did not approach me at all, he hastily went away" (193). Indeed, the Drinkard's isolation, his social death, mirrors the tapster's own experience, as recounted in Deads' Town: "he came back to my house on the very night that he fell and died at the farm and looked at everyone of us, but we did not see him, and he was talking to us, but we did not answer, then he went away" (279). The tapster's story is a silent counterpart to the Drinkard's, the tale of the subaltern which we can only glimpse through the effusive narratives of privilege. This parallel between their

experiences strengthens Hogan's reading of the text as an account of the *Drinkard's* own death, a death which he has brought upon himself by disrupting the cycles of fertility and violating Yoruba ethics of reciprocity: life's cycles fail when reciprocity fails due to greed or excess (34-5).

4.2 Entering the Bush and Entering Folkloric Space

4.2.1 Leaving Home

The Drinkard sets off "one fine morning" on a journey in pursuit of his tapster, away from the failed striations of his plantation and his social existence, on the trail of death. As he leaves his "father's hometown," Tutuola suddenly gives us a dizzying sense of its extreme isolation:

> But in those days, there were many wild animals and every place was
>
> covered by thick bushes and forests; again, towns and villages were
>
> not near each other as nowadays…I was travelling from bushes to
>
> bushes and from forests to forests and sleeping inside it for many
>
> days and months…and again I could spend two or three months
>
> before reaching a town or a village. (193)

The bush engulfs and dwarfs human settlements. In the plantation, Tutuola offered us a glimpse of the forests' negation through the monocultural trajectory of market-led developments, but with the tapster's death, the plantation is interrupted and we suddenly see the forest. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* begins on the brink of profound ecological and economic transformation, but when the spiralling acceleration of production and consumption is interrupted by the tapster's death/exile/escape, Tutuola returns to the moment of the forests' supremacy.

The journey into the forest is a movement towards the past—Tutuola tells us that the forests are not as thick now as they were "in those days"—but I would suggest that, in the flickering schizohistorical timeframe of this text, the Drinkard is not simply looking back into his own past as he narrates his story, but also that by leaving his father's hometown for the forest, he dislodges himself from his own historical moment. He is moving from the plantation to the bush, and the bush, as we have seen, is also a historical space. Different spaces are characterised by their own speeds, by the kinds of time and movement which are appropriate to the particular space. The plantation was a space of almost inhuman haste, as the tapster tapped wine at a pace impossible to sustain or replicate. The bush, by contrast, is a space in which distances are measured by time, and time is drawn out by the laboured slowness of travel through the bush—thus we move into a different mode, a folkloric mode. The distances created by slowness lead to isolation: the bush fragments the landscape, and from our contextual awareness of the bush, we can guess that this bush which separates towns and impedes travel is a matrix which contains violence, greed and terror.

After his initial period in the bush, the Drinkard and the text emerge into a folkloric space. Tutuola signals the shift with familiar tropes such as tricksters, gods and challenges (194-5), then leads both reader and Drinkard through a series of retold tales, including the capture of Death (195-9), the beautiful girl's capture by Skulls (200-13), and the monstrous baby (214-21). Tutuola remains in the folkloric space, exploring the potential of these tales, while the Drinkard is searching for his tapster in the human world. He leaves it when the Drinkard learns that the tapster has reached Deads' Town—from that point "there was no

road or path which to travel, because nobody was going there from that town at all." Instead, as the section heading declares, they "OUGHT TO TRAVEL FROM BUSH TO BUSH" (223).

The Drinkard's earthbound search matches Tutuola's explorations of folklore: they are exhausting the possibilities of familiar territories. Yet while Tutuola manages to use these tales to mobilise themes of death, slavery, greed and devastation, ultimately he is walking us through these tales to take us beyond them. The Drinkard journeys *through* the retold tales, seeking but never finding the tapster, the key to unblocking the flows. Information about the tapster's whereabouts is repeatedly promised as a reward for completing certain challenges set by local authorities (first a "god" [194], then "the head of the town" [200])—but the information is never given, the promise never fulfilled. The reward is constantly deferred: the old man tells him "there remained another wonderful work to do for him" (195) and his father-in-law withholds his information to prevent his daughter's leaving with the Drinkard (214). The Drinkard is blocked and held until the forces of deterritorialization break free in destructive fury, first as death unleashed upon the world (199) and then as the greedy changeling (217).

4.2.2 Encountering Gods and Death

As the Drinkard comes into the folkloric zone he encounters otherworldly figures living in quiet domesticity—a harmonious balance which he utterly disrupts. The Drinkard meets "an old man, this man was not a really man, he was a god and he was eating with his wife when I reached there" (194). From comma to comma, we jump further and further from ordinary reality—then return abruptly to normality after the conjunction. Tutuola's grammar brings different

levels of reality into close conjunction. Playfully demonstrating the declarative power of the writer, he follows the revelation of the old man's godhood with an announcement of the Drinkard's: "but I myself was a god and a juju-man….my name was 'Father of the gods who could do everything in this world'"—following which, the Drinkard becomes "a very big bird" (194). As discussed in the previous chapter in Section 2.4, West African pantheons remain relatively open, and it is accepted that shamanic journeys into the bush can reveal new divinities. If a 'juju-man' can go into the bush and discover an oracular god, perhaps the novelist can go into the bush and discover an oracular novel. In this passage, as the old man becomes god and Drinkard becomes bird, Tutuola is flourishing his textual powers of transformation and becoming, playing with a sense that it is, in fact, a human, and even more so, a *writer* who is "the Father of gods who could do everything in this world."

The old man orders the Drinkard to capture Death (195), a supposedly impossible or lethal task which will rid him of his troubling visitor (199). Tutuola provides no motivation for the old man's hostility, unless perhaps it is the Drinkard's disrespectful intrusion on his meal (194). The old man's animosity towards the Drinkard may refer to the adversarial relationship between the Yoruba and their capricious gods (Liyong 118), but it also extends the idea of dissolving sociality. First the Drinkard's friends refuse his hospitality, and now the man he asks for directions tries to send him to his death. When he arrives at Death's house, the violations of hospitality escalate as Death the host tries to kill his sleeping guest (197). In the world of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, friendship and hospitality are at best self-interested, and at worst thin disguises for murderous intent: Tutuola creates the sense of a society collapsing into

atomised hostility, where each social interaction contains the possibility of micro-warfare.

The escalation of hostilities climaxes when the Drinkard unleashes Death at the old man's doorstep, so that "the whole people in that town ran away for their lives and left their properties there." Ever since, the Drinkard explains in 'just-so' style, Death "has no permanent place to dwell or stay, and we are hearing his name about in the world" (199). This conclusion does not mean what it seems, most simply to mean: this is *not* a tale of death's origins, as death is already an established part of the narrative landscape; rather, it is a tale of social collapse taken to its extreme conclusion. The social code is violated, and so the social body (the town) is scattered into the isolated individuals which composed it. This is the first of many attacks by the Drinkard upon a town, and the resulting image of the town abandoned by inhabitants fleeing death is, as we saw in Stone's and Hinderer's accounts, an important image from the Yoruba Wars. The Drinkard's deterritorialization of Death, as the final step in a breakdown of social decency, moves the text towards war.

Embedded in this tale of intensifying hostility, we encounter Death the farmer: "When I reached his (Death's) house, he was not at home at that time, he was in his yam garden which was very close to his house" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 196). Hogan reads the episode as "an allegorization of the life-sustaining function of agriculture" ("Understanding" 43). Death causes the Drinkard to be bound with drum-strings, while the Drinkard orders the yam ropes and stakes to bind and beat Death in return (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 196). Hogan reads this as "Death subdued…by crops" in "a rather obvious way" ("Understanding" 43). Furthermore, Hogan argues that throughout the novel,

beatings and whippings may be read as purifying scourges, moving society towards a restoration of balance (39). While aspects of Hogan's reading are persuasive, it fails to adequately address *The Palm-Wine Drinkard's* complexity, subtlety and strangeness. This is in part due to Hogan's lack of historical grounding: relying instead on ahistorical anthropological evidence, he is led towards simplified symbolic patternings. Hogan argues that *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is about balance disrupted—*and restored*—but in seeking these harmonious resolutions, Hogan is forced to ignore the many disruptive elements in the text, elements that resist any resolution.

The Drinkard's encounter with Death—his deterritorialization of Death—sends a town's population into flight and causes a generalised increase in terror and killing. This is not an allegory of agriculture's power to sustain life, although it may in part be a tale about agriculture's failure in times of war. Hogan's reading inverts Tutuola's imagery. Death tending his yams is an image rooted in mutualistic cycles of growth and decay. On the other hand, Death bound and beaten by yam ropes and stakes is an overthrow of that peaceful balance. The Drinkard's weaponisation of yam ropes and stakes is an inversion of the Biblical image of swords beaten into ploughshares. The Drinkard, child of the plantation, removes Death from his natural place in subsistence agriculture. Perhaps there is a suggestion here of the elimination of fallow 'dead-time' in the drive for increased profits in cash-cropping, and the rippling impact this has upon farming communities—we may even wonder at a link between this episode and the famine at the end of the text (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 295).

This is not simply a tale of greed disrupting the natural balance, however. Death uses bones to build his furniture, eats from skulls, burns bones for fuel:

this comfort constructed out of killing suggests worlds which have been built from exploitation and death. Death attacks his guest and lives in isolation from "even bush animals and birds" (196-7). Death may have been a farmer, but that does not make him either peaceful or innocent—nor does it lessen the disastrous complications of his deterritorialization. This story breathes hints of slavery, of disrupted subsistence, of social disintegration, and of war.

4.2.3 The Complete Gentleman

In the story of the Curious Creature, Tutuola explores a popular folk story, at least seven variants of which can be found across collections of Yoruba folktales (Tobias 71). In Tutuola's treatment, the tale shuttles between the market and the forest, exploiting the affinity between them established within vernacular theory. Market and bush are connected in a dynamic tension, like the two modes of the Curious Creature: the complete gentleman and the Skull. The Drinkard is asked for help by the head of a town, whose "daughter was taken away by a curious creature from the market," a phrase which is repeated four times in a page (200). Meaning doubles up within Tutuola's ambiguous phrasing, so that the daughter is taken from the market by a creature who is from the market, an emanation of the place. That the marketplace is thematically central to the story, rather than simply being a convenient meeting place, is suggested by Tutuola's insistent invocation of the word: "market" is repeated nineteen times in three pages (200-2). The town in this tale "was not so big, although there was a large and famous market" (200): civic life is overshadowed by the market-place, which draws "spirits and curious creatures from various bushes and forests [who] were coming to this market every 5th day to sell or buy articles" (201). The market's gravitational pull establishes a rhythm of tidal

flows in and out of the town, and the tale establishes the dangerous consequences of getting caught in these flows.

Tutuola establishes the daughter as economically independent and personally ungovernable, a characterisation which draws on Yoruba women's traditional autonomy. The daughter "was a petty trader and she was due to be married before she was taken away from the market" (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 201). Tutuola's slippery grammar allows for a suggested connection between the woman's marriage and her removal from the market, as if she would cease to be a petty trader once she had a husband. This is, of course, precisely what happens, through her marriage to the Drinkard (213). However, this would not have been the normal course of events. As Judith Byfield explains, "Yoruba gender ideology…expected women to work, keep their profits, and support their children's daily upkeep" (23). Their degree of independence disturbed nineteenth century missionaries, who hoped to end polygamy and "domesticate wives" by using 'legitimate trade' in cash crops to create a Christian middle class (22).

The daughter "refused totally" to marry any man, "So that her father left her to herself" (Tutuola 201). Hogan interprets her refusal to marry as a refusal to reproduce and to participate in the project of social continuity: by nullifying her own fertility, she is choosing the path of death, as represented by the Skulls (43-4). Although Hogan is certainly right to read these Skulls, with their grave-like underground dwelling (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 205), as symbolic of death, he completely ignores the significance of the market in this tale.

The woman is lured away from "sell[ing] her articles as usual" by "a beautiful 'complete' gentleman…dressed with the finest and most costly

clothes…if he has been an article or animal for sale, he would be sold for at least £2000 (two thousand pounds)" (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 201). This is the novel's first reference to sterling, and it is used for a joke about a man who is so completely commodified, so utterly a creature of the market, that it harks back to the slave trade. The daughter abandons her petty-trading to follow this spectre of commodified desire. Ignoring his warnings, she follows him away from the road and into "an endless forest in which only all the terrible creatures were living" (202-3).

Tutuola's complete gentleman is a bush spirit: in this case, the bush represents the dangers of pure capitalism and symbolises the abstract 'Market' which works within yet extends beyond the marketplace. The marketplace is at least partially territorialized: it is a concrete *place*, associated with a town, with roads, and with social life. In contrast, the Market is a smooth space and a force of radical deterritorialization. Attracted by the complete gentleman, who embodies total commodification, the woman leaves the socially-integrated marketplace and becomes trapped by the Market-as-bush.

> Here, too late, she realises the true nature of what has seduced her:
> But when the lady saw every part of this complete gentleman in the
> market was spared or hired and he was returning them to the owners,
> then she began all her efforts to return to her father's town, but she was
> not allowed by this fearful creature at all. (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*
> 204)

In the creature's return of his body parts, Tutuola presents an image of fetishisation: money can buy anything, and the law of value controls all aspects of existence. The Curious Creature is monetised right down to his bones. Once

the daughter has strayed into this terrifying wilderness, in which absolutely everything is for hire, there is no turning back to the old ways, represented by her father's town.

Because the creature pays "rentage" (203) on his hired body parts as he returns them, rather than as he acquires them, money and commodification are associated with disintegration rather than accumulation. Tutuola does not mention what currency the curious creature pays in: he is valued in sterling (202), but holds his wealth in cowries (210): he stands at the juncture of two systems of value. We might also wonder about the body parts hired out by the forest creatures. Are these their own? Are they spares? They sell their bodies, but only in part(s) and only temporarily; this may reference the pawn system, or even wage labour. The curious creature is an assemblage of autonomous 'organs' which arrange and disarticulate themselves in configurations which are alternately seductive and disturbing. In this, he is like the marketplace itself. He, like the market, is a social Body without Organs, a body with no necessary internal cohesion, held together and broken apart at regular intervals by money.

The Drinkard, like the daughter, is overwhelmed by the stranger's beauty, as Tutuola reflects the astonishing power of capitalism to generate envious, covetous desire: even though the Drinkard knows that the complete gentleman is "only a skull...I was still attracted by his beauty" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 207). Tutuola expresses the man's special aura through an extended meditation on his immunity to violence in war:

> if this gentleman went to the battlefield, surely, enemy would not kill
> him or capture him and if bombers saw him in a town which was to
> be bombed, they would not throw bombs on his presence, and if they

did throw it, the bomb itself would not explode until this gentleman

would leave that town, because of his beauty. (207)

Through witty hyperbole, this passage reflects on the impossibility of killing

something which is, in its essence, death; moreover, it is true enough that the law

of value cannot be destroyed by war (as, indeed, the Yoruba Wars never stopped

the caravans of traders circulating between the coast and the interior [Byfield

26-7]).

To follow the all-consuming law of value is to follow a line of flight which

leads through the wilderness into the grave. We see "the complete gentleman in

the market reduced to a 'SKULL'" (204), which is the 'skull beneath the skin' of

capitalist modernity's allure. The Skulls imprison the woman by tying a cowry

round her neck, locking her in a state related to, as Steven Tobias puts it, "death

and enslavement" (72). Indeed, Tobias' reading of the episode in his article

"Tutuola and the Colonial Carnival" follows broadly similar lines to my own

interpretation, although with an important difference of focus. The complete

gentleman, for Tobias, represents "the dangers and temptations" of "Western

ideas and projects," the allure of which is only a "façade" concealing colonialism's

essentially violent nature (72). Focusing on colonialism rather than capitalism

both limits and weakens Tobias' argument, however. His interpretation finds no

use for the market, and although he mentions the cowry in his summary (71-2),

he fails to connect it to either money or enslavement. If the curious creature

represents colonialism, then his disintegration can be nothing more than an

"unmasking," indeed, a carnivalesque unmasking of colonialism's "dignity and

control" (72). A critique of colonialism locates frightening dynamics as

externally imposed threats, while critiques of capitalism must recognise the even

more disturbing operation of fetishisation, the "othering" of the self, the family and the community.

Tobias is right, however, that Tutuola associates the Skulls with modernity through his use of noise. The Skulls, as well as being nimble and fierce, are obtrusively loud: "They were rolling on the ground as if a thousand petrol drums were pushing along a hard road" (205). They are the spirit of the motorway in the depths of the forest. There are also further associations with inhuman noise: the Skull "was humming with a terrible voice" (204), the cowries tied round the lady's neck alarms "with a terrible noise" (206), and a guard Skull calls the others with a whistle (211). Mbembe notes Tutuola's use of noise as a tool of surveillance and control (13), while Hogan links noise with death through funeral "keening" (44). Neither, however, notes the industrial, mechanical nature of many of these noises (as with the half-bodied baby who speaks "with the lower voice like a telephone" [*Palm-Wine Drinkard* 218]). By noting the industrial nature of the noises, then, we can combine and extend Mbembe's and Hogan's readings so that noise comes to represent domination, death and mechanisation. Noisiness may represent the special forms of oppression facilitated by modernity.

Following the Skull to his home, the Drinkard discovers a pit filled with cowries: "I believed that the cowries in that pit were their power and to reduce the power of any human being whenever tied on his or her neck and also to make a person dumb" (210). Discussing the magical use of cowries, Gregory refers to a 1940s debate in *Man*, in which anthropologists argued over whether cowries represented eyes or vulvas, completely failing to appreciate their "iconographic significance" as a peculiarly loaded money symbol (214), one

which directly recalls the slave trade and consolidation of kings' power (Ogundiran 440), as discussed in Section 2.6. Tutuola is unmistakably calling on this vernacular theory, condensed in the symbolism of the cowrie. The Skull, spirit of the pure-market and spectre of commodity fetishism, holds his power in cowries, a currency inextricably linked to slavery and tyrannical power. When Tutuola tells us that "the cowries in that pit were their power," he is referring to the financial magic of money, a magic which does indeed have the power to dominate and silence others.

The way to escape these forces of slavery and death seems to be transformative nimbleness, as the Drinkard and then the lady flee the Skulls by turning into a lizard (209), air (210) and a kitten in a sparrow's pocket (211). Nevertheless, these evasions do not solve the problem: "Now I had brought the lady but she could not talk, eat or loose away the cowry on her neck, because the terrible noise of the cowry did not allow anybody to rest or sleep at all" (211). As when he unleashed Death upon the world (199), the Drinkard has brought a disruptive force from the bush into the town—now it is money, which banishes peace and ease. The Drinkard seems to break the power of the cowry by stumbling upon the Skull casting a spell with leaves: the Drinkard takes the charmed leaf for her to eat, and she is given to him as a wife (213). Like their shape-shifting, however, this coincidental magic brings no genuine liberation. The woman escapes one current only to be swept along on another: her marriage to the Drinkard leads neither of them towards social integration, and they will soon find their lines of flight intensified.

4.2.4 The Half-Bodied Baby

While living in her father's town, the Drinkard tells us that "I was tapping

palm-wine for myself, of course I could not tap it to the quantity that I required

to drink; my wife was also helping me to carry it from the farm to the town"

(214). They are both compelled to serve the Drinkard's desires, yet unable to

satisfy them. Their enslavement to greed and their unproductive relationship to

fertility are represented in the episode of their monstrous spirit son, ZURRJIR or

the half-bodied baby. Their prodigious offspring is identified by Hogan as a

tohosu, a changeling spirit which is in many ways the opposite of the sickly,

wasting abiku children.[9] A tohosu child becomes enormous, devouring huge

amounts of food, making it an apt projection of the Drinkard's greed. According

to Hogan, the ethics of Yoruba culture and of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* are based

upon "fertility, the continuation of human life through the growing of food and

the birth of children." An ethics of sustainable fertility, for the Yoruba, is an

ethics of reciprocity, and when reciprocity is perverted by greed or excess, life's

cycles fail (Hogan 34-5). We find a classic tohosu tale in Fagunwa's *Forest of a*

Thousand Daemons: as Fagunwa writes, "This story was so widespread at one

---

[9] Tohosu children may be marked by physical abnormalities such as macrocephalism

or hermaphrodism (Hogan 46). René Girard argues that bodies such as these are

frightening because they overstep the bounds of what is supposed to be possible,

and thus contain a whispered suggestion that, if a body can be so 'deviant' then a

system (physical, social or intellectual) also has "the potential to differ from its own

difference, in other words, not to be different at all, to cease to exist as a

system….Difference that exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the

truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility (qtd. inin Cohen 12).

time that whenever one spoke about a truly vicious character one would say of

the man that he is worse than Ajantala" (115). He characterises the "Ajantala

type of child" as one "whose very nature is turbulence itself" (106) and as "a

wanderer-child" (108). Yet while Tutuola uses Zurrjir to represent a monstering

of fertility as a result of socially irresponsible greed, Fagunwa presents Ajantala

as a parenting parable, a lesson about inversions of appropriate generational

authority (101-5).

When the Drinkard and his wife work on their farm with no thought

towards growing food, they produce a child devoted to unsustainable

consumption. His very birth represents a perversion of fertility: "everybody had

seen that the left hand thumb of my wife had only swelled out, but she did not

conceive in the right part of her body as other women do" (215). The monstrous

child is born when the wife's swollen thumb is pricked by "a palm-tree thorn"

(214); the Drinkard's precise role in this is not clear, although he and the child

both recognise his paternity (216). The child, then, is a conjunction of woman

(and man) and thumb and palm-tree, the kind of assemblage which Deleuze and

Guattari describe as "unnatural participations or nuptials," which "are the true

Nature spanning the kingdoms of nature" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 266). The

assemblage which results in the child is a monstering which has as much to do

with the logic of contagion (a pricked thumb, an infection, a swelling) as sexual

reproduction (the pricked thumb as *double entendre* taken literally).

Sexual reproduction is further parodied when the half-bodied baby's

greed results in his own mock-pregnancy: "his belly swelled out like a very large

tube, because he had eaten too much food and yet he did not satisfy at any time

for he could eat the whole food in this world without satisfaction" (219). This

swollen belly signals not enrichment but depletion, not a bringing forth but a taking in, with the world-emptying suck of a black hole. The imbalance of 'give and take' is, as Hogan notes, a driving dynamic in Tutuola's text. For the child to inflict his appetites on the Drinkard introduces a kind of eye for an eye reciprocity, but it is also simply a literalisation of the Drinkard's condition: he is enslaved to his insatiable desires; and, possessed by these desires, he is driven beyond all social limits.

Why is the child born from the wife's thumb? Following Hogan's suggestion, we can associate childbirth with agricultural production. Such an association implies a further connection between the woman's body and farmland (which, as we have seen in Section 2.2, is cyclically interchangeable with the bush in traditional agriculture). The couple are growing palm-trees rather than food, working in the 'wrong part' of the land and turning their bodies to the wrong purpose. If we map the land onto the woman's body, then farming the land inappropriately translates into a failure to "conceive in the right part of her body" (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 215). Instead, she conceives in her thumb, the body part most associated with human dexterity—that it is her *left* thumb further suggests that the problem lies in a misuse of her 'power to do', to use Holloway's phrase. Tutuola also subtly introduces the incident's social context: "everybody had seen" that her pregnancy was not like other women's (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 215). Both the woman and the Drinkard are only ever loosely coupled to society, and their association with this spirit child will result in their complete exile from "all towns and villages" (219). This strange pregnancy is of a piece with the couple's social isolation and anti-social agricultural activities.

The perversion of our power to do leads us to produce and reproduce conditions which damage, alienate and constrain us. Holloway argues that, by continuing to participate in processes of fetishisation, even when we recognise them as destructive, "We repeatedly externalise our power, convert our creative power into an impersonal, alien power over us" (*Crack Capitalism* 130). This perversion and alienation of the couple's power is embodied by their monstrous, tyrannical offspring. The father is dominated by his own insatiability, and previously the mother has been in thrall to the allure of money. Since her marriage, it seems, she has subordinated her economic independence to the Drinkard's socially empty productive efforts. Their fertility and the fertility of the land are not used creatively: because they have not used their potential responsibly, they give birth to this monstered incarnation of their own powers and desires, to which they are subordinated.

The half-bodied baby represents insatiable consumption, indiscriminate destruction and cruel domination.[10] He eats "all the food" and "flogged the man" who tries to stop him. When the rest of the household tries to control him, "he

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[10] The child's first act is to name himself "'ZURRJIR' which means a son who would change himself into another thing very soon." 'ZURRJIR' seems to be a name of Tutuola's invention. It is not a Yoruba word, nor does it seem to be a recognisable play on Yoruba words. It is also, however, the only instance of ghost-language given in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, and the emphasis which Tutuola places on the name makes it worth playing with. Spelled backwards, it becomes RIJRRUZ, which can be read as a snarled 'riches'. Such a name would be well-suited to a child whose greed leads to everyone else's impoverishment, their abjection being the mirror-image corollary of his 'riches'.

was smashing everything on the ground to pieces, even he smashed all the
domestic animals to death, still all the people could not conquer him" (215).
Through brute strength, "he became our ruler in the house," before spreading his
domination further: "he went around the town and he began to burn the houses
of the heads of that town to ashes" (216). Whereas the Curious Creature lured
the woman away from her father's sphere into his forest death-world, Zurrjir
launches a direct attack on this father and his fellow heads, seizing control and
destroying old structures of authority, instituting a new rule of greed. The child's
despotism echoes Holloway's argument that capitalism constructs its own model
of social cohesion, the totality, through "the elimination of alternative ways of
doing and alternative ways of living, of anything that does not fit in with the
blind laws of abstract labour" (*Crack Capitalism* 143).

His parents' attempt to burn him to death fails because of the wife's own
greed (Hogan "Understanding" 46-7): she returns to search for her "gold trinket,"
and "the middle of the ashes rose up suddenly and at the same time there
appeared a half-bodied baby, he was talking with a lower voice like a telephone"
(217-8). Personal greed makes it impossible to break free from the damaging
effects of capitalism: instead, the system is able to mutate and adapt. The child's
new, still more horrible form corresponds with his "telephone" voice: their
attempts to destroy him has caused him to morph into something more modern
and more dangerous.

In his manifestation as the half-bodied baby, the spirit is clearly linked to
the Curious Creature at the moment of the woman's capture: "when I became a
half-bodied incomplete gentleman you wanted to go back, now that cannot be
done, you have failed" (203). These spirits renew themselves through their own

dismemberment, and as their deformity increases so too does their power. The half-bodied baby is both less and many more than one: "he was whistling as if he was forty persons" (218). Mbembe links "anatomical terror" to the mutilations of war, quoting a passage from Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et Demi*: "Everyone was fleeing…those who were whole, those who were halves, members, bits" (qtd. in Mbembe 40-1). In war, not only is the social body shattered, human bodies are horribly fragmented. As we imagine the half-bodied baby, we may well envisage the disturbing image of a child's half-burnt body: frightening images pulse under Tutuola's affectless language. Yet the focus here is not on human injury. Rather, we are looking at disfigured desire, a spirit which is mutilated and terrible. Just because an idea, a society or an urge survives, one cannot be sure that it is fit or whole.

The half-bodied baby possesses his parents by literally 'mounting' them: as mentioned in Section 2.4, spirit possessions are referred to in West African vernacular theory as 'mountings.' They have been possessed by the grotesque extremity of their own anti-social tendencies. Driven from every town—"we could not travel the roads unless from bush to bush" (219)—they become pariahs, presaging the fate of the slave in the end (302). The half-bodied baby does "not allow us to do anything except carry him along" (219): they are possessed by a spirit of greed which forecloses any chance of peace or rest. He forces them into certain tracks and patterns of movement: they are trapped in the desolate smooth spaces of limitless consumption. Holloway refers to the "faster, faster, faster" dictated by the law of value: capitalism's impossible goal of perpetual growth requires an expansion and acceleration of its grasp ("Rage"). The hunger of the half-bodied baby admits no possibility of satisfaction; it

creates a killing deterritorialization, a line of flight which, like the Skull's

progress into the forest, becomes a death march.

4.2.5 Drum, Song and Dance

What can interrupt this relentless drive to destruction? Rhythm can:

when they meet Drum, Song and Dance, "the half bodied-baby started [to dance]

too, my wife, myself and spirits etc., were dancing with 'Dance' and nobody who

heard or saw these three fellows would not follow them to wherever they were

going" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 220-1). Hogan reads Drum, Song and Dance as

symbolic of funerary celebrations, which may go on for days after a death, with a

premature death leading to forty days of "keening." Death, he argues, replaces

speech with "inarticulate, artificial sound," of which there are two kinds, "music

and noise," singing and keening (44, 47). Drum, Song and Dance, therefore, are

aligned with the humming, whistling and alarms of the Skulls and the half-bodied

baby (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 211, 218)—yet, surely, any conjunction of noise

with music must contain a tension and a potential for mutual transformation or

transcoding. Noise and music may be the overcoming of speech, the ecstasy of

language or its excess—but there are many ways to become speechless, and even

if we accept death as the prime form of speechlessness, we have already seen

that in Tutuola, as in vernacular theory, death can be a slippery concept.

Speechlessness may fly from silence into noise, which may be transcoded into

music; and death may be annihilation, captivity or flight. In vernacular theory,

death is a passage, a transition.

The connections between death, noise and music are illuminated by

Deleuze and Guattari's writing on music, particularly the potential affinities they

find between chaos and rhythm. Each territory or milieu, they argue, produces

or perhaps is produced by a refrain: birdsong marks territory, and a town may have its home-song (*A Thousand Plateaus* 344). We find an instance of this in Tutuola's *The Witch Herbalist of Remote Town*, in which the traveller is overcome when he hears a wild orchestra play the rhythm "of my town's lovely music" (47) along with "all kinds of the songs which were sung in the whole world's languages" (43). The music calls him out of his hiding place, dangerously exposing him: music *requires* response. These songs represent the musical encoding of territoriality—an encoding of territoriality which renders that territory highly susceptible to deterritorialization, as the home-song may be played by the Wild People in the bush.

A refrain is a territorial assemblage, and as the refrain is repeated, differences emerge through the repetitions; these variations on the refrain produce rhythms (*A Thousand Plateaus* 346). Variation and difference produce rhythm, and rhythm is associated with passage from one territory or milieu to another, or the transformation of milieus (345). Rhythm is a function of movement and of transformation, of passage between milieus and also of milieus' own transformations:

> milieus are open to chaos, which threatens them with exhaustion or intrusion. Rhythm is the milieus' answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between—between two milieus, rhythm-chaos….In this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm, not inexorably, but it has a chance to. (345)

The open space of potential that exists between chaos and rhythm allows for the connection between the half-bodied baby and Drum, Song and Dance. His

deathly line of flight and the intensities which drive it are transcoded by the encounter with Drum, Song and Dance.

To return to Hogan's reading, if the half-bodied baby is a creature of noise and death, then the funeral music of Drum, Song and Dance provide a ritual means of transcoding chaotic emotion back into social rhythms. Drum, Song and Dance will reappear several times throughout the texts, in Red-town (263-4) and on Unknown-Mountain (293), so that they themselves become something of a refrain. Their reappearance invites what we might call a 'rhythmic' engagement with the text: that is, a reading which focuses on patterns, variations, movements in-between, and the intensities which these can create.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is a text which is strongly concerned with passage from one milieu to another (appropriately the appearance of these "three fellows" allows for the start of "a fresh journey" [221]). It is a text concerned with the nature of these passages, the danger of 'in-between', and the possibility of chaos. Motifs circulate across this text about milieus, passages, and the transcodings of lines of flight. These motifs repeat themselves in rhythmic variation. Drum, Song and Dance produce the rhythms which allow the passage of the Drinkard and his wife out of the folkloric zone and into the Bush of Ghosts proper, which begins in the following section.

Here, as we leave the folkloric section, the Deleuzo-Guattarian understanding of rhythm gives us the key to understand what Tutuola has been doing through his retellings of folklore. As Adrian Parr explains, if every repetition produces variations, then repetition is not an imitative process but a creative one: "To repeat is to begin again…" ("Repetition" 223). Therefore, Parr continues, repetition may be a destabilising process, calling forth "a *terra*

incognita filled with a sense of novelty and unfamiliarity" (224). By retelling

tales, Tutuola has been producing difference and opening a new space for

himself, and with a grand flourish, he passes into this *terra incognita*, his Bush of

Ghosts, via the ecstatic inarticulacy of death-noises transcoded into rhythms of

passage and motion.

4.2.5 Ferryboats and Highwaymen

This is not quite right, however: the new journey which Drum, Song and

Dance enable the Drinkard and his wife to undertake does not lead them into the

Bush of Ghosts: first they must earn a living (221-2) and escape highway robbers

(222), tasks which require the Drinkard to become a canoe (222) and "a big bird

like an aeroplane" (223). Their movement into the Bush of Ghosts involves a

passage "in between" folklore and realism. The Drinkard negotiates these

transitional moments by transforming himself into vehicles suited to different

types of passing: the shuttling movement of the canoe which collects the

necessary 'change,' and then the aeroplane's line of flight. Operating

simultaneously within two different milieus of folklore and realism, the Drinkard

uses his juju powers as "Father of the gods who could do anything in this world"

to carve a paddle and become a canoe, putting in fifteen hour days with his wife

to run the ferry business (221-2).

Achebe argues that this episode illustrates "the proper balance" between

work and magic: the Drinkard can magically become a boat, but he must carve a

real paddle (*Hope and Impediments* 259). This is the first and only situation in

which they must earn money to eat and in which they must perform non-

agricultural labour: hospitality has broken down, and they are in temporary exile

from the fields. This ferryboat episode, according to Steven Tobias, encodes

Tutuola's frustration with his bureaucratic job, as the Drinkard becomes "a virtual object in service of an alien bureaucracy…reduced by an externally imposed economic system to struggling subhumanly—yet in a way that seems vaguely, almost cryptically bourgeois" (67-8). Tobias is correct that images of alienation and objectification abound in Tutuola's texts, most clearly in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*; and he certainly satirises bureaucracy heavily in his first novel, *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts*, particularly in his depiction of Heaven and Hell. The ferryboat episode, however, does not speak to those issues in the way that Tobias suggests: the couple's buoyant navigation of the economic situation hardly qualifies as 'subhuman struggle'. It is "cryptically bourgeois" because the Drinkard has transformed himself into a successful and diligent small businessman, confidently and patiently negotiating the monetary flows. As Judith Tabron argues, the Drinkard's metamorphosis "expresses a personal and societal wish for control over capital" (78). Such an engagement with economic concerns, she further notes, is not uncommon within Yoruba folklore—as Adeboye Babalola quipped, the folkloric trickster-hero "Tortoise attends adult literacy classes and aspires to becoming a clerk in the civil service or in a commercial house" (Tabron 78).

The Drinkard's next transformation is prompted when the couple encounter "gangs of the 'highway-men' on the road, and they were troubling us too much." They must choose whether to risk robbery and murder on the roads or travel through the bush where there are "wild animals, and the boa constrictors were uncountable as sand" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 222). Faced, as before, with realistic problems, the Drinkard responds with magical—yet still pragmatic—transformation, becoming a "big bird like an aeroplane" (223). Who

are these 'highway-men' who make the roads impassable? They were an increasing threat in 1950s Nigeria—and indeed, in naming them, Tutuola seems prescient, as the problem continued to intensify through the twentieth century (Otu 44). In his 2003 thesis "Armed Robbery in the South-eastern States of Contemporary Nigeria," Smart Egwu Otu includes a strikingly Tutuolan passage:

> Driving on the highways—day and night—is
> frightening….Welcoming visitors or relations is fraught with utmost
> risk as these armed robbers use all kinds of trick [sic] to surprise
> their victims….They come in groups; large enough to send ones heart
> down the throat [sic]. (46)

Otu evokes a landscape swarming with violence and a social fabric saturated with dread and mutual mistrust, and it is possible to trace a rhizomatic line from this contemporary criminological crisis back to the haphazard violent opportunism with which wealth and power were reconsolidated following the disintegration of the Oyo empire.

As new cities came to act like miniature empires, war chiefs based in these cities used private armies to control territory, win booty and exact tribute (Falola "From Hospitality to Hostility" 55-6). With the end of the wars and the consolidation of British colonial control through the region, these chiefs and these armies were deprived of social context, blocked from their former routes to wealth, power and prestige (63). This led to an increase in robbery from the 1890s, as former war-chiefs and soldiers, "who found farming or any other occupation too boring or too difficult, took to stealing and raiding" (65). This is a tension recognisable from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*: the choice between a rooted, social life based on agriculture or a nomadic, predatory existence in the bush.

The transition from war to crime was further encouraged by the British prioritisation of free trade via "construction of better roads…[and] the introduction of a new currency" (Falola "The Yoruba Toll System" 78). Along with the increasing prevalence of wage labour, the new currency spread through society (Falola "Manufacturing Trouble" 123), meaning that potential targets of robbery proliferated. The location of wealth shifted from "land, slaves, wives and children" (Falola "From Hospitality to Hostility" 55) towards cash and imported consumables (Falola "Manufacturing Trouble" 123). Fragments of the old system attached themselves to the most significant circuits in the new system, and this created the highway-robber assemblage. The highway-robber is a criminal manifestation of the war machine, emerging from and negotiating the cracks between different systems of wealth and power. The highway-robber is a rhizomatic continuation of the Yoruba war machine mediated by cash economies, modern transportation, and imperfect state control. When Tutuola mentions the highway-men, he is connecting his text—lightly, allusively—to this historical thread of violence and terror, which renders the human space of the roads as dangerous as the wild space of the bush. Through the ferryboat and the highway-men, he is also creating an anchoring point which reconnects his text to a recognisable contemporary and historical Nigeria after the text's passage through folklore.

There remains one more passage before *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* fully enters the Bush of Ghosts: the Drinkard's literal line of flight as an aeroplane-bird. In the course of this flight, Tutuola allows us to glimpse a flash of something strange over the textual horizon: he writes that the juju "was given me by 'Water Spirit woman' in the 'Bush of the Ghosts' (the full story of the

'Spirit woman' appeared in the story book of the Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts)" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 222-3). Tutuola is referencing an episode in his first novel—the manuscript of which was at the time lost and would not be recovered for another thirty years—and implying an identity between the novels' two distinct protagonists. As the Drinkard flies over the bush, he momentarily also passes between texts. Tutuola seems to be playing with the Drinkard's mutable identity while pushing the limits of his transformative powers as an author. We have already seen the Drinkard switch to juju-man and "Father of the gods who could do anything in the world;" if he can become a lizard, ferry boat or bird; and he is able to travel to Death's house and to soar over the bush—so why should he not also for an instant become a different novel's hero, the participant in another story? If that story was, due to the vagaries of publishing, then a lost object, a hidden and unreadable text, it had only become one of many lost stories in an oral and emergent print culture, stories that are glimpsed in this text as ghostly pre-texts and contexts.

Tutuola experiments with the quilting together of texts and identities again in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* where various figures from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* turn up, first as wedding guests ('Skull' and 'Spirit of prey' quarrel after being forced to share a plate) (*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* 62), and then as warriors fighting to protect the protagonist from arrest (107-111). Here, however, they are references not to a lost text but acknowledgements of Tutuola's fame, so that the 'stars' of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* can make 'guest appearances' in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts.* These cameos occur at moments when the protagonist is being drawn more deeply into ghostly society through personal, religious and military involvements. Similarly, the Drinkard's

reference to *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts* takes place just before he

and his wife enter the Bush of Ghosts to find Deads' Town.

Tutuola's intertextual play draws reader attention to the texts as texts,

but also to the texts as milieus, potentially permeable spaces. The powers which

facilitate the characters' passages and becomings may be intertextual powers:

texts strengthen one another. The episodes following the escape from the half-

bodied baby have been preparations for a textual line of flight into a more fully

deterritorialized space. Tutuola has drawn our attention to rhythm, to money, to

work, to crime and war, and then he makes an intertextual reference to throw a

connecting line into a larger body of work, reminding us (as with his retellings of

folkloric stories) that the text is a milieu and that milieus are not unitary. He is

pointing us towards what Deleuze and Guattari call "a transcoded passage from

one milieu to another, a communication of milieus, coordination of

heterogeneous space-times" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 345). Folkloric space

communicates with historical space, which communicates with

contemporaneous space, which communicates with intertextual space—and

Tutuola's passing back and forth between these milieus becomes a rhythmic line

of flight, a deterritorialization which allows him to create a new space that still

shares in all of the other spaces. This new space is the *terra incognita* of the

Bush of Ghosts, through which "there was no road or path to travel" (223).

4.3 The Bush of Ghosts: Site of Suffering and Recuperation

4.3.1 White Creatures

The travellers' first encounter in the Bush of Ghosts is with the swarm of

long white creatures. This is a strange, inconclusive episode which portrays the

limitations of the folkloric formula to which Tutuola has, so far, roughly adhered.

The couple stop to sleep when they "reached a very thick bush; this bush was very thick so that a snake could not pass through it without hurt" (224): it is a space of frustration and blocked flows. After falling asleep in the thick bush, the couple are awakened by

> a creature, either he was a spirit or other harmful creature, we could not say, he was coming towards us, he was white as if painted with white paint, he was white from foot to the topmost of his body, but he had no head or feet and hands like human-beings and he got one large eye on his topmost. He was long about ¼ of a mile and his diameter was about six feet, he resembled a white pillar. (224)

Transforming themselves into fire, they burn this creature—but ninety more immediately appear and surround the fire, crying "cold! cold! cold!" (224). The couple's transformation has failed comically, and they are only able to escape by moving until they reach a field upon which the long white creatures "were bound not to trespass" (225). This field is the site of a market, a place of gathering and exchange (226), in which the long white creatures cannot participate, although neither can the travellers.

The long white creatures are the first beings in the text which are unrecognisable, uncategorisable, and which offer no information about themselves—the couple cannot even say "definitely whether they were eating creatures or not" (225). Theirs are the first uncertain bodies within *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, and they are unusual in their minimalism: Tutuola's creatures are characteristically baroque, their bodies crowded with multiplicities: many eyes, many horns, many heads. The stripped-down bodies of the long white creatures suggest, however, that what is fundamentally unsettling about Tutuola's

creatures is not any physical grotesquery but rather, following Cohen's argument, that their bodies "resist attempts to include them in any systemic structuration" (6). These particular creatures are almost completely stripped of organic features: they seem to be painted, their size is measured in distance, and they look like pillars. Essentially vertical, they are the opposite of the horizontal line of journeying. They remain trapped within their dense bush, just out of reach of the market, defined by their lack. Perpetually cold (due to poor *circulation*?), they display a passive dependence upon external energy, which they themselves seem powerless to produce or obtain. They are emptied bodies, almost inorganic, almost not bodies at all. The narrative within this section feels similarly deadened: it is a classic confrontation between hero and monster, but the hero's transformation does not work, the monsters' hostility is never determined, and the eventual solution is a lacklustre, creeping escape over an arbitrary boundary.

These arbitrary boundaries—which bind the spirits but not the Drinkard—are a startling and essential feature of Tutuola's texts, particularly *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. The apparently smooth space of the bush is actually, for the creatures and spirits who inhabit it, strictly striated. Moreover, the Drinkard does not so much disregard these borders as fail to recognise them. In this, he resembles not only transnational capital but also colonial officials unaware of the subtle lines which they cross unawares.

In the borders that striate the bush, Achebe finds reassuring evidence of the moral order and reasonableness which, he argues, lies at the heart of Tutuola's works. He writes that the bush-borders constitute

a law of jurisdiction which sets a limit to the activity of even the most

unpredictable of its rampaging demons…[so that] anarchy is held—

precariously, but held—at bay, so that the traveller who perseveres

can progress from one completed task to another and in the end

achieve progressively the creative, moral purpose in the

extraordinary but by no means arbitrary universe of Tutuola's story.

(110)

Where Achebe finds a progressive rule of law—that, by containing abuses of

power, frees individuals and societies to advance—Obiechina finds a more

repressive system of control: the boundaries are "as fully demarcated as modern

national boundaries and a good deal more rigid since the folk-tale world, having

no provision for the visaed traveller, has no means of admitting him from the

outside except on terms of hostility" (128). Nevertheless, Obiechina continues, it

is a narrative necessity that the traveller should cross these boundaries—the

Drinkard could not even leave home "if he [were] afraid to violate the integrity of

other people's territory" (128). The Drinkard is crossing borders he completely

fails to recognise, in an endless series of invasions required by the most basic

logic of his endeavour: Obiechina seems to suggest here a persuasive case for

reading the deep narrative of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in terms of colonial

incursions. Nevertheless, he does so in notably positive terms, for he continues

that the Drinkard's border-crossings not only facilitate the narrative itself but

bring "a great immensity and variety of colour, character and idiosyncrasy"

(128): colonial encounters as a source of charming diversity. As strongly as his

analysis seems to beg a colonial reading, however, that is not a reading that

Obiechina presents, even in passing. Nevertheless, Obiechina's comments help

to highlight the fundamental importance of trespass and violation in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* a text which has itself often been viewed as something of a literary interloper.

Are borders—and the associated social striations they imply—tools of advancement or blockage in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*? They are both: the point of Tutuola's borders is that, as Achebe says, they cannot be crossed and that, as Obiechina writes, they must be crossed. It is necessary that the Drinkard can pass across them and that others cannot: each border becomes, through the Drinkard's crossings, a threshold for further deterritorialization which gives his line of flight greater velocity. In the Drinkard's crossings, there are suggestions of migrants and invaders, colonial agents and escaping slaves, of cosmopolitanism and capitalism, and these schizohistories flicker within the text.

However, the greater significance of the Bush of Ghosts' borders is not symbolic: if we follow Obiechina's assertion that the narrative exists as a function of border-crossings, then we will find that on a structural level, the borders facilitate the text's own deterritorialization and its creation of a smooth textual space. As Quayson notes, Tutuola frequently deploys bush creatures' "scrupulous respect" for boundaries as a narrative device. These boundaries, he suggests, can best be understood as textual rather than geographical:

> the spirit-figures are obeying the dictates of the episodic format that
>
> controls the narrative in general. In that case what they are obeying
>
> are the limitations imposed by the writer's handling of his material
>
> and not any necessary boundaries within the spirit realm. (63)

In its collapsing of textual and spatial divisions, Quayson's suggestion is extremely helpful. This observation about physical boundaries corresponding to

narrative limits builds on Quayson's suggestions concerning Tutuola's use of formulaic endings such as "That was how we got away from the long white creatures" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 225). Quayson writes that Tutuola, by retaining the formulaic endings characteristic of West African orality while simultaneously "stringing such stories together…prevents the affirmation of closure that these formulaic endings would signify in the context of oral storytelling." This technique suggests "the provisional nature of such closures," indicating that "there are numerous stories to be told and that they can be added *ad infinitum*," complete with digressions and embeddings (58).

Tutuola's narratives play with the possibilities afforded by their episodic structure. In the case of the long white creatures, he presents us with a story which *cannot go any further*, a joke about the inertia of hero-hunter tales. The limitations of this story and this formula do not limit the text, however: the narrative simply moves through and beyond them, towards a more open situation. Deleuze and Guattari's translator, Brian Massumi, writes that "Nomad thought replaces the closed equation of representation, $x = x$ not y (I = I = not you) with an open equation: … $+ y + z + a + $ …" Thus, rather than insisting upon unity or structural rigidity, nomadic thought "synthesizes a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity or hindering their potential for future rearranging (to the contrary)" (*A Thousand Plateaus* xiii). To follow Massumi, then, we can describe Tutuola's episodic format as an open equation— in which endings provide not closure but forward momentum, and in which boundaries facilitate a transcendence of closed situations. Thus the episodic nature of the text signals not authorial limitation but a nomadic and playful disregard for limiting structures.

4.3.2 The Termites' Market and the King of Refuse

Having escaped from the white creatures' forest, the Drinkard and his

wife pass into a savannah landscape, which at night reveals itself to be a ghostly

marketplace. The bizarre owners of the market capture and present them to

their king, a creature covered in dead leaves, who orders that they be sacrificed

to their gods of war (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 225-8). The field surrounding the

marketplace "resembled corn-plants, the edges of its leaves were as sharp as

razor blades and hairy" (225). Like the impenetrably thick forests, this razor-

sharp grass is another instance of Tutuola constructing his hostile environments

from recognisably naturalistic elements: the grass described is *pennisturm*

purpureum, known as elephant grass, through which it is almost impossible to

pass, but which farmers use for animal feed ("Elephant Grass"). Like the

marketplace into which they are stumbling, the field is a smooth space, but an

inhospitable one which limits free circulation.

The marketplace is dead outside of business hours, but it is a dangerous

place—as the Nigerien saying has it, "the market isn't anybody's home" (qtd. in

Masquelier 19), a concept we explored in detail in Section 2.6. They shelter

under a "TERMITES' HOUSE which resembled an umbrella and it was 3 feet high and

cream in colour" (226)—only realising too late that this is the "owner of the

market." The owner reveals himself, in his nocturnal form, to have one foot and

a "very small head like a one-month old baby's head" (226). The thing described

here is one of the large termite mounds that dot the forests and savannahs of

south-eastern Nigeria, including "a not inconsiderable percentage of farmers'

fields" (Maduakor 157): once again, Tutuola is making use of outlandish

commonplace, animating familiar features of the bush in the manner of

vernacular theories, such as those of evil stones and trees discussed in Section 2.5. These termite mounds come in two types, the cathedral and (as per Tutuola) the umbrella (157). These last can be far larger than the one Tutuola describes, with tops of up to three meters in diameter, while the cathedral mounds can tower nine meters high (Wood 229). Their forms are bulbous and anatomically suggestive, with protuberances that could easily resemble an infant's head and a foot. Composed of "soil, together with saliva and faeces," termite mounds form an inhuman organic architecture, "continually being eroded and reconstructed" (Wood 228). The mounds comprise swarming bodies, with nests composed of "several thousand to several million individuals" (Wood 228). The mounds are suggestive of cities—with their mud walls and mud buildings, their many-bodied identities. Yet the termite-city is at once familiar and incomprehensibly alien: it is not a community you could join.

The "TERMITES' HOUSE" and the other creatures of the field surround the travellers "and caught us like a policeman" (226). As the swarms of termites form one corporate identity as the "TERMITES' HOUSE," so the field's creatures form a unified force, with the many creatures acting like *a* policeman. The creatures lead them to their king's palace: "The palace was almost covered with refuse, it resembled an old ruined house, it was very rough," and the king "himself was refuse, because he was almost covered with both dried and undried leaves and we could not see his feet and face etc." (226)—as a structure of organic waste, he resembles the termite mound. When he speaks, "a hot steam was rushing out of his nose and mouth as a big boiler" (228). In the 'ruined' palace, we find an echo of towns and kingdoms destroyed by the wars, but here there is also strong suggestion of a marketised present being constructed out of reclaimed waste

matter, governed by 'rubbish' kings. The king is a mechanised creature covered

in refuse, linking waste and destruction to industrialisation and the Victorian

modernity of steam.

The detail of the king's 'boiler' mouth, added at the very end of the

episode almost as an afterthought, is crucial because it points us towards the

tight, even determinative links between the British industrial revolution and

market development during the Yoruba Wars. From the mid-nineteenth century,

Manchester's textile industry held sway over Yoruba markets and fields. The

loom on which the warp and weft of exported Nigerian cotton and imported

British textiles were woven together was the infrastructure of steam-powered

transportation: steamships and railways (Byfield 16-8, 49). British colonial and

corporate policies engineered the replacement of Nigerian systems of production

with chains of consumption. Increasingly, markets were filled not with Nigerian

woven and dyed fabrics but with cheap, mass-produced textiles woven from

Nigerian cotton in Lancashire mills, printed with 'authentic' West African-style

patterns designed in Manchester, designs which faded quickly—and which

would be redyed locally (Byfield 27).[11] The market is filled with rubbish, and it

is rubbish which holds remarkable sway over the entire structure of Yoruba

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[11] The borders of these imported textiles were printed with the names and location of
the manufacturers, a practice which is transformatively recognised in a length of
indigo resist-dyed cloth held in Manchester's Whitworth Art Gallery: designed and
dyed in Ibadan, the border is stenciled with "HENDESON'S
MANCHESTER/IBADAN." The manufacturers' mark is deterritorialized, claimed as a
decorative motif.

society. Farmers were encouraged to grow cotton for export rather than food for

consumption, encouraging forced labour in the process. That cotton was then

sold back to the Yoruba as cheap replicas of their own textiles, undercutting local

production and artistry. In order to buy what they would formerly have

produced, people became dependent upon cash earned through further wage

labour and sale of crops. The king of refuse and his market had gained authority.

4.3.3 Wraith-Island

From the market and the gods of war, we return to the farm and to peace:

these alternating moods will become one of the characteristic cadences of *The*

Palm-Wine Drinkard. In Tutuola's open-ended episodic format, rhythm becomes

an important unifying principle, and one of the overarching motifs is, as Paul

Edwards notes, "a rhythmic movement between, on the one hand, states of terror

and distress, and, on the other, periods in temporary Edens associated with

farming, trees, and another recurrent image of harmony, music and dance"

(207). Having moved away from the market, the Drinkard and his wife move

into the agricultural and musical utopia of Wraith-Island, where the islanders'

"work was only to plant their food, after that, they had no other work more than

to play music and dance" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 228). This passage obviously

both echoes and inverts the novel's opening statement, "I had no work more than

to drink palm-wine" (191). Wraith-Island contrasts sharply with the narrator's

home life, as well as with many of the forces he encounters in the Bush of Ghosts.

As Edwards notes, Wraith-Island is a coming together of "the two key images of

harmony and accommodation, the farm and the dance" (257). Wraith-Island is a

society released from the tyrannies of excess: its inhabitants produce no surplus

for market, and they manage to enjoy music wholeheartedly without becoming carried away by Drum, Song and Dance.

The 'harmony' of Wraith-Island emerges from and depends upon a mutually recognitive social dynamic which is fully inclusive. The importance of inclusion and respectful recognition are emphasised in the stories of the "terrible animal" (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 229) and "NONE TOO SMALL TO BE CHOSEN" (230-232). In the first episode, the Drinkard tries to frighten away a monster that is eating his crops, then realises that the monster is "the owner of the land…[and] he was angry that I did not sacrifice to him." Once the proper acknowledgements have been made, however, the creature bestows the Drinkard with magically productive seeds (230). If we overlook the monster's fearsome physical detail, the episode is, Eldred Jones notes, "based on two commonplaces of life in agricultural Africa. The first, that animals attack crops at harvest time, and the second that it is customary for the first fruits of the harvest to be offered to the local deity" (111-2). As Edwards comments, here it is very clearly the Drinkard and *not* the spirit who is the disruptive element (208).

Social harmony rests just as much on the respectful inclusion of society's smallest or most marginal members, as demonstrated by the "tiny creature" who, angry that he has not been asked to help clear the king's corn field, causes the weeds to grow back until the king acknowledges the omission and "made excuses to him" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 230). The lesson of Wraith-Island is straightforward: productive and creative activity should be balanced, and fulfilment is only possible within a balanced society which respects the strong and the weak and maintains a healthy balance between the farm and the bush.

Wraith-Island is almost too plain: its ethical and narrative simplicity lie inert under critical attention—and critics have, consequently, awarded it only the most cursory attention. Wraith-Island is, in fact, the only positive manifestation of the ethics of reciprocity which, Achebe and Hogan argue, animate Tutuola's text. The ethics of reciprocity, Hogan explains, underlie sustained cycles of fertility (34-5). Achebe argues that Tutuola patterns his narrative according to the ways in which "work and play in their numerous variations complement each other" (103). Yet despite Wraith-Island being the clearest possible support to their assertions of Tutuola's ethical concerns, neither Hogan nor Achebe find much to say about it, focusing instead on its sister recuperative episode, the Faithful Mother in the white tree.

I would argue that Wraith-Island has been critically neglected because Tutuola has written the episode in such a way as to invite us to skim over it, to keep moving like the Drinkard and his wife. As Armstrong writes, it functions as a passage of "diminuendo," heightening the surrounding episodes by contrast (233). It is an island of social and narrative striation in a chaotic sea. Contrast its simplicity, for instance, to the detailed strangeness of the Refuse King or the Greedy-Bush. In Tutuola's narrative patterning, the striations of Wraith-Island emphasise the smoothness surrounding it. Through the tiny creature, smooth space overruns the striations of the king's field, but in this narrative, the agent of chaos is easily dismissed ("the king made excuses to him, after that he went away" [232]), although he is the precursor of the implacable Invisible-Pawn whom we will encounter in Section 4.3.8.

Although the episode has a deliberate flatness, it takes on considerably more interest and nuance if we examine the schizohistorical whisperings within

it. Tutuola has taken us to a swampy coastal region, an island inhabited by wraiths (*The Pam-Wine Drinkard* 228): is there an aspect of pre-colonial Lagos Island here? The tranquil ghosts, then, read as ancestors—but they are not simply ghosts, they are wraiths, a word suggesting something less frightening but also less substantial. They have an illusory and theatrical air: "Whenever these Island creatures dress, you would be thinking they were human-beings and their children were performing always the stage plays" (229). In costume, with a penchant for performance, the islanders are perhaps not simply ancestors but an *idea* of ancestors, creatures of idealised history who have emerged from the heavily politicised discourses of culture, tradition and history which divided the early and mid-twentieth century Lagos (Waterman 75).

Following this thread, let us examine the cryptic pronouncement made by the tiny creature as he carries out his subversion. He bids "ALL THE CLEARED-WEEDS RISE UP; AND LET US GO AND DANCE TO A BAND AT THE 'WRAITH-ISLAND'; IF BAND COULD NOT SOUND, WE SHOULD DANCE WITH MELODIOUS MUSIC" (231). While manipulating the boundaries between farm and bush, the creature invokes a dichotomy between bands and "melodious music." What musical division could he be referring to, and what relation could this possibly bear to his sabotage of the field? The question is illuminated by Christopher Alan Waterman's social music history in his book *Juju.* The 'bands' mentioned by the tiny creature probably reference the Nigerian sensation for brass bands that began in the 1930s. Ballroom dance bands, staffed from Police or Regimental bands and playing music from waltzes to highlife, became a staple at elite African gatherings (Waterman 43). At the same time, in palm-wine bars, migrant labourers, armed with cheap guitars that they learned to play by listening to gramophone records, were developing the

palm-wine and juju musical genres (45-7, 55). When Tutuola's tiny creature

calls to a 'weed' music in opposition to the 'farm' music of the band, he is

probably referring to something working class and informal like the palm-wine

and juju genres. Waterman powerfully summarises the nomadic and syncretic

cultural operations of juju music:

> Yoruba sound imagery and metaphor, Christian instruments and
>
> harmonies, the songs of perpetually mobile sailors and their inland
>
> counterparts on the railroad, and pan-West African palm-wine songs
>
> and guitar techniques were combined in the production of a style
>
> symbolically grounded in local traditions, yet oriented toward the
>
> world economic and political system into which Nigerians were
>
> ineluctably drawn. (74)

By the 1930s, the Saro elites had become politically divided between those who

supported the colonial regime and nationalists who backed Herbert Macaulay's

Nigerian National Democratic Party. The cultural dimensions of this political

division were reflected in musical patronage: nationalist elites adopted juju

music, while the collaborationists felt it was a 'bastardization,' preferring to

maintain a 'pure' separation between European and African musics, "essentially

a variant of the anti-Creolization ideology that justified British attempts to

exclude literate Africans from positions of administrative responsibility"

(Waterman 75). The tiny creature's gnomic pronouncement refers to these

musical genres which held a decades-long political charge and which

represented radically different strategies of cultural performance, appropriation,

mixture and improvised innovation.

Into the striated space of the king's field, the tiny creature calls the forces

of the bush, chaos, and nomadic culture. Because the idyll has failed to be fully

inclusive, the communal projects of fertility, order and sustenance are

threatened by social discord, vegetally incarnate. Tutuola also suggests a chain

of association between the farm, the king, the band and colonialism. Now

perhaps we may even pick up a schizohistorical resonance between Wraith-

Island—with its tranquillity, its cultural pride and its king—and the British Isles,

whose imperial striations are threatened by the 'bush' voices it first ignores and

then dismissively placates. The Drinkard leaves Wraith-Island because of his

greed, but Tutuola's own style—summary and vague—hurries us along as well.

As with the white creatures, "Wraith-Island" is a story which is 'not going

anywhere': it is a charming but static myth of an idyllic pre-colonial past—or

even of a 'green and pleasant' colonial paradise wafting with daffodils. Despite

its charms, it is a story which is itself much too fragile and wraith-like, and

which avoids genuine engagement with the troubling spirits within and around

it.

4.3.4 Greedy Bush

In the journey away from the agrarian utopia of Wraith-Island towards

the urban hell of Unreturnable-Heaven's Town, the Drinkard and his wife pass

through bushes animated by intensities of greed, desolation, and predation.

These spirits and territories resonate powerfully with histories of capitalism,

war and slavery, preparing the text for its most vivid encounter of

institutionalised cruelty. After leaving Wraith-Island, they come first to the

Greedy-Bush, where the ground is too hot for the couple to rest and where

neither hunger nor thirst can be sated, although a kind of satisfaction is provided

by the phantom smell of cooking. This bush channels the restless dissatisfaction

which caused them to abandon the moderate delights of Wraith-Island—and the

"destination" for which the Drinkard must depart, let us remember, is death,

towards which he is driven by selfish greed.

Edwards notes the contrast between the islanders' inability to cross their

borders and the Drinkard's identity as "the one who can, indeed must, keep

moving." He places, however, an excessively romantic gloss on the Drinkard's

deterritorializations: "To farm is delightful, but the Drinkard has entered upon a

journey of the imagination and must pursue it to its end" (258). Such

idealisation of the Drinkard may stem from a confusion between the character

and the genuinely exciting nomadism of Tutuola's style. The Drinkard's

deterritorialization from Wraith-Island is better explained by Tutuola himself:

"That bush was very 'greedy,' so that within an hour from when we sat at the foot

of the tree, the ground on which we sat began to warm and we could not sit on it

any longer" (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 233). Greed leads to restlessness—and

what West African could read the journeyer into strange lands as an

uncomplicatedly poetic and benign figure?

Hogan reads the 'greedy bush' as a disastrous fall from fertility to famine,

brought on not by human vice but rather by nature's own failure to sustain

fertility: the bush without sticks and dried leaves is so lush that it "shows no

signs of death" and, through satisfying smells, provides nourishment without

labour, but "the temperature begins to increase, water becomes scarce, and the

leaves disappear. The treetops smoke or burn in the heat and the land is ravaged

by carnivorous birds reminiscent of vultures" (*Empire* 148). Hogan's

interpretation, proceeding via simplification of Tutuola's imagery, allows us to

see this odd interlude as a coded reference to the catastrophic drought and famine afflicting the Drinkard's home (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 295-6), as Tutuola weaves elaborate parallels between the Bush of Ghosts and the human world. Hogan's argument that we take the greed to be simply nature's own is, however, unconvincing. Greed has uprooted the Drinkard and his wife from Wraith-Island, and in this bush, a Deleuzo-Guattarian 'greedy-effect' forbids rest.

The intensities of greed are unsustainable. Greed precludes nourishment: the bush is empty of any fuel for a cooking fire, and the water in a pond "dried away at our presence." They are "satisfied," however, by "a sweet smelling in every part of the bush…just as if they were baking cakes, bread and roasting of fowls and meat" (233). The suggestion here is that greed is satisfied and sustained by the mirage of fulfilment, causing those possessed of this mirage to stumble on almost unaware of their emptiness.

The Greedy-Bush cannot sustain life, but it is filled with "many palm-trees without leaves, but only small birds represented the leaves" (234). These birded trees are topped with "artificial heads" which laugh, shout and smoke "just as if [the bush] was full of a big market's noises" (234). Most simply, we may read this image as a readily recognisable reference to the Nigerian tradition of "talking palms," which were understood to be spiritual conduits that might be consulted by those seeking conference with the dead: supplicants would approach a priest based at the foot of such a palm, and in the rustling of the palm fronds, they could hear the voices of the dead (Talbot 117). The tree is also, Deleuze and Guattari remind us, the image of a rooted, stable, authoritative, traditional world (*A Thousand Plateaus* 5), an image with strong Yoruba resonance. Waterman writes that the closest Yoruba equivalent to 'traditional' is

'*ijinlée,*' which means, roughly, 'deeply grounded' (14). Achebe writes that

Tutuola "has his two feet firmly planted in the hard soil of an ancient oral, and

moral, tradition" (101)—an arborescent image which seems grossly unsuited to

the rhizomatic, nomadic author. In the strange trees of the greedy bush, Tutuola

subverts this image of natural authority: there may be a tree here, and there may

be roots—but the leaves have been replaced by birds, which disconcertingly

combine stability with flight. Through the raucous trees, the Greedy-Bush is

appropriately animated by the restless, inhospitable and alienating spirit of the

marketplace.

Greed, dissatisfaction and deracination segue into predation. The

spectres of kidnappers and marauders stalk the Bush of Ghosts: these are the

ghosts that hunt alone or in packs, leaping from the bush, surrounding sleepers.

Before reaching Unreturnable-Heaven's Town, they are attacked three times: by

birds of prey (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 234), the "Spirit of Prey" (235), and by

the backwards man with a whip (237). The birds, who hunt in packs like wolves

or warriors, are armed with beaks "very sharp as a sword" (234): they suggest

the bands of robbers, slavers and soldiers who plagued the Yoruba forests during

and after the wars. The travellers are then stalked by

> a 'Spirit of Prey,' he was big as a hippopotamus, but he was walking
>
> upright as a human being…he was not chasing his prey about, and
>
> when he focused the prey well, then he would close his large eyes,
>
> but before he would open his eyes, his prey would be already dead
>
> and drag itself to him at the place that he stood. (235)

The name of this spirit is playful: it recalls the phrase 'bird of prey,' suggested

but never used in the description of the fierce birds. By reframing the familiar

phrase, Tutuola opens it to reinterpretation: the 'Spirit of Prey' is a predator with no need to hunt, because the gaze of "his eyes which brought out a flood-light like mercury in colour" (236) induces a 'spirit of prey,' or a 'prey-effect' in its victims. The gaze induces a compliance so complete that the prey will simply die and drag itself to him. The impossibility of struggle may reflect the helpless condition of unarmed civilians and refugees surprised by kidnappers, but it even more closely resembles the relationship between citizens and the state, as described by Deleuze and Guattari. The state "operates by immediate magical capture, 'seizes' and 'binds', preventing all combat" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 388). The Spirit of Prey's gaze thus functions as a particularly crude version of the policeman's "Hey you!" in Althusser, interpellating the objects of its gaze as prey-subjects (Althusser 1503). That this gaze operates through mercury-coloured flood-lights suggests street lighting, or perhaps the floodlights of a barracks or prisons, which catch and freeze an intruder or escapee. In its monstrous body, the Spirit of Prey suggests the ideological, legal and military functions of a state apparatus.

After escaping the Spirit of Prey, the Drinkard and his wife encounter another combined kidnapper/police figure, an emanation of the broken society represented by the ruined town. From a basket in the ruins, the Drinkard takes a cola, ignoring the voice which cries "DON'T TAKE IT! LEAVE IT THERE" They are then surprised by a man of distorted proportions ("his both arms were at his both thighs, these both arms were longer than his feet and both could reach the topmost of any tree") who is "walking towards his back or backwards" and carries "a long whip too" (237). He walks like a trickster spirit (McCaskie 119)

or like the deads (Hogan *Empire* 141).[12] The man's backwardness represents his

inversion of social mores: cola nuts are for sharing with guests, a symbol of

hospitality, but in this wrecked social arena, they are like commodities in an

empty shop: there is nobody to give them, and those who take them will be

chased and punished. His backwardness also anticipates the thoroughgoing

wrongness of Unreturnable-Heavens' Town, represented through a series of

absurd inversions (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 240).

As Hogan notes, the backwards man's whip is associated with Egungun,

"members of the community who take on the identities of important ancestors

for ceremonial purposes" and whose whipping is associated with fertility, justice,

and the restoration of social balance (*Empire* 140). Flogging, however, is also

unmistakably linked to colonial violence: in 1908 the chief justice of Nigeria

declared that "The only way to correct black people is to flog them" (qtd. in

Falola *Violence* 67). In the early twentieth century, the notoriously violent and

despotic District Officer Harold Morday Douglas made extensive use of public

flogging in his repressive campaigns in Iboland, including one beating of a

Nigerian government interpreter that left the victim unconscious (29). In

whipping, Falola finds "racist arrogance…and violence" combined to achieve

"political domination and economic exploitation" (67). Whipping, however, with

its connotations of degradation and extreme brutality, has remained a feature of

government repression post-independence as well. In 1998, for instance,

---

[12] It is incidental but interesting to note that the man's walking backwards is quite

likely an indication that he is a more malign relative of trickster-spirits with

backwards-facing feet mentioned in the previous chapter (McCaskie 119).

journalists at an anti-Abaca rally in Ibadan were whipped by police, while three

participants were shot dead ("Four Journalists Severely Beaten"). Whipping has

not disappeared with military rule, either, but remains strongly associated with

the Nigerian military and police. In 2011, the Chief of Defense Staff Paul Dike

called for a decrease in "the use of horse whip on the public often attributed to

military personnel, whether on duty or not" (Abayomi), while in the same year

whips were used to disperse rioters in Kano (Brock). Thus, although it is

possible to read the whip as a purifying scourge, in Tutuola's usages it is better

understood as a historically-rooted symbol of irresponsible, arrogant and cruel

power.

4.3.5 Unreturnable-Heaven's Town
From terrains of greed, ferocity, power and desolation, Tutuola moves

towards the climactic horror of the text: Unreturnable-Heaven's Town, whose

road captures the travellers (239) and delivers them to both mob violence (240)

and ritual, institutionalised torture (241-3), and which the escaped victims

eventually destroy with reciprocal cruelty (244). Graphic and disturbing, this

episode is a schizohistorical vision of hell, a furious invocation of the social

perversions wrought by war, power and greed.

The road which leads to Unreturnable-Heaven's Town's gate is the

Biblical wide road to destruction, but it is also a apparatus of capture and a force

of striation marked with an unmistakable modernity. The travellers find

themselves seized by the road, "unable to branch or to stop, or to go back, we

were only moving on the road towards the town." The Drinkard tries to use juju

to stop them, "but instead of that, we started to move faster than before" (*The

Palm-Wine Drinkard* 239). In a text densely patterned with forced marches and

lost autonomy, their capture by the road recalls the wife's capture by the skull, their forced march with the half-bodied baby, the five days of unstoppable dancing, and most directly, the Spirit of Prey's flood-light eyes which force a victim to drag itself to him. The travellers' lines of flight are captured and subjected to the line of striation. The travellers are positioned as alien outsiders to be punished, or as prey to be consumed. These dynamics are schizohistorical engagements with the compounded histories of the slave trades, the Yoruba Wars, British colonialism, vast movements of displacement and migration, and absorption into globalised capitalism from a deliberately weakened position. The road from which deviation is impossible and which moves the travellers along itself at ever increasing speeds resembles the motorway, the railway and the conveyor belt.

This section draws on the Yoruba metaphor "Life is a Road" (Waterman 53) in ways which are consonant with Ben Okri's treatment of the theme in his *Famished Road* trilogy. As Highfield writes of Okri,

> The road, along with its constant hunger for the movement of goods
>
> and bodies represents the unequal balance of trade that comes to
>
> define African economies…The famished road, then, is a
>
> representation of global capitalism. The road eats without
>
> discrimination, devouring whole communities in its mission to feed
>
> an insatiable external market. (146)

Reading Highfield's interpretation of the road as capitalism back onto Tutuola, we should expand the focus from trade imbalance onto a broader *experience* of capitalist development. The sense of being moved along a fixed track at ever

increasing speeds evokes the experience of homogenised time and activity under

capitalism, as we can see in Holloway's comment upon Lukács:

> People's doing becomes converted into a train that moves faster
>
> and faster, but along pre-established tracks: "Time sheds its
>
> qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly
>
> delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things'…:
>
> in short, it becomes space"….All that lies, lay or might lie outside the
>
> tracks is pushed aside. (Lukács qtd. inHolloway *Change the World*
>
> 58)

Holloway's comment draws our attention to the fact that it is the travellers' own

initially voluntary movement which traps them on the road: their movement and

the road combine to create an irresistible momentum. Reading space as a

fetishisation of time, Tutuola's road to hell suggests a sense of historical doom, as

the travellers move from desolated spaces, animal predation and slavery

towards a wholly deracinated and deranged social body based upon torture—

uprooted, destratified and crazed.

The graphic tortures, the extreme cruelty, and the abject depravity which

Tutuola describes in Unreturnable-Heaven's Town demand our attention. While

critics such as Hogan and Achebe have seen in the couple's suffering a form of

cleansing expiation for previous sins, I would counter that such readings are an

attempt to avoid the text's unsettling suggestions about the relationship between

violence, xenophobia and social cohesion. Achebe argues that the Drinkard's

sufferings constitute "appropriate punishment" and allow for his ultimate

redemption (101) and points out that Unreturnable-Heaven's Town is countered

by the Faithful Mother in the white tree, an example of how "particularly harsh ordeals" are balanced by "recuperative periods of rest" (106).

Hogan understands Unreturnable-Heaven's Town not primarily in contrast to periods of rest like Wraith-Island or the Faithful Mother's white tree, as suggested by Achebe, but rather as an inversion of Deads' Town, a pairing suggested by Yoruba cosmology. Both cities are spaces of death, and both are characterised by reversals of normal human behaviour, but while Deads' Town corresponds to the benign *orun afefe* or "heaven of breezes," from which people may be reborn into earthly life, Unreturnable-Heaven's Town links to the wicked *orun apadi* or "heaven of potsherds…a brutal place where cruel people are sent" and from which souls cannot return to earth ("Understanding" 41). For the Christian Tutuola, however, Hogan suggests, this place of torment actually does offer hope of redemption: it "provides, by way of the burial and the beating, the sacrifice required of the narrator, the sacrifice which compensates for his greed" (143). Although a redemptive reading of Unreturnable-Heaven's Town is deeply problematic, as I shall demonstrate, Hogan does offer persuasive evidence in favour of reading the episode in terms of initiation and sacrifice. He points out that burial to the neck had been used as a Yoruba form of human sacrifice (143). Further, he notes that ritual shaving is an aspect both of Yoruba initiation ceremonies and of corpse preparation (150): the Drinkard and his wife die, are buried and are reborn. Hogan likens their burial and escape, facilitated by rain, to "planting" and to the power of agriculture to give temporary respite from death (143). While Hogan's cultural contextualisation is helpful, and his identification of cycles of life and death is certainly correct, what is missing here is a critical attention to cruelty and pain which acknowledges the emphasis

placed upon them by Tutuola. A further problem with Hogan's reading, as well

as Achebe's, is that any assignment of moral or ritual purpose to the tortures

inflicted in Unreturnable-Heaven's Town needs to address the agency and role of

the town's inhabitants in inflicting those tortures.

If the Drinkard and his wife are undergoing an initiation, into what are

they being initiated, and by whom? The answer is suggested by their act of

revenge: "we lighted some of the houses with the fire…about ninety per cent of

them also burnt with the houses and none of their children were save" (The

Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 244). Despite the horrors visited upon them by the

townspeople, and the special emphasis placed on the children's wickedness

(239, 240, 243), this retaliation remains shocking due to the couple's calculation

and efficiency: the Drinkard outlines the factors contributing to the town's

extraordinary flammability, and he reports the deaths as a statistic. Having

previously brought Death to the old man's village and having attempted to burn

their frightening child, the Drinkard and his wife have moved not towards

redemption but to greater destruction and killing. This is a line of progression

which will be further intensified through their role in the destruction of Red-

town (269-70), and which is consonant with the parental cannibalism being

resorted to in the Drinkard's home village (295-6), as well as with his casual

acceptance of mass-death following the egg's production of whips (301).

Hogan's agricultural interpretation of their internment as a planting and harvest

is persuasive—but his optimistic conclusions result from an incomplete reading

of the imagery.

Unreturnable-Heaven's Town does not function merely as a trial

contributing to personal redemption, nor is it in any clear way integrated into a

moral or religious schema. Rather, Tutuola has adapted Yoruba and Christian ideas of eternal suffering and spiritual displacement to his schizohistorical vision of destructive social and cultural configurations. Terror and cruelty, far from being the sole remit of wild bush creatures or bands of outlaws, manifest most intensely through social institutions. The Yoruba Wars fostered a hostile, fragmented regional climate; and the wars produced and were perpetuated by new, aggressive cities. Among these, the most notably ferocious was Abeokuta's historic rival Ibadan, whose social functioning was overwhelmingly mediated through warfare, plunder and empire-building (Falola "From Hospitality to Hostility" 53). Although I am not suggesting that Unreturnable-Heaven's Town is simply a cryptohistorical portrait of Ibadan, the history of Ibadan demonstrates the existence of a society which used violence as its cohesive force.

The sacrifice of the Drinkard and his wife to the city could be an image of enslavement, the agricultural 'planting' of their bodies serving not as an uncomplicated paean to fertility, as Hogan suggests, but rather referencing the nineteenth century Yoruba agriculture's reliance on slave labour (Ajayi 69): Tutuola shows us tortured bodies whipped, mocked, exposed and imprisoned by the land. If we read slavery into their trauma, then we might also gain an insight into their violent revenge upon Unreturnable-Heaven's Town. In the 1890s, as the British forced the wars to an end and brought the region under its own imperial control, the constant trickle of escaping slaves became a mass exodus; some of these slaves, before leaving, first destroyed or looted their former masters' properties (Falola "Power Relations" 104). It might also recall 'stranger' refugee populations, such as those in Ife, who were kept in quasi-pawnship, until they finally declared war upon their 'hosts' (Ajayi 72-3). It is an

image of cyclical violence, as the dynamics of the perverted social body are perpetuated even in the city's destruction. To return to Hogan's agricultural imagery, if a society sows torture and death, Tutuola suggests, then it will reap its own destruction.

The episode of Unreturnable-Heaven's Town opens with a light-hearted description of the town's absurd customs, the tone of which is markedly different from the descriptions of torture which follow. The cruel creatures are mocked for sleeping on their roofs; washing their animals but not themselves; building their houses on steep hills so that their children roll out; and climbing a ladder before leaning it against the tree. In the next paragraph, Tutuola writes that should a stranger enter the city's "thick and tall wall," the inhabitants will "cut the flesh of his or her body to pieces while still alive, sometimes they would stab a person's eyes with a pointed knife and leave it there until that person would die of much pain" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 240). How can we explain this tonal dissonance, and how does absurdity relate to cruelty?

Fagunwa deploys the same abrupt shift in his description of the city Filth in *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. The city's inhabitants, blinded by God in punishment for their sins (31), fall into a senseless marketplace brawl: the old and young collapse, "while the entire populace made their bodies their thoroughfare," and mothers collect "dead babies instead of their own living children." Directly following this grotesque tableau of a suicidally fragmented society of the damned, Fagunwa proceeds to note that "many of them wore their clothes inside out; some wore their *agbada* back to front" and "every garment shone with filth, it was more like the inside of a hunter's bag" (32). Attention to

the trivial reversals and inversions are a temporary blind to the genuine horror of clothes glistening with gore.

Tutuola uses absurdity to similar effect—a rhythmic variation, a distraction, enhancing the shock of the creatures' genuine transgressions. The comic inversions can also be read as social satire: the point of Unreturnable-Heaven's Town is that it depicts hostility, perversion and cruelty as *systemic*. The society's priorities are perversely mistaken: they value human life so little that they do not even value their own comfort. Climbing the ladder before leaning it against a tree may be an image of social climbing, so that advancement is not based on socially valuable contributions. The unstable houses built on a steep hill (240) suggest, similarly, unsustainable and untenable development— and if a society is built on such an 'unlevelled playing field', then family life will become unstable, with economic pressures forcing children out of the home, rolling downhill. Covered in filth and dressed in leaves (240), the cruel creatures hark back to the King of Refuse, "covered with both dried and undried leaves" (227): like him, they are simultaneously spirits of the bush and of market or urban spaces. As the Refuse King, lord of the bush market, may suggest the social and cultural violence by which the capitalist market replaces traditional items with mass-produced trash, so the cruel creatures wrapped in leaves may suggest city-dwellers clad in flimsy, faddish fashions. The animals, kept in luxury, may suggest a disproportionate attention towards the inhabitants' base instincts, their 'animal nature.' More simply, the pampered "domestic animals"

may simply be pets, a characteristically 'European' concept.[13] While it certainly

is possible to read the 'absurdities' as brief satirical comments on urban life, the

tone nevertheless remains out of keeping with the intensity of later passages.

What this section attempts, perhaps, is primarily to emphasise that cruelty is

neither natural nor spontaneous, but that it arises from a thorough distortion of

social priorities and values: it may be innocent to cherish an animal, for example,

but not to the exclusion of care for oneself or one's fellow humans.

The king of Unreturnable-Heaven's Town declares it to be "a town in

which are only enemies of God living, only cruel, greedy and merciless

creatures." This announces the beginning of the travellers' formal torture: he

"commanded his attendants to clear all the hair from our heads," using first "flat

stones" and then "pieces of broken bottle." The stones "only hurt every part of

our heads," while the bottles "cleared some of the hair by force, and the blood did

not allow them to see the rest of our hair again" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 241):

in the painful, ineffectual shaving with blunt instruments, the creatures'

penchant for 'incorrectness' takes a sinister turn. Through torture, this social

configuration impresses itself upon individual bodies. As Deleuze and Guattari

write in *Anti-Oedipus*, "Cruelty has nothing to do with some ill-defined or natural

---

[13] The characteristic foreignness of pets is played upon in a recent satirical essay by

the Nigerian writer Elnathan John, who councils any wishing to befriend foreigners to

"avoid fellow Nigerians....You cannot afford some nosy Bulus telling your oyibo

friend, Mr. Carter, whose dog Quentin you religiously ask after, that during Christmas

in your village in Kaduna South you routinely welcome visitors with peppered dog

meat."

violence…cruelty is the movement of culture that is realised in bodies and inscribed on them…" (159). By inducing extremities of pain, Unreturnable-Heaven's Town symbolically 'kills' the individual as an individual: torture transforms them into bodies without organs, and the continued tortures cause intensities of pain to circulate upon those bodies without organs.

The goal of the shaving is not to remove hair but to cause dehumanising levels of suffering, to construct traumatised and catastrophic bodies without organs "that only pain can fill" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 168). In Unreturnable-Heaven's Town, the program is that of a sadistic social body, and it consists of two kinds of scraping, then two kinds of burning—pepper rubbed in the wounds and a burning rag hung over their heads—followed by yet more scraping, now with a snail's shell (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 241). The victims' heads flow with blood, and "we did not know whether we were still alive or dead" (242). In Mbembe's terms, their torture takes them to an extremity which becomes a "threshold experience" and transports them to a "death-world." Most importantly, Mbembe makes it clear that these death-worlds, populated by the "living dead (ghosts)" and "wandering subjects," are not individual but social traumas ("Life" 1). The inability to confront historical trauma and guilt becomes a haunting: "Because the narrative of slavery has been condemned to being elliptical, a ghost persecutes and haunts the subject and inscribes on his or her unconscious the dead body of a language that must be constantly repressed" (Mbembe "African Modes" 261). Unresolved and continuing trauma becomes a memory "physically embedded in bodies marked with the signs of their own destruction" (267). We have already considered a reading in which the Drinkard and his wife here occupy the roles of slaves. In Tutuola's multivalent

schizohistories, it is simultaneously possible to follow Mbembe's arguments about haunting silences so that the travellers, whose heads are tortured, represent a pre-independence African consciousness which is afflicted by histories which it cannot comfortably acknowledge. Mbembe argues that African historical discourse and writing has been critically hobbled by unwillingness to speak of "the murder of brother by brother" and "the divided polis"—and that until such historical reckonings take place, "the appeal to race as the moral and political basis of solidarity will depend, to some extent, on a mirage of consciousness" ("African Modes" 260). Thus, perhaps, Unreturnable-Heaven's Town represents the history of war and slavery which not only torments but marks, claims and imprisons the travellers; so that they do not so much overcome this history as destroy it, moving onwards, but in ways which bear the continued imprint of a brutal and brutalising past.

4.3.6 The Faithful-Mother in the White Tree

The travellers' cruellest ordeal is followed by a recuperative holiday, courtesy of Faithful-Mother of the white tree. This woman, who "was only helping those who were in difficulties and enduring punishments" (248), gives them treatment in her hospital (249), then allows them uninterrupted amusements in a large dance hall:

> This beautiful hall was full of all kinds of food and drinks, over
>
> twenty stages were in that hall with uncountable orchestras,
>
> musicians, dancers and tappers….There we saw that all the lights in
>
> this hall were in technicolours and they were changing colours and
>
> five minute intervals. (249)

As this passage makes clear, the white tree is a modern pleasure palace, equipped not only with coloured lights and orchestras, but also with photographs (248) and a casino (250).

These trappings of modernity are the elements which have most captivated critics commenting on the episode of the Faithful-Mother in the white tree, a space which Achebe refers to as "this European-style haven of conspicuous consumption" (*Hopes and Impediments* 107). Because the white tree is the most modernised zone in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, this will be a convenient moment to take note of critical reactions to Tutuola's textual usages of the furniture of modern life. Critics consistently mark these objects as being out of place, usually noting the objects as both historically and culturally incongruous. Cameras and electric lights are both assumed to be too modern and too Western to belong naturally in the world of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Dylan Thomas' first review of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* set the tone by noting the "many…convenient features of modern civilised life that crop up in the black and ancient midst of these fierce folk legends, including bombs and aeroplanes, high-heel shoes, cameras, cigarettes, guns, broken bottles, policemen" (Thomas 7). Nigerian critic Sunday Anozie concurs that "One does not expect to find such diverse phenomena of Western technological culture side by side with primitive African magic in the same folkloristic world" (244). Some critics feel that these juxtapositions serve roughly the same purpose as Tutuola's use of precise numbers: they heighten the comical effect of his fantastic imagery. Gerald Moore, for instance, praises "Tutuola's easy use of the paraphernalia of modern life to give sharpness and immediacy to his imagery" (52). Collins feels that Tutuola's "anachronistic syncretism of the old and new" (64) has the effect of

"curiously de-emphasising the white man's ways and works" by converting them into mere props for his own rather more spectacular "mythical marvels" (66). Anozie, on the other hand, feels that Tutuola's aim is not to diminish Western modernity but rather to "fuse the values of the living and the dead, that is to say, of modernity and tradition" (244). In the case of the Faithful-Mother in the white tree, however, Achebe sees Tutuola casting doubts on the ethics of this particular kind of modernity which, unlike the traditional haven of Wraith-Island, fails to maintain the proper balance of work and rest: instead, it holds out a deceptive offer of absolute convenience and pure play (108). Thus, although critics have offered different interpretations of the significance of modern objects in Tutuola's texts, there is a broad consensus that these items are incongruous.

From my reading so far, however, it should be clear that these more modern objects are not at all out of place; rather, they help readers to put the text *in place.* They serve as clues and reminders that we should understand the Bush of Ghosts as a vernacular theorisation of historically situated realities. Contrary to critical assumption, Tutuola's use of the fantastic mode does not at all require that his setting be either 'ancient' or ahistorical. As we saw in Section 2.3, West African vernacular theories commonly use the bush as a matrix for exploring both contemporary and historically specific concerns, a practice in which Tutuola participates. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* Tutuola is exploring patterns of connection between the Yoruba Wars of the nineteenth century and the economic transformations of Nigeria in the early to mid-twentieth century. Within this framework, the text plays complex schizohistorical games, such as creating multi-layered histories, abstracting histories into intensities, and moving freely between historical moments with only the faintest signalling.

Thus the text creates a densely populated *smooth* historicity, rather than an ahistorical flatness.

Once we have understood Tutuola's historical frames of reference, we can question an important assumption contained within critical reactions to his texts' engagement with modernity, which is that more modern items do not really belong in Africa or in African texts. This is the belief lurking behind the idea of 'anachronism', and it is the tacit corollary of equating the modern with the Western: modernity is un-African. Tutuola's texts are assumed to be ahistorical because Africa is seen as essentially ahistorical. African history is understood to consist more or less entirely of colonialism and perhaps slavery; apart from this, there is only an undifferentiated 'legendary' village past. This, at least, is the approach we find in Tutuola's critics, who find no historical referents in his texts apart from a few references to colonialism and the striking artefacts of modernity, scattered like debris across the wilderness of his 'folkloric' texts, with their roots in 'orality.'

Nevertheless, as we consider the Faithful-Mother in the white tree, there is no doubt that she presides over a zone which exists in contrast to and at a remove from its surroundings, although these distinctions by no means render it anachronistic or 'un-African'. The Faithful-Mother's hospitality not only contrasts with the cruelties of Unreturnable-Heaven's Town; it also breaks with the pattern of hostility and selfishness which has marked almost all of the Drinkard's encounters so far. It stands with Wraith-Island and, to some extent, the less welcoming Deads' Town as a space in which the social body has not completely disintegrated. While Wraith-Island was an old-fashioned pastoral idyll (something resembling the ahistorical village past of critical imaginations),

the white tree is wealthy and urban: "When we entered inside the white tree, there we found ourselves inside a big house which was in the centre of a big and beautiful town" (247). The Faithful-Mother, who presides over this town, receives them in "a big parlour which was decorated with costly things" (247). Although the couple do not buy anything during their stay in the white tree, Tutuola emphasises monetary value: they 'sell their death' for £70: 18: 6d and 'lend their fear' for a monthly rate of £3: 10: 0d (247), and "the largest dancing hall" is decorated "with about one million pounds (£)" (248). Once again, as with their ferry business, they have left the zone of cowries—the pre-colonial currency of slavery—and entered the colonial realm of sterling, where even such mysteries as immortality can be handled with a financial transaction, and fear is for hire much like the body parts rented by the complete gentleman.

The Faithful-Mother is widely recognised as a missionary. Collins describes her "a strangely indulgent missionary" in "an oddly undisciplined missionary hospital" (64): there is, he suggests, something surprising about a missionary running dance halls and casinos. The Faithful-Mother is certainly a different kind of missionary from the earnest Victoria Juliana of *The Wild-Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts*, who establishes a Salvation Army Church and school which trains "ghost scholars" to be bureaucrats in Hell (68-72, 92). She also has markedly different priorities from the Methodist cousin of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, who has undertaken a comprehensive development project, involving churches, schools, hospitals, courts and prisons, all of which Tutuola describes with a keen satirical attention to logistics and bureaucratic development (146-152). Those two missionaries are clearly operating according to different developmental priorities, aiming towards a very different vision of modernity.

While their projects recall the self-consciously edifying development projects of nineteenth century Saros in Abeokuta, the Faithful-Mother's white tree belongs to the very different, voguish modernity of Lagos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Faithful-Mother is indeed a missionary, but she is a missionary not of a religion but a way of life, of high culture and consumption. Her white tree stands as an oasis of pleasure and leisure in the middle of a violent region, much like Lagos during the Yoruba Wars, particularly those areas of Lagos which were home to Europeans or Saros. For all its delights, the white tree is an arborescent, striated space of straight lines: "all the rooms in this house were in a row," and the Faithful-Mother's authority is indisputable. Her sphere of influence, nevertheless, is tightly constrained—"she must not go beyond their boundary" (251). She sends the travellers back into the conflict zone with "a gun and ammunition and a cutlass," which may well reference the fact that missionaries, through energetic lobbying, bore some responsibility for the large role Lagos played in the arms trade during the Yoruba Wars (Ajaiyi 20). Lagos remained safely insulated from the hellish effects of the conflicts, while its supplies facilitated and prolonged the wars. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* the Faithful-Mother has "no right to delay anybody more than a year and some days" (251): she has to keep the flows moving.

Is the Faithful-Mother white? The white tree is certainly the zone in this text which most clearly portrays the long history of European-influenced development in the region. Tutuola has offered a fairly clear and witty answer to this question: the photographs of the white tree's guests "resembled us too much and were also white colour" (248). That is, in the white tree, as in areas of Lagos,

they are 'acting white.' In the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, before nationalism became an influential ideology, wealthy Lagosians prided themselves on usage of European cultural signifiers. The wealthy areas of Victorian Lagos boasted a cultural program including concerts of Bach, Beethoven and Handel; and these performances were reviewed by music critics in the local papers (Cole 46). The sophistication of the Saros, who could claim "such indices of civilisation as top hats and handlebar moustaches" (Waterman 32), was frequently remarked upon by European visitors, although often with a patronising or ironic tone. One 1880s observer noted, for example, "Even the natives will offer champagne and moselle to visitors" (qtd. in Cole 47). It is impossible to know whether the Faithful Mother is white, and although I would argue that we would do well to envisage her as a member of the Lagosian Saro elite, the point is that it hardly matters: money, rather than race, is the most significant factor in access to luxury.

Lagosian and Nigerian modernity was not limited to fashion: by 1900, the city had electricity, a railway, several schools, roads, hospitals and bridges (Cole 10). As trade and British currency thoroughly penetrated the colony, imported goods became widely available in Nigerian markets. In 1911-1916, for example, south-eastern Nigerian markets stocked umbrellas, sewing machines, bicycles, soap, beer, watches, guns and tobacco (Martin 50). These "indices of civilization" had been fairly common in Nigeria since before Tutuola was born.

Not only were 'Western' amenities and consumer goods commonly found in Nigeria, Nigerians did not regard them as foreign, but rather incorporated them not only into their daily lives but also into their vernacular theories. Soyinka makes this point emphatically when discussing Tutuola in his 1963

essay "From a Common Backcloth," in which he notes that Yoruba "absorb every new experience…and carry on with life." Illustrating their vernacular theoretical assimilation of modernity, Soyinka writes that "*Sango* (Dispenser of Lightning) now chairmans the Electricity Corporation, *Ogun* (God of Iron) is the primal motor mechanic" (9). In this essay he argues that Tutuola's confident use of modern imagery is a signal of his "creative emergence from the true, not the wishful, untainted backcloth" (10). Tutuola, Soyinka argues, is writing from and to a historically-situated and real Nigeria, rather than harking back to an invented, ahistorical 'authenticity': "Tutuola lives *now*, and he responds to change" (9). Yet even Soyinka fails to sufficiently convey the rather important fact that electric lights and cameras were not brand new, but were part of social changes which had already been in motion for nearly half a century.

Electricity, as Waterman notes, had the culturally transformative effect of facilitating the emergence of nightlife. In the dance halls of the white tree, one can enjoy "non-stop dance till morning," lit by "technicolour" lights "that were changing colours at five minutes intervals" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 249). Lagos nightlife of 1911 is described by the German anthropologist, Leo Frobenius:

> The people pour in and out of numerous buildings like music halls, glaring with electric light. They come on bicycles, swagger canes in their hands, cigarettes between their lips and top-hats on their heads. They can be seen outside sitting in tightly packed crowds, singing for hours together. They display all the outward signs of advanced European civilization, from patent leather boots to the single eye glass and every other individual wears either spectacles or

eye glasses of gold. And the ladies! Good gracious me! The picture

hats! The stoles! The frocks of silk! These temples of vanity blazing

with illuminations like Variety theatres are in Christian Churches.

(qtd. in Cole 89)

Frobenius, obviously, is not an impartial observer: he speaks from within a racist

imperialist establishment, articulating a not uncommon European discomfort

with West African cosmopolitanism, which he sees as vulgar, presumptuous and

morally suspect. His description of "music halls, glaring with electric light" is

clearly similar to the attractions of the white tree, making such sights the

marvels of the generation or two before Tutuola's own. It is also worth noting

that Frobenius is disturbed by precisely the same conjunction of religion and

'vanity' that the Faithful-Mother seems to embody.

The imperialist anthropologist's suspicion towards nightlife would have

been shared by a good number of Yoruba more conservative Lagosians. West

African cultures had long held night to be spiritually as well as practically

dangerous, a temporal equivalent to the dangerous spaces of the bush. As

Achebe writes in *Things Fall Apart,* "Darkness held a vague terror for these

people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at

night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and

uncanny in the dark" (8). In this passage, Achebe's narrative voice creates a

distance between itself and the reader on the one hand and the nineteenth

century villagers on the other, calling them "these people" and juxtaposing "the

bravest among them" with children. This distance suggests that attitudes

towards the night had become culturally distinguishing, dividing the old

fashioned and rural, the 'bush', from the urban and sophisticated. This division

emerges again in a passage written by American observers in Abeokuta, describing the paved main roads lined with shops: "Late into the night, the municipal street lights blaze along these roads, supplemented by the lights of private enterprises. Away from these streets, electric lights are considerably less frequent, and modern amenities are scarcer" (Leighton 296). It is worth noting that these observers would be highly unlikely ever to describe the streetlights of their hometown Ithaca, New York as 'blazing': as with Frobenius' "glaring" lights, these street lights are marked as out-of-keeping with the 'natural' darkness of an African city like Abeokuta. We can place this assumption in ironic context by noting that Abeokuta, before it was forced to capitulate to British rule in 1914, was carrying out ambitious municipal development schemes, and that under British rule "the modernisation process was halted and sometimes reversed: the planned electric street lighting was cancelled, and the waterworks fell into disrepair" (Parrinder-Law 77). Thus in Abeokuta the autonomous African modernisation, which had been on-going throughout the nineteenth century, was concretely hindered by British rule: a writer from Abeokuta could not uncomplicatedly equate the Western with the modern.

Electricity had been known in Nigeria for almost as long as it had been in Britain or the United States, but well into the twentieth century its spread was limited to wealthier urban spaces, making electric lighting a clear territorial marker, allowing certain public spaces to assume distinct social characters and functions. As Waterman writes, "The opening of the night, a sociotemporal correlate of urbanization and the organization of proletarian leisure time, exposed humans to supernatural forces constrained during the day" (75-6). Not only did the "nocturnal subculture in Lagos" expose participants to supernatural

forces (75); it might also be understood to transform them into these supernatural beings. The bush serves as an urban space, and city-dwellers become ghosts, creatures of the night.

The Faithful-Mother and her white tree *are* out of place in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, not because they are icons of modern white civilization situated incongruously within an ahistorical landscape of folkloric orality, but because they signal sharp and persistent class divides in Nigerian society, as well as a hardening distinction between rural and urban life. The white tree's urbanity is signalled in part by seemingly miraculous commodity production:

> One night, when we were short of drinks at about two o'clock in the mid-night, then the chief waiter reported to the Faithful-Mother that we were short of drinks and there were none in the store, then she gave the chief waiter a small bottle which was exactly the size of injection's bottle and it contained only a little quantity of wine. After the chief waiter brought it to the hall we began to drink it, but for three days and nights, the whole of us could not drink the wine which the bottle contained to one-fifth. (251)

In this urban zone, the tapsters have disappeared, leaving only the waiters visible. The magic of commodities renders procurement effortless and the production processes invisible. Interestingly, however, Tutuola has the Faithful-Mother show them "the kitchen in which we met about three hundred and forty cooks who were always busy as bees" (249). Commenting on the white tree, Achebe writes that "play, though a necessary restorative, is not only a temporary but even an illusory escape from the reality of waking life, which is work with its

attendant pain and suffering" (Achebe *Hopes and Impediments* 108).[14] By

showing us the cooks and waiters of the white tree, Tutuola not only reminds us

of the inescapably constant presence of work, he also makes it clear that for

some to enjoy uninterrupted leisure, it is necessary for others to do

disproportionate amounts of work. Achebe continues that "The Drinkard's

fault…is that he attempted to subvert the order of things and put play in the

place of work" (Achebe 108). Tutuola is not simply moralising against laziness,

however, and I would slightly revise Achebe's observation: the Drinkard's fault is

that he exploits and seeks to perpetuate the existing order of things, with its

unbalanced distribution of play and work. Karl-Heinz Bottcher notes that the

couple's sojourn in the white tree is the only time during the Drinkard's decade-

long journey when he loses sight of his goal (48). This is because, of course, he

has actually achieved his goal, which is the enjoyment of limitless consumption

with no work. The Drinkard's childhood enjoyment, funded by his father's

fortune in cowries, may have been facilitated by the slave trade, but in the white

tree, he and his wife have become commodities.

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[14] Achebe's insistence in this essay on the moral value of manual labour—a
morality which he locates entirely in Tutuola yet explicitly voices himself— sounds
slightly disingenuous coming from a professional writer and broadcaster. I rather
suspect that Tutuola might have had slightly more sympathy with Jeffrey Bernard,
who objected to the myth that that there was something romantic and glamorous
about hard work….If there were something romantic about it, the Duke of
Westminster would be digging his own garden, wouldn't he? Shitty jobs are alleged
to have dignity. But there's nothing undignified about lying about all day and being
waited on by servants, sipping champagne (qtd. in Hodgkin).

4.3.7 Red-Town

After the travellers' departure from the white tree, *The Palm-Wine*

Drinkard enters a long section about the Red-People, a section which comprises

several shorter episodes: the Red-king's story about the origins of Red-town

(254-7); the Drinkard's sacrifice to and battle with the red-bird and red-fish

(258-60); the Red-people's flight from the Drinkard and his pursuit of them

(261-2); the cosmic celebrations of Drum, Song and Dance (263-4); and the tale

of the Invisible-Pawn (265-70). The tales of Red-town are complex and have

received relatively little critical attention, particularly given their length. This, I

will argue, is likely due to the obscurity and moral ambiguity in these tales.

We have just emerged from the absolute wickedness and goodness of

Unreturnable-Heaven's Town and the Faithful-Mother's white tree, and

previously the travellers have been assailed by selfishness and greed (as with the

wife's father or the half-bodied baby), automatic hostility to strangers (as in

Refuse-Town or Unreturnable-Heaven's Town), or simple predatory instincts. In

the stories of Red-town, however, Tutuola presents more recognisably human

mixtures of vice and virtue: rather than clear victims and persecutors, the

characters become combinations of both. This episode intensifies the Drinkard's

destructiveness, following on from his release of Death (199), the attempted

burning of the baby Zurrjir (217), and the torching of Unreturnable-Heaven's

Town (244). Following the Drinkard's slaying of the red-bird and red-fish, the

Red-king presciently recognises him not as a rescuer but as a danger, saying

"'Here is another fearful and harmful creature who could ruin my town in future.'

(He called me a fearful and harmful creature)" (260)—Tutuola emphasises the

point through repetition. As Edwards writes, in Red-town, "it is the Drinkard

himself who seems like a monster...he is simultaneously victim and killer"
(Edwards 259-60). It is important to recognise that this ambivalent position is
shared by all of the actors in these episodes; this culminates in the Invisible-
Pawn's deliberate, carnivalesque and lethal play with inversions of power
relations, and gaps between apparent and actual power. The red-bird and red-
fish terrorise the Red-people, but only after the king has tried to burn them alive
(256). The Red-people, victims of the red-bird and red-fish, in turn try to pass on
their victimisation to the Drinkard and his wife by compelling them to
"volunteer" for sacrifice (257). The Drinkard, thus, has been wronged by the
Red-people, but by the time he causes them all to be killed, he has been living
and prospering among them in peaceful neighbourliness for over a year (264).

In these cycles of suffering and inflicting suffering, as well as in the
pattern of deterritorialization and reterritorialization by which the Red-people
repeatedly flee and resettle their towns, we can see patterns which are familiar
from the Yoruba Wars. As we saw in Section 3.2, the Yoruba Wars involved
several incidents of large-scale regional depopulation. In one of these incidents,
refugees from Oyo, fleeing Fulani invaders, sacked and destroyed every single
Egba village, before going on to found Ibadan (Watson 41). The Egba who
escaped fled their burning homes, seeking shelter in the bush, before gathering
and founding the fortified city of Abeokuta (Ajayi 11). As in any war, but very
particularly in tangled, serial conflicts like the Yoruba Wars, there are no clear
heroes or villains in the stories of Red-town—victims become aggressors only to
face attacks again. As is also the case in war, however, the actions of a few result
in the sufferings of many, as represented in the many deaths and
deterritorializations of the Red-people. Thus, abstracted to its basic shape, the

story of Red-town follows and elaborates upon a pattern familiar from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, with its many images of ruined settlements and wholesale destruction of communities—as well as the many even more abstracted incarnations of fear, hostility, predation and violence.

The story of Red-town also draws on another leitmotif of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, one just as fundamental as the cyclical cruelties of war: the opposition between the settled and the nomadic, between capture and flight, between reterritorialization and deterritorialization. The Red-people's attempts to reterritorialize themselves—that is, to resume and sustain their lives and agricultural practice—are repeatedly disrupted by forces of deterritorialization, forces which are recognised as inherently threatening because they carry the force of deterritorialization. These deterritorializing forces enter the town from the bush, and they are all linked by being out of place: the red-fish in the forest; the red-bird in the river; the Drinkard and wife on their recently-resumed line of flight; and the Invisible-Pawn, a disguised emissary of the bush. Their interactions with the Red-people are not simple, however. As Deleuze and Guattari write, the lines of the nomad and of the settlement "do not only coexist, but also transform themselves into one another, cross over into one another" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 245). The deterritorializing forces which menace, dislodge and transform the Red-people also attach themselves to the town and become temporarily reterritorialized, however problematically. The red-fish and red-bird assume a kind of totemic, guardian role; the Drinkard and his wife become prosperous farmers; and the Invisible-Pawn deliberately, though very partially, insinuates himself into the economic logic of the town.

The enigmatic red-bird and red-fish can be read primarily through intense displacement and associated category confusions, although we can begin by examining some contextual connections which may help us to situate these bizarre bodies. They are wrongfully-taken prey, creatures which demand cautious respect and restoration; the boy's wanton attempt to destroy them brings disaster upon his town. In this, they connect with the Yoruba and broader West African belief in sacred spaces within which one must not hunt or farm, and sacred animals which must not be killed. This connection is strengthened when the wronged creatures demand annual sacrifices in atonement. In the episode of Red-town, the boy's violence against the sacred creatures and the resulting social suffering represent the violation of social mores and cultural cohesion during the wars, as well as their continued fraying through modernisation.

Their redness may well be understood in vernacular theory as indicative of dissolution or catastrophe, as is indicated in a brief passage from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The residents of Abame have killed a white man on a bicycle, having been informed by their Oracle that "the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them" (101). Following their killing of the stranger, their market is surrounded by an detachment led by three British men, and in the ensuing massacre, "everybody was killed, except the old and the sick who were at home" (102). Following this catastrophe, it is reported, "Their clan is now completely empty. Even the sacred fish in their mysterious lake have fled and the lake has turned the colour of blood. A great evil has come upon their land as the Oracle had warned" (102). We can compare this to the Red-king's testimony that, as well as the people and animals, the "river and bush became red at the same time" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 256), and that this redness

indicates their doom. Achebe seems to be drawing on a vernacular theoretical

practice which associates social calamity with the land and water turning red,

and the redness with the land's abandonment. The violent destruction of Abame

by the British is a response to their decision to kill a strange, wrongly-coloured

creature found out of place, as is the destruction of the original Red-town.

Achebe and Tutuola both use Abame and Red-town respectively to convey a

dread of outsiders, a dread which is well-founded but ultimately disastrous.

The boy's mistreatment of the red-bird and red-fish may also be

connected to a more modern phenomenon: the destruction of Yoruba sacred

groves, which by the 1950s was becoming calamitous. The ruin of these groves

was so total that there is now only one remaining, the Osun-Osogbo sacred

grove, which was saved thanks to conservation efforts beginning in the 1950s

and which received the further protection of National Monument status in 1965.

While at one time every Yoruba town or village had a sacred grove, within which

all economic activity was forbidden, by the twentieth century they were being

destroyed by logging, agriculture and urban expansion. As Christianity and

Islam increasingly gained influence within the Yoruba community, traditional

sanctions protecting the sacred groves lost their force. A lucrative foreign

market in antiquities encouraged looting of religious statues. By the 1950s,

almost all Yoruba sacred groves had been despoiled. Prior to community

intervention, part of the Osun-Osogbo grove was transformed by the Department

of Agriculture and Forestry into a teak plantation, while throughout the grove

there was increasing theft, hunting and fishing (UNESCO). The fish and birds

that must not be taken had been taken, outside every Yoruba town and village.

The spaces within the bush that had been sacred had been defiled, and that

which should have been preserved was ransacked. By so doing, in the imagery of
The Palm-Wine Drinkard, the people had broken their territorial connections,
and they had opened the way for the Drinkard, who is the embodiment of
limitless greed, of the unstoppable flows of red palm oil, and of
deterritorialization which leads to social annihilation.

Having understood the red-fish and red-bird as linked both to historical
calamity and to the depredations of modern development, let us take some more
time to understand them abstractly, as connected to the fraught relationship
between deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The initial dangerousness
of the red-fish and red-bird is connected to their misplacement and
displacement:

> But when my parents saw the red-fish that the trap caught instead
>
> of a bush animal and again that the fish-net had caught a red-bird
>
> instead of a fish, and both were still alive, they told me to return
>
> them to the place that I brought them from... (*The Palm-Wine*
>
> *Drinkard* 255)

The parents recognise their being in the 'wrong' places as ominous, and their son
has compounded the risk by further dislocating them; he must atone by restoring
them to the 'right' wrong places. The boy refuses to make this restoration,
instead "stopping mid-way" (255) to build a fire upon which he throws the
creatures until "they burnt into halves" (256): this is a blocked line, an
abandoned mission, and an interrupted killing resulting—it seems—in the
monstrous, confused forms of bird and fish (259-60). His refusal to re-place the
red-fish and red-bird results, of course, in the transformation and displacement
of his entire town (256), which assumes a liminal existence as dead-but-alive. In

his descriptions of the red-bird and red-fish, Tutuola seems to be playing with

the limits of words: how unlike a fish and bird can he make his fish and bird

while still calling them 'fish' and 'bird'? The red-fish boasts

> over 30 horns and large eyes which surrounded the head. All these
>
> horns were spread out as an umbrella. It could not walk but was
>
> only gliding on the ground like a snake and its body was just like a
>
> bat's body and covered with long red hair like strings. It could only
>
> fly a short distance, and if it shouted a person who was four miles
>
> away would hear. All the eyes which surrounded the head were
>
> closing and opening at the same time as if a man was pressing a
>
> switch on and off. (259)

This is a fish with absolutely no characteristics of a fish. It is a spider-eyed,

umbrella-horned snake-like bat which half-flies, and shouts like a bullhorn. It

combines the bilateral, the radial, the reptilian, the mammalian and the

mechanical—without any hint of the piscine. After the jumbled, category-

exploding body of the red-fish, Tutuola gives us a red-bird which defies language:

> I saw that it was a red-bird, but its head could weigh one ton or more
>
> and it had six long teeth of about half a foot long and very thick,
>
> which appeared out of its beak. Its head was almost covered with all
>
> kinds of insects so that I could hardly describe it here fully. (260)

While the fish confused categories, the tyrannosaur-headed bird simply refuses

description, disappearing instead beneath its interkingdom swarms. The insects

covering the bird's body are a counterpart to the jumble of animals and objects

swarming within the fish's form. These creatures' composite bodies signal the

upheaval experienced by Red-town. Thinking about the links between

monstrous bodies and cultural disruption, we can turn to Cohen's "Monster Culture." There he writes that monsters "are disturbing hybrids whose incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (6). In this case, their bodies explode the deceptively simple words "bird" and "fish": was all their bodily chaos always contained within those words, or did they assume these monstrous bodies in the fire? By referring to them as simply the red-fish and red-bird for several pages before he actually describes them, Tutuola invites the reader to form mental images which he then overturns, replacing them with bodies so radically disordered that it is almost impossible to picture them at all. He wittily prefaces his extravagant descriptions by having the Drinkard announce, "I saw it was a red-bird" and "it was a red-fish in form" (259-60): these simple declarations soon make no sense at all. He subverts language, rendering apparently clear words meaningless and offering precise descriptions that will not cohere into an image.

We have considered the monsters that give Red-town its colour, but the question still remains: why is Red-town red? The first explanation for the Red-people's redness is offered by the Red-king himself, who tells how it was his own misdoing that caused the townspeople's change in colour as well as their deaths. As a youth, he had set two traps, one in the bush and one in a river; the bush trap caught a living red-fish, while the river trap caught a living red-bird. His parents order him to return the strange creatures to the river and bush; rather than do this, however, the boy decides to "burn them into ashes" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 256). The creatures object, "talking like human being, saying that I

must put them in the fire, because red creatures were not to go near fire at all."

At first he is "greatly terrified," although still determined to burn them, and after

they continue to object he becomes "greatly annoyed and put them in that fire by

force." They continue to speak from within the fire as they "burnt into halves,"

until the fire erupts in smoke, which covers the boy and follows him back to his

town. First the boy and then "the town and all the people, domestic animals,

town, river and bush became red at the same time" (256). Seven days later, "the

whole of us died with our domestic animals, and we left that town and settled

down here, but we were still red as before we died and also our domestic

animals, rivers, town and bush and anything we met here became red" (256-7).

They are followed to their new Red-town by the red-bird and red-fish, who settle

in a hole near the village from which they emerge annually to demand sacrifice

(257). On purely textual evidence, redness seems to be associated with

wrongness, inappropriateness, or being out of place, in the manner of the red-

bird and red-fish. The boy becomes red through his inappropriate response to

his unnatural discovery: he disobeys his parents and refuses to listen to his prey,

and his decision to burn rather than return the creatures is based on nothing

better than laziness and pettishness. Tutuola's world is, of course, one of

collective punishments, so that one boy's bad behaviour results in an entire

town's death and displacement. The town turning red signals its coming death

and deterritorialization: to be red is to be out of bounds, perhaps, to have strayed

beyond the limits of acceptable behaviour or to be pushed beyond the normal

and proper limits of life. As long as they live under the vindictive power of the

red-bird and red-fish, the people remain red, marked and vulnerable; once the

Drinkard kills the creatures, they revert to their previous colours (262).

Hogan suggests that redness here signifies a very specific kind of displacement: that of death. He reads Red-town as a third town of the dead, along with Unreturnable-Heaven's Town and Deads' Town: the redness is the red of laterite soil, and becoming the colour of soil represents burial ("Understanding *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*" 48). The deterritorialized red-fish and red-bird indicate "abnormalities of sustenance," which are connected to the concept of "abnormalities of reproduction" symbolised by the half-bodied baby through the phrase "burned into halves" (48-9). They live in holes, like buried corpses or planted crops, and from there they demand sacrifice: they are prey who have become predators, and represent a nature that does not feed humans but consumes them (49). Red, then, indicates death brought about through distortions in or violations of the necessary life cycles. Red-town is a space pervaded by death: death is at once past calamity, present condition and future threat. According to Hogan, then, the Red-people are red because they are dead; they have become marked by the earth that entombs them.

I would argue, however, that the redness of Red-town is more likely to be associated with the redness of the spiritually and economically significant camwood tree and the red dye produced from its wood. This potent tree has also been used as a totem, providing protection to those associated with it. Some of these 'children of the camwood tree' actually do have a reddish skin-tone. In his conversational 1923 book *Life in Southern Nigeria*, Percy Amaury Talbot observes the presence, in the Niger Delta, of some people whose skin tone is "vividly red." He writes of seeing one such woman at sunset:

> The rays of the setting sun fell upon [her], turning her red skin to
>
> positive scarlet, so that she seemed all aflame. Natives explain the

> peculiarity by saying that such red men and women are 'Children of
> the camwood tree.' This tree is their affinity, and when set free, their
> spirits enter trunk or branches... (102)

If Tutuola were referencing such a phenomenon, it might explain the Red-people's transformation into "two red trees," which flee before him, as "all the leaves on these trees were singing as human-beings as they were moving on" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 261). Tutuola does mention that "these Red-people could change themselves to anything they liked"—they first become "a great fire which burnt their houses and all their properties"—but even given this power, travelling in the form of trees is a strange choice.

In trying to understand the Red-people's transformation into trees, it may be worth noting the several rather notable qualities of the camwood tree, qualities which make it into a link between global capitalism and local magical practice. The tree's heartwood had long been used as a dye for textiles, and had been exported to Europe in large quantities since the seventeenth-century. With industrialisation, it became a major source of dyes for the wool and cotton mills, yielding a range of colours from red to brown to black (Cardon). As has previously been seen in Section 4.3.2, the Yoruba region had profoundly significant links with the British textiles industry, representatives of which shaped agricultural and social development of the region: by encouraging the growth of cotton as a cash crop, they funded mid-nineteenth century Yoruba modernisation, but they also encouraged increased demand for and reliance on slaves, forces which helped to perpetuate the Yoruba Wars.

Camwood, as well as being a long-standing export product with links to industrialisation and slavery, also had spiritual associations. The same dye

which was exported to the mills of Manchester is used across West Africa as a mystically potent body-paint, and is also used to dye Yoruba ceremonial masks. As Cardon and Jansen explain, "the tree is considered sacred, endowed with the power to protect against evil spirits and to attract benevolent ones." As the Red-people flee from the Drinkard, whom they perceive to be "another fearful and harmful creature," then, they assume the shape of the magically protective camwood tree, with which they have a spiritual affinity, or, as we might say, they dye themselves red (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 260-1).

It is a protective tree, however, with links to the destabilising flows of international trade, and this sense of destabilisation is also clearly evident in Tutuola's imagery. The Red-people become the fire which destroys their town (261)—as, perhaps, by becoming red initially, they 'became' the fire which half-burnt the red-fish and red-bird and destroyed their town (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 256). They then become two trees which flee across the bush for days (261). We should return here to the Yoruba word which roughly equates to 'tradition', '*ìjinlée,*' which means, 'deeply grounded' (Waterman 14). Previously, Tutuola has given us artificial trees with birds for leaves, which I discussed in Section 4.3.4 as images for the construction of an unstable, unreliable tradition. The refugee trees can be read quite clearly as the uprooting of societies. Nevertheless, the Red-people flee in an arborescent formation, just as the Egba Yoruba did. When the Egba were forced to abandon their homes and resettle in the new fortified city of Abeokuta, they did so in their old community formations. Abeokuta was formed as a patchwork of autonomous communities, each with their own forms of organisation and hierarchy. The image of the

deterritorialized tree, then, is an apt symbol for the refugee communities that
founded Tutuola's home city.

What are we to make of the reappearance of Drum, Song and Dance in
Red-town? Dance initially leads them to the town (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard*
253), and once the Drinkard has killed the beasts and the town has finally
reterritorialized itself, Drum, Song and Dance appear to celebrate the fact that
"they were also in a comfortable place and were no longer red." Their
celebrations initiate a cosmic upheaval, so that "the whole people that of the new
town, the whole people that rose up from the grave, animals, snakes, spirits, and
other nameless creatures, were dancing together with these three fellows" (263).
The celebrations end, however, with the disappearance of the musical avatars
from the earth and a restoration of the festively-disrupted orders:

> all the deads rose up from the grave returned to the grave and since
>
> that day they could not rise up again, then all the rest of the creatures
>
> went back to the bush etc. but since that day they could not come to
>
> the town and dance with anybody or with human beings. (264)

Hogan reads this passage against his interpretation of Drum, Song and Dance as
primarily signalling spaces of ritual and death. He argues that the presence of
Dance in Red-town indicates a movement away from the white tree's vivacious
modernity, indicated by its orchestral music, which is "different from—indeed,
opposed to—the implicitly funerary drum, song, dance and bell, and the various
hummings of the figures of death" ("Understanding" 48).

This funerary reading of Drum, Song and Dance is not satisfactory.
Rather, Tutuola seems to associate the figures strongly with liberatory
celebration: in their first appearance, they free the couple from the half-bodied

baby (220); and here they reappear to initiate a valedictory carnival before the town's anticipated return to proper order (a return which the Invisible-Pawn will subvert). Not only are they associated with life rather than death, there is also no indication that they should be understood as necessarily 'traditional,' as Hogan suggests. Dance, indeed, appears to them in a form so modern and 'Western' that she could well have been coming from the white tree herself:

> she was dressed in a long fancy gown, and there were many gold-
> beads around her neck and she wore high-heel shoes which
> resembled aluminium in colour, she was as tall as a stick of about ten
> feet long, she was of deep red complexion. (253)

Through her voguish appearance, Tutuola would seem to pointedly refute the division Hogan claims between traditional and modern music, between ritual and celebration. As Waterman makes clear throughout his book, *Juju*, Lagosian musicians found many different ways of incorporating inland Yoruba musical techniques into their urban musical innovations: against British and conservative elite preferences for 'pure' African and European music and the maintenance of a "separate-but-equal aesthetic" (75), Lagosian musicians developed styles which ranged from "modernized African musics" to "Africanized Western music" (43). The 'buzzing' which Hogan finds particularly 'noisy' and deathlike is, Waterman points out, a "highly valued" tonal quality in Yoruba music—the imported tambourine was prized for its ability to produce this buzzing in modern music. While the buzzing is "traditionally associated with supernatural manifestations," it should not necessarily be equated with death; for example, the "sizzling sound of the [tambourine's] jingles was associated with the spiritual potency of Christianity" (62). When Drum, Song

and Dance appear in Red-town, they facilitate crossings and mixings: the dead resurrect and dance with the living, and the bush creatures dance with the townspeople. Considering these crossings, let us recall my argument that the dead in Tutuola can represent 'the departed', those who leave home for cities or for the imperial metropole; and that, similarly, the bush can represent the urban or global world beyond home. What, then, does it mean when Drum, Song and Dance cause the living to dance with the dead and the bush spirits to dance in the town? This seems to represent the power of music to span diasporic distances and to incorporate outside influences. Indeed, the magic worked in Red-town is very like the feats accomplished by early twentieth-century Yoruba music, which was so remarkable for its syncretism.

Drum, Song and Dance do not mark death; rather, they facilitate rhythmic passage and harmonious mixings. Just as Yoruba music found ways to combine traditional sounds with exotic new instruments and styles, so Tutuola's musical avatars bring worlds together. Music combines tradition and innovation, so that the dead may dance with the living. Music also creates spaces of social wildness, wildness that is called out yet contained by the dance, so that bush creatures may come and dance with the people of the town. In the tale of Red-town, which is characterised by violation and socially destructive crossing, the dance is a respite, a moment of easy suspension between deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

4.3.8 The Invisible-Pawn

The final period of the Drinkard's sojourn in Red-town is contained within the story of the Invisible-Pawn, also known as "GIVE AND TAKE." This tale is concerned with money, debt and labour. It draws on Yoruba histories of forced

labour, including a form of indentured servitude for debtors known as 'pawnship,' which became increasingly common during the Yoruba Wars. In contrast with the cosmic dance described above, the tale of the Invisible-Pawn narrates inharmonious and ultimately ruinous interactions between the bush and the farm or town. By examining the economic histories Tutuola references, while paying attention to the episode's patternings of smooth and striated space, I will argue that the Invisible-Pawn represents the socially destructive effects of exploitation: economic injustice brings the destructive energies of the bush into the heart of social dynamics.

Before we examine the broad outlines of this episode, let us pause to examine an apparently inconsequential detail. The Invisible-Pawn asks to borrow "two thousand cowries (COWRIES), which was equivalent to six-pence (6d) in British money" (265). What is the significance of this request and the values given? Is it simply an instance of what Robert P. Armstrong, articulating a critical commonplace, calls Tutuola's "incredibl[e] and therefore very funny precision" and "spurious accuracy" (224-5)? First, let us note the possible meanings of cowries. As Ogundiran notes, cowries formed a link between slaves and waged labourers, including pawns. Cowries, 'slave money' obtained through the slave trade, began to be used in the nineteenth century to pay labourers, servants and pawns (Ogundiran 447). Next, let us turn to the exchange rate which Tutuola has given us. Two thousand cowries for six pence seems absurdly imbalanced—as indeed it is, but it is also absolutely accurate. From the mid-nineteenth century, British monetary policies caused a drastic devaluation of cowries, which lost 800% of their value against the shilling from 1850 to 1895

(Zeleza 284).[15] By 1895 in Lagos, two thousand cowries were worth precisely 6d

(Johnson 340). Following this link, we may read the Invisible-Pawn, learning the

meaning of the word "POOR," as late nineteenth century Yoruba-land, the wealth

of which was destroyed by imperial monetary policy. It is worth bearing this

possible reading in mind as we move through the interpretation of this section:

the dynamics of subservience and subversion that Tutuola explores in this

section may relate just as strongly to the colonial situation as it does to other

unequal and exploitative relationships.

The Invisible-Pawn, or "Give and Take," appears once the Drinkard has

established himself as the wealthiest man in Red-town. Having taken advantage

of the magical, instant-growth seeds from Wraith-Island, the Drinkard becomes

rich enough to hire "many labourers to clear bush for me," expanding his farm

until he becomes "richer than the rest of the people in that town" (264).

Remembering Achebe's emphasis on the moral value of agricultural labour

(*Hopes and Impediments* 108), we should note that the Drinkard's prosperity in

Red-town bears no relation to his own efforts but rather is the result of a magical

gift and the hired labour of others. Here—as in his palm plantation, in the white

tree and when he receives the magical egg—the Drinkard embodies unearned

wealth and exploitative consumption. He is a moral imbecile, in Achebe's terms,

but the cost of his parasitism is borne not by him, but by the societies he has

infested.

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[15] Cowries were not only devalued, they were also eventually "demonetised without

compensation," leading to the sudden loss not only of personal fortunes but also to

centuries' worth of accumulated wealth (Zeleza 284).

The magical seeds that the Drinkard plants are part of a narrative patterning that binds the ultimate destruction of Red-town to the idyll of Wraith-Island. Wraith-Island emphasised that social harmony requires a society which is absolutely inclusive and in which all members are accorded appropriate respect. The Drinkard receives the magical seeds in return for his sacrifice to the "fearful animal," which was in fact "the owner of the land on which I planted the crops" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 229). The reasonable sacrifice demanded by this creature contrasts with the blood-price extracted by the red-fish and red-bird. The seeds and the wealth they produce are the fruit of understanding, mutual recognition and respect. Just as the Drinkard and the animal were preparing to fight, "I understood what he wanted from me": this flash of comprehension is unparalleled in the text, and it leads to a similarly unique instance of reciprocity. When the Drinkard plants the seeds in Red-town, however, he fails to continue that reciprocity. Instead, he becomes "richer than the rest of the people in that town" (264) and employs as his Invisible-Pawn the spirit named "GIVE AND TAKE," who gives to his rich boss by taking from everyone else (266). The Invisible-Pawn, as mentioned in our discussion of Wraith-Island in Section 4.3.3, is an agent of chaos linked to the tiny creature that causes weeds to grow in the king's fields. While that creature was easily placated, the Invisible-Pawn is neither recognised nor acknowledged. The minor discords of Wraith-Island were easily resolved, but Red-town is riven by chronic patterns of disrespect, cruelty, selfishness and fear. While the king of Red-town was certainly correct in recognising the Drinkard as "another fearful and harmful creature who could ruin my town in future" (260), perhaps the Drinkard is the monster they have summoned. Just as the Drinkard is plagued on his journeys

by monsters which embody his 'demons', he in his turn becomes the emanation of the bush through which Red-town's failings are manifested and visited upon it.

The Drinkard's partner in this destruction is the mysterious master of bush creatures who becomes the Invisible-Pawn. The Invisible-Pawn is a ghostly manifestation of—among other things—the social discord created by exploitative labour relations. He indebts himself to the Drinkard so that he may discover the meaning of the word "POOR" that "he was always hearing about" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 265). Having thus pawned himself, however, he becomes an unmanageable force, deploying subversively literal and excessive interpretations of his boss' instructions. He clears not only his master's farm but all bush and farms in a fifty mile radius (266); when told to gather firewood, he blocks all streets and houses with felled trees (266); he takes as his share all crops in the town (268); and when asked to "barber for [the Drinkard's] children at home," he ritually humiliates every resident and domestic animal in the town by shaving them and painting their heads white (267). His invisibility is a set of tactics rather than a physical condition: the Drinkard is able to see him ("I *saw* a certain man" [265, italics added]) but not to monitor him. The Invisible-Pawn is an unsupervisable and uncontrollable workforce, one which is dangerously unbounded.

In this, the Invisible-Pawn resembles the pawns and slaves of the Yoruba nineteenth century, who were unfree but nevertheless often also uncontrollable. During the Yoruba Wars, the walled cities contained several different sorts of hostage populations. There were local and 'foreign' refugees, driven from their farms by fighting and hunger. There were enslaved captives from enemy cities, and pawns from allied cities. All of these deterritorialized populations, living

within recently settled cities dominated by the mechanics of war, created highly unstable situations. Although disempowered, the populations of refugees, slaves and pawns were by no means inert objects of domination: they were volatile, unpredictable and occasionally violent elements in the social (dis)order. They were splinters of the outside world, often former enemy combatants, brought into cities under incomplete control. Pawns in particular were notoriously difficult to control and often escaped, as did many slaves. They fled into forests, took refuge in railway camps, and disappeared into different cities. Impoverished refugee populations might also enter into a kind of pawnship en masse. In Ife, refugees were offered shelter in return for labour—but this 'foreign' population of tenants eventually declared war on their landlords (Ajayi 72-3). Economies based on slavery and war are necessarily founded on insecurity and disorder.

It is with Yoruba slaves, however, that we encounter the most surprising variety of condition and scope for autonomy, power and violence. Some slaves were cycled back into conflict on the side of their masters, becoming 'war-boys.' The slaves of one unpopular military leader of Ibadan, *Balogun* Osungbekun, rioted while he was away fighting; and they looted the city (Watson 51). As well as being soldiers, servants, labourers and craftsmen, privileged slaves might occupy more prominent roles, such as controlling villages, holding their own slaves, working as gatekeepers, or even becoming diplomats and spies (Falola "Power Relations" 97-8). As Falola argues, slavery could become more profitable than freedom (100). The slaves who held power, particularly over other slaves, "were generally described as overzealous men who would not hesitate to work a slave to death" (100), and the unsupervised slave-governors of village colonies

"could be extremely cruel" (101). These independent, privileged slaves had become disconnected from all social ties except their bond to their master—a bond which they could potentially sever by earning enough to pay their own ransom (thus motivating them to be particularly merciless overseers) or by presenting their masters with enslaved captives in exchange (102-3). Slaves, then, like refugees and pawns, were unpredictable and only loosely controlled, whose relationship to the cities that contained them ranged from tension to open violence.

The Invisible-Pawn manifests the disorder and insecurity bred by violent and exploitative social relations. As a nominally subjugated but wholly uncontrollable force, he sows chaos, steals crops and eventually kills all the inhabitants of Red-town so that "all the lives of the natives were lost and the life of the non-natives saved" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 270). The Invisible-Pawn enacts the fears that dominant social groups have of the disempowered: he is the insolent pawn, but also the *Balogun* Osungbekun's rampaging slaves, and the insurgent refugees in Ife. As Achebe comments, the Invisible-Pawn is true to his name, Give-and-Take: "a community which lets some invisible hand do its work for it will sooner or later forfeit the harvest" (111). The Invisible-Pawn draws on principles of reciprocity as well as historical experiences of exploitative labour practices in Yoruba land to become an extreme warning of the dangers of social inequality.

While continuing the nightmarish carnivalesque of Unreturnable-Heavens' Town (as an omnipotent slave-figure), the Invisible-Pawn is also clearly another of the monsters of excess which plague and mirror the Drinkard. He farms too much of the bush, clears too many trees, takes 'service' to a

predatory extreme, consumes not some but all, and cannot fight without

exterminating. Excessive land usage and consumption become excessive

violence.

This situation is complicated, however, by the Invisible-Pawn's secret

identity as "the head of all the Bush-creatures and he was the most powerful in

the world of these Bush-creatures, all of these Bush-creatures were under him

and working for him every night" (268). The servant is thus master, and the one

is many. Rather like Simbi in Tutuola's *Simbi and the Satyr*, who reacts to her

friends' enslavement by wanting to experience 'Poverty' and 'Punishment' (8),

the Invisible-Pawn becomes indebted as an experiment: "He told me that he was

always hearing the word—'POOR,' but he did not know it and he wanted to know

it" (The Palm-*Wine Drinkard* 265). Through the Invisible-Pawn, the swarms

pretend to be one, bush creatures pretend to be a man, a master pretends to be a

servant, and those who exist beyond money play with debt and poverty. The

Invisible-Pawn and his bush creatures behave 'as men do': that is, with

destructive greed and terrible cruelty. This is how the slave becomes the master,

by first becoming the war-boy, the war-machine. The wild swarms of the bush

play at entering social contracts, and, by entering, explode them. Bush

intensities smooth social striations from inside and outside, by impersonating,

surrounding, overwhelming and destroying them.

The episodes of Red-town, taken in their totality, may be read as a

schizohistorical summary of the Yoruba Wars. The cyclical destructions and

resettlements of the town echo the patterns of violence and upheaval

experienced by the Yoruba during the nineteenth century. The root causes of the

terror are never addressed—the boy's unnecessary cruelty to the animals, the

town's hostility to strangers, or the Drinkard's exploitation of labour—and so the patterns reoccur, with rhythmic variation and accumulation, until the town is utterly destroyed in what reads very much like a cryptic warning to the Yoruba. Red-town thus encapsulates and concentrates the intensities that populate Tutuola's Bush of Ghosts.

4.4 The Drinkard's Return

4.4.1 Deads' Town

Once Red-town has been destroyed by the creatures of the bush, however, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* begins to move out of the Bush of Ghosts. In general terms, we can understand the remaining episodes of the narrative as a sort of reversal of the text's initial movement from home into folklore and finally into the Bush of Ghosts. The narrative now rapidly unspools, moving back into flatter folkloric territory, simplified imagery, and finally into the territory of the mythic with the squabble of Land and Heaven.

The pivotal moment in this narrative unspooling is the Drinkard's arrival in Deads' Town, the culmination of ten years' journeying (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 278) and the achievement of the impossible. It is also utterly anti-climactic and banal. Even though the couple manage to offend the deads by walking forwards (275), showing blood and failing to recognise the sign of the deads (276), these transgressions register as no more than embarrassments, signals of their gaucheness as 'alives' and of their inability to integrate with the life of the town. As the tapster explains and the Drinkard accepts, "a dead man could not live with alives and their characteristics would not be the same" (279). Tutuola provides us with several clear indications that we can read this incompatibility in terms of cultural transformation. The tapster, who is now

named as "BAITY" (274) informs the Drinkard that "a person who just died could not come here (Deads' Town) directly….he spent two years in training and after he had qualified as a full dead man, then he came to this Deads' Town" (278). Death itself is not enough to become 'a dead'; there is a formal system of examination and training. The whispered similarity to colonial schooling here, which would prepare Nigerians to participate in the life of the imperial establishment, is not accidental. Tutuola makes the same connections much more explicitly in *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts*, an earlier manuscript which he had unsuccessfully submitted for publication. In this text, whose cryptohistorical signs are far clearer, Tutuola describes a ghostly missionary school preparing students to become bureaucrats in the pleasantly Lagosian imperial city of hell: "before the ghost scholars finished their final examinations, the Devil used to ask us to send him the name of the scholars who passed so he could employ them" (70). Only the subtlest hints of this open satire are found in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* as when the tapster says "that both white and black deads were living in Deads' Town" (278), a nod towards the nature of major colonial urban centres. Deads' Town is an urban and sophisticated space, a city in which an escaped slave like Baity can retrain and remake himself, enabling him to confidently greet and dismiss his former master. Those who leave home for Lagos or other urban centres become so changed by urban habits that true return becomes impossible. Similarly, the unpolished 'bush' visitor will fail to fit in: they may return home with urban treasures ("he would give me anything I liked in Deads' Town" [279]), but they cannot stay in the city, nor can they bring their departed home again.

4.4.2 Along the 'Really Road'

From the urban modernity of Deads' Town, a "really road" leads directly back to the Drinkard's home (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 279). This road is an emanation of colonial modernity, a convenience which is also a function of death and displacement, facilitating the movement of souls from life into death, from home to the city. In this, they resemble the Gold Coast 'ghost roads,' which were said to lead to the land of the dead and actually led to a regional slave-trading centre. Along the road from Deads' Town, the couple encounter the chilling menace of "400 dead babies" on the march, who beat them with sticks until they flee into the bush "because these dead babies were the most fearful creatures for us" (280). What is the significance of these fierce dead babies? These are almost certainly victims of the famine in the Drinkard's home, from which they are marching. As we later learn,

> Before reaching my town, there was a great famine (FAMINE), and it killed millions of the old people and uncountable adults and children, even many parents were killing their children for food so as to save themselves after they had eaten both domestic animals and lizards etc. (296)

The catastrophic famine, which has resulted from a trivial quarrel between Heaven and Earth, has led to a total breakdown of social dynamics. Following Hogan's emphasis on reproductive dynamics and reciprocity, this clearly represents a society in which reproductive dynamics have been disastrously inverted, so that the parents devour the children.

The babies' warlike behaviour also brings us back to the Yoruba Wars. Indeed, the petty fighting of Heaven and Earth, which has such devastating

consequences for the ordinary people, can be seen as a cutting image of war, particularly the Yoruba Wars, with their increasingly self-sustaining logic and systems of honour and plunder. Destruction of crops and sieges led to several famines during the wars, including a particularly terrible one in Ijayi, witnessed by the American missionary Stone. Under siege from Ibadan, Stone writes, "the people of Ejahyay [sic] were now starving by their hundreds." Soldiers "would throw their dry and wasted forms in heaps on each side of the path…" (184). When military convoys arrived from the allied city of Abeokuta, some starving Ijayi parents "were compelled to put their children in pawn to the Egbar [sic] warriors. These children were then sent to Abeokuta and kept in slavery until the redemption price was paid. In most cases it was never paid" (185). Tutuola's image of the parents devouring their children during a famine amplifies the historical horror of starving parents pawning their children into slavery. This monstrous injustice accounts for the vengeful aspect of Tutuola's marching babies. More abstractly, the dead babies represent a dead future, a future betrayed by the present: Nigeria's future, then, becomes a violent march along the devouring road towards an alien modernity.

Escaping from the dead babies, the Drinkard and his wife are captured by "a very huge man who had hung a very large bag on his shoulder and at the same time that he met us, he caught us…inside the bag as a fisherman catches fish" (281). They, along with the other "terrible creatures" in the bag, are taken to work his farm (283)—that is, they are enslaved. "Capture in a sack," as Laura Murphy notes, is a common vernacular encoding of the slave trade in West Africa (147). Slave testimony includes accounts of slavers using sacks in their kidnapping: Olaudah Equiano was stuffed in a sack when captured, and a

Caribbean slave recalled that slavers "were walking about and robbing humans,

especially children….they put the children into sacks" (qtd. inMurphy 147).

Figuratively, Murphy argues, "bondage in a bag is a means of representing the

complete subordination of the African body in slavery" (147). This is the clearest

image of slavery and the slave-trade in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, underpinning

the concerns about exploitative labour practices suggested through the Invisible-

Pawn and implicit with the tapster.

Their transport by the giant, however, also seems to be a recoding of a

commonplace of contemporaneous Nigerian life: the mammy-wagon, lorry-like

informal busses. The giant's head "resembled a big pot of about ten feet in

diameter, there were two large eyes on his forehead which were as big as bowls"

(282), and his feet are too "long and thick as a pillar of a house" (282); his sack,

woven of thick rope, "could contain 45 persons" (281). The giant has a rounded,

metal head like the bonnet of a lorry with huge, bright eyes like headlamps. The

backs of mammy-wagons are often covered with a lattice of wood or webbing for

passengers to hold onto, and their capacity would be roughly similar to that of

the giant's sack. Having left the bush for the modern Deads-Town road, the

Drinkard and his wife have been caught up in the flow of traffic which carries

people to labour on farms that do not belong to them. Continuing this satirical

riddling, the "terrible creatures" sharing the sack with them seem like ghostly

reconfigurations of goats, which would also frequently be found on mammy-

wagons. As Tutuola writes,

> These 9 terrible creatures were short or 3 feet high, their skin as
>
> sharp as sand-paper with small short horns on their palms, very hot
>
> steam was rushing out of their noses and mouths whenever

breathing, their bodies were cold as ice and we did not understand

their language, because it was sounding as a church bell. Their hands

were thick about 5 inches and very short, with fingers, and also their

feet were just like blocks. They had no shape at all like human-

beings or like other bush creatures that we met in the past, their

heads were covered with a kind of hair like sponge. (283)

Clearly, the description is not exact, but they are small, noisy, coarse-haired, hooved creatures with short horns. As we emerge from the bush and the deepest levels of schizohistorical transfiguration, Tutuola has recoded the mundane discomfort of travelling all night on a mammy-wagon packed with livestock into a humorous ghostly form. Integrated into this everyday image are additional elements of the mechanical and corpse-like: the cold bodies, steamy breath and noisy artificial language (Hogan *Empire* 152). As Hogan argues, reading the "terrible creatures" as corpses, the giant is "another Death-figure," carrying the bodies to bury in a hole (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 283). The mammy-wagon, barrelling along the roads at night, loaded with labourers and livestock—with bodies of all kind for sale—accumulates associations with the slave trade and with death, with these different forms of dislocation and removal of agency and action. As the Drinkard journeys from the urban calm of Deads' Town to his famine-stricken home, slavery comes to the fore thematically. He has failed to retrieve his tapster, whom we can read as an escaped slave. Nevertheless, as Tutuola emphasises, Baity's individual escape does not resolve the issues of slavery, exploitation and terror. Rather, these flaws in the social fabric remain urgent if sublimated problems through all the rest of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*:

the unresolved and unacknowledged suffering of slaves provides Tutuola with

the novel's final, haunting image.

4.4.3 Heaven and Earth

Passing through zones of slavery and terror, the Drinkard returns to his

home town, which has been devastated by famine. The Drinkard offers two

forms of resolution: first, he uses the tapster's Miraculous Egg to provide magical

sustenance; and then he suggests a sacrifice to appease the petulant Heaven.

Both of these stories—the fight between Land and Heaven and the magical but

ultimately punishing egg—are readily recognisable folktales. Tutuola ends *The*

Palm-Wine Drinkard firmly in the realms of accessible vernacular theory,

drawing on popular tales of pettiness, greed, marginalisation and sacrifice.

In the tale of the "wonderful egg," Tutuola expands upon a theme which

he has already touched on several times: that of miraculous, effortless

production. When the Drinkard puts the egg in water, "I saw that the room had

become full of varieties of food and drinks, so we ate and drank to our

satisfaction" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 297). This plenitude recalls the

Drinkard's original satisfaction with his tapster (191), the luxury of the Faithful-

Mother's dance halls (250), and the magical productivity of his farm in Red-town

(264). In each of these situations, Tutuola has hinted at the shadowed costs of

such abundance—from the tapster's labour, to the hive-like kitchens of the white

tree, to the Drinkard's disastrous use of pawned labour. Here, however, Tutuola

most fully emphasises the dangers of consumption wholly alienated from

production. To return to Holloway's terminology, capitalism breaks the social

flow of doing and replaces it with value: rather than specific and social relations,

we have money, a deterritorialized universal abstraction, which "tears our lives

apart and sticks the fragments back together in a cracked whole" (Holloway

Change the World 34). The egg functions as an image of the cracked social body:

it magically produces food until it is broken by a greedy, fragmented crowd;

gummed back together as a disunified whole, it produces "only millions of

leather whips" (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 121-3). The Drinkard begins by using

the egg's magical production of food and drink to end a devastating famine:

people pour into his town from surrounding areas as if for UN relief, but this

charitable hospitality soon turns sour. After satisfying the crowd, he secretly

"commanded the egg to produce a lot of money"—and then the crowds return,

wanting more (*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* 121). With his magical means of

production, the Drinkard "had become the greatest man in my town and did no

other work than to command the egg to produce food and drinks…." The crowd,

in their gleeful consumption, break the egg (122). When the Drinkard pastes the

egg back together, it produces "only millions of leather-whips" (123). These

whips flog the crowd, and people scatter in terror: "Many of them ran into the

bush and many of them died there, especially old people and children and many

of my friends died as well" (124). The egg's seemingly miraculous production

becomes a sinister force of social destruction: unlike the bounty of harvest, the

egg's produce entails no collective doing, only mass consumption. Having made

"a lot of money" through control of this means of production, the Drinkard no

longer cares whether the egg produces food or whips. The consuming crowd is a

mass not a collective, and when they are attacked by whips—the punishments of

fragmented doing—they forget their children and elders in their scramble for the

bush.

In the final section of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the Drinkard intervenes to end the famine by arranging for a sacrifice to be "carried to Heaven in heaven": pleased to have his seniority over Land recognised, Heaven sends the rains and ends the drought (301-2). This ending is generally recognised as signalling the Drinkard's successful rehabilitation and integration into his community. This critical perspective is well stated by Achebe:

> [The Drinkard's] ordeal in the jungle of correction changes him
>
> from a social parasite to a leader whose abiding gift to his people is
>
> to create the condition in which they can overcome want and
>
> reliance on magic, and return to the arts of agriculture and
>
> husbandry. (*Hopes* 111)

Edwards concurs, writing that "The Drinkard has grown, through experience and vision, from a layabout to a man of spiritual powers. Through his vision and knowledge, he is able to serve the land and the men who work it" (262). Priebe reads this resolution as the outcome not only of the Drinkard's spiritual purification but of the villages' as well: only once the egg and its whips have punished them for their greed are they "in a position to learn the proper sacrifice and course of action necessary to stop the famine and restore life to the land" (272). Whereas these critics read the Drinkard's intervention as the work of a changed man, Quayson argues that the Drinkard has always been on a quest for "social being." In Quayson's reading, it is not greed for palm-wine that sends the Drinkard on his journey, but rather his loss of social status following the tapster's death: he is on a quest not for palm-wine but for recognition, although this urge is "somewhat interfused with an impulse towards hedonism and the satisfaction of personal desire for greatness" (53). After all his struggles, the

Drinkard's truest heroism comes through "the intrinsic value of wisdom subserving communal interests" (53):

> No longer does the Drinkard stand as a hero facing odds on the
> strength of his own personal stature. He now subsumes his talents
> to communal democratic processes and, by this, achieves at-onement
> with his people….We see that heroism is subsumed under
> compassion and community, showing that heroism centred on the
> individual ego is not adequate to the dictates of social existence. (54)

Quayson's reading is similar to Achebe's in that it enfolds *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* within a structure of strong communal ethics: although the Drinkard may stray, either through excessive individualism as in Quayson or through laziness as in Achebe, he is transformed by his journey and returns to champion agrarian communal values.

Reading the ending of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* along these lines brings the text to a satisfying conclusion. The prodigal son returns as an authoritative voice on the restoration of normality, and in so doing, he retroactively converts all of his chaotic wanderings into reformative ordeals. The Bush of Ghosts becomes Achebe's "jungle of correction," a space yielding Edwards' "experience and vision": if it has produced moral reform, the bush is rendered retroactively coherent, a space filled not with monsters but with lessons. The final episode not only redeems the Drinkard but the text itself.

There is something very important, however, that these readings ignore: the slave who carried the sacrifice to heaven and who, upon his return, is excluded from society. The slave is made to carry the sacrifice after even "one of the poorest men in town" refuses, and the reason for their reluctance is clear:

he (slave) could not reach halfway back to the earth before a heavy

rain came and when the slave was beaten by this heavy rain and

when he reached the town, he wanted to escape from the rain, but

nobody would allow him to enter his or her house at all. All the

people were thinking that he (slave) would carry them also to

Heaven as he had carried the sacrifice to Heaven, and were afraid.

(302)

Hogan, one of the only critics to treat the plight of the slave, writes that the slave

becomes an additional quasi-sacrifice, for although he is not killed he is

nevertheless "located in the area of death" (*Empire* 139). It is also possible that

the slave *has* been killed: in this interpretation, it is as a dead man that he takes

the sacrifices (including himself) to heaven, and that he returns as a ghost who

has, like the tapster (278), not yet understood or accepted his death. Whether

the slave has been killed or simply excluded from society, the community has

forced him to wander in the spaces of death, that is, in the Bush of Ghosts. In this

Bush of Ghosts, Tutuola has indicated, his status cannot be resolved until he

reaches Deads' Town: until then, alive or dead, he is simply one of the 'departed.'

Should he be alive, however, his fate is still crueller, because Tutuola has made it

clear that, should he ever reach Deads' Town, as an 'alive,' he will be refused

entry there as well. The Drinkard's return is the slave's exile, and it is implied

that the slave's wanderings will become a subaltern echo of the Drinkard's

sufferings in the Bush of Ghosts. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* does not, therefore,

end with comfortable reterritorialization; rather, it leads back into the Bush of

Ghosts, that swarming cesspool of sublimated social ills. The Drinkard's

'compassion' and 'wisdom' have led the community back to a normality founded

on slavery, injustice and forgetting. In his exilic wanderings the slave will presumably encounter not only the babies eaten in the famine but also the victims of the whips, those many children and elders who fled into the bush to die. Although these are human deaths from within the community, they are reckoned as lightly as the extermination of the ghostly inhabitants of Unreturnable-Heaven's Town and Red-town. The normality which the Drinkard facilitates is the normality which produced the nightmarish Bush of Ghosts: a normality founded on inequality, greed, coercion and violence. Such a social order, Tutuola suggests, can only be celebrated if one ignores the slave shut out in the rain. Tutuola has shown us, however, what becomes of societies which exclude the small, weak and poor. If the tiny creature is not included, if the pawn is made invisible and if strangers are treated with cruelty, there will be a reckoning.

Chapter 5
Bessie Head and *A Question of Power*

5.1 Theorising in a Private Vernacular

Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* is complex, challenging, disorienting—and it is often also bewildering and frustrating. Near the beginning of the novel, however, Head offers a statement which comes close to summing up her methodology: "One might propose an argument then, with the barriers of the normal, conventional and sane all broken down, like a swimmer taking a rough journey on wild seas" (15). In *A Question of Power*, Head does just that. This text is a work of theory, and it is embattled theory, theory for survival, theory with no foothold or vessel, theory in smooth space, theory with much motion and no safe distance. In the previous chapter, I explored the ways in which Tutuola deployed West African vernacular theoretical traditions of the bush as a historical and traumatized space, as well as a space for spiritual and economic development. In this chapter, we will be working with a very different manifestation of vernacular theory, that developed in Head's novel of psychic disintegration. With *A Question of Power* as with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, a vernacular theoretical approach will encourage us to read the text—with all of its strangeness—as situated and connected, as speaking from and to the world, as doing theory. A vernacular theoretical approach, aided by concepts from Deleuze and Guattari, will enable us to read the text's strangeness and difficulty as crucial to enacting a certain kind of theory: in this case, a theory of power at once intimate and cosmic.

This chapter aims, in part, to stretch our application and understandings of vernacular theory and Deleuzo-Guattarian theory as approaches to African

literature, by demonstrating their usefulness in reading a text which seems to be poles apart from Amos Tutuola: cosmopolitan, highly interior, and self-consciously literary. Tutuola's vernacular theorising, as we have seen, emerges from and engages with broad and deep traditions of vernacular theory and practical memory. He engages with the widely-shared practice of using the bush to contain stories about personal distress, familial rivalries, current economic worries, political critiques, and histories from over a century ago. Critical difficulties with Tutuola have largely stemmed from the failure to recognise his participation in this wider vernacular theoretical context.

Head's vernacular theory, however, developed differently, and cannot be traced back to communal practice in the same way as Tutuola's. Rather, she constructs her vernacular theory from contexts such as Pan-Africanism, gay culture in Cape Town, alternative understandings of madness, and Hindu and Buddhist mysticism. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find a community that shared Bessie Head's frame of reference. From George Padmore to Sri Ramakrishna, Head constructed her theoretical practice as a bricoleur, in something like the sense defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, in that her reading materials were limited, heterogeneous and "the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock" (qtd. in*Anti-Oedipus* 8). By beginning to explore Head's intellectual schemata, we will be able to engage far more fully with *A Question of Power*. This chapter will not, however, constitute a full reading of *A Question of Power*, nor will it attempt to 'solve' this text—rather, I will offer notes, suggestions, and maps, with a full awareness of their inconclusive character and their incompleteness.

There is something about *A Question of Power* which wrings statements

like this from critics: this reading is inadequate, this reading is incomplete, I could not track the imagery, I am baffled, I have felt I was going mad. Such caveats—whether personal to the critic or redirected onto 'the reader'—have almost become a ritual gesture within Head criticism, for reasons which I suspect any reader of the text will readily understand. Let us take a moment, then, and consider some of these admissions—not of defeat, but of distress or dismay— which Head's novel has wrung from critics. Kim identifies some of the reasons why this text is so maddening: "*A Question of Power* is difficult because it does not adhere to any single axis of oppression or identification, but rather tries to take the full complexity of existence into account at once" (64). Arthur Ravenscroft admits his inability "to have mapped out for my own ordered satisfaction the full values and equivalences of the myriad figures who people Elizabeth's…nightmares," or to properly trace "the extraordinarily comprehensive free-wheel ranging over cultures and their myths" (184). While preparing to write this chapter, I myself tried to map 'for my own ordered satisfaction' the symbolic resonances of just one of these myriad figures, Medusa. I surrounded her name with a constellation of symbolic referents: Zeus for thunderbolts; Set whose role she plays in the story of Isis and Osiris; Nazism, Apartheid, and African nationalism; Mahamaya; and the will to power. My map was a dense web of lines, expansive and contradictory, and I realised that it looked quite mad itself. As Rose writes, "I am not sure if it is possible to read this book without feeling oneself go a little bit mad" (404). It is a text which promises deep, hidden, encoded coherence, if only you can track the imagery, uncover the pattern.

Perhaps we are being drawn into Head's own madness? In this vein,

Desiree Lewis links Elizabeth's theories of power to "the paranoid perception in much of Head's letter-writing": "In the same way that Head does in many of her letters, Elizabeth perceives 'some coherent, broad, overall pattern' and uncovers menacing forces concealed by everyday actions and behaviour" (199). Theory, Lewis suggests, becomes not only totalising but paranoid, finding evil in innocence. If we return to the text, however, we find that Head actually says something quite different: "She struggled over and over to link the brief snapshots, the statements he made and the torture of certain states of mind, into some coherent, broad, overall pattern" (40). The trouble is not that, as Lewis suggests, Head imposes totalising paranoiac patterns while ignoring the true multifaceted nature of experience: rather, Elizabeth suffers because she is realising the impossibility of finding the "coherent, broad, overall pattern"—she suffers because life and pain are too complex and intense to comprehend within theory. Elizabeth does then proceed to offer one of her most ambitious theoretical statements—using power to connect religion, state formation, and personal dynamics—but even though this is an elegant summation of anti-authoritarian historical theory, Head stresses its incompleteness, its contingency, and its origins in pain. Head's description of Elizabeth's intellectual efforts— "she struggled over and over again to link the brief snapshots"—resonates strongly with the attempt to make sense of this novel, of its flashes of disconnected imagery.

This lack of logical narrative sequence is something that *A Question of Power* shares with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* or *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*: in all of these texts there is, as Susanna Zinato puts it, "sequence…to the detriment of salience" (125). Moreover, the text has a disconcerting way of shifting, like a

magical forest that rearranges itself around the hapless traveler. One can remember a salient phrase, but when it is closely checked, traced, and followed its meaning morphs and slips; it seems to associate itself first with one context, and then with another. All quotations, therefore, are necessarily contingent, and they are necessarily taken out of context, because their context is woven at once so densely and so loosely. It is a text of constellations, dense clusters of stars with no real lines connecting them.[16]

Zinato, in a dazzling feat of linguistic interpretation, offers a reading of the grammatical basis for the difficulties I have described, locating and interpreting the "madness" of Head's text. She explains this approach to literary 'madness' with the following quote from S. Felman: *"Plus un texte est 'fou'—plus, en d'autres termes, il résiste à l'interpretation—plus ce sont les modes spécifiques de sa résistance même à la lecture qui constituent son 'sujet', et sa littérarité"* (22).[17] Madness, in a text, constitutes resistance—and we engage with its strategies, its tactics. The madness of the text is its program, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, for the construction of a Body without Organs or a smooth space, resisting 'organization' and striation.

In the case of *A Question of Power*, the text's elusiveness and sense of

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[16] Following Roland Barthes'"The Death of the Author," we might say the same of all texts: "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (1468).

[17] "The more 'mad' a text is—the more, in other words, it resists interpretation—the more it is the specific modes of its resistance to reading which themselves constitute its 'subject' and its literary quality" (translation mine).

disconnection arise in part from peculiarities of syntax: clauses linked only with commas, semicolons or 'and'—"the vaguest of linkers, it certainly does not make up for the absence of logical relations between clauses" (125). The grammar refuses to make connections: "Full stops…split up constructions that might have been easily conglobulated in the same syntactic unit," while semicolons "fragment the sentence's inner structure," maintaining "the sense of an on-going flux; they separate and conjoin" (126). The text is constructed from rickety grammar, grammar which does not specify relationships, and which, in this, bears a strong resemblance to Tutuola's own ambiguous, open grammatical formations. "As a result of this fragmentation of the text into a series of minimal units," Zinato writes, "each clause is allowed to stand on its own feet and is accorded equal importance with the others" (126). This is a radical style with radical implications. As the translator of *A Thousand Plateaus,* Brian Massumi, writes,

> Rather than analysing the world into discrete components, reducing their manyness to the One of identity, and ordering them by rank, [nomad thought] sums up a set of disparate circumstances in a shattering blow. It synthesizes a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity or hindering their potential for future rearranging (to the contrary). (xiii)

In her syntax as in her plot, Head refuses to create solid relationships. Atomized clauses, disconnected incidents and kaleidoscopic imagery all confound Elizabeth's attempts to make sense of her world, while simultaneously creating a particularly open textual space across which meanings can proliferate. The loosened connections within the text, as well as its astonishing variety, invite as

well as frustrate the reader's own theoretical activities.

To theorise is painful, and all theories will be inadequate: not only does Head repeatedly dramatise this point, she has produced a text which forces readers and critics to experience it for themselves. The pain arises, in part, from our resistance to and unfamiliarity with the kind of radically open thought which Head practices—and which she demands of us in response. Nomadic, mad, schizophrenic: one *does* have to become deranged to read the text with attention to its nomadic circulation of references and codes. 'Deranged,' indeed, is a particularly apt word for this process, as it derives from the Old French *desrengier*, meaning 'to move from orderly rows': to read Head's text, we must shift out of striated forms of thought.

In *A Question of Power*, Head attempts to make a textual Body without Organs, upon and within which she enacts the damage done by power and with which she attempts the precarious project of opposing and evading power while cultivating potential. For Head, the theory must be close-range, both because there is no safe remove from which to theorise, and because access to such distance is itself a privilege of power. As Foucault writes, in his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, power must be understood *not* as an external phenomenon, but as "the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" (xv). An adequate theory of power—a theory which is not just another manifestation of domination—requires intimacy with suffering to access the compassion that *may* emerge from it. As Sello the monk says, with his not entirely trustworthy wisdom, "Everything was evil until I broke down and cried. It is when you cry, in the blackest hour of despair, that you stumble on a source

of goodness" (*A Question of Power* 34). Intense personal suffering is a necessary precondition for any adequate theory of power or goodness: goodness, for Head, cannot exist except in opposition to power.

With Head's text, we move into quite different terrain than that we have moved across in the previous chapters. Before we make this shift from Tutuola to Head, from monsters to madness, let us pause and reflect on vernacular theory, reminding ourselves what vernacular theory is and what purposes it may serve, very generally, for those who do it. Behind the concept of 'vernacular theory,' there is a very simple idea: that it is worthwhile to listen to people with genuine respect and interest, to listen to what they say and how they say it, and to try to understand the situations from which and to which they speak. The concept of vernacular theory also asserts that theory is something people do constantly. Theory is not a rarified pastime; it is crucial to our ability to understand and engage with ourselves, others and the world. The concept of vernacular theory also recognises that, for many people much of the time, to engage with themselves, others and the world is a fraught, difficult and even dangerous undertaking—vernacular theories will often emerge from embattled situations, from painful encounters, from engagement with power structures weighted against the theoriser.

Vernacular theories may emerge out of collective understandings. For instance, Taussig describes how an egalitarian community of Cameroonian subsistence farmers theorised new banana plantation owners as witches who transformed labourers into zombies (20). Such communal vernacular theories may also be significantly transformed and reinterpreted by individuals,

according to their own experiences and positions. We might remember here the
rural Ghanaian father and his city-dwelling son, discussed previously, who both
heard voices: the father interpreted them as ancestral spirits, while his son
believed they were government radio broadcasts.

Yet while vernacular theories may be developed in common, they can also
be extremely idiosyncratic, individual bricolages. Such vernacular theories can
develop from the experience of psychological breakdown, emerging perhaps
through voices, visions or unusual thoughts and beliefs. Throughout *A Question
of Power*, Elizabeth engages in a constant intellectual struggle: trying to make
sense of her visions, to answer questions about good and evil, and to translate
suffering into understanding. Head frequently articulates Elizabeth's theoretical
processes, as in this passage from the end of the first book, "Sello":

> Something was eluding her—the mystical madonna. How had all her
> wild fires quieted down into that still river of eternal abstraction of
> soul….Elizabeth could only speculate. Perhaps at some dim time
> Medusa had encountered Perseus and, out of the death he had
> inflicted on her, risen again with a still, sad, fire-washed face….There
> was something more elusive still: Sello's African circumstances. He
> had half-indicated great resources of strength and goodness in his
> surroundings. Or what did the poor mean by: Take off your vesture
> garments? Did they, as the victims of those who had everything, also
> see into the nature of a soul like Sello's?...Humility, which is a
> platitude of saints and recommended for the good life, could be
> acquired far too drastically in Africa. And still something eluded
> her… (99)

"And still something eluded her": Elizabeth grapples with the fragmentary and oblique imagery, as the reader must, trying to push the resistant images beyond themselves into something that could help her, and us, to understand humility, transformation, or goodness. It is a struggle which is never fully or satisfactorily resolved, however: the images remain excessive and resistant to any full interpretation. In this passage, however, Head also brings us back to the divergence between communal and individual vernacular theories. Elizabeth hears the poor speaking, but she puzzles over their utterances—and these utterances come, of course, from her own hallucinatory notion of the poor. There are many different varieties of vernacular theory, and understandings across them are by no means assured.

5.2 'Be Ordinary': Troubled Vernacular Translations

As Elizabeth struggles to understand power and decency, she repeatedly returns to images of "the poor" and "the victims of those who had everything," figures who insist on humility, ordinariness, and the removal of crowns and vesture garments (*A Question of Power* 99). In the book's first paragraph, Sello translates their "African" philosophy into "one of the most perfect statements: 'I am just anyone'" (11), and Elizabeth finds that they introduce her "one of the most complete statements for the future a people could ever make: Be ordinary" (39). Elizabeth venerates 'the poor' and their philosophy of ordinariness, but they remain always separate from her, and are at times hostile or confusing.

Elizabeth's individual theoretical efforts take place in relation to but at a remove from much larger collective projects of theory and critique: 'the poor' appear as a kind of chorus, which she must listen to but cannot quite understand and certainly cannot join (31-2, 39). Nevertheless, she suspects that she and the

poor are engaged in convergent projects: "Did they…also see into the nature of a soul like Sello's?" (99). In these hesitant, hopeful and anxious searches for connection and translation, Head alludes to the existence of multiple streams of vernacular theory, in Botswana and across Africa, which question and challenge the political trends that she explores in *A Question of Power*—and, indeed, it is in these popular vernacular theories that she most insistently locates wisdom and hope. As Elizabeth tells Tom, "Africa isn't rising. It's up already" (135).

Yet while Elizabeth, and indeed the novel itself, attempt both sympathy and solidarity, they remain necessarily distanced from 'the poor of Africa,' and this distance contains not only admiration but varying degrees of fear and mistrust. This separation and ambivalence are translated into the accusations of Medusa and the "Asian man." The fierce Asian man, who seems to be a stock Third World revolutionary, hisses, "You have never really made an identification with the poor and humble" (31); and Medusa, amplifying the message, shouts, "This is my land. These are my people….I can do more for the poor than you could ever do" (38). There is a very upsetting tension here between Elizabeth's difference from the poor and her admiration of them, and this tension is exacerbated by the intensely conformist tendencies she perceives within the anti-authoritarianism of the poor. It is an element of their vernacular theory which Elizabeth, and Head, struggle to reconcile themselves with.

Throughout the novel Elizabeth is haunted by a phrase which she regards as a central tenant of the vernacular theory of the poor: "Be ordinary" (39). For Elizabeth, the ordinary becomes an ideal, but a troubling one: it represents the comforts of decency and simple humanity, but it also implies a conformity and narrowness within which she can never hope to find acceptance. In the South

African slums, "they hated any black person among them who was 'important'…She had seen too many people despised for self-importance, and it was something drilled into her: be the same as others in heart; just be a person" (26). Here Head reveals the trouble with this theory, which equates "be ordinary" with "be the same as others." Nevertheless, the 'ordinary' seems to offer a response to the terrors of power:

> People [in most advanced societies] had their institutions, which to a certain extent protected them from power-lusting presidents for life with the 'my people' cult. Africa had nothing, and yet, tentatively, she had been introduced to one of the most complete statements for the future a people could ever make: Be ordinary. Any assumption of greatness leads to a dog-eat-dog fight and incurs massive suffering. (39)

Head does not make explicit the connection between 'the ordinary' and Africa's lack of institutional defenses. 'The ordinary' seems to offer some shelter from the ravages of the powerful, a decency which can ameliorate suffering and a social matrix which allows life to continue in spite of power's abuses. The ordinary is the answer to importance, in that it offers some defense against power's onslaughts, but also—and this is the danger—the ordinary is also the answer to importance in that they imply one another. The same lack of institutions seems to generate both dictatorship and veneration of the ordinary. Further, insofar as the ordinary implies conformity, it becomes a tool of "power people" to facilitate dictatorial abuses. Its egalitarianism is also repressively conformist.

This double-edged ideal of the ordinary allows us to understand the sense in which "Medusa was expressing the surface reality of African society. It was shut in and exclusive. It had a strong theme of power-worship running through it, and power people needed small, narrow, shut-in worlds" (38). The "shut-in" conformism latent within the vernacular theory of power is open to abuse by the powerful: "When someone says 'my people' with a specific stress on the blackness of those people, they are after kingdoms and permanently child-like slaves" (63). 'Blackness' here, in reference to African nationalist rhetoric, refers to race which has frozen into a fixed identity, an identity which stiffens into homogeneity and conformity.

How can a highly eccentric text like *A Question of Power* genuinely revere 'the ordinary'? How can such an individual vernacular theory of power connect to broader struggles and avoid becoming reified into an artifact of elite culture? These anxieties surface in Elizabeth's dinner party encounter with modern Danish literature. Camilla boasts that "It takes a certain level of education to understand our novelists. The ordinary man cannot understand them" (79)—it is a statement which seems, in fact, to describe *A Question of Power*. Elizabeth reflects that, "those authors had ceased to be of any value whatsoever to their society—or was it really true that an extreme height of culture and the incomprehensible went hand in hand?" (79). How can Head justify the incomprehensibility of her text? The difficulty of *A Question of Power* is not an intentionally elitist gesture, but rather, as we have said, the mark of embattled theory, creating difficulties and contradictions that can be acknowledged but not eliminated. Nevertheless, this process has resulted in a novel which is radically less approachable than *When Rain Clouds Gather*, for instance, and this of course

affected its reception.

A Question of Power has been particularly poorly received in Botswana, as Mary S. Lederer and Leloba S. Molema, of the University of Botswana, detail. They write that Head remains "relatively unknown in the country she adopted and made famous in her work." Those who did know her regarded her as "just an outsider or 'that madwoman in the village'" (110). This may be changing, however, due to the successful adoption of an abridged version of *When Rain Clouds Gather* as a secondary school set text in 1998 (119). Nevertheless, when Lederer and Molema have taught *A Question of Power* to second year students at the University of Botswana, it was poorly received by confused students (112). A colleague, Tholagango Mogobe, suggested that student antipathy was caused not only by the difficulty of the text but also by her approach to race and gender: "the problems Head raises are not perceived as problems, because there is a vested interest in preserving the cultural status quo" (114). The radicalism of *A Question of Power*, in content as well as form, sets it necessarily beyond and against the status quo—not only of governmental power, but of the more intimate power dynamics lived and perhaps even cherished by 'ordinary people.'

One of the text's final moves, however, is an attempt to eliminate that most troubling and persistent contradiction, between 'the ordinary' and eccentricity. Elizabeth tries to smooth this wrinkle with an act of translation: "when a people wanted everyone to be ordinary it was just another way of saying man loved man" (206). This translation temporarily satisfies her, and it allows the text to conclude with that cathartic, reassuring "gesture of belonging" (207). At the same moment that she seems to resolve the contradiction for Elizabeth, Head reawakens it with regards to the text itself through her reference

to *The Gift Of A Cow*, a novel which "exalted the poor" and opposes "a literature of magic, of ghosts, of high-born heroes and heroines" (206). This is an ironic conclusion to a text which moves away from apparent social realism of novels like *When Rain Clouds Gather* or even *Maru* into the realms of the fantastic, which moves—we might say—away from the African realism established by Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, towards something with closer affinity to the ghost novels of Amos Tutuola. Head's "gesture of belonging" is hopeful, but necessarily momentary and partial, for a project and a character seeking affinity and connections from positions of difficulty and strangeness.

There is, however, another level on which to read Head's injunction to "be ordinary" and her "gesture of belonging": not as social or political at all, but rather as matters of transcendence, of cosmic unity. At the end of all becomings, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is "becoming-imperceptible." What does it mean to become-imperceptible? "A first response would be: to be like everybody else" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 308). To engage constantly in becomings is to shed the particularities and tensions which hold one within individuality and identity, opening the way for a merging with the world. In trying to "be ordinary," Elizabeth struggles with imposed identities, as well as with a morality at once Manichean and ambiguous. She is tortured by unsustainable dualisms, to which her involuntary, unconscious response is a series of splittings, transformations and becomings. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between…never ceasing to become" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 305).

If we understand the figures who torment Elizabeth as products of her mind, as dreams or hallucinations, then we recognise that she *becomes* all of

them. She becomes Sello, Medusa and Dan, as well as all the rest of the

phantasmagorical cast, while also remaining herself in the world. She passes

between man and woman, between good and evil, between omnipotence and

abjection. She not only crosses between these dualities, she occupies both poles

simultaneously. Such relentless, uncontrollable becomings are terribly painful.

As Head writes, "What sort of gymnast was she supposed to be, so overstrained

between concepts of good and evil?" (*A Question of Power* 109). The process is

torturous, a destructive creativity.

By becoming all of these figures—by stretching in that painful arc

between the poles, by becoming God and the devil at the same time—Elizabeth

becomes *everybody*. This is not, Deleuze and Guattari point out, the 'everybody'

which is an aggregate of isolated individuals, like Marx's proverbial "sack of

potatoes," but an "everybody/everything…that brings into play the cosmos with

its molecular components" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 308). Deleuze and Guattari

here oppose the *molar* 'everybody' of individual identities to the *molecular*

'everybody' of the cosmos, with 'molar' referring to the chemical unit designating

a mass of molecules. That is, the 'everybody' of masses, of self-contained 'potato-

like' units, is opposed to an 'everybody' conceived of as something much finer

and less stable, given to interminglings and recombinations. The molar unit

disintegrates into its component molecules, and the individual, after many

becomings, dissolves into union with the world.   Such a becoming

everybody/everything is the result, then, not only of a series of becomings but

also of loss, elimination, dismemberment or pulverisation.

Elizabeth suffers through just such processes in her becomings: "She was

losing track of the personality pattern she'd lived with since birth" (*A Question of*

Power 131). Her suffering is the interconnected sufferings of the world, so that

"if she cried about one thing, she cried about other things too. Pain was not only

pain. It was a blinding daze of agony piling up on all sides" (68). Yet it is through

these extremes of empathy—which involve not only *feeling for* the other who is

suffering but *becoming* the suffering other as well as the persecuting other—that

Elizabeth is finally able to 'be ordinary' and belong to the world in this

intermingled sense.

In 'becoming-imperceptible,' the individual vanishes. Deleuze and

Guattari describe a camouflaged fish able to blend in with its environment as an

example of becoming-imperceptible, but they describe it in startlingly violent

terms: "this fish is crisscrossed by abstract lines that resemble nothing, that do

not even follow its organic divisions; but thus disorganised, disarticulated, it

worlds with the lines of a rock, sand, and plants, becoming imperceptible" (*A

Thousand Plateaus* 309). Elizabeth, in becoming-imperceptible, must be

"disorganised, disarticulated" so that she may "world" with Botswana. Head

describes the euphoric result:

> To rediscover that love [with Sello] was like suddenly being
>
> transported to a super-state of life. It was the point at which all
>
> personal love had died in them. It was the point at which there
>
> were no private hungers to be kissed, loved, adored. And yet there
>
> was a feeling of being kissed by everything; by the air, the soft flow
>
> of life, people's smiles and friendships….That was the essential
>
> nature of their love for each other. It had included all mankind, and
>
> so many things could be said about it, but the most important was
>
> that it equalized all things and all men….And from the degradation

and destruction of her life had arisen a still, lofty serenity of soul

nothing could shake. (202)

Her love for Sello is impersonal and non-sexual in part, I would suggest, because it is love not of another but of herself, a compassionate acceptance of her own corruptibility, her own struggle between spiritual questing and earthly attachment. It is a self-acceptance which radiates outwards into "the soft flow of life," indicating an understanding of a fluid world which easily, naturally moves through barriers. Her personal desires dissolve, allowing the "equaliz[ing] of all things and all men" as she becomes imperceptible, becomes everybody and everything.

The direction to "be ordinary," then, is entirely in keeping with the novel's vernacular transformations of Buddhist and Hindu spirituality. Despite its apparent simplicity, the mantra "be ordinary," enters into the game of dualism and ambiguity that runs throughout the text. It urges surrender and transformation, conformity and transcendence, the imposition of identity and the dissolution of all identities. It is an oppressive tool, and it points towards enlightenment.

5.3 Soul Journeys

Much of the difficulty and strangeness of *A Question of Power* is linked to the way in which Elizabeth's vernacular theory develops from, through and against her experience of madness. Her reflections and theoretical process are part of her attempts to cope with pain, to heal through understanding: as she says, at the conclusion of the passage quoted above, "'May I never contribute to creating dead worlds, only new worlds'" (100). As Gillian Stead Eilersen reports,

however, Head became indignant when reviewers discussed her novel in terms of 'breakdown': she, instead, "maintained solidly that the novel had been about a confrontation with God and the Devil, a soul journey to hell." Eilersen concludes that such a reaction proves "that she had not been able to extricate herself from the experience she had described or distance herself from her material" (157). Eilersen is concluding that Head's choice of terminology—"soul journey"—is symptomatic, betraying a mysticism that shades into madness.

What happens, however, if we take Head at her word, and consider *A Question of Power* as a 'soul journey to hell'? A striking parallel suddenly emerges between *A Question of Power* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*: Head's text becomes, like Tutuola's, a harrowing journey across strange territories upon which monstrous forces must be confronted. Elizabeth, like the Drinkard, travels through hells and death-worlds. The spaces across which they journey are beyond, yet close to, the normal human world: the spirit-worlds resonate with the protagonists' lives and hold up cracked, distorting mirrors to the 'real' world.

The Drinkard moves through the Bush of Ghosts, while Elizabeth's 'soul journey' takes place within her mind, but divisions between the internal and the external are not clear-cut. The Bush of Ghosts often seems to function as a projection of the Drinkard's mind, projecting his greeds as monstrous forms. Elizabeth's external reality is also populated by her mental projections. One of the first symptoms of her breakdown is that she experiences her mind as a huge, external realm: "it seemed as though her head simply filled out into a large horizon. It gave her a strange feeling of things being right there inside her and yet projected at the same time a distance away from her" (*A Question of Power* 22). This sense of things "inside her" being "projected" describes her experience

of visual hallucinations. It also, however, suggests an acute awareness of the

extent to which all sensory perception is a mental construct: various waves,

vibrations and particles interpreted by the brain and projected onto what seems

to be the external world.

This merging of the internal and the external world is important on

several levels. Psychologically, Richard Bentall identifies the loss of distinction

between the internal and external as a key mechanism in hallucinations and

delusions: a person's normal processes of 'source-monitoring' fail, so that they

cannot distinguish between internally and externally generated thoughts and

images (483). The blurring of distinctions between self and other is also,

crucially, a key goal of Deleuzo-Guattarian theory and of mysticism. In this

section we will examine the process from a psychological perspective before

considering it in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms. We will return to this concept in

more detail later, however, to examine its resonance within a Hindu mystical

perspective, a perspective which Head herself found strongly appealing.

Bentall argues that we can follow the breakdown of thought 'source-

monitoring' on a spectrum from relatively common intrusive or automatic

thinking to more fully developed delusions and hallucinations. As Elizabeth feels

her mind expanding across the landscape, *becoming* the landscape, she also finds

herself thinking and speaking automatically: "The words were almost jerked out

of her mouth" (22). Her mind expands into a world, but at the same time she

loses control of her thoughts, so that her words and thoughts seem subject to an

external influence. Conveying this sense of automatic, circular thought, Head

writes, "Someone had turned on a record inside her head. It went on and on in

the same, stuck groove: 'Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death'" (45). This

automatic thinking feels so uncontrollable and unacceptable that it seems to be actually external to her. The imagery of the record-player thinking, however, indicates that she still feels some capacity for resistance: she has no control over her automatic thinking, and she is unable to stop it, but Head shows how she struggles with it, resists it, and refuses to fuse with the thinking. The image of an unstoppable record-player is frightening, but it allows Elizabeth some space for maneuver, however futile that may feel: "Nothing turned off the record. She had not planned it. She had not been thinking along those lines at all, and the option of any sane, reasonable reply had been taken away from her" (47). Worse, however, are the moments of exhaustion when such thinking consumes her, so that rather than having a record playing *inside* her head, she herself becomes the record-player: "her endurance broke. Her mind was not functioning. In that state, he [Dan] talked through her….There was nothing in her to check the onrush of hell" (169).

Her feeling of losing control over her thinking merges with her experience of mental imagery assuming apparently autonomous external existences. She initially sees Sello on the "large horizon" of her mind, and his name "instinctively formed itself in her mind" (22), but he is soon such a part of the external world that she prevents visitors from sitting in 'his' chair (24) and offers him a cup of tea ('Agh, I must be mad! That's just an intangible form' [23]). Elizabeth's experience, then, is fundamentally characterised by a deterioration of her ability to tell the difference between the internal and external worlds. This is the fundamental process at work in hallucinations, according to Bentall, who writes, "people who experience hallucinations are mistaking their own thoughts and imaginings for things they are hearing or seeing" (363). Thus, he argues,

"Hallucinations exist on a continuum with normal mental imagery" (353)—with intrusive thoughts and 'thought insertions' as intermediary points along the continuum (350-1), precisely as Head shows. Auditory hallucinations, he argues, are a misattribution of ordinary inner speech, and indeed their form echoes that of most inner speech: "a stream of instructions issued to the self" (360). Fascinatingly, this connection between inner speech and auditory hallucinations has allowed a further blurring of the lines between the internal and external. Inner speech is accompanied by "small activations of the speech muscles…a neuromuscular echo of a time when we did not know how to speak silently" (360). These same subvocalisations characterise the hearing of voices, meaning that by using an extremely sensitive microphone, researchers have twice managed to "*record and listen to* their patients' voices" (361). The lines between the internal and the external are always somewhat arbitrary, and under certain circumstances, they may become even more confused.

Bentall's psychological analysis helps to explain the ways in which the internal and external intermingle. Deleuze and Guattari, whose theory is characterised by an extreme willingness to find connections between different dimensions, allow us to explore the implications and potentials of such a blending, in terms which help us to see firmer connections between *A Question of Power* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. The mind, they say, may become a smooth space in the same way as the land or sea, and it is possible to journey across it: "There is no reason to oppose an interior voyage to exterior ones" (*Anti-Oedipus* 93). Elizabeth's mind, and her body, become a smooth space across which she moves, encountering intensities which manifest as Sello, Medusa, Dan and the swarms of other visions, figures and

somatic sensations. Elizabeth's experiences resonate strongly with Deleuze

and Guattari's description of the schizophrenic's "interior voyage" which

> caus[es] pure intensities—coupled together, almost unbearable—to
>
> radiate within and without, intensities through which the nomadic
>
> subject passes. ...everything comingles in these intense becomings,
>
> passages, migrations...countries, races, families, parental
>
> appellations, divine appellations, geographical and historical
>
> designations, and even miscellaneous news items. (*Anti-Oedipus* 93)

The inner smooth space of the schizophrenic is characterised by strong

sensations, sensations which are translated into imagery or designated by

symbolic names. Elizabeth has the feeling of being Medusa, the feeling of being

Buddha, the feeling of being Al Capone, the feeling of being Osiris—these images

might designate, respectively, sensations of sensual power, serenity, violence

and fragmentation. Intensities are translated into images—or simply

experienced as abstract forces, as blue lights or roaring. The intensities

Elizabeth experiences are not wholly internal in origin, however. They are the

translation of external forces into internally experienced intensities, intensities

which are recoded through historical and mythological imagery.

 Elizabeth's 'soul journey' is a reckoning with forces at work around her,

abstracted and recoded in tangled, teeming imagery. The images are drawn from

Cape Town and Hollywood gangster films, Egyptian mythology and the Bible,

Buddhism and pornographic fantasy. Flowing beneath or behind these forms,

however, there are currents, streams of light and waves: Deleuze and Guattari's

intensities. These intensities are often "almost unbearable." Dan attacks her

"like a violent windstorm, full of sand and swirling dust" (147), and Sello manages the passage and manifestations of pure energies: "Just as forms were taking shape, Sello reached forward and silently drew back a thin, dark curtain between her and the explosion of activity behind it. He kept his thumb pressed against the edge of the curtain. The most appalling roar burst forth" (36). The 'roar' is the energy that underlies all forms: even Elizabeth's wildest visions represent a controlling and reterritorialization of this primal, overwhelming flow.

It is through the circulation of intensities upon her body and within her mind that Elizabeth undertakes her soul journey, a soul journey through which her body and mind become her own Bush of Ghosts: she journeys in "the bush of the mind," to borrow Oyeyemi's phrase from *The Icarus Girl*, that meeting of spirits and madness. Where Tutuola has extensive journeys, Head depicts intensive voyaging. The Drinkard's monstrous soul manifests across an endless landscape, while within Elizabeth's mind the vast geographies of human history collapse into terrible density. This, Head writes, is "almost a suppressed argument she was to work with all the time; that people, in their souls, were forces, energies, stars, planets, universes and all kinds of swirling magic and mystery" (*A Question of Power* 35).

5.4 Becoming a Body without Organs

This process—the circulation of intensities, through which a person becomes a kind of Bush of Ghosts flowing with the energies of human history—is what Deleuze and Guattari call becoming a Body without Organs. It is a soul journey: "keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 177). Previously, we discussed the way

in which the passage of intensities characterises smooth space. In a very similar way, intensities characterise and create a Body without Organs: "A BwO [Body without Organs] is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 169). That is to say, the Body without Organs is a condition in which social signifiers slip away and formal structures of organisation collapse, leaving nothing but these abstract forces: "The BwO [Body without Organs] is what remains when you take everything away" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 168).

The passage of intensities creates a Body without Organs—but the question is, what kind of intensities pass and what kind of Body without Organs do different intensities create? The Body without Organs is what happens when one removes oneself from the structures and strictures of social 'organ-isation'. The Body without Organs is what exists before, beneath, or against socialising processes and subject formation (*A Thousand Plateaus* 176). It is the absence, loss or collapse of ego. There are, clearly, many ways to come loose from society, and many ways to lose selfhood. These range from Buddhist enlightenment to schizophrenic dissolution. Elizabeth has disconnections and dislocations imposed upon her by systems of power: the combined efforts of Apartheid South Africa, missionary Christianity, and Botswana authorities deterritorialize her catastrophically. Elizabeth suffers through much of the text from the ravages of intensities channeled or blocked by Sello, Medusa and Dan, the manifestations of power. This is because her separation from society and collapse of selfhood are the result of accumulated abuses imposed on her by intersecting power structures: her Body without Organs is created by power—none of her deterritorializations is voluntary—and as a result, it is characterised by pain and

abjection, in danger of total collapse.

Elizabeth has been forcibly deterritorialized to such an extent that power has blocked her ability to maintain a viable sense of self. The interconnected narratives of self, memory, and social position break down—even the deep, fundamental narratives of linear time and corporeal integrity fail. As we have seen through Zinato, language—from symbolism down even to grammar— cracks under the strain. As Rose writes, *A Question of Power* exposes "the delusional component behind any uncritical belief that text or speaker simply speak" (403). The novel destabilises language, and through that subversion it destablises narratives of 'self'. Zinato writes that the goal of *A Question of Power* seems to be "disrupting in the reader any illusion that he/she is listening to a unique, self-possessed, speaking subject" (129). Head's challenges to stories of self and illusions of coherence take on profound significance when viewed in the contexts of Hindu and Buddhist mysticism, as we will see later: the text's difficulty is affiliated with the absurdities of Zen koans, and its disruptions can be read as liberatory tactics.

Elizabeth's spectral tormentors embody the processes by which she is transformed into an abject Body without Organs. The processes are illustrated in some of the novel's more opaque passages, those which, in Zinato's phrase, "enact…a 'physics of power.'" Head develops this physics of power, which is the means by which destructive intensities can be circulated across a disempowered and eventually desubjectified body; her physics of power is a program for the creation of an abject Body without Organs. This perspective illuminates some of the more opaque passages in the text, those in which imagery gives way to pure sensation: of lights, electricity, waves, or roaring, all directed by the "power

people." Sello turns her body into "channels through which raced powerful currents of energy. He kept switching off and adjusting the currents…until one day her head simply exploded into a sea of pale, blue light. It was the sensation which accompanied it which was so final and absolute: Here is the end of all life. Here is nothing" (36). Dan performs a similar operation, although even more explicitly technological: "he had to fix up his electrical wiring system (her whole body was a network, a complicated communication centre)…This was his version of God" (126). Dan also invades her more grossly, "a supreme pervert thrust[ing] his soul into your living body….It was like no longer having a digestive system, a marvelous body, filled with a network of blood-vessels—it was simply having a mouth and an alimentary tract; food was shit and piss; the sky, the stars, the earth, people, animals were also shit and piss" (138).

Sello and Dan, with their respective programs of ascetic morality and pornographic degradation, convert Elizabeth into different kinds of emptied Bodies without Organs: the mystical and the abject. Neither of these Bodies without Organs, holy or obscene, "correspond to the energies needed for the tasks of life; making tea, cooking food for a small boy, eating, washing, working" (36). Instead, they are isolating experiences, separating her from any possible connections: as an electrical circuit, she is a complex but closed, connected only to the guru's switchboard, while as a vehicle of "shit and piss" she is reduced, in Alan Watts' terms, to a tube with teeth ("The Human Game" 7).

Elizabeth's deterritorializations have been too drastic, uncontrollable and traumatic, and it causes her to become an empty Body without Organs, on the brink of suicide. Deleuze and Guattari comment on this as a danger inherent in the project of trying to remove oneself from structures of identity and power:

"Staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected—is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 178). We might understand the jumbled nightmares of Elizabeth's visions as just such a "demented or suicidal collapse" of stratifications within her: race, sex, power and identity are crashing down on her, manifesting in a tangled wreckage of signifiers and sensations.

Traumatised, dislocated and isolated, Elizabeth becomes dislodged from all forms of social belonging, to the extent that she even seems wistful about the intimate cruelties of witchcraft from which she is excluded: "People don't care here whether foreigners get along with them or not…They have a saying that Batswana witchcraft only works on a Motswana, not an outsider" (*A Question of Power* 56). What she needs is to form connections: "Too much isolation isn't a good thing for anyone," as Eugene tells her, inviting her into his cooperative industries project (56). The cooperative industries project—particularly the garden Elizabeth establishes within it—functions as a model for the kinds of connections—and disconnections—people need in order to thrive. Head's imagery, as she writes about the personal and communal therapeutic potentials of the garden, is interestingly close to Deleuze and Guattari's, as they recommend a strategy for the creation of a full Body without Organs—that is, a life beyond ego and power structures which thrives and blossoms rather than withering:

> Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities

segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is

through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in

freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and

bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO [Body without Organs].

Connect, conjugate, continue… (*A Thousand Plateaus* 178)

The key is to cause intensities to flow and pass, and to flow *correctly*: not too much, not too little. Crucially, such flows cannot be achieved in isolation: by advising the reader to "Connect, conjugate, continue," Deleuze and Guattari emphasise the importance of cooperative communities in the creation of new modes of living. The isolated Body without Organs is at risk of emptiness and collapse. There can be no sustainable 'individual' transformation without at least small pockets of communal transformation, and such transformations should be imagined not simply in terms of 'lines of flight'—motion, rootlessness, escape—but also in terms of growth and cultivation. The importance of the experimental community gardens in *A Question of Power* is no accident.

5.5 The Garden and the Bush

To consider the garden, we must also consider the bush: the garden is formed from the bush and is surrounded by its wildness. The bush's wildness is the matrix for the garden's regulated growth. The bush is bleak, beautiful and dangerous—its wild liveliness leads Elizabeth on a journey which leads her to the garden. We catch only fleeting glimpses of the bush in *A Question of Power*, but it manifests as the 'bush of the mind' through which Elizabeth must travel in her solitary shamanic quest towards understanding. Head writes the stories of the farm and the garden as the textual counterpoints to the novel's wilder passages: sections of 'mad' writing interweave with passages of realist narrative,

written with technical and compassionate sanity. The bush and the garden are polarities, opposites which imply and contain one another. The open possibilities of the bush allow for the hopeful experimentation of the garden and the rest of the Cooperative Industries project. The bush "contrasted vividly in beauty with the starkness of central village [sic] with its endless circles of mud huts…Motabeng Secondary School had been built right amidst this wilderness of solitude and slumber" (55). The garden is formed within the bush: like the bush, it exists beyond the confines of the village, as an alternate space, stretching the bounds of possibility. When Elizabeth first visits the farm project, she feels "the extreme delicacy and precariousness of the experiment…[the volunteers] were young men who had had no future and were suddenly being given one" (76).

Elizabeth experiences the village as a closed circuit of people moving in their own circles, of unchanging traditional patterns. As Head writes in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, Serowe (or its fictional counterpart Motabeng) is "a traditional African village with its times and seasons for everything," and "it has been like this for ages and ages—this flat continuity of life" (xi).[18] This continuity and circularity manifests in thought as well, as Elizabeth finds among the students she teaches. Whatever topic she sets for English composition, the

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[18] It is important to note, however, that *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, written nearly a decade after *A Question of Power*, shows a keen appreciation of the paradoxical dynamism that Serowe manifests within its traditionalism. She writes, "Although we live by such an ancient pattern, no other village in Botswana is so dynamic as Serowe and no other has seen so much tangible change" (xiii). We might also note that in this oral history, Head has adopted a confident, communitarian 'we.'

children inevitably end up circling around the same fixed groove, a rote essay on

"Life in Botswana—'When the rain rains we go to the lands to plough. We

plough with oxen. The cow is a very useful animal…'" This is, she writes, the

limit of their "radius of imitation" and "furthest reach of [their] imagination,"

which has been "severely restricted to barren ground" (*A Question of Power* 67).

In the rote English compositions of the children, restricted to the rote recitation

of traditional subsistence farming, we might detect a glint of satire about the

development of the African novel, including Head's own penchant for

agricultural detail. The Motabeng Secondary School and the cooperative

industries project it houses are beyond the "endless circles" of the village,

identified with the open, peaceful potential of the bush.

Within the bush, Elizabeth's garden functions as a sanctuary of sanity, not

only in her life but in the novel as well: plot, character, imagery and syntax enjoy

well-regulated order in the garden sections. Within the garden sections, Head

returns to a style and story familiar from *When Rain Clouds Gather* and even

Maru: in naturalistic prose threaded with lyricism and dense with agricultural

detail, she tells the story of an outsider gradually becoming incorporated into a

village, while in the process helping the village in its development. In these

passages, as in her previous novels, Head continues to explore practical

experiments in sustainable, egalitarian and inclusive living. Yet while *When Rain*

Clouds Gather and *A Question of Power* in particular revel in the particularities

and technical poetics of such projects, there is a tension or fear latent in *When*

Rain Clouds Gather that becomes manifest in her later novel: the terrible

realisation that this kind of project and this kind of writing are not adequate

responses to power. They fail to address or even conceive of aspects of

experience which are difficult, irrational and strange, yet crucial. Eugene, the principle representative and proponent of this rational radicalism, will not listen when Elizabeth tries to elaborate on the details of her crisis: "He did not want to hear any details about the country or anything else, simply accepting that she had had a nervous breakdown out of the blue" (52). A truly revolutionary understanding of the world requires these strange dimensions of experience, and it is search of them that Head moves her writing 'into the bush.' The garden and garden-work are necessary, but they are not enough: Head is also exploring wider and wilder territories. Elizabeth needs the garden to anchor her to life, and the reader needs interludes of realism, glimpses of recognisable, stable characters and threads of coherent plotting. Elizabeth is anchored to life by the garden and its small community; and these interludes of realism, stable characters and coherent plotting allow readers to ground themselves also. These passages are embedded within highly disordered spaces, however, where the striations of garden-realism give way to the smooth 'bush of the mind.'

The bush leads Elizabeth into the garden, prepares her for it. In traditional Batswana practice, not wholly dissimilar from the Yoruba agricultural practices we previously examined, the bush is the space of farming. As Head writes,

> the beginning of the rainy season always seemed a magical time to [Elizabeth]. Women gathered up their possessions in a big bundle of cloth, heaved it on top of their heads, slung a hoe over their shoulders and set out with long, firm, determined strides to their lands.
>
> 'We are going to plough,' they said.

> She could only stare after them, wistfully. It was not a part of
>
> her life… (*A Question of Power* 59-60)

The magic of the rainy season is not only the magic of how, as Head writes in *Serowe*, "with just a little rain everything comes alive at once; over-eager and hungry" (x), but also—perhaps primarily—the magic of women walking confidently into the bush with a sense of belonging. Elizabeth believes that their seasonal circulation between village and farms gives them a stable agency and mobility which she can only envy: she, the migrant, remains in the "deserted" village (*A Question of Power* 59).

These women's agency is intimately linked to the desert's blooming. Even though Elizabeth remains excluded from their farming, her fascination with the women's activity draws her more closely into the area's social and ecological life. Watching them go into the bush and return with their harvest, Elizabeth moves from an urban, alienated understanding of fruit and vegetables to an enchanted proximity with their growth:

> …it was one thing to walk into a greengrocer's shop in a town and
>
> pick up neatly-wrapped parcels of potatoes, tomatoes and onions; it
>
> was another to hold Thoko's pumpkin, which she had produced with
>
> her own hands. Who ever cared about farmers in a town? Why, if
>
> vegetables came out of a machine, it was one and the same thing to a
>
> town dweller. They were just there, ready made. But here, it was
>
> Thoko and the ploughing season and one a half dozen high dramas in
>
> a bush life, shrouded with mystery. (60)

At first glance, this passage simply contrasts urban indifference to rural authenticity. If we read it more closely, however, with the help of Holloway, we

will come to better understand the significance of agriculture in Head's texts and the role that it plays in her analysis of power. The shift from urban to rural here is a shift from alienation to social and ecological connection. In the grocer's shop, the vegetables are "just there, ready made": they are commodities, wholly separated from the social flow of doing that produced them, and hardened into such an inorganic separateness that they might have come "out of a machine" like any other industrial product. As "neatly-wrapped parcels," they are discrete, isolated objects. In Motabeng, however, the watermelon or pumpkin becomes not a commodity but a gift, the product not just of someone's labour but of a friend's hands. The pumpkin is not simply itself: it *becomes* a friend, a time, a place, and all of the "high dramas" and "mystery" associated with them. The object dissolves outwards into reenchanted liveliness.

This shift is of a part with Elizabeth's "great wonder about the soil and the food it produced," as well as "the slowly drifting closeness to the soil" born of living in a mud hut, where there is "no sharp distinction between the circling mud walls of a hut and the earth outside." In her hut, Elizabeth lives in and among earth, grass and swarms of insects (60). As her perception of objects and commodities shifts and dissolves, so too do the boundaries between herself and the world, between human and natural spaces. This parallels, of course, the disintegration of her ability to distinguish between the internal and the external, between thought and perception.

Why are these dissolutions important? What connects Elizabeth's hallucinatory confusions with her growing closeness to the soil and stories? The shift from perceiving commodities and separate objects to appreciating and participating in a flow of doing is a crucial step, not only in critiquing power but

in moving away from alienation and into a world beyond coercive power. Head traces a journey from Elizabeth buying packets of potatoes, to cherishing her friend's gift of a pumpkin, to working her own garden: it is a movement from passivity to agency, out of a world of power and into the realm of powers. As we have already discussed, the magic of commodities—of objects which seem to have their own independent lives, which seem to spring into being, "just there, ready made"—is a central function of capitalism and its particular manifestations of power. Holloway writes that "Whereas power-to is a uniting, a bringing together of my doing with the doing of others, the exercise of power-over is a separation…Power-over is the breaking of the social flow of doing" (*Change the World* 29). Thoko's pumpkin is a manifestation of power-to, of her own and the other women's hard work and courage, and by giving the pumpkin to Elizabeth—along with stories and gossip—Thoko begins to draw Elizabeth into a social flow of doing, a flow which Elizabeth continues through the cooperative farm and garden projects, projects which effect an international uniting of effort and expertise. The potatoes in their packets, however, come from nowhere and lead nowhere: they offer only passivity, a fragmented social flow of doing.

This is related to the paralysing separation that Elizabeth suffers after the onslaughts of the hallucinatory "power-people," Medusa and Dan. Medusa's thunderbolts can "shatter a victim into a thousand fragments" (43), and "a week of it reduced [Elizabeth] to a total wreck. She lay on the bed trapped in misery" (47). Medusa's harsh assertions freeze Elizabeth into fixed identities which fragment her social connectivity, thus eliminating her ability to interact, to move, to enter the social flow of doing. She freezes and fragments through

identification: this is the sense in which she turns her victims to stone.

Power causes us to think in terms of objects and identities: these are predetermined, fixed and stable. To move away from objects and towards action, however, shifts the emphasis towards change and potential: nouns are transformed into verbs, and rather than fixed states we find a continuous becoming. According to Holloway, "Doing is practical negation. Doing changes, negates an existing state of affairs. Doing goes beyond, transcends" (*Change the World* 23). Elizabeth is fascinated by farming and the soil because she senses in them a magical creative potential. Farming awakens in her an urge to become more closely connected to the world just as she is also facing forceful separation from it. As she works against the mental drive towards isolation and death, her garden anchors her to sanity and life. The garden is a space of practical negation, where changes can be enacted: tradition gives way to experimental knowledge, racial hatred can be confronted, and cooperative friendships develop across racial and cultural lines. The garden is a crack in power's domination, where other possibilities can be developed and practiced.

Farming is central to Head's critique of power because it manifests potential, connection and cooperation. It is a practical negation of power's isolating, paralysing effects. Having seen this, we must return to our previous question, that of the connection between the farm and the bush. Thoko tells Elizabeth that she cannot come to help plough the farm because, "'A foreigner like you would die in one day, it's so dangerous.'" She tells Elizabeth about the dangers of animals like the leopard: "He comes around softly and with one smash of his paw cracks open our skulls and eats our brains." Elizabeth is frightened off by "these gruesome details of life in the bush" and "cancelled totally the idea of

being that kind of farmer who earned her year's supply of food in breakneck battles with dangerous wild animals" (60). Head draws ironic parallels, however, between Thoko's description of life in the bush and Elizabeth's experiences of mental breakdown. Most strikingly, Dan attacks Elizabeth in ways almost identical to the leopard: "two large, familiar black hands move towards her head. They had opened her skull" (177), and he continues to do this "for months, opening her skull and talking into it in a harsh, grating voice" (193). One of the effects of these parallels is to create a connection between the women's productive, dangerous journeys into the bush and Elizabeth's journey through 'the bush of her mind.' Head makes this link more or less explicitly, when Elizabeth thinks,

> Journeys into the soul are not for women with children, not all that
> dark heaving turmoil. They are for men, and the toughest of them
> took off into the solitude of the forests and fought out their battles
> with hell in deep seclusion. No wonder they hid from view. The
> inner life is ugly. (50)

Thoko tells Elizabeth that she could not survive in the bush, but in her own way, she is already there—or, worse, in a space which combines savagery with domesticity, collapsing the distances that vernacular theories of the bush establish between acceptable and unacceptable dimensions of intimacy and community. These separations cannot be maintained: Elizabeth does not have the privilege of hiding the ugliness of her inner life, the painful violence of her struggles. This passage also creates an important connection, to which we will return, between madness and spiritual experiences, including shamanic states, the 'calling' of fetish priests into the bush, as well as Jesus' time in the wilderness.

The theoretical struggle with power is, Head suggests, a kind of theory which engages not only the mind but the heart, soul and body. Men might wrestle with these issues in the forests, outside the human sphere and beyond ordinary realities, yet Elizabeth does not have the privilege of untangling herself too completely, or of setting off confidently into the bush like the village women. Simultaneously too isolated and too entangled, Elizabeth lacks any support networks to facilitate her journeying, and her son anchors her to life: watching him play football distracts her from fulfilling Dan's prophecy of suicide (13-4). Elizabeth's 'soul journey' cannot be discretely isolated from her life and responsibilities as a mother, but it does take her far beyond the reaches of ordinary perception and accepted reality. The novel's development of its critique of power involves the bending and scrambling of structure and syntax. Why does the theoretical struggle with power take place in these alter-spaces, in the bush? A passage from Holloway proves highly suggestive in this regard:

> Reality and power are so mutually encrusted that even to raise the question of dissolving power is to step off the edge of reality. All our categories of thought, all our assumptions about what is reality, or what is politics or economics or even where we live, are so permeated by power that just to say 'no!' to power precipitates us into a vertiginous world in which there are no fixed reference points to hold onto other than the force of our own 'no!'…to ask for a theory of anti-power is to try to see the invisible, to hear the inaudible. To try to theorise anti-power is to wander in a largely unexplored world. (*Change the World* 22)

This passage connects powerfully with Head's project. A radical critique of

power and an attempt to envisage or create life beyond power is a dangerous and frightening theoretical process, and it is one which cannot be undertaken within the confines of a reality defined by power relations. It is a mad undertaking, a journey into the wilderness, a dissolution of the self and its world. This is why Head's questioning of power takes place in a hallucinatory dream-space where she "see[s] the invisible" and "hear[s] the inaudible": as she radically questions the power relations which permeate the world, she sees the monstrous madness of reality. As Ravenscroft writes, Head shows "how close is the similarity between the most fevered creations of a deranged mind and the insanities of deranged societies" (184).

The deconstruction of power must be continued through the cultivation of what Holloway calls 'anti-power,' the awakening of potentiality and dignity in ways which are radically opposed to domination. It is impossible to say what forms such anti-power might take, because such lives remain "a largely unexplored world." This "vertiginous world in which there are no fixed reference points to hold onto" (*Change the World* 9) is the smooth space of nomadic thought, of radical openness and experimentation: it is, of course, the bush. As we have seen, the bush in *A Question of Power* is the alternative space in which life and drama dissolve the inert fixities of commodification. It is the space where Motabeng Secondary School can be built, where the Cooperative Industries Project can take shape, and where Elizabeth can make a home and form a garden. The experimental farm and garden are projects of practical negation: they are the overturning of brutality, the development of possibilities, the compassionate nurturing of life, the marriage of poetry and science. The text itself is also a work of practical negation, fragmenting narrative arcs and creating

a disconcertingly open space where pain can be voiced and visions remain radically resistant to even the illusion of final interpretation.

5.6 African Schizohistories in *A Question of Power*

We can move much more confidently through *A Question of Power* if we understand it contextually. Head's novel is a schizoanalysis of power, and schizoanalysis—like all forms of vernacular theory, which is to say, all forms of theory—is necessarily situated. Contextualising *A Question of Power* is nothing new: it has almost reflexively been read against Head's own life and has been related more generally to South African Apartheid. This focus is too narrow: this novel ranges across much broader historical and geographical expanses. The first line of the novel reads, "It seemed almost incidental that he was African," (11). The novel's Africanness may *seem* incidental, but it is in fact crucial. *A Question of Power* maps onto four main contextual situations: the regional history of Southern Africa in the nineteenth century; Pan-African politics since independence; Botswana's own history leading up to independence; and contemporaneous Botswanan development politics. In the schizohistory of Head's novel, these histories are layered, abstracted, and simultaneous.

5.6.1 Why are the Devils Black?: 'Colonialist Criticism' and *A Question of Power*

Before we begin a historical reading of *A Question of Power*, let us consider a question about this novel which has troubled many critics: why are the evil characters black? Sello, Medusa and Dan's blackness presents a serious problem for critics who want to read the novel primarily in relation to Apartheid. Surely, then, Elizabeth's tormentors should be white. Critics have offered a number of inventive solutions to this problem of apparent misidentification, most of which

are variations on a theme of false consciousness. Elizabeth is understood as having internalised Apartheid racial ideologies, and is tormented by hatred of her own blackness. Hershini Bhana writes that the image of Elizabeth's body invaded by black ghosts echoes Apartheid fear of being invaded by African countries or perhaps being undone by black religion and culture—hence, invasion by the monk and the phallus (38). She also reads Sello, Dan and Medusa as being ghosts who are themselves "haunted by the viciousness of a history where the black man is infantilized, hypersexualized, inauthenticated" (38). Huma Ibrahim also reads Elizabeth's attitudes towards Africa and towards her African tormentors as a result of Apartheid's racial propaganda. Elizabeth, Ibrahim argues, does not speak any African languages and is not embraced by African society because she is unwilling to claim her father, seeking instead identification with her white mother (135)—Ibrahim does not allow the historical complexities of the Coloured situation to intrude upon this Oedipal reading. Moreover, "Medusa is not the 'other'" but is "a manifestation of 'self-loathing' or 'self-contempt'" (138), while Dan, similarly, "is villain only in that he represents subjective polarity, the 'inappropriate other in every I'" (140). There is certainly a degree of truth in this reading: as we shall explore later, Elizabeth's hallucinatory figures challenge distinctions between self and other, expose the inescapable darkness within everyone, and reveal the absolute interdependency of polar opposites. Nevertheless, the racial element of Ibrahim's argument is unconvincing: can we accept that either Medusa or Dan is primarily representative of Apartheid's racial fears and stereotypes? While these may be elements in their composition, are they the most important? Maureen Fielding offers a more plausible explanation by reading the novel's depiction of evil

African men and women as part of a project of revising national mythologies—

this, she writes, is a principle pursuit of trauma literature (100-1). Which

national mythologies is Head revising, and to which traumas is she responding?

Strangely, Fielding locates the novel primarily within the traumatic confines of

South Africa: Elizabeth must learn to "respond to the deaths of so many victims

of Apartheid, racism, patriarchy, and in particular her mother's death…" (103),

but Head cannot offer forgiveness because victims of Apartheid never received

restitution (104). If *A Question of Power* is principally engaged with the

traumatic effects of Apartheid—and, perhaps, traditional African patriarchy—

then why does Head engage so overwhelmingly with revisions of African

nationalist ideology? Head herself insisted that the evils depicted in the text

were not those of Apartheid (Eilersen 221), and she forcefully rejected attempts

to read her characters as being *not really* black:

> I am sick to death of all that has been written about *A Question of*
>
> *Power* by white reviewers. …In the mind of any white, whether
>
> racialist or liberal, a black man is not a whole man, with whole,
>
> horrific, satanic passions. A black man is a wee, sleekit, timorous,
>
> cowering beastie they mowed down with maxim guns a hundred
>
> years ago. A black man could not possibly be the characters in my
>
> books, so hugely vile, so hugely demonish. (qtd. inEilersen 222)

So far from accepting that her portrayal of monstrous blacks stems from racist

myths of Apartheid, Head insists that it is the racially revisionist critical impulse

which springs from sublimated racial arrogance.

Head is infuriated by the patronising moves of what Achebe called

'colonialist criticism.' Another tactic of colonialist criticism, closely related to

this critical discomfort with the evil black characters, is the impulse to read the

text as being not primarily African at all, but universal: the characters are not

really black and the novel is not really African. The first words of *A Question of*

Power even nod towards this universalising tendency: "It seemed almost

incidental that he was African" (11). Significantly, this is almost identical to the

sentence from critic Charles Larson—"That it is set in Africa appears to be

accidental"—which Achebe mockingly quotes as an example of the faux-

universalising tendencies of what he calls 'colonialist criticism' ("Colonialist

Criticism" 75). Head's first sentence, like the entire opening section, is a

misdirection, a set-up which she thoroughly and rapidly deconstructs—as we

will see in detail later in the chapter. Critics have tended to take her at her word,

however. Kim reads *A Question of Power* as historical theory (40), yet much of

her argument rests on the belief that Elizabeth identifies as a bourgeois white

man, in denial of her black female body (54). Considering the Eurocentric

historical schemata Kim applies to the text, however, the misidentification is not

necessarily Elizabeth's.

Rose's reading of Head is far more strongly universalising, declaring

Elizabeth "a woman philosopher for the whole world" (415). Within this

universalism, Rose does try to contextualise *A Question of Power*, placing it

within contexts of Tswana beliefs about spirits and witchcraft (407), yet this is

an unhelpful misdirection. Head had no Tswana ancestors to haunt her, although

Elizabeth and Head both recognise that witchcraft beliefs function as vernacular

theories of mental distress, meaning that there are forceful similarities between

experiences of witchcraft and their own experiences. Nevertheless, Head

emphasises, both within the text and in private letters, that witchcraft is not *her*

explanatory framework, so that she is fascinated, but as an outsider: "People then began to tell me of things I had lived through in *A Question of Power*" (qtd. in Rose 407). Rose is by no means the only critic to 'contextualise' Head inappropriately by invoking a mental landscape of sorcery and spirits while producing essentially universalised readings. Unintentionally summing up this strain in Head criticism, Rose writes, "Voices migrate, mimic, impersonate, and invade…before freezing and ossifying into place" (412). Head's text is taken, in Head's own words, as "a blending of everything…a huge hotch potch…a sprawling run across the universe" (qtd. in Rose 416), but it is also at the same time taken as symptomatic of the African night-worlds of ancestors and witches. Never mind that Head was outside these beliefs, and that even the tormented Elizabeth pragmatically hops over the owl lying dead on her doorstep like an omen of witchcraft: "a longing for a cup of tea pushed through her terrified mutterings. 'I think the owl must have suddenly died of old age'" (*A Question of Power* 48-9). Critics catch *A Question of Power* in a pincer movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, so that it demonstrates universal wisdom and African madness.

5.6.2 An Introduction to Head's Histories

A Question of Power is embedded in and responds to the astonishing, dismaying history of Africa in the twentieth century. As a young woman, Head was inspired by Pan-Africanism and became involved with the Pan-African Congress (Eilersen 44), but she later became terribly disillusioned with the party, the ideology, and African nationalism more broadly. She clearly expresses her dismay, mistrust and fear with these ideologies in *When Rain Clouds Gather*:

The opposition political parties had long been aligned to the Pan-

African movement. They also called themselves the vanguard of

African nationalism in southern Africa. To many, Pan-Africanism is

an almost sacred dream, but like all dreams it also has its nightmare

side, and the little men like Joas Tsepe and their strange doings are

the nightmare. If they have any power at all it is the power to plunge

the African continent into an era of chaos and bloody murder. (42-3)

This political nightmare constitutes a powerful current within the horrors

explored in *A Question of Power*. In this section, we will examine first of all the

"sacred dream" of Pan-Africanism, as it appeared before and in the early days of

national independence. One of Head's early influences was the Pan-Africanist

thinker and activist George Padmore, who became an advisor to Kwame

Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, the first newly independent African

nation, and a powerfully influential figure within Pan-Africanism and African

nationalism. There is an affinity between Nkrumah, who was often pictured

draped in white robes, and Sello the monk, with their dreams for a bright African

future. We will then consider one of the first great crises of Pan-Africanism: the

Congo crisis in 1960, during which Nkrumah unintentionally betrayed both an

ally and his ideals (Mohan 369, 378). As the 1960s progressed, Nkrumah and

most other African nationalist governments became increasingly authoritarian

(Decalo 209), embracing Medusa and becoming Sello in the brown suit. Towards

the end of the 1960s, things became increasingly nightmarish, with the atrocities

of the Biafran war and the eruption of three particularly brutal 'personal

dictatorships,' as defined by Samuel Decalo: Jean Bedel Bokassa in the Central

African Republic (1966-1979), Macias Nguema in Equatorial Guinea (1968-

1979) and Idi Amin in Uganda (1971-1979). These personal dictators were monstrously cruel, ideologically void, and nearly demolished the societies under their sway (Neuberger 146). In their nihilism, self-glorification, sexual rapacity, and personal violence, they strongly resonate with the personal monstrosities of Dan. Thus, I will demonstrate that it is possible to read Sello the monk, Sello in the brown suit and Dan as phases in the horrifying developments of African nationalism from colonialism through the first decade of independence.

As well as being a schizohistory of Pan-African politics, the imagery of *A Question of Power* can also be read more locally as a schizo- or cryptohistory of Botswana. I suggest 'cryptohistory' because Head, as a stateless refugee, was not able to write openly against the government of Botswana or its president Seretse Khama. Of course, her precarious status notwithstanding, Head actually *did* attack Seretse Khama very openly with her infamous defamatory poster at the Serowe post office, which accused him of secretly assassinating his Vice-President and molesting his daughter, an attack which was pardoned on grounds of insanity but resulted in her hospitalisation (Eilersen 136-7). I will demonstrate the parallels between Sello the monk and Seretse's grandfather, Khama the Great, while arguing that Sello in the brown suit represents the bureaucratic and elitist disappointments of Seretse's presidency. Dan, "one of the very few cattle millionaires of the country…[and] an African nationalist in a country where people were only concerned about tribal affairs" (*A Question of Power* 104), may represent the elites who were achieving increasing control within Botswana, directing its development towards their own interests (Picard 147). In this perspective, the garden becomes not only a sane refuge from Elizabeth's mental torments, it also emerges as an alternative vision of

development, opposed to the exploitative land policies favoured by cattle
millionaires like Dan.

5.6.3 The Mfecane

Before we consider the hope, violence and betrayals of the African
twentieth century, or the quieter disappointments of Botswana's politics, it is
worth noting a deeper history which may reverberate within *A Question of
Power*. There is an underlying period of trauma across southern Africa, which
precedes, underlies, and paved the way for Apartheid South Africa, white
minority rule in Rhodesia, and the 'benign neglect' of the British Protectorate of
Bechuanaland. This trauma is the Mfecane, to which Head would later turn in *A
Bewitched Crossroads*: "nearly twenty years of war had raged and devastated the
Highveld of south-central Africa….Village after village lay in ruins and the ground
everywhere was covered with human skeletons" (*A Bewitched Crossroads* 19).
These 'wars of catastrophe' followed a pattern similar to that of the Yoruba
Wars, in that original attacks by the Zulus, who constituted a war machine like
the Fulani, led to rippling waves of violence spreading through the region, as
refugees themselves became marauders (20-2)—"Desperate bands of homeless
refugees turned to cannibalism in order to survive" (19). The Mfecane brought
previously unimagined levels of violence and destruction to the region, causing
vast dislocation and dispossession. Peoples were enslaved, and regions were
depopulated:

> It was a period of terror with the daily rhythm of ploughing, cattle-
> herding and hunting completely disrupted. Whole clans disappeared
> from the face of the earth and human bones littered the land. What

had once been homesteads and cultivated fields, reverted to wild

bush. (44)

Head writes about the Mfecane in language which strongly resembles the terms

in which she described Elizabeth's breakdown: "Here is the end of all life. Here is

nothing. It did not correspond to the energies needed for the tasks of life" (*A*

Question of Power 36). She had not yet researched the wars of catastrophe when

she wrote *A Question of Power*, but it seems highly likely that, in passages like

these from *A Bewitched Crossroads*, she was aware of the parallels between

personal and social suffering, between the devastation of a mind and of a

landscape.

The Mfecane left the region reeling and wounded, a state in which it was

more vulnerable to the depredations of Boer and British and adventurers (*A*

Bewitched Crossroads 32). Serowe itself was a product of those times, as the

Bamangwato migrated north through the Kalahari to escape the wars, and

eventually "conquered and absorbed neighbouring groups of people into a state"

with a capital in Serowe (Parsons 4). Khama the Great, who became a teetotal

Christian convert (5) was also "one of the few African rulers who clearly saw

what the whites were doing ten or twenty years before the colonial axe fell" (6).

As a result, he was able to navigate the dangerous politics of colonialism

successfully, securing the establishment and maintenance of the Bechuanaland

Protectorate, preventing its absorption into the Union of South Africa, even

though they "expected, pleaded and sometimes demanded" its surrender for fifty

years (9).

Although Head's deep historical engagement with this period came after *A*

Question of Power, the Mfecane helped to form the societies and landscapes in

which Head lived, worked and suffered. I suggest that this history of chaotic, violent deterritorialization (predating and underlying Head's own) may feed into and connect with the fragmented, unrooted style of *A Question of Power*. It is a text which has no firm moorings, which is in violent motion, in which victims and oppressors roll together in waves of evil. As the regional violence of the Yoruba Wars reverberates through Tutuola's novels, it is possible that the traumas of the Mfecane shake *A Question of Power*.

5.6.4 Pan-Africanism and its Betrayals: Nkrumah and the Congo

Head was writing *A Question of Power* at a strange and terrible moment in African history. The idealism, optimism and energy of the anti-colonial movements—which reached their apogee in the ringing, transformational hopes of Pan-Africanism—were being crushed, betrayed and perverted. If there is any doubt that the text trembles with deep memory of the Mfecane, there can be no question at all that we should connect Africa's first decade of 'independence' to *A Question of Power's* sense of hellish corruption, pain and despair. Elizabeth, Head writes, "followed the world news over BBC world service each morning in a dazed fashion; a military coup in Africa, the Middle East crisis, a busmen's strike in London—it just went on and on" (*A Question of Power* 131-2). We might now remember the role of the radio in her public breakdown: it is a charged object, representing a connection to an extremely troubling world, and it is the government control and monitoring of this connection (through the radio license) which caused her to snap (50-1).

What are we to make of this mention of Elizabeth listening to new news, and to the surrounding passage, her debate with Tom about global politics? Initially, Head seems to be stressing Elizabeth's passivity, helplessness and

confusion: she listens "dazed;" she "hardly heard or grasped the implications" of the American invasion of Cambodia; and as she speaks, "she hesitated, floundering" (*A Question of Power* 132-3). This impression of naiveté is misleading. Her hesitation recalls Cixous' description of a woman's terror at political speaking: "at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 880). Head identifies Elizabeth's hesitancy as a condition of vernacular theorising, of speaking from within danger: "Did one make speeches right inside hell?" (*A Question of Power* 133). She does, however: "She was a great orator" (134), and she proceeds to draw potent connections between Buddhism, black power, nationalism, and the terrible risks of liberation (134).

Although Head's language suggests a helpless confusion—certainly, she lacks Tom's excessively clear convictions—we can also read this passage as a hint, an indication of engagement: Elizabeth may be isolated, but she is not ignorant, and it would be a mistake to assume (as critics seem to have done, implicitly) that her exile from South Africa marks the end of her knowledge of or concern with world affairs and politics. In her debate with Tom about 'rapid economic development' and Black Power, Elizabeth's analysis proves more subtle, astute and well-informed than his: "He'd included Nkrumah, who had already disappeared in a coup. When Elizabeth protested he said, quite calmly: 'Nkrumah made a few errors, that's all. But he stood for rapid economic development'" (132). The reference seems casual, but it is the second mention of Nkrumah in the novel, and this hints at an important strain within Head's political thought.

Head became intellectually involved with the politics of Nkrumah and Pan-Africanism in Durban in the late 1950s when she was electrified by the writings of George Padmore (Eilersen 45), a diasporic veteran of transnational struggle and advisor to Nkrumah's new government (Von Eschen 12, 15). In 1960, Head's brief involvement with South Africa's Pan-African Congress ended in disillusionment, when the money she helped to raise for the party, recently banned in the post-Sharpeville repressions, was used by party leaders to fund a womanising spree (Eilersen 49). In the same year as this episode of petty venality, the practical limitations of Pan-Africanism were exposed through Ghanaian involvement in the Congo crisis, a gesture of solidarity which mutated, through covert Cold War manoeuvres, into betrayal. Patrice Lumumba, the elected president of the Congo, was strongly influenced by Nkrumah's Pan-African nationalism and non-Soviet socialism (Gibbs 79). Belgium, however, had no intention of permitting autonomous nationalist development in the tremendously valuable colony: as one Belgian general stated, "After independence=Before independence" (Gibbs 78). Within days of independence, the Congo "degenerated into crisis," facing military revolt and regional secessions orchestrated by Belgium and supported by the United States (Gibbs 77, 90). Lumumba called on Nkrumah for military aid, which Nkrumah supplied under the internationalist aegis of the United Nations. Ghanaian troops were the "largest single national contingent" in the United Nations force, comprising over a quarter of the troops (Mohan 375), and Nkrumah believed that their involvement would 'Africanize' the intervention, rescuing Lumumba from both imperialism and the Cold War (376). Nkrumah and Lumumba both failed to

appreciate, however, the vast difference between supplying troops and controlling the operation.

The United Nations used Ghanaian troops against Lumumba at crucial moments, to the extent that Lumumba accused "the aggressive and hostile" Ghanaian troops of being "in a state of war against our republic." Nkrumah complained to Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld that "Ghana's troops are used almost exclusively as [a] cat's paw against Lumumba" (qtd. in Mohan 388). When Lumumba was arrested by Mobutu's troops, a Ghanaian officer's request to be allowed to rescue him was refused by the United Nations, clearing the way for Lumumba's murder and Mobutu's ascension (390). The Ghanaian and larger United Nations presence created an appearance of legitimacy and international consensus that neither Belgian nor American involvement could achieve, so that, as Mohan concludes, "Lumumba's removal was probably more easily accomplished by a collective U.N. than by an exclusive U.S. intervention" (378).

The Congo crisis was a catastrophic failure of Pan-Africanism. Mohan concludes, "It marked the first major break in the tidal wave of decolonisation, a recession in the triumphal march of nationalism in Africa," serving as a terrible indication of the inadequacy of the "rather primitive tactics of the anti-colonial struggle as the basis for a new strategy against the powerful and all-pervasive imperialism…" (370). Nkrumah and Ghanaian soldiers became instruments for the will of the United Nations, itself a vehicle for the aims of the United States. The Congo crisis is a series of betrayals and unwitting evils. In the imagery of vernacular theory, we might think of Ghanaian involvement in the Congo in terms of spirit possession, in which bodies are seized by the force of another's will—and, of course, there is an element of this in all domination.

5.6.4 Sello and Pan-Africanism

Twice in *A Question of Power*, Sello says, "You don't realise the point at which you become evil": first, as he stares into a future ruined by Medusa and then as Elizabeth comes "to accept the impossible, that Sello had molested his own child," who is "going to die" (96, 144-5). What is happening? Sello has destroyed a future, may be killing his child, has betrayed a dream, and has drifted into evil. Nkrumah committed troops which assisted in the overthrow and murder of his ally and protégé. In so doing, he became an agent of neo-imperialism and helped to usher in a period of African authoritarianism (Mohan 370), to the extent that authoritarian governments became "ingrained as the norm in much of the continent today" (Decalo 209). African nationalism shifted from struggles for autonomy to shallow and coercive performances of authenticity, such as Mobutu's penchant for renaming places and people. Shortly after the Congo crisis, Nkrumah began to implement repressive policies and declared himself dictator, before being overthrown and living the rest of his life in exile. The bearer of a philosophy which offered transformative promise—to the individual, the nation, and the world—he was reduced to quite a different figure: impotent, malign and disgraced. In his rise and fall, with his radical philosophy which eventually becomes another tool of power, Nkrumah strongly resembles Sello. More generally, Sello's grandeur, corruption and diminishment connect to the history of African nationalist liberation movements and leaders.

"You don't realize the point at which you become evil," Sello tells Elizabeth, as he sits "listlessly….reduced to a quarter of his former size, so shrunken that his monk's cloth flapped about his form like a scarecrow's rags." He stares "ahead straight into the future with forlorn eyes" (96). This is the end

of Sello's era, of his dominance over Elizabeth. He has caused her great suffering

and paved the way for worse, and he is still trying to manipulate her

understanding of this pain: "It had nearly cost her her life and sanity. Such are

the times of exalted moods, when one thinks a sacrifice of great gesture is

complete, that she turned with a stirring of deep admiration to Sello and thought

'He has done something great'" (98). Nkrumah was deposed, and later lionised

once again. Stories of heroism are rejected then adopted once again. Sello's rags,

however, suggest that his power was mostly a scarecrow-trick, a hollow

performance. As Kim writes, "The vagueness, elusiveness, *emptiness* of language

describing Sello's teachings reveal his instability, unreality. Language is

commanding in form, vacant in content" (43). His were only ever straw men

arguments.

What was the nature of those alarming and empty teachings? "He had

defined the future, in African terms, as one of uncompromising goodness," Head

writes, but "he had tried to weave Medusa into this structure" (95). That is, he

promised Elizabeth an African utopia, one which would develop through "the

slow, interweaving pattern of life where one thing influenced another, where

cells formed and re-formed in a natural way without violence" (95-6)—what

Samuel Decalo calls "the inherent pluralism and inertia of traditional African

society" (210). He tried, however, to achieve this utopia through the increasingly

authoritarian exercise of power, represented by Medusa. Even as a monk, Sello

assumes too great a degree of personal power: "she privately accused him of

being the originator of the caste system, alongside his other theories of the

heavens" (32). Obsessively in love with Medusa—that is, with "his power lusts,

his greeds, his self-importance" (40)—he becomes evil, as he recognises: "I

thought too much of myself. I am the root cause of human suffering" (36). He

swaps his monks robes for a brown suit, exchanging moral for temporal

authority—if moral authority is taken too far, Head suggests, it turns into

something very different. As Elizabeth theorises, "the title of God, in its absolute

all-powerful form, is a disaster to its holder, the all-seeing eye is the greatest

temptation. It turns a man into a wild debaucher, a maddened and wilful

persecutor of his fellow men" (36-7). These absolute corruptions of absolute

power are embodied by Dan: Dan and Sello the monk may be opposites, but in

the sense of being opposite ends of a continuum of power's exercise.

Sello the monk represents the idealism of Pan-Africanism before

independence, an idealism in which some troubling hints may be glimpsed.

When he is seduced and corrupted by power, symbolised by Medusa, he yields to

Sello in the brown suit. Sello in the brown suit is corrupt and heartless, yet also

passive and ineffectual: Medusa acts through him or for him. This is

representative of the authoritarianism and corruption which rapidly came to

characterise many African governments within a few years of independence; and

it was the weak and venal authoritarianism manipulated by former colonial

powers, Cold War superpowers, and corporations. From Nkrumah in Ghana to

Hastings Banda in Malawi, dictatorships emerged which manifested nationalist

totalitarianism rather than liberatory nationalism (McCracken 232).

In her lucid moments, Elizabeth understands the ease with which

messages of Pan-Africanism, African nationalism and Black Power have been

distorted into tools of authoritarianism. Of the Black Power salute, she declares

that "'It only needs a Hitler to cause an explosion…He also stuck his fist in the

air.'" As Tom guesses, she is not really talking at all about the United States but
about Africa:

> The politicians jump on the bandwagon of past suffering. They're
>
> African nationalists and sweep the crowd away by weeping and
>
> wailing about the past. Then why do they steal and cheat people
>
> once they get into government? They don't view the African masses
>
> as having any dignity or grandeur. They're just illiterates who don't
>
> know anything, so they think they can get up there and steal and
>
> cheat and squander the money. Every time there's a coup someone's
>
> been stealing and cheating. Then someone else steals and cheats and
>
> there's another coup. They don't ever see that the roots of it lie in
>
> their despising of the illiterate masses. (133)

African politics has already become a repetitive wheel of samsara, with Pan-
African ideals reduced to something worse than cynicism, to emotional control
based in hatred, the same kind of power that Dan is exercising over her even as
she holds this conversation with Tom.

5.6.5 Dan and the Personal Dictators

Apart from these ideologues turned authoritarians, there was a different
kind of dictator emerging in the mid-1960s, whose rules resonate with the
cruelty, debauchery and nihilism demonstrated by Dan. Three of these
particularly extreme, debauched regimes are those that Decalo has labelled
'personal tyrannies': the Central African Republic under Jean Bedel Bokassa
(1966-1979), Equatorial Guinea under Macias Nguema (1968-1979) and Uganda
under Idi Amin (1971-1979). These dictators "had no ideological colour or
content" nor "any significant social base," tribal or political. Instead, their

regimes have been likened to gangs, bound to the leader "by patronage, opportunism, plunder, complicity and fear." Between them, they were responsible for an estimated 300,000 deaths (Neuberger 146). David Smith writing in *The Guardian* described the Central African Republic in 2013 as "a phantom-state," and the United States ambassador to Equatorial Guinea from 1991-1994 said, "There is not really a government. There is an on-going family criminal conspiracy" (Gardner).   The regimes of Amin, Bokassa and Nguema were characterised by terror, brutality, slaughter, and sexual excess, as well as magical beliefs and delusions of divine guidance.

Kim has written that Dan represents a form of power which negates "intrinsic meaning": "Dan is a cipher, because he does not have any fixed content…[and] no goal other than his own will to power" (50). While Kim convincingly reads Dan's manipulative meaninglessness as an image of "the postmodern schizophrenia of the near future" (40), particularly the "postmodern's critique of authenticity, subjectivity and agency," (52), Head also had access to more concrete and distinctively African models of nihilistic will to power. Decalo writes of the 'personal dictator' that "He rules in an absolute imperial manner often for the sole purpose of self-gratification or glorification….Personal dictators create a vast societal void within which they often enact their personal fantasies and whims…" (212). The image of the societal void resonates particularly strongly with Dan, as does the emphasis on megalomania. Although Dan claims the universe as his, his dominion is actually limited to Elizabeth, within whom he creates a hellish, chaotic void, directed towards his own glorification: "There wasn't any soul as spectacular and dashing as he. He'd been cast from the start in the mould of a superman. He raised his

majestic head and surveyed the universe with cold eyes and supreme

indifference" (*A Question of Power* 118). He degrades and destroys Elizabeth

through a regime of relentless yet unpredictable terror designed to grant him

such total control that he can drive her to suicide:

> Before her gaze, Dan's head exploded into a ball of that red fire. The
>
> loud, pounding rhythm of his drama drummed in her ears day and
>
> night. It was like large, grasping hands gathering every thread of her
>
> life to themselves for a total command; a total encroachment on her
>
> mind and soul….A persistent theme was that she was not genuinely
>
> African; *he* had to give her the real African insight. (159)

This last statement resonates, of course, with Head's assertion that any claim to

African particularity is a tool of oppression—"once you make yourself a freak

and special any bastard starts to use you" (133)—is another, even more

frightening suggestion. It is the suggestion that, perhaps, there really is

something genuinely African about Medusa and Dan's terror tactics: "The African

grin said so much. It was hatred. It was control of a situation" (108). This fear of

a peculiarly African evil, as well as the repeated references to Hitler, takes on

much more significance in the context of regimes like Amin's, Bokassa's and

Nguema's, which combined near-genocidal slaughter with an exaggeration of

underdevelopment through destruction of infrastructure, and topped it off with

grim flourishes such as cannibalism, blood rituals, and communion with spirits.

While the infamously meticulous record-keeping and efficiently resourceful

slaughter of the Nazis can seem like a hellish exaggeration of German

stereotypes, the horrors of these African personal dictatorships—the crocodiles,

the cannibalism, the black magic—seem to have sprung from the filthiest depths of a racist collective unconscious.

Amin, Nguema and Bokassa are men about whom grotesque stories circulate, and it is difficult to translate these stories precisely into history: this is precisely the nature of traumatic memory. Joanna Quinn, writing about difficulties facing the Ugandan Truth Commission, notes that memories of atrocity are notoriously resistant to searches for factual precision: "as has been discovered in the testimony of Holocaust survivors, events are rarely remembered in any semblance of temporal or chronological order, but instead in 'durational time,' making less and less credible the details reported" (405). Within schizohistory, however, the phantasmagoria of trauma can circulate freely; rumour, propaganda, and the distortions of memory combine into vernacular theories of horror and oppressive violence. There is substantial evidence, certainly, that these three regimes perpetrated astonishing crimes. Amin and Bokassa were accused of cannibalism (Neuberger 146) and both participated in beating prisoners (Decalo 224). Thomas Ofcansky writes of Uganda:

> The tactics Amin used against his adversaries defy description. He did not merely order his henchmen to kill people but also encouraged them to subject their victims to unspeakable atrocities after they were dead. Ugandans regularly discovered the mutilated bodies of their friends, relatives and acquaintances with their 'livers, noses, lips, genitals or eyes missing.' Amin himself was suspected of cannibalism and practicing traditional Kakwa blood rituals on slain enemies. (qtd. inQuinn 402)

The atrocities are 'unspeakable,' and the corpses are fragmented: memory, language, society and the victims are savaged and disfigured, left irrevocably lacking. There is a furious performance at work in these atrocities: they are excessive, maximally traumatic, aiming not only at death but also horror.

These regimes were governmentally and socially vacant: they had no base and no policy; their power was maintained wholly by terror, and that terror was married to spectacle. Similarly, Dan's ascension within Elizabeth is marked by spectacle: he conjures up his own status through bombastic pomp, a tactic he shares with many dictators, including the markedly theatrical Bokassa. The ostentatious Bokassa was notorious for having himself crowned emperor in a ceremony mimicking Napoleon Bonaparte's coronation; and his final downfall was linked, fittingly for one so fixated on image, to his massacre of hundreds of school children who refused to wear uniforms printed with his face. Dan, Head comments, "was a great one for the right atmosphere and lighting-effects" (108), and it is this predilection which most alarms Elizabeth in the beginning:

> The unseen female choir repeated the words over and over: 'Glory be
>
> to God on high, on earth peace, goodwill towards men.'
>
> Elizabeth listened, appalled. Nothing Sello had ever said in the
>
> beginning frightened her as much as this did. It implied that there
>
> was still something up there, unseen, unknown to account
>
> for….[Sello] had introduced her to people. He had produced no
>
> phenomena. He had reproduced the solid beauty of life. (109)

Although it does not seem quite true to claim that Sello "produced no phenomena"—we might remember his annihilating sea of pale blue light (36)—Head is affirming a link between showmanship and totalitarianism. Elizabeth's

shocked response to the apparently angelic carolling is striking: their message is ostensibly benign, but the medium and the implication are both totalitarian. In contrast to Sello the monk's message of participatory divinity, Dan's "female chorus" (a precursor of his 'good-time girls') restores an "the unknown God…to his absolute supremacy" (109). The reason that this heavenly choir serves as an early warning of Dan's devastating tyranny is that it is unanswerable and mechanical: "The insistent record was shattering. It went on and on" (109). The choir, then, is merely a variation on Dan's favoured tactic of record-playing, which he initiates during Medusa's assaults—"Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death" (45)—and continues throughout his reign of terror. Instead of asserting divinity, however, these later records insist on obscenity, either Dan's own (116) or that of Sello (130) and Mrs Jones (171). He uses records to urge Elizabeth to suicide and to order her to "suffer unrequited love for me" (186). His records are accompanied by other phenomena: "a racking pain fill[ing] her chest" (186); an image of Mrs Jones rising "on the horizon like a monstrous, cackling old witch" (171); a feeling of "cold slime touch[ing] her mouth" followed by a vision of Sello in the brown suit grabbing her (130); or simply a "feeling behind it…a cringing, deep shame" (117). From Dan's first deployment of the records, Head establishes it as her primary symbol for totalitarianism:

> the option of any sane, reasonable reply had been taken away from
> her. Was that why propaganda broke whole races of people?
> Someone just asserted something and directed it at a victim,
> regardless of whether it made sense or not: 'You are inferior. You
> are filth.' Their power of assertion was so tremendous that the
> whole flow and interchange of life stopped before it…Here was a

world, now, where there were no questions, only pre-planned,

overpowering statements that choked her… (47)

Thus, although the records generate associated hallucinatory phenomena and

sensations, what makes these experiences particularly crushing is the relentless

repetitiveness of the records. Elizabeth's experience of the records is a kind of

motorized samsara: she gets stuck in a groove. Her schizophrenia becomes all

the more painful because it is blocked. She cannot flow, and she cannot theorise:

The elegant pathway of private thought, like the wind sweeping

around a bend in the unknown road of the future, had been entirely

disrupted.…She was not supposed to sort out one thing from another.

Dan had set her up as the queen of passive observation of hell. (54)

As her thoughts are blocked—placed in a chair rather than sweeping across

smooth spaces—so too her mental imagery, under Dan's influence, becomes far

less given to slippery transmutations.

In this latter portion of the text, Elizabeth's mental imagery becomes

more fixed, rigid and stereotyped. While her early visions were characterised by

metamorphoses, Dan allows no transformations, only corruption and decay.

Sello is attended by Buddha's wife/Isis/Goliath/Medusa: one woman in many

forms, or many women occupying one space, as their souls pass from one into

another. Dan, on the other hand, parades his harem of fixed and fixated women,

simple and under his thrall: "The seventy-one nice-time girls appeared at some

stage or another to have fallen prostrate at Dan's feet, never to rise again" (163).

Their flat stability is driven home by their reductive names and symbols:

Madame Loose-Bottom whose "symbol was a clump of wild grass" (164);

Madame Squelch-Squelch whose "symbol was darkness" (164); of Miss Pink

Sugar-Icing, whose symbol, unsurprisingly, is "sponge cake with pink sugar-icing" (166). The nice-time girls are, in many ways, representative of Dan's repressive mode, so similar to Bokassa or Amin: spectacular and superficial, allowing for no modification or deviation, and all directed towards glorification of the phallic majesty of the man in charge. Sexual voracity was also a key part of Amin and Bokassa's personal mythologies: they created a "cult of sexual masculinity" around themselves (216). As Dan demonstrates, aggressively phallic performance can become central to the function of personal totalitarianism.

These women, despite their abjection, become Dan's victims. He pounds Miss Wriggly-Bottom to death: she "was stone dead. He'd overestimated her stamina" (129). It is the strong and assertive Miss Pelican-Beak, however, who falls victim to Dan's most grotesque display of repressive violence. Deciding that she is "too pushy for this new world," Dan "broke her legs, he broke her jutting spindly elbows, he decorated her with tiny, pretty pink roses for a new image of tender love" (167-8). Here, symbolism becomes an adjunct of violence, even atrocity. Constrained by symbolism, images and meanings cannot flow and develop, but must be violently forced into artificial new forms. Even maimed and bedizened, Miss Pelican-Beak is still too dangerous for Dan, who "slashe[s] off" her pelvis and replaces it with "a feminine pelvis with passive legs, nearly a replica of Elizabeth's" (168). His destruction of Pelican-Beak over, he confirms his power by displaying the phallic Miss Chopper, who patrols as a kind of one-woman militia: "She walked around with a chopper slung over her shoulder. She threatened to behead all his women" (168). Her name, of course, plays with transsexuality, particularly since the nice-time girls' monikers characterise their

genitals. We might imagine her as one of the cross-dressing gay men of Cape

Town referenced earlier in the text, a community whose history we will examine

in detail later; this reading is strengthened by Dan's references to his own

homosexual acts. With her axe or machete, Miss Chopper also references the

brutal militias and guards surrounding dictators.

While Amin and Bokassa made their sexual voracity part of their

performances of power, Nguema's regime was marked by magical or

hallucinogenic paranoia. In Equatorial Guinea, he "pulveris[ed] society through

brute terror and repression," killing 'intellectuals' and reintroducing slavery in a

drive to reverse development (Decalo 221). In a spectacle horribly reminiscent

of Tutuola, Nguema publically executed thirty-six people by forcing them to dig a

trench in which they were then buried to their necks, so that their heads could be

eaten by ants. His regime killed between 65,000-70,000 people, nearly 20% of

the population of 360,000 (Gardner). Although all three of these dictators "relied

on soothsayers, sorcerers and diviners to spread the myth of their omniscience

and divine powers," and while Bokassa and Amin's cannibalism served ritual

purposes (Decalo 224), magic was most fully utilised by Nguema, "a master of

traditional witchcraft, preoccupied with 'centralising' all magic in his own hands"

(225). As part of this effort, he took hallucinogens and spoke to the spirits of his

victims, fearing their vengeance—locals speculated that he was "half-mad"

(Decalo 232-3). He was "almost totally immersed in the world of spirits"

(Neuberger 225): once, having called for a table to be set for eight, he sat down

alone and proceeded to speak with the assembled ghosts (Gardner). Reporter

Dan Gardner writes that he "wrestled with nightmares, made decisions based on

nocturnal visions and often made baffling pronouncements, such as his

declaration in a 1967 speech that Adolf Hitler 'was the saviour of Africa.'"[19] He

was ferociously opposed to modernisation. As well as reintroducing slave

labour, he led the slaughter of so-called intellectuals, so that "all schools,

newspapers and printing presses" were closed for a decade and "less than a

dozen technical school graduates survived the holocaust" (Decalo 221). In a

telling confrontation between the industrial and (a probably imagined) tradition,

he ordered the workers at the capital's power plant to stop using mechanical

lubricant: "He would keep the machinery running with magic, he promised.

When the plant exploded, the city plunged permanently into darkness"

(Gardner). Nguema's reign of terror seems to have been his manifestation of an

inner nightmare, located somewhere in the shadow-lands between witchcraft

and madness. Past horrors and personal insecurities were violently manifested.

Slavery, for instance, no longer lingered in tales of malevolent spirits, but became

once again a present evil. Lacking schooling himself, he murdered everyone who

had surpassed him in education. A haunted sorcerer presiding over a non-

existent state, savagely driving the country towards his fantasy of a pre-colonial

past, Nguema was transforming Equatorial Guinea into something like his own

Bush of Ghosts, summoning both his own and the country's demons.

The regimes of Amin, Nguema and Bokassa were extraordinarily

traumatic, and they were all merely episodes in longer, continuing traumas that

have wracked and shattered these countries. In a passage on Uganda, which

could equally well apply to Equatorial Guinea and the Central African Republic,

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[19] Presumably this is a reference to the decolonisation that followed the Second
World War.

Joanna Quinn writes that, "Nearly thirty years of mind-numbing

violence…culminated in a broken society. Where once had stood a capable

people, able to provide for themselves on every level, now was found a country

whose economic, political and social systems were seriously fractured" (402).

The repercussions of their societal destruction became jarringly evident once

again in 2013 as violence again erupted in the Central African Republic, which as

Smith writes, was "never much more than a phantom-state." It is a phantom

state which is becoming its own far too literal Bush of Ghosts. Villages are being

abandoned and destroyed as 400,000 displaced people seek refuge, "many

hiding in the jungle," recalling refugees from the 19th century Yoruba war or the

mass-displacements during the *Mfecane.* A man reports that the Muslim militia,

Seleka, tortured his sons with pepper-paste, which they rubbed onto their

bodies: "They put it in the ears and nose of one of my sons and forced him to

inhale it, then hit him so he almost asphyxiated. He was bleeding from his ears

and mouth." Beatings and burnings with pepper: these tortures recall, uncannily,

the excessive cruelties Tutuola details in Unreturnable-Heaven's Town. Smiths'

précis of refugee stories also has the incantatory, nightmare quality of Tutuola:

> One man describes how his four-year-old son's throat was slit, and
>
> how he saw a snake swallowing a baby. A woman explains that she
>
> is caring for a young girl because her mother went searching for
>
> medicine and was bludgeoned to death with Kalashnikov rifles. A
>
> young man tells how he was bound and thrown to the crocodiles, but
>
> managed to swim to safety. (Smith)

In horrors like this, perhaps we can sense something about the common origins

of Head and Tutuola's very different responses to violence: this sense is intuitive

and ahistorical—schizohistorical, perhaps. It lies in the hallucinatory particularity, the stark surrealism of the attacks—as well as in their terrifying scale and generality. It is monstrous and mad: it leaps beyond the capacity of logical narration, into the distended, dismembered storytelling of trauma. In Head's own personalised, hallucinatory glimpse into this kind of violence, her suffering finally goes beyond words into an almost mechanical roar: "two large, familiar black hands move[d] towards her head. They had opened her skull. He'd bent his mouth towards the cavity and talked right into the exposed area. His harsh, grating voice was unintelligible. It just said, 'Rrrrrrrrraaaaaaaaa'" (*A Question of Power* 177).

Dan's brutality, greed, vacuity, showmanship and promiscuity are all reminiscent of the new African dictatorships which were emerging in the years following Head's exile. The dictatorships of Nguema, Amin and Bokassa were extreme instances of an authoritarianism and venality which was coming to replace idealistic nationalism and internationalist solidarity as the hallmarks of African government. During the same period, from 1967-1970, the Nigerian Civil War was a shocking example of government brutality: the blockade of Biafra deliberately targeted civilians, leading to one million civilian casualties. Images of the starving circulated around the world, and there were charges of genocide being committed against the Igbo. Given this continental context, it is hardly surprising that *A Question of Power* explores such nightmarish desolation, such obscene phantasmagoria of abjection. Elizabeth contemplates hell while participating in a small, hopeful project; Head watches catastrophic developments across Africa from Botswana, a country which managed to escape not only the worst distortions of colonialism but also the disasters of post-

colonialism. The sufferings Elizabeth witnesses are real, but they are only in her

head: isolated from the continental turmoil, she experiences these traumas as

nightmares.

5.7 The History of Botswana and *A Question of Power*
So far we have considered *A Question of Power* as a schizohistory of Africa,

from the *Mfecane* to the hopes and disappointments of Pan-Africanism and the

atrocities of dictatorships and war which began from the mid-1960s. It has been

a schizohistory which has passed fairly lightly over colonialism and even

Apartheid: it is the evil—that is, the power—of Africans which most concerns

Head as she considers the past and possible future of the continent. Thus it is

fitting that, contrary to almost all critical readings, *A Question of Power* is more

deeply engaged with Botswana than it is with South Africa. The novel's setting is

not incidental, nor is the country's presence limited to the realist sections;

rather, concern with Botswana's development and politics runs right through the

text, haunting Elizabeth's dreams.

In this section, we will read *A Question of Power* as a schizohistory of

Botswana and as a vernacular critique of its development. In the first,

schizohistorical section, we will examine connections between the novel and the

nation's political history. This discussion will centre on two key leaders: Khama

the Great, who skilfully navigated his kingdom's imperial encounters; and his

grandson Seretse Khama, who became the first president of Botswana after

causing an international furore by marrying a white woman. I will argue that

these rulers can be seen in the figures of Sello the monk and Sello in the brown

suit. In the history of this dynasty we will also encounter those elements which

seem most inarguably autobiographical within *A Question of Power*: interracial

unions and madness. By reading these themes through Batswana history rather than or as well as through Head's personal experiences, we will push engagement with this text further away from restrictive critical impulses.

Head's major concern is less with Botswana's past than with its future, however, and *A Question of Power* can be read as an vernacular theory of the developmental crossroads which the country had reached by the early 1970s. It is here that South Africa becomes most important. Despite maintaining political independence, Botswana had a long history of structural and economic dependence on South Africa, and the recent discovery of diamond mines had only intensified economic penetration by South Africa and other foreign interests. It is possible to read some of Elizabeth's more abstract sufferings— invasion by flows, for instance—in terms of Botswana's economic vulnerability. By 1970, it seemed likely that the nation's developmental future would be dictated by elites—as represented by the wealthy Dan and Sello—who would privilege the interests of cattle millionaires and mining corporations at the expense of subsistence farming. By reading Dan, with his secret ally Sello, as Botswana's economic and political elites, we can then integrate the text's fantastic sections with its realist elements: Head presents a struggle for control of Botswana's future (represented, crudely speaking, by Elizabeth) between economic elites and subsistence agriculture, between elite 'dictatorship' and cooperative participation. Economically, politically and socially, Head is portraying a struggle between mad obscenity and restorative growth.

5.7.1 Sello and Seretse Khama

Before moving into the more abstracted intensities of developmental direction, we begin in the realm of personalities, and here we can say with some

confidence that Sello is Seretse Khama. Seretse Khama played a role in Head's own delusions nearly equivalent to the role played by Sello in Elizabeth's delusions. Where Elizabeth posts a notice declaring that "SELLO IS A FILTHY PERVERT WHO SLEEPS WITH HIS DAUGHTER" (*A Question of Power* 175), Head pasted up a signed poster at the Serowe post office accusing Seretse Khama of committing incest with his daughter, as well as secretly having his prime minister assassinated (Eilersen 136). In court, she explained this by "raving uncontrollably about the President being both the Devil and God," causing her to be admitted to Lobatse, Botswana's only mental hospital (137). Elizabeth in turn is hospitalised because she explains to the police, "I did it because he's God and the devil at the same time" (*A Question of Power* 176). This similarity between life and text suggests that in one respect at least, Head's portrayal of Sello is similar to her opinion of Seretse Khama. Behind their public façade, Head senses profound corruption.

Further indications of Head's opinion of Seretse Khama, as well as similarities between him and Sello, can be found in two texts that Head sent to her friend and editor Jean Highland: "Pieces, Patterns, Impressions" in 1968 and "Bothwell" in 1970. These pieces describe a long-running soul drama involving herself, a man named "S" or "Long Profile," another man named Deep Ridge with whom she was in love, and a woman named Dan (Eilersen 129). As Head described it, these figures had slipped through a long history of incarnations, strongly reminiscent of those described in *A Question of Power*. In 'Bothwell,' Head writes that she had been Mary Queen of Scots and that Elizabeth was now tormenting her in the form of S, an "effeminate slob" who, for two years, "beamed a straight hell at me: 'You are the dog of the Africans. You are filth'…I

was allowed no rest night or day to live with my mixed breed appearance." Yet she had once been friends with S and "worked with him as a monk" before he became "a pervert" (qtd. in Eilersen 130). In S, the monk turned pervert, we see Sello, as well as the persecuting figure of Medusa, while Deep Ridge seems to correspond roughly to Dan.[20] The S of Head's letters corresponds to Sello in *A Question of Power*; and from her poster and court statements, it is clear that S is Seretse Khama, the president of Botswana. This identification, incidentally, explains the odd specificity of the moniker "Sello in the brown suit": Seretse

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[20] One interesting feature of Head's narration, which we will note briefly now but discuss in more detail later on, is the sexual fluidity of the figures. In one sense, these figures' genders are incidental: King David and Queen Elizabeth name intensities rather than bodies; they serve as totems perhaps of flawed righteousness or persecutory power rather than as bodily incarnations. Yet even in this reading, we must note that such disregard of gender is quite unusual and remarkable. In *A Question of Power*, homosexuality and transvestitism is a troubling leitmotif, and Elizabeth's own sex, gender and sexuality are indirectly but persistently questioned, as will be discussed extensively in a later section. In such a context, it is striking that Head and the protagonists of her soul-drama change gender. It is also intriguing that this first reference to a 'Dan' refers to a woman: might the flamboyantly phallic polymorphous pervert of the novel be, on some covert level, transsexual? Insofar as he is part of Elizabeth herself, of course, he certainly is.

Khama seems to have favoured pale brown suits,[21] so it is quite conceivable that readers familiar with him would have recognised the president in Head's description.

5.7.2 Botswana and the Sexual Politics of Race

In connecting *A Question of Power* to Botswana history, our main concerns will be systemic, but before we move on to them, we should pause to note a striking intersection between Head's text and the personal histories of Khama the Great, his son Sekgoma, and Seretse Khama: interracial relationships. Elizabeth and Head are both mixed race, and although Elizabeth's parentage occupies roughly two pages of text of *A Question of Power*, it is the detail which most strongly influences the overwhelming critical impulse to read the novel against both Head's biography and South African Apartheid. It will help in uncoupling *A Question of Power* from both this excessive attention to Head's personal history and the exclusive contextual attention to South Africa to note the dramatic and well-known connections between sex and race in Botswana over three generations. Both Khama and his son Sekgoma had significant relationships with women from other tribes (Parsons 12-3). While Khama the Great successfully married a woman of Bakirwa and Baseleka origins, "regarded as semi-servile folk," Sekgoma lost political standing when he tried to marry a

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[21] It is difficult to be certain from black and white photographs, although his suits are certainly pale, but five memorial stamps produced in 1980 all show him wearing brown suits ("Stamp Issues for Botswana").

Masarwa woman (12).[22] The nomadic Basarwa, derogatively known as

'bushmen,' had been enslaved by the dominant Bamangwato tribe and

discrimination against them continued through the twentieth century—Head

wrote about their mistreatment and Batswana racism in *Maru*, noting there the

common Batswana association between Coloured South Africans like herself and

Basarwa. Due to Sekgoma's relationship with the Masarwaa woman, there were

persistent rumours that Seretse Khama was half Masarwa—his "large backside

in later life [was taken] as evidence of Basarwa ancestry" (Parsons 12). Seretse,

suspected of being mixed-race himself, then caused an international furore when

he married the white British woman Ruth Williams just as Dr Malan's

government began hardening South African Apartheid by further criminalising

interracial marriages (76, 84). South Africa and both Southern and Northern

Rhodesia pressured the British not to recognise Seretse, and indeed the British

government used deceit and coercion to exile him and temporarily remove him

from local politics (100, 109). By the time Head wrote *A Question of Power*, then,

Botswana had long been ruled by a black man, himself suspected of being mixed-

race, with a white wife. Their children had the same racial mix as the character

Elizabeth, so that even this most apparently Oedipal textual detail may equally

well be read onto Batswana politics.[23]

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[22] Interestingly, Khama's first wife was named Mogatsa Elizabeth and was more

commonly known as Mma-Bessie—a fact which Head may well have enjoyed, given

her fascination with Khama.

[23] Considering the story of Elizabeth's parentage, it is also worth noting Head's

fondness for D.H. Lawrence (Eilersen 113): as Desiree Lewis notes, in the forbidden

5.7.3 *A Question of Power* as a Developmental Critique

It would not have been possible, of course, for Head to make any explicit connections to Botswana politics or Seretse Khama, certainly not following her poster a year earlier. Botswana was a *de facto* one-party state (Picard 142), and one in which refugees like Head occupied a precarious position.

To give some sense of the spectrum of permissible dissent in Botswana, in 1977 Patrick van Rensburg, the model for *A Question of Power's* Eugene, founder of the Swaneng Secondary School and cooperatives and a South African anti-Apartheid activist, was accused of 'disloyalty' in the Botswana legislature following a speech in which, as Parsons writes, "he called on people to rely on their own labour and skills to create rural infrastructure, and to reject colonial dependency on outside 'experts'" (361). The statement is very similar to that made by Eugene in *A Question of Power*, when introducing Elizabeth to the local industries projects:

> We want to turn people's attention to their natural resources. There
> aren't any local industries except corned beef, and if people only
> knew how and what to use from their surroundings we could
> become independent of the goods of the rich manufacturers in South
> Africa and Rhodesia. (69)

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affair between Elizabeth's parents, we can clearly see the shadow of *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (102). Head even draws attention to this parallel later in *A Question of Power* when describing relations between Dan and the Sugar-Plum Fairy: "She was so upper-class that really to go with Dan was…coming down to slumming level. After all, hadn't Lady Chatterly done it?" (165). Where we seek Oedipus, Head gives us Lawrence.

Khama's party accused him of "perverting Botswana's youth" and "undermining democracy in the country" (Picard 165). Why would a call for Botswana development and economic independence be considered disloyal by Seretse's party? The answer leads us back to Botswana's colonial history, and it also helps to explain why Head demonised Seretse Khama, who was, after all, not only not a bad president, but a remarkably good one in the era of Mobutu and Amin.

5.7.3.1 Independence and Dependence

Caught between South Africa and Rhodesia, Botswana maintained its independence at the expense of losing that independence: economically and structurally, it was tightly bound to both neighbours, and the recent discovery of diamonds had only strengthened their hold. This dependency dates back to the days of the British Protectorate, which invested almost nothing in Bechuanaland and actively stifled economic development through the introduction of taxation and the refusal of trading licenses to Africans. As Picard writes, "British colonial decision making more closely approximated structural underdevelopment than the more neutral benign neglect" (97).

As elsewhere, taxation was a key transformative factor, politically and economically. Chiefs levied the taxes, in return for a ten per cent cut (Picard 111). This was part of their shift from being popularly accountable leaders, limited by a traditional set of checks and balances, into "a financially and politically dependent, bureaucratic extension of the colonial administration" (38), simultaneously "less democratic and more powerful, yet more subservient to imperial interests" (13). In this mutation of traditional powers—their atrophy and ossification—we can see the corruption of Sello the monk by the Medusa of his power-lust and his transformation into the malicious yet passive Sello in the

brown suit: "He had looked then like a Caligula in little boots with thin stick legs" (*A Question of Power* 42). Even more profound than the political changes, however, was the economic impact of taxation: it disrupted an entire pattern of existence. Reporting in 1933 on the major economic changes wrought by colonialism, Sir Alan Pim wrote that

> The main factor in destroying the old subsistence economy
>
> has…been the introduction of a money economy, and more especially
>
> of taxation levied in money….To pay taxes the Native has to raise
>
> money and he could do this only by selling his possessions to
>
> European traders or by going outside his reserve to earn money in
>
> European service. (qtd. inPicard 106)

"Going into European service" meant, in effect, becoming a migrant labourer in South African mines and on South African farms—this was exacerbated by the colonial administration's routine rejection of African applications for trading licenses "on the grounds that the territory was sufficiently served by Existing European shops," with the result that in 1949 only ten stores were owned by Africans (110). British policy transformed Botswana into a South African labour reserve (30-1). Migrant labour became "a way of life for Batswana males," writes Picard (110); agriculture became the preserve of women, boys and old men, while young men became alienated from their rural homes (113). Migrant labour in South Africa continued through the twentieth century, reaching its peak in the early 1970s, just as Head was writing *A Question of Power* (Picard 4). Aside from labour, Botswana's only export was cattle, a trade which South Africa restricted to protect its own ranchers (108). In 1910 a common market was created between Botswana and South Africa, followed by Botswana's adoption of

the rand until 1976, creating "a kind of de facto currency union" (106). What wages the migrants brought home would be spent on cheap South African imports with which local industries could not compete (107). Picard sums up the state of Botswana in 1966, the year when Head arrived: "South Africa had a firm grip on the territory's export and import markets, controlled its transportation and communications, marketed its agricultural products and employed most of its labour force" (106-7). Cecil John Rhodes saw Bechuanaland as a "Suez Canal," as a conduit between South Africa and Rhodesia (30), and British colonial policy furthered this vision of the land as a conduit, an exploitable emptiness: nothing was made in Botswana, and nothing was built; what skeletal infrastructure there was existed only to pump away its life: cattle to the slaughter, and men to the mines.

Botswana's political independence, then, coexisted with profound structural subordination to South Africa and, to a lesser extent, Rhodesia. The new ruling class was much the same as the old ruling class, as transformed by colonial contact. To some extent this was unavoidable: at the time of independence, there were no secondary schools in the country, so only the sons of chiefs were able to travel to South Africa to access further education (Picard 8). Seretse Khama was one such student, and oddly, while he was at school his uncle Tshekedi Khama stressed that he must live like an *ordinary* student (Parsons 44). Such teachings, of course, were paradoxical and bizarre in such an extraordinarily privileged and exclusive educational situation. Parsons recounts an anecdote which captures this tension: Seretse accidentally trod on another boy's foot, and the boy accused him of acting 'just like a chief,' whereupon "Seretse slapped the unfortunate student across the face in fury, saying 'At

school there are no chiefs. We are *equal*'" (49). It is an astonishing moment, this imperious assertion of equality and violent imposition of 'ordinariness,' which recalls the vexed, tangled associations that Head brings to the word.

5.7.3.2 Cattle Versus Gardens

The 'real' Sello is a farmer and cattle breeder wealthy enough to own a green truck, while Dan is "one of the very few cattle millionaires in the country" (*A Question of Power* 28, 104): they represent the ruling classes of independent Botswana, with Sello potentially representing an older aristocratic power while Dan is more of a politically active *nouveau riche* (104).[24] Dan and Sello, who 'in reality' seem to be friends (27), represent the elites who dominated Batswana politics and whose interests guided policy (Picard 147). Their cattle ownership signals their status—as Picard remarks, "For most Batswana, politics are the politics of cattle" (15), and by 1970 it had become a politics of stark inequality, with 50% of the population owning only 5% of the herd while 6% owned 40% (221). Beyond the interests of these large cattle holders, the government was largely disconnected from rural areas, failing to initiate or coordinate development projects (14). In *A Question of Power*, remember, the garden and farm are *outside* the village—and this village, Motabeng, is the fictional counterpart of Head's own Serowe, a massive 'village' which was also the seat of tribal power for the Bamangwato tribe and the home of both Khama the Great

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[24] It is not possible to ascertain much about the status of Sello 'the living man,' but Head's stress on the soul-age (34) and ancient noblity of Sello the monk (40) suggests that Sello the man may well be associated with an old family and traditional prestige.

and his grandson, President Seretse Khama. The garden and farm develop

beyond the reaches of political power, reflecting the actual limits of state

influence in Botswana.

Economic inequalities and the gulf between urban politicians and rural

populations were sharpened by the 1960s drought, which left many small-

holders' cattle dead and left hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers

reliant on food support. This catastrophic drought looms large in Head's writing,

and to understand its largely implicit role in *A Question of Power* we can briefly

consider its explicit treatment in *When Rain Clouds Gather.* In this 1969 novel,

Head depicts this crisis as a chance for the Batswana to turn away from cattle,

"these huge beasts" whom the refugee Makhaya finds "an intolerable

encumbrance" (153), and towards the progressive agricultural plans of Gilbert,

who declares that "Farming under irrigation is controlled and predictable

farming" (151-2). In so doing, they would gain independence from the

paramount chief Sekoto, who "lives off the slave labour of the poor," and the

malign politician and cattle speculator Matenge, who profits from buying poor

farmers' cattle cheap and selling them on to South African abattoirs (20). Both

Sekoto and Matenge fear the possible cooperative action and developmental

progress of the poor (18)—Matenge, finally, is driven to suicide by the peaceful

gathering of the poor (175).

Matenge's fear of collective action does reflect political anxieties of the

time, according to Picard. The state sought to discourage rural political

participation—even in support of the ruling party—fearing that any political

activation could trigger unrest (Picard 149). Meanwhile they sought to buy

quiescence through development projects, which were carried out by foreign

volunteers, lest local involvement foster an active sense of community (242). Investment was meagre: between 1970 and 1975, nearly half of the development budget was spent on a single diamond mining complex, while only 8% was invested in rural development (236). Furthermore, by the early 1970s, there were definite moves towards a major rural transformation which manifested fully in the mid-1970s: enclosure of common grazing land, a policy meant to protect the land, but which clearly favoured large ranchers. Since the mid 1960s, when Head arrived, wealthy cattle owners had been rapidly gaining control over previously communal grazing areas through private bore holes which blocked small holders' access to better grazing land (244). Head addresses this enclosure of land with acute prescience in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, in which Gilbert's attempts to promote fencing are met with horror by poor farmers who associate these enclosures with the threat of ranches (33).

Through Picard's economic analysis and Head's novelistic analysis in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, then, we can understand a basic division in Botswana between an elite vision of the future and a much quieter, more marginal alternative developmental vision. Elite development stresses mining, with heavy involvement from South African and other foreign corporations: the country's mineral riches, discovered only after independence, hold the promise of huge wealth (Picard 8). Miners and the state discovered vast deposits beneath the unprepossessing desert scrub—just, perhaps, as Dan discerns unsuspected wealth and power in the soul of the ugly, mixed-race Elizabeth. Describing Dan's desire to harness Elizabeth's soul-wealth, Head writes, "He was in it for the money. The things of the soul were the greatest money-spinning business on earth. Treasures in heaven could be turned into real cash" (*A Question of Power*

103). It is essential that Elizabeth remain unaware of her richness and power, as

Sello explains: "You were created with ten billion times more power than

he...You will never know your power" (199). Elizabeth's hidden soul-wealth and

spirit-power, which both Dan and Sello seek to exploit and control, correspond

on one level to the surprising subterranean wealth of Botswana, dismissed for so

long as a worthless desert backwater. The extraction of this hidden wealth is not

in Elizabeth's best interest, nor in Botswana's. Sello and Dan's oppressive

domination of Elizabeth make it impossible for her to grow and live. Most

significantly, Dan's torments make it hard for her to get to the garden—but the

garden, when she is able to access it, protects her from these onslaughts. The

garden brings community, friendship, independence, pride and magical

possibility. To the many levels of significance that we have already found in the

garden, we may now add another: the garden represents hope of a sustainable,

cooperative agrarian alternative to the damaging and self-serving developmental

policies of Botswana's cattle millionaires.

5.8 Head's Mysticism

Thus far, we have read *A Question of Power* as a schizohistory encoding

and critiquing African historical development. We have mapped how the text

engages simultaneously with continental trends and with issues specific to

Botswana. We have seen how the peculiar style or vernacular employed by Head

in *A Question of Power* allows the text to become this multidimensional

schizohistory. The 'schizophrenic' vernacular opens up several kinds of extreme

textual ambiguities, including grammatical slipperiness (as charted by Zinato);

polysemic symbols; confusion and flattening of interior/exterior (so that both

coexist on the same textual plane); and abstractions which pass beyond

symbolism into pure intensities such as sound, sensation and light. Multiple

readings are suspended in these ambiguities, while unacceptable critiques are

encoded and disguised. The obscurity of *A Question of Power*—combined with its

moments of didactic clarity and realist narrative—are its potency and its

protection, enabling the text and its meanings to circulate freely.

Yet this explanation is only partly satisfying. Can it account for the text's

pervasive mysticism and its moral fixations? A schizohistorical reading helps to

explain the text's emphasis on power, but it does not adequately address the

question of good and evil, raised so persistently throughout *A Question of Power*.

Is the mysticism and morality all misdirection and disguise for a multi-layered

historical saga and social critique? If that is the case, how can we explain the

radical difference between the style of *A Question of Power* and Head's other

works, all of which engage with social and historical issues in a far less 'schizo'

vernacular than *A Question of Power*? Even though the 'schizo' vernacular allows

a freedom and richness of engagement, a schizohistorical reading cannot

adequately explain the most distinctive features of *A Question of Power*.

Ultimately, are these features, which we might call 'schizotextual,' just artefacts

and symptoms of Head's own mental disturbances? Must we fall back onto

biographical readings to explain them? On the contrary, these stubborn

schizotextual elements draw us to engage with *A Question of Power's* mysticism,

which will allow us to find a far greater sense of unity and purpose within this

irreducibly fractious text.

5.8.1 Approaches to Hindu and Buddhist Mysticism in *A Question of Power*

Using Hindu and Buddhist mysticism, *A Question of Power* can be deeply

and satisfyingly read as engaging with the hallucinatory and dramatic nature of

perceived reality; the underlying unity of opposites; and the transformative

power of awakening to reveal these mystical truths. Head's lifelong interest in

Hindu mysticism is well documented by Eilersen, who notes her particular

interest in the nineteenth century work of the eponymous Hindu mystic, *The*

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. If we examine this text, we find that it suggests

methods for marrying the 'mad' and the mystical.

Desiree Lewis notes that Head was "profoundly influenced by Hinduism,"

although her use of it "was neither systematic nor rigorous" (85) but rather a

process of bricolage (73). Lewis argues that Head uses Hinduism to "dislodge

binarisms, to stress the relativity of all experiences" (86), and that Hinduism also

provides "a gestalt for Head's linking of the everyday, the ordinary, the 'profane'

with universal experiences, politics and spirituality. This largely explains the

distinctively metaphysical register of works seemingly concerned only with

everyday or autobiographical experiences" (84). Lewis' observations are

correct, but they only take us so far: *why* does Head want to create these

connections across experiential spheres, and how do these connections resonate

within Hindu mysticism?

The most complete and nuanced reading of Head's use of eastern

philosophy is June Campbell's article "Beyond Duality: A Buddhist Reading of

Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*." As indicated by the title, Campbell's article

focuses solely on a Buddhist reading, not discussing Head's interest in

Ramakrishna, but rather taking appearances of Buddha in the text as signalling

the strong resonance of Buddhist teachings throughout the novel (65). In

keeping with Buddhist philosophy, Elizabeth must overcome her suffering by

moving beyond the delusions caused by duality (a false belief in separateness of

the self and the other) (68). Sello and Dan are the emanations of the dualistic

thinking that they practice and espouse, and their hallucinatory nature signals

the deceptiveness of dualism (76). This insight will prove crucial for our reading

of the multi-layered influence of Hindu and Buddhist mystical thought on Head.

Before reading *A Question of Power* through this mysticism, we will begin

by exploring Head's particular point of access to these broad, deep traditions:

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. As a young woman in Durban, a city with a very

visible Hindu presence, Head became involved with a sect of Ramakrishna

(Eilersen 33-4). She later withdrew from this sect following a breakdown which

she explained as the result of "forc[ing] myself into a way of life and thought that

was completely foreign to my upbringing" (qtd. in35). In 1969, she urgently

requested a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* during the period of psychic

distress which preceded the composition of *A Question of Power* (129).

The connections between mental breakdown and Ramakrishna are not

coincidental, and are certainly not wholly explicable through culture clash:

rather, Ramakrishna's mysticism developed through behaviours and sufferings

that many observers took as madness. This narrative of mysticism and madness

is clearly presented in the lengthy introduction to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*,

written by Swami Nikhilananda. and present in the edition that Head would have

received.

5.8.2 Madness and Mysticism

In the mid to late-1960s, there was an assumed connection between

schizophrenia and mystical altered states of consciousness, and it is through

these assumptions that Head may well have approached Ramakrishna. Tracking

the Western pathologising of altered states of consciousness, Robert Walsh

quotes a 1966 psychiatric textbook by Alexander and Selesnitch: "The obvious similarities between schizophrenic regressions and the practices of yoga and Zen merely indicate that the general trend in oriental cultures is to withdraw the self from an overbearingly difficult physical or social reality" (qtd. in Walsh 740). Walsh's article aims to systematically chart the distinct differences between schizophrenic experiences and controlled, mystical altered states of consciousness, but it also helps us to understand the scope of mystical readings that would have been available to Head in the 1960s.

Her use of the term 'soul journey' may originate, for example, in shamanic traditions in which the shaman experiences leaving their body and "traversing strange worlds, placating angry gods, and battling fearsome spirits" (749). The shaman, master of the 'soul journey,' has been called "mentally deranged, an outright psychotic, a veritable idiot, a charlatan, an epileptic, and perhaps most often, an hysteric or schizophrenic" (742). To the controlled discipline of the shaman, yogi or monk, Walsh opposes the acute schizophrenic episode, during which the sufferer has little control over content or duration, is distracted by hallucinations, has extreme difficulty communicating, and has a sense of the self dissolving even to the point of annihilation (751). Yet while Walsh is correct to de-pathologise altered states of consciousness, in terms of our reading of *A Question of Power*, he is too quick to dismiss the potential of the schizophrenic episode, for all its lack of control. It is entirely possible that Head used her acquaintance with mystical altered states of consciousness, as described in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, as an aid in interpreting and reframing her own experiences of schizophrenic episodes as potently visionary.

Ramakrishna was a devotee of Kali, the mother-destroyer; and his worship of her was so unconventional that priests, doctors and even Ramakrishna himself thought he was mad. Yet besides the definite parallels between his religious experiences and the experiences Head describes in *A Question of Power*, there is a further similarity in the subversive nature of their attitudes towards organised religion. These similarities will help us to understand the role that the closely related philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism play in *A Question of Power*.

Head's explicit references to Hinduism are exclusively critical of its excessive hierarchies (15, 32, 206); and she portrays Buddhism through the ambivalent, withdrawn figure of the Buddha (43) or the irrelevant "milksop monks" (65, 199). How can we reconcile this textual content with the novel's clear affinity with Hindu and Buddhist beliefs? Through noting Ramakrishna's attitudes towards the Hindu establishment, as well as exploring the populist Mahayana strand of Buddhism, however, it will become evident that Head's criticisms are shared within segments of Hindu and Buddhist thought. As Nikhilananda puts it, Ramakrishna opposed "superstitious practices" and "greedy priests;" compared religious scholars to vultures hovering over "the charnel pit of greed and lust" (20-1); and denounced the caste system (26). We find similar sentiments in *A Question of Power*. Even when she admires Sello the monk, Elizabeth "privately accused him of being the originator of the caste system" (32). In her openness as "Blabbermouth," Elizabeth sets herself against "the ghastly deathbed of black-magic rituals, miracle-performing, cloistered halls" of hierarchical religious practice, favouring instead "the monks, with bare feet and simple cloth draped around their forms" (41). Yet Head's critique

attacks even these gentle figures: "delicately-buffered pillars of principles and platitudes," possessed of "blank, shut-eye goodness" (65). Here Head draws not only on the intuitive religious ecstasies of Ramakrishna but also, more directly, on the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, in which one who withdraws from the world upon attaining enlightenment as "'a private buddha…who does not teach or help others, and, in Mahayana Buddhism that is almost a term of abuse" (Watts *Philosophies* 67). Both Buddhism and Hinduism are, of course, vastly diverse philosophies, and they offer within them spaces highly conducive to radical thought, scornful of hierarchies and eager to transform the world.

In particular, Ramakrishna opens the way to an intuitive, direct and intense access to mystical insight. His experiences, as documented by his follower Mahendranath Gupta in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, offer a model for the reinterpretation of schizophrenic episodes into revelatory experiences, and I would argue that this model was key for Head in her development of a schizophrenic mode of vernacular theory in *A Question of Power*. Ramakrishna offered a potential mode for this powerfully experiential, painful theorising, as well as influencing the direction of Head's theorising, at the deepest, cosmic level.

Ramakrishna's agonies and ecstasies were religiously themed and, to a degree, deliberately cultivated, but they were also extreme, unusual, and believed to be possibly pathological (Nikhilananda 28). He violated social conventions, dancing like a monkey when meditating upon Hanuman the monkey god, and he once slapped a woman in temple (29). He experienced various transformations or becomings through his practices. For instance, he sought union with Krishna by becoming one of the milkmaids who loved him,

dressing and behaving like a woman until he *became* a woman, went mad with love and suffered psychological collapse (36-8). He had a number of vivid visions or hallucinations, containing striking or alarming imagery. One of the most remarkable occurred as he meditated upon *maya*, the creative and illusionary force through which Brahman, the ultimate self, dreams and loses himself in the drama of the universe. This is a key concept, to which we will return shortly. In Ramakrishna's vision, *maya* is personified as a mother-destroyer, much like Kali:

> he saw a woman of exquisite beauty, about to become a mother,
>
> emerging from the Ganges....Presently she gave birth to a child and
>
> began to nurse it tenderly. A moment later she assumed a terrible
>
> aspect, seized the child with her grim jaws and crushed it.
>
> Swallowing it, she re-entered the water of the Ganges. (34-5)

The nightmare mother, *maya*, is time and change: that from which all emerges and by which all is consumed. This is the flux and flow of existence in which nothing is created and nothing is destroyed, yet energy and matter pass in and out of a universe of forms. It is the inescapable union of birth and death, good and evil. Reality is all impermanence—yet the impermanence is born from illusion. Yet, of course, all of this—time and change, all of the separate forms of the universe, good and evil—are conceptual hallucinations. As *maya* gives way to awareness, one realises that "The whole physical universe, right out to the galaxies, is simply one's extended body" (Watts *Philosophies* 44).

Ramakrishna's unorthodox worship and visions brought him, repeatedly, to a condition in which his body dissolved into a totality which closely resembles the full Body without Organs described by Deleuze and Guattari. Early in his

devotions, for instance, Ramakrishna fasted, stopped sleeping, and became

oblivious to his surroundings. This brought him to a crisis in which he resolved

to kill himself with a sword:

> When I jumped up like a madman and seized it, suddenly the blessed
>
> Mother revealed herself….I saw a limitless, effulgent Ocean of
>
> Consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were
>
> madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise to swallow
>
> me up! I was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and
>
> collapsed, unconscious…within me there was a steady flow of
>
> undiluted bliss. (Gupta qtd. inNikhilananda 27)

His practice involved suicidal urges, and a sudden retreat from them into

spiritual insight, much as Elizabeth is abruptly saved from deathly collapse,

under Dan's influence, by Sello's first effective intervention in months (13). The

terms in which he describes his experience, as recounted by Gupta, closely

resemble Elizabeth's hallucinatory experiences, or the Deleuzo-Guattarian

schizophrenic experience. He leaves the confines of the temple and his own

restless desires and finds himself in a limitless smooth space, a supreme ocean,

characterised by a number of free flows: the "madly rushing" billows and their

"terrific noise," then, once he has been engulfed by the smooth space—once the

smooth space has overwhelmed his consciousness and *become* his body,

transforming him into a full Body without Organs—he experiences "the steady

flow of undiluted bliss."

5.8.3 Mysticism and the Body Without Organs
The similarity between Ramakrishna's experience of religious ecstasy and

the Deleuzo-Guattarian full Body without Organs is not, I believe, accidental. It

seems, in fact, that Deleuzo-Guattarian theory is in part working along very similar lines to Hindu and Buddhist meditative practices, except that Deleuze and Guattari are working this out in a culture which has no acceptance—and certainly no long-established practices—for experiences such as dissolution of the ego. We can understand this parallelism through Walsh's work with altered states of consciousness. As he explains, Western thought lacks "categories for states other than waking, sleeping and pathological ones," leading Westerners to either doubt the existence of altered states of consciousness or to pathologise them (739). Thus it is not surprising that, in seeking to explore altered states of consciousness from a Western perspective, Deleuze and Guattari channeled their thinking through a reinterpretation of schizophrenia.

The experience of becoming a Body without Organs--that is, slipping away from ego, merging with otherness, and experiencing all of this as processes within or across the body—is an experience which the West interprets as frightening and dangerous, which it certainly does not encourage, and which therefore is associated with marginal experiences and processes such as (for Deleuze and Guattari) masochism, drug use, and schizophrenia. They write, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that it should be possible to become a Body without Organs without these practices, without falling into "a demented or suicidal collapse," through use of certain careful, delicate operations (178)—which they do not or cannot explain with any concrete specificity. It seems possible, however, that these could resemble any of a range of yogic or Zen practices, which are designed to obtain exactly the same sort of result: dissolution of the ego, and realisation of unity.

Once we have understood this, we may be able to better account for the

particular character of their 'schizophrenic,' a being who may open up or collapse, who is only partly connected to clinical understandings of schizophrenia—although there is a remarkable overlap with Elizabeth's experience, a connection due per9haps to Head's radical theoretical and philosophical interests. Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenic is not quite a schizophrenic, but a way for talking about processes and experiences which we lack a vocabulary for in the West, but which might be similar to mystical experiences, movements towards enlightenment.

Deleuze and Guattari are developing an embattled, marginalised, subversive perspective on those experiences. Of course, as an embattled theory of enlightenment, Deleuze and Guattari's questing, journeying schizophrenic connects that much more powerfully to experiences such as those Head describes. Elizabeth might have done well as a shaman, or as a devotee of Kali, or in a Zen temple, but none of these frameworks were available to help her though the dissolution she suffered.

5.8.4 Brama's Dream: Hallucination and Awakening

There certainly are grounds for understanding Ramakrishna's story as potentially that of a schizophrenic who found a social niche and a spiritual discipline capable of containing and directing his unusual experiences of reality. Ramakrishna's mystical practice channelled experiences which he and others believed to be hallmarks of madness, including vivid visual and somatic hallucinations. The centrality of hallucination in his spirituality takes on a particularly deep significance within Hinduism, which posits that the reality we perceive is the hallucinatory dream of the cosmic self. This idea of hallucinatory reality, shared with Buddhism, is essential to Head's use of these philosophies in

A Question of Power. According to the Buddhist Longchempa, quoted by

Campbell, the world "with all the affirmation and negation, are set up phantom-

like by the mind. Even this mind does not exist but is merely a presence (68). If

we accept that *A Question of Power* grows to some degree from Head's own

experiences of hallucinations and delusional beliefs, it seems clear that such

teachings offer an empowering approach to a frightening experience. As Alan

Watts writes, Buddhism and Hinduism are less like religions than therapies

designed "to change your state of consciousness," based on "the understanding

that the average human being…is hallucinating. The average human being has a

delusive sense of his own existence" (*The Philosophies of Asia* 7). Hence the term

'awakening': one must awaken from the dream of one's own existence and

realise that all is Brahman, "the supreme self—the 'which than which there is no

whicher'" (10). As Watts explains, the world, "this great, magnificent

hallucination," is understood as a cosmic "game of hide and seek," in which the

great self does not sit always in bliss but loses itself in endlessly complex

creative play (15-6). This hallucinatory power, by which the non-dual "universe

appears to be a multiplicity of different things and different events," is called

maya, "which is illusion, magic, art, or creative power" (10). Head refers to this,

rather obliquely, at the close of *A Question of Power's* first section:

> Hadn't they a name for her [Medusa] in India—Mahamaya, the
>
> Weaver of Illusions, the kind that trapped men in their own
>
> passions? It was the trap of death. They had stumbled upon her as a
>
> creative force, as a power outside themselves that could invade and
>
> destroy them. (98)

Maya is the creative power of the dreaming universe which binds us to existence and creates our world, with all of its evils and wonders—but at this point in her development, Elizabeth has not yet realised the positive potentials of *maya*, nor has she recognised that she herself is not only the victim of Mahamaya but is Mahamaya herself, with the power to creatively transform her experience through thought and writing. Thus, the Hindu model of the universe as dream or drama maps onto *A Question of Power* at several levels. Elizabeth, with her nightmares and hallucinations, enacts the *maya* of Brahman: she dreams a world in which she becomes entangled. As Brahman loses himself in his dream of the world, becoming each of us all at once and forgetting that all is himself, so Elizabeth's sense of her own unity is fragmented into the multiplicity of figures which populate her unreal world.

The fragmentation of Elizabeth's consciousness into a multiplicity of opposing archetypes echoes the world-dreaming of Brahman, and it does so in a way which stresses the intellectual creativity of this world creation. We have already seen in Section 5.1 how Elizabeth's engagement with her dreams or hallucinations often contains an intense theoretical element as she struggles to interpret the significance of her visions. Her early engagements with Sello, in particular, also suggest a strong link between hallucination and creation:

> In many ways, her slowly unfolding internal drama was far more
> absorbing and demanding than any drama she could encounter in
> Motabeng village. The insights, perceptions, fleeting images and
> impressions required more concentration, reflection and brooding
> than any other work she had ever undertaken. (29)

Describing Elizabeth, absorbed in the intricacies of thought and thoroughly

engaged with the dramatic potentials of internally-generated characters, Head

seems to be describing a work of intense intellectual imagination, such as, for

instance, writing a novel or generating a poetic moral theory. Carrying this

further, we can draw on Margaret Tucker's compelling reading of *A Question of*

Power as a novel about its own composition, dramatising the internal dramas of

its creative genesis. Thus, when Elizabeth "began to jot down fragmentary notes

such as a shipwrecked sailor might make on a warm sandy beach as he stared

back at the stormy sea that had nearly taken his life" (204), this is the

recollection of emotion in tranquillity, the writing of the text we have just read—

for while "One might propose an argument…like a swimmer taking a rough

journey on wild seas" (29), it is only possible to *write* from the shore (Tucker

171). Now we not only see Elizabeth *within* the text as the creative progenitor of

her hallucinatory interlocutors, but she also seems to become—and reminds us

of—the authorial presence, another self-beyond who is creating and 'playing at

becoming' Elizabeth, just as Elizabeth is 'playing at' Sello and Dan. This author-

as-Mahamaya has also sought to draw the reader into an illusory world, to make

the "purely conceptual" seem actual, and to involve us with "ideas, phantoms and

ghosts" (Watts *Philosophies* 49). At this level, the text's depiction of

schizophrenia becomes not only a potential theoretical mode, it also becomes a

model of writing and reading. These, in turn, become metaphors for the

underlying cosmic dream-drama. Head draws us towards the mystical through

the ordinary experience of 'getting lost in a book' and the exoticism of

hallucination: the fundamental nature of this universe is this comprehensible

and this shocking. This reading also shifts the inflection of *maya* away from

'illusion' and towards 'creative power', the interpretation favoured by

Ramakrishna (Gupta 42).

The transgressive nature of Ramakrishna's practice and philosophies has

a strong appropriateness to his worship of Kali, a goddess often depicted as a

roaring black woman wearing a necklace of male heads. According to

Nikhilananda, Kali "combines the terror of destruction with the reassurance of

motherly tenderness. For She is the Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, a

glorious harmony of opposites. She deals out death, as She creates and

preserves," and she represents a last gateway to the total escape from ego into

unity with "the Absolute, the undifferentiated God," or Brahman (23). Kali, the

devouring mother, represents the paradoxical unity of self and existence, the

necessary union of good and evil: realisation of and balance within these arcs of

tension is the final step to enlightenment. As an embodiment of this unity, Kali is

shown as drunk and profane, for "is not the Ultimate Reality above holiness and

unholiness?" (26). Thus Kali, the focus of Ramakrishna's worship, represents the

element of Hindu and Buddhist thought which most torments Elizabeth and

which *A Question of Power* seeks to guide us through: the unity of good and evil.

Elizabeth revolts against this concept: "What sort of gymnast was she supposed

to be, so overstrained between concepts of good and evil?" (109). It is precisely

this sort of spiritual gymnastics which characterises the Middle Way of

Buddhism: it is a balance achieved not by moderation, nor by stretching between

opposed points, but rather through "the bringing together of opposites" (Watts

Philosophies of Asia 66). Elizabeth never fully accepts this—indeed, much of her

suffering, particularly under the influence of Dan, arises from her unwillingness

or inability to embrace the coexistence and mutuality of good and evil in others, herself and the world.

Although Elizabeth is unable to achieve this transcendence of duality, *A Question of Power* perhaps comes closer. It is a text which refuses resolution, which embraces ambiguity at every level, from its grammar to its philosophy. It is a text which dances, all at once, across histories of great suffering and betrayal, across micro-politics of practical hopefulness, and across cosmic understandings of good and evil. It is an embattled text and a lively text, one which dramatises the struggle to understand. It is a text which enacts the extent to which vernacular theorising can become a resistant battle for existence. As McLaughlin writes, "Groups defined by demeaning and dehumanising mainstream values either do theory or die in spirit" (21). In its mysticism and schizotextual manoeuvres, *A Question of Power* is a fiercely engaged and practical text, a tactical guide for others' struggles. Head encodes her belief in the novel's practical value in a typically cryptic yet tender manner: "I felt that I would go through this experience again were I reborn….My desperate terror then was that if I recorded the evil and the same story was about to happen in some other life, I would read *A Question of Power* and it would save me much suffering" (qtd. in Campbell 65). Of course, in a mystical understanding, we are all 'some other life' of Head, insofar as she and we are all the dreams of Brahma. She offers us this text, this theory of suffering and hope, as a map for our soul journeys through hell.

Chapter 6
Conclusion: Connections, Disconnections and Catatonia

6.1 Connections

We have now explored many of the historical, critical and philosophical resonances and patternings within *A Question of Power* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. We have used a Deleuzo-Guattarian approach grounded in vernacular theory to work with texts which have long seemed to be thoroughly disconnected from other texts and from the world, as well as being internally incoherent. Our theoretical approach has allowed us, however, to discover many points of connection between these texts and a surprising range of contextual situations. Our readings have allowed us to see these texts as engaged in fierce, vital critical conversations. Far from being detached, the texts are revealed as radically engaged. Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* joins a deep regional vernacular theoretical tradition of practical memory and social critique. Head uses *A Question of Power* to critique the authoritarianism which had become so dangerously central to twentieth century political thought. Both authors use non-realism as a method for engagement rather than escapism.

The methodology that we have used to read these two notoriously difficult texts is, I would argue, widely applicable. A Deleuzo-Guattarian approach provides us with an invaluably practical set of tools which can be used to connect a wide variety of texts to their contextual situations. It is particularly easy to see how my methodology could be applied to the texts of authors such as Ben Okri and Dambudzo Marechera. Beyond this, I believe that this approach has the potential to vastly increase the engagement of postcolonial literary studies with history, anthropology, economics and medical humanities:

interdisciplinary connections suddenly become dazzlingly apparent and possible to read.

6.2 Disconnections

Once we have seen the deep connectedness of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *A Question of Power*, however, an unsettling question arises: why have these connections not been seen before? In its essence, my approach has been simply historicist, situating the texts within their contexts. There is nothing particularly innovative about this.

Indeed, *A Question of Power* has very frequently been read contextually: the problem has been that its context has been understood too narrowly as consisting of Bessie Head's own biography and the history of South African Apartheid. In contrast to this approach, we have looked into Southern Africa's pre-colonial history, the Pan-African politics of the mid-twentieth century, and the circumstances of Botswana's own independence and development. The resonances between these contexts and the novel have been striking, and problems which haunted other more limited contextual readings have been resolved. We see why Elizabeth's tormentors are black, and we understand why her childhood and parentage are given such brief treatment—furthermore, we can even reread her parentage in a Batswana context. As for the agricultural plot, rather than regarding it as a sideshow, we can now see that it relates powerfully to Elizabeth's hallucinatory struggles. Head's decision to describe Elizabeth's personal sufferings in cosmic and mythical terms also makes more sense when placed in the relevant historical and philosophical contexts. The question of *why* the contextual links I have made have not been explored by other critics is, of course, impossible to answer here. It is possible, however, to

examine the points of blockage in those other readings and consider the effects

that critical disconnection has had, on readings of Bessie Head as well as Amos

Tutuola.

In the case of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the failure of non-Nigerian critics

to explore the Yoruba Wars can, in all probability, be explained by a general lack

of awareness of those wars outside Nigeria. With Nigerian critics, the question

becomes more complex. The first wave of backlash against Tutuola was clearly

based in nationalist politics, and it seems likely that such a generation would be

uncomfortable with the history of the Yoruba Wars, which runs counter to

narratives of national identity and which records that the wars were ended

through colonial intervention. As for the lack of commentary from later Nigerian

critics, this is a question which would require a high degree of intimacy with

Nigerian and Yoruba cultural situations: the twists of traumatic memory,

particularly regarding internecine conflicts, are paradoxical and complex.[25] With

A Question of Power, however, the problem is different. With the exception of the

Mfecane, which is itself relatively well-known, the contexts in question will have

occurred within the living memory of many of the critics who have neglected

[25] The ambivalent, coded and powerful memory of a different civil war was a

subterranean but unmistakable force in my own South Carolinian childhood. I only

learned in 2014 that Florence, South Carolina, where I spent the first eighteen years

of my life and where my parents still live, was the site of a Civil War prisoner of war

camp where three thousand Union prisoners died in six months, between 1864 and

1865. The site is marked with a gazebo, a plaque rusted to illegibility, and an

apparently abandoned half-built replica stockade situated in an overgrown field

marked with 'Keep Out' signs.

them. The Seretse Khama scandal, for instance, was amply covered by the British and American press. The Congo crisis, framed as a Cold War flashpoint, was also heavily if misleadingly reported. From the mid-1960s, there was sufficient Western media attention played to the drumroll of coups and dictatorships across Africa so that these events became a twentieth century trope of African representation. Idi Amin's cruelties were such common knowledge that they were the subject of a series of comic columns in *Punch*. Despite this, however, it has not occurred to any critics that there might be connections between, for example, Dan's abuses and Amin's. Is it possible to theorise these disconnections and blocked readings?

We have engaged with both *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *A Question of Power* as schizohistorical texts. Building on Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, I have been using 'schizohistorical' to designate a mode of historical engagement in which multiple historical contexts are brought into loosened, abstracted conjunctions. These contexts are evoked or invoked through slight or cryptic allusions, ambiguous imagery and, perhaps most importantly, through the use of mood and atmosphere to conjure up certain historical intensities. Historical periods are thus condensed into their atmospheric essences: hope, experimentation, terror, brutality. Moving via these abstract intensities, schizohistories can achieve startling flashes of non-causal affiliation. Such crossings and encounters are facilitated by the very nature of textuality, described by Barthes as "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1468). Head, for instance, in *A Question of Power* blazes a line of vampiric affinity from the "insane, raving, power-maniac world of the Pharaohs" (41) to Al Capone (40) to Caligula, tacitly to Hitler

(through a reference to "their holocausts"), and to modern African dictators (39). These affinities are based, she explains, on patterns found in "mankind's myths" (40): the intensities of violence, cruelty and corruption are transcultural and transhistorical. Such vast, deep patterns find their illumination in the intricate essentialism of schizohistory.

To write about schizohistory in this way, however, is inappropriately celebratory. What I have been describing might be called, in Deleuzo-Guattarian style, the full Body without Organs of schizohistory; that is, a schizohistory that works. In this functional and lively schizohistory, the connections are being made: the tangled circuitry of affiliation is plugged in, allowing intensities to flow across the text; and this lively schizohistory can then enter new worlds, form new connections, generate new lines of flight. This can only happen if the schizohistorical text is read in certain ways, however. A text does not exist autonomously: it is created and recreated by its readers. What kind of collaborations will take place between the schizohistorical text and its readers?

Let us take a moment to consider the position of the reader. Barthes writes, "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost" and that, further, "the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (1469). Such a reader, however, cannot exist. Barthes' 'reader' seems to be a wholly abstracted theoretical construct, a textual function rather than a human with a body in the world: as such, Barthes' reader is of limited use to us in this discussion. Readers are unavoidably situated, and most readers will be spaces in which *most* of the quotations that make up a text will be lost: the

connections we form as readers are idiosyncratic, partial, and fluid. Through our changeable, unpredictable connections with texts, influenced perhaps by other critical and scholarly texts, we recreate and reanimate these texts, drawing them back into the dance with life.

6.3 Catatonia

What happens, then, when most of the connections in a text are missed or ignored? What happens if a reader is not receptive to the potential presence of unrecognised connections—does not feel them humming and roaring across the text? What happens if the text's traces are effaced and its "tissue of quotations" is torn or starved of blood? With a schizohistorical text, I would suggest that in such an instance we could speak of the text becoming a catatonic schizohistory. This term draws on the contrast between the Deleuzo-Guattarian theory of powerfully productive schizophrenia and the dominant clinical portrait of schizophrenia marked by catatonic withdrawal. Confronting this jarring disjunction, Deleuze and Guattari ask:

> How is it possible that the schizo was conceived of as the autistic rag—separated from the real and cut off from life—that he is so often thought to be? Worse still, how can psychiatric practice have made him this sort of rag, how can it have reduced him to this state of a Body without Organs that has become a dead thing—this schizo who sought to remain at that unbearable point where the mind touches matter and lives its every intensity, consumes it? (*Anti-Oedipus* 21)

This emptiness and collapse, they suggest, is the result of "a horrible frustration" born from the experience of carrying out "the process" of schizophrenia "in the void" (76). Deleuzo-Guattarian schizophrenia is a process of connection, even

the connection of contradictory elements sustained in disjunction "through a

continuous overflight spanning an indivisible distance" (85). If connections

cannot be formed, the schizophrenic processes are blocked, and the Body

without Organs created by schizophrenia empties into a void. Frustrated and

depleted by these deprivations and isolations, the schizophrenic collapses

inwards into impenetrable unresponsiveness. Catatonia, then, is the not the

result of the schizophrenic processes themselves, but of their blockage,

enclosure and exhaustion. As Deleuze and Guattari write,

> Why the same word, schizo, to designate the process insofar as it
>
> goes beyond the limit, and the result of the process insofar as it
>
> runs up against the limit and pounds endlessly away there? Why
>
> the same word to designate both the eventual breakthrough and
>
> the possible breakdown, and all the transitions, the intrications of
>
> the two extremes? (147)

How might we apply these observations to schizohistorical texts? The

schizohistorical text may achieve 'breakthrough,' moving beyond the limits of

historical thinking and writing to catalyse further radical thought; or it may

'breakdown' into a catatonic inaccessibility. Any schizohistorical text will run

through both breakthroughs and breakdowns, as well as "all the transitions, the

intrications of the two extremes," according to readers' differing engagements

with that text.

A Question of Power has often been reduced to a catatonic schizohistory.

What kind of critical engagements will result in a schizophrenic text's

breakdown or shutdown? The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, is what Deleuze

and Guattari call 'Oedipal' engagements (*Anti-Oedipus* 145), or what Barthes

would call 'decipherings' (1469). Deciphering is the critical impulse towards

discovering "a 'secret', an ultimate meaning," as opposed to 'disentangling', by

which "the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every

point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to

be ranged over, not pierced" (1469).[26] It is an image upon which Deleuze and

Guattari's smooth space seems to draw. Disentangling will explore the complex

webbing of quotations, while deciphering seeks to discover "the Author (or its

hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work" (1469).   Closely

related to deciphering is Oedipal criticism, in which a series of problems and

solutions are posed, particularly those in which the problem is identified as an

unresolved conflict from the author's past and the solution is a textually-

proffered plan for the future betterment of humanity. Thus oedipalized, the text

is reduced "to an object of consumption conforming to the established order and

incapable of causing anyone harm" (*Anti-Oedipus* 145). Oedipalization and

deciphering are processes through which works can be studied safely, while the

schizohistories within them fall into catatonic neglect: dismissed, glossed over or

simply unnoticed.

　　　To a remarkable extent, however, this seems to be precisely the sort of

reading which *A Question of Power* invites. Early in the novel, Head establishes a

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[26] Barthes' choice of a run in a stocking is an odd, perhaps deliberately unsuitable

image for illustrating the concept of a fabric beneath which there is nothing. Unlike

unravelling knitting, for example, the laddered stocking is tightly pressed to the leg

which it covers and exposes: there are not actually any threads to follow in this

unravelling, only a progressive, potentially erotic revelation of the flesh beneath it.

neat configuration of conflicts rooted in Elizabeth's South African childhood, and her own: madness, race, sex and politics are staked out with rare clarity and concision:

> We have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was native. (*A Question of Power* 16)

A warning follows, little heeded by critics: "[Elizabeth] could not relate it to herself in any way…the story was an imposition on her life," through which the missionary interprets her all too easily (16). Nevertheless, the passage seems inescapably significant, and that the circumstances described so closely resemble Head's own early life only increases the draw they exert on critics. Head has apparently offered us the keys to her difficult novel at the outset: no matter what grotesqueries may follow, and no matter how puzzling or disturbing their details may be, the reader can confidently return to the 'explanation' so clearly found in the protagonist's and author's origins.

Tutuola offered a similarly disarming explanation for the genesis of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*:

> What was in my mind? Well. Oh…the time I wrote it, what was in my mind was that I noticed that our young men, our young sons and daughters did not pay much attention to our traditional things or culture or customs. They adopted, they concentrated their minds only on European things. They left our customs, so if I do this they may

> change their mind…to remember our customs, not to leave it to
>
> die….That was my intention. (qtd. in Thelwell 187)

Tutuola declares himself to be a traditionalist without giving the slightest

hint of what these traditions might be. The word 'tradition'—particularly in

an African context—seems so harmless, remote and inert that it discourages

further enquiry. It is a word which excuses all strangeness and disqualifies

the text from current relevance.

Tutuola's invocation of 'tradition' renders his ghostly antics palatable.

Similarly, Head's autobiographical explanations for Elizabeth's madness are so

satisfying that a reader may allow Uriah, Caligula and waves of blue light simply

to wash over them: these are, perhaps, just incomprehensible schizophrenic set-

dressing, a word-salad side dish to the real Oedipal meat of the madness.

Furthermore, both Tutuola and Head conclude their texts with airs of assurance

and reassurance that critics have found irresistibly appealing. In Head's case,

disturbance and confusion are swept aside with that famous "gesture of

belonging" (206), which affords the reader a much longed-for sense of resolution

and relief. Head's concluding gesture is so hopeful and satisfying that a reader

might disregard signs within the text that clearly signal circularity, such as the

beginning which retells the ending in another mode, or the end of "Sello," which

offers a very similar but very short-lived sense of resolution. In much the same

way, Tutuola ends *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in a mythic key, with the result that

critics consistently fail to notice either the final story's injustice or its open-

endedness. Both Head and Tutuola have firmly staked out the poles of Oedipal

interpretation, laying the trails which have led to such unproductive readings

and have left the novels' schizohistories crouched in catatonic neglect.

Why would a novel invite its own limitation? Why would a schizohistory disguise itself and distract attention away from itself, towards an Oedipal straw man? The schizotextual or schizohistorical project is a delicate, difficult one. Laing, champion of 'reading' schizophrenia, remarks, "A good deal of schizophrenia is simply nonsense, red-herring speech, prolonged filibustering to throw dangerous people off the scent, or to create boredom and futility in others" (164). This is certainly the impression created by the more obscure passages within both Tutuola's and Head's more obscure passages—but, of course, if texts engender too much boredom and futility, they will fail: they will not be published, will not be read. The biographical and traditional 'explanations' offered prevent the texts from becoming too overwhelming. They are limiting and misleading—but they are also sustaining, and perhaps necessary.

6.4 Schizotextual Infiltration

Theorising such misdirection, Deleuze and Guattari write, "The only literature is that which places an explosive device in its package, fabricating a counterfeit currency, causing the superego and its form of expression to explode, as well as the market value of its form of content" (*Anti-Oedipus* 145). There is a sense in which we can understand both *A Question of Power* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as 'counterfeits,' texts which appeared to be strange, self-limiting and not nearly as ambitious as Deleuzo-Guattarian readings reveal them to be. Head and Tutuola smuggled their histories and critiques into circulation in wrapped in schizotextual disguises. Their narratives are not triumphant, and their theories are uncomfortable.

We have understood these texts as engaged in vernacular theory. They speak from beyond dominant discourses, and they participate in hidden forms of resistant understanding: their opacity is a tactical necessity, as is their appeal. These texts are, to an extent, literary infiltrators. Why are schizohistories necessary? Schizohistories allow us to tell stories that cannot be told and to remember that which cannot be safely remembered. Why are these texts so difficult? They are difficult because it was not possible for them to be simple.

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