Pre-Colonial Africa in Colonial African Narrative

From Ethiopia Unbound to Things Fall Apart, 1911–1958

Donald R. Wehrs

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PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA IN
COLONIAL AFRICAN NARRATIVES

To Lorna

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From *Ethiopia Unbound* to *Things Fall Apart*, 1911–1958

DONALD R. WEHRS
Auburn University, USA

ASHGATE

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Contents

Acknowledgments vii
Introduction ix

1 Embodied Ethical Life and the Threat of Cognitive Imperialism in African Contexts 1

2 Hayford, Balewa, and the Representation of African Culture and Society 33

3 Articulations of Empire and Hatred of the Other Man in Hazoumé's *Doguicimi* 53

4 History, Fable, and Syncretism in Fagunwa's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* 75

5 The Ordeal of Cognitive Imperialism in Tutuola's Early Fiction 101

6 Pre-Colonial History and Anticolonial Politics in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* 133

Conclusion 165

Bibliography 169
Index 187

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Introduction

This study explores the origins of political reflection in twentieth-century African fiction—both in colonial languages (English and French) and in indigenous languages (Hausa and Yoruba)—by reading seven pioneering narrative representations of pre-colonial African history and society. J.E. Casely Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911) combines a scathing portrait of Gold Coast British colonialism with a depiction of the Cambridge-educated protagonist's efforts to derive from African culture and history an indigenous ethical basis for political reform and modernization. Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's *Shaihu Umar* (1934), the fictional autobiography of a saintly religious teacher, recounts a young Hausa boy's experience of political instability, kidnapping, and slavery in late nineteenth-century Islamic West Africa. Paul Hazoumé's *Doguicimi* (1938), a Francophone historical novel written by a leading African cultural historian of Dahomey (now Benin), depicts the ambitions, traumas, and self-understandings of the Dahomean elite in the 1820s, at a time when that West African nation exemplified entwinements of state power and ideology with slave-producing warfare. D.O. Fagunwa's Yoruba classic, *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (*Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irumale*) (1938), originates a distinctive narrative form. This genre, which has long baffled criticism, transmutes folkloric sources into a simultaneous retelling of Yoruba pre-colonial and colonial history and delineation of a hero's progress away from anarchic violence towards a civic-minded sociability. Amos Tutuola, in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), reconstitutes Fagunwa's genre in his own peculiar English, presenting a sophisticated, though controversial, reading of Yoruba pre-colonial history, especially of the turbulent nineteenth century. The study concludes by exploring how much Chinua Achebe's depiction of pre-colonial Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart* may be seen as a culmination of the ways of representing pre-colonial history developed in the earlier fictions. Achebe transposes the resistance to totalizing forms of thought and conduct that circulated within Igbo oral discourse and social practice into novelistic representation, thereby making novelistic art a medium for communicating an ethical critique of colonialist habits of mind and material practices.

Because this study concerns colonial-era representations of pre-colonial history and culture by authors who were writing mostly from within the societies portrayed, and whose recreations of the past reflect access to indigenous accounts and communal memories, it is only tangentially concerned with European fictions' imagining of pre-colonial Africa. Readings of H. Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, and Joyce Cary contribute much to our understanding of European colonialist discourse, but shed little light upon the range of interpretations and evaluations that colonial-era Africans brought to bear upon considerations of pre-colonial experience and practices. Although it is important to note Western influences,

such as the genre of the novel or the allegorical model of John Bunyan, this study focuses on how African writers employ intellectual and discursive resources internal to their own cultures to address a readership for whom the past evoked is not exotic, but rather a matter of living memory, communal debate, and personal identity. Narrative versions of the pre-colonial era intervene, implicitly at least, in colonial-era politics, but political intervention is often subtle or ambiguous. When the study refers to "colonial Africans," it means only Africans living in the colonial era; "colonialist" will designate attitudes supportive of colonial rule.

The indigenous ethical reflection upon which each of these writers draws to depict and interrogate pre-colonial experience intersects with insights that Western philosophical discourse over the last twenty years has come to associate, respectively, with neo-Aristotelian and Levinasian accounts of ethical subjectivity. Throughout West Africa, albeit with variations in Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo contexts, ethical selfhood is understood to involve the cultivation, through habituated practices, of an identity structured around concern for others and care for the well-being of the community. Good speech, whether narrative, homiletic, or proverbial, moves desire from egoistic forms of appropriation to ethical forms of sociability. Ethical consciousness is understood to originate in the disruption, constantly renewed, of a naively appropriative attitude, in which our egocentric intentionality, structuring a world we encounter as being-for-us, is repeatedly torn asunder by the call of the Other—that is, by ethical obligations experienced as unconditional and inescapable.

Pre-colonial African ethical practice and discourse constantly contest what might be called cognitive imperialism—habits of mind that reduce the Other to a determinate "thing" that may be "seized" in its totality by consciousness. Transposed into politics, cognitive imperialism naturalizes ethnocentrism and predatory relations to outsiders, which include enslavement and colonization, which in turn calcify self-serving hierarchies. Within pre-colonial contexts, acculturation—understood as an educating, disciplining, and socializing process—is frequently construed as integral to denaturalizing egoism, to allowing people access to the moral, intellectual, and social goods peculiar to human beings, as opposed to remaining locked up within the "natural" rapaciousness of witches and beasts.

The presence of such indigenous ethical discourse suggests, of course, a need for it. Much African historiography over the last thirty years has explored the intimate bonds between the power of pre-colonial African states and material practices reliant upon political economies that tended to naturalize, and even institutionalize, ethnocentric empowerment. Indeed, much historical research since 1970 suggests that, within pre-industrial, pre-capitalistic societies, the configuring of the ethnically Other as material to be seized or as impediments to be removed (as in territorial expansion through expropriation) often accompanies material economies structured around appropriating labor through slavery and land through forced depopulation and/or colonization.

Indigenous African patterns of violent accumulation, however, were radically intensified and brutally distorted by the Atlantic slave trade, which from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth century sustained predatory

polities whose incessant warfare destabilized and depopulated their neighbors, while supplying "raw material" integral to a capitalistic global economy whose consolidation contributed mightily to the political stabilization of European nation-states. The abolition of the Atlantic trade in the early nineteenth century had in turn the perverse effect of intensifying slavery within Africa. On the one hand, forced labor for commodity production was needed; on the other, the absence of European markets drove down the price of slaves, thus generating more warfare and raiding to make up in volume what was lost in demand.

A significant amount of the oral African literature collected in the twentieth century (folktales, epics, narrative chronicles, proverbs, praise songs, and other genres) describes social contexts in which communal wealth, political power, and individual self-assertion are rooted in accumulation through violence. At the same time, sub-Saharan oral discursive traditions and narratives frequently invite their audiences to assess social practices in terms of ethical consequences, to judge polities by whether the people that they tend to produce are characterized by kindly, sociable dispositions, or not. However, because such moral intuitions frequently stand in tension with normative institutional practices (warfare, seizure of territory, conquest of the bush), an aura of the tragic pervades a significant part of the oral canon.

While Hayford contrasts a predatory colonial present with an African past in which idealized generalities obscure socio-economic specificity, the pioneering fictions of Balewa and Hazoumé explicitly thematize the structural contradictions of moral and material pre-colonial life. Balewa's text is riveted by tension between, on the one hand, homiletic and dialogic Hausa genres, and on the other hand, between modes of understanding experience that derive from Islamic piety and modes that derive from novelistic discourse. While Balewa would enfold the dialogic into the homiletic, his own novelistic discourse presents both the Hausa boy protagonist and his mother as ethical Others who haunt the reader and whose victimization and suffering implicitly demand a political and economic order that would do their humanity justice. Unlike Balewa, Hazoumé allies his text unequivocally with the genre of the novel. The tension between moral intuitions and predatory material practices central to his characterization and plot give rise to an ethical assessment of the political.

Both Fagunwa and Tutuola construct "fantastic" worlds of predatory spirits, self-aggrandizing kingdoms, and extravagant ordeals to trace the emergence of political community from ethical obligation. The careers of Fagunwa's and Tutuola's protagonists begin with traumatic encounters with the consequences of psychic and material economies that naturalize cognitive imperialism. The quests they undergo describe increasingly successful efforts to develop the kind of subjectivities and organize the kinds of polities that work against resurgences of predatory dispositions and exploitive practices. For both Fagunwa and Tutuola, this process involves movement from anarchic masculinist aggressivity to an ethical sociability mediated by the maternal-feminine, and for both it involves an affirmation of Christianity. Fagunwa, however, emphatically correlates his hero's progress with the emergence of a new society that transcends the anarchic violence and endemic warfare of nineteenth-century Yorubaland, while Tutuola,

in both *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, casts severe doubt upon the notion that the protagonists' arduous personal victories over egocentric, predatory styles of thought can be replicated on a broader social and political scale.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe portrays an Igbo world in which non-totalizing habits of mind and social practice, long at the center of the culture, are increasingly marginalized in favor of militaristic forms of self-assertion with which Okonkwo identifies intensely and exclusively. Achebe portrays Okonkwo as emblematic of an Igbo society increasingly estranged from its own sources of resistance to cognitive imperialism. The personal and political disastrousness of that estrangement is underscored most forcibly by the story of Ikemefuna. Achebe implies that the very inability of Igbo society to provide a vocabulary for acknowledging the ethical significance of Ikemefuna's fate not only reinforces unjust social practices, as indicated by the large numbers of marginalized people (mothers of twins, the outcaste *osu*, those who through temperament or luck cannot compete successfully in yam-farming and war, the *efulefu*, "worthless, empty men"); it also leaves members of the cultural elite, like Okonkwo and Obierika, emotionally wounded and intellectually perplexed. British cultural colonialism is politically effective because it appears to provide, however delusively, a conceptual framework within which the significance of the Other, of people like Ifemefuna and the mothers of twins, can be registered. At the same time, the British would confine articulations of ethical significance to a single cultural tradition, a single conceptual vocabulary—their own. In doing so, they marginalize Igbo culture by dismissing the pluralism at its heart. The material violence of colonialism presents itself as legitimating the conceptual violence that places the Igbo as a whole in the position of *efulefu*, reducing them to "raw materials" for imperialistic manipulation and self-enrichment.

By positioning the Igbo in general as the marginal, the disempowered, the "feminized," by forcing "big men" to experience within their own communities the injustice accorded a deprecated Other, colonial power has the perverse effect of granting non-totalizing, anti-hierarchical, pluralistic currents within Igbo discourse and life a new cultural centrality, by making them integral to a nascent anticolonial politics. Achebe thus combines the kind of specific representation of pre-colonial history found in Balewa, Hazoumé, Fagunwa, and Tutuola with Hayford's project of demonstrating that a progressive politics may be rooted in indigenous African cultural values. The capacity of non-totalizing Igbo discourse to motivate anticolonial ethics enables Achebe to make novelistic craft a decolonizing practice, to demonstrate how Igbo moral resources, far from being the "savage" customs and beliefs of a "primitive" people, find their consummation in a politics born of ethical sociability and dedicated to justice against which colonialist practices and ideologies are measured and found wanting.

Chapter 1

Embodied Ethical Life and the Threat of Cognitive Imperialism in African Contexts

Disruptive and Constructive Ethical Embodiment in African Discourse and Practice

In both oral African narratives and African fiction nurtured by oral traditions and indigenous values, ethical life is frequently depicted as both disruptive and constructive—challenging ossified hierarchical, traditional norms while nonetheless motivating the subject to construct a rational, coherent self capable of enacting in daily life habits of virtue, fidelity, and love. The study that follows will trace how early novelistic representations of pre-colonial history and experience move between ethical registers of disruption and construction, transcendence and immanence. Negotiating such a dialogue is not easy. Paul Ricoeur underscores the difficulty by contrasting his own neo-Aristotelian stress on constituting a self through habituated practices of aiming for the good with Emmanuel Levinas's stress upon the disruptive, invasive character of the ethical call.[1]

Family resemblances between Aristotelian and African ethical reflection have long been noted. Discussing Akan moral discourse, Kwame Gyekye observes that in Twi *omni suban* means both "He has no character" and "He has no morals," for *suban* covers a semantic range equivalent to the Greek *ethos*. Moreover, the term for "goodness" (*papa*) implies both the habituation of the self to sociable virtues (kindness, generosity: *ayamyie*; compassion: *mmôbrôhunu*; and hospitality: *ahôhoye*, *adôe*) and subordination of politics to ethics, understood as the effects of actions upon "human well-being."[2] Similarly, Kwasi Wiredu points out that the Twi word for person, *onipa*, has an evaluative as well as descriptive sense, so that "personhood is not something you are born with but something you may achieve, and it is subject to degrees," a usage consistent with both Aristotelian-humanistic notions that humanity (*humanitas*) is an achievement, not a given,

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1 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 339.

2 Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 147–8, 132; Donald R. Wehrs, *African Feminist Fiction and Indigenous Values* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 151.

and Levinas's insistence that ethical sensibility is not something "added on" to human subjectivity, but rather constitutive of it.[3]

By composing historical fictions, the colonial African writers we shall consider sought to dramatize, perhaps against colonialist discourse, the centrality of pre-colonial African conceptual frameworks and history to the lives and choices of their characters. In doing so, they stress the historical-cultural contextuality of all human understanding and interaction, but while noting the tendency of cultural discourses to lapse into totalizations akin to those Derrida characterizes as "onto-theology" and Levinas as "the Said," they also are at pains to insist, consistent with Aristotelian thought generally, that contextuality may be conducive to both political pluralism and intersubjective revision. Thus, the pre-colonial worlds that colonial African writers from the 1930s through 1950s evoke are "historical" in ways that contest Eurocentric assumptions that Africa was without history, and are "pluralistic" in ways that contest both colonial anthropological assumptions that pre-modern societies are marked by "organic unity" *and* postmodern assumptions that cultural life "naturally" drives towards totalization.[4]

Indeed, contemporary African philosophers such as Paulin Hountondji, Kwame Wiredu, and Kwame Appiah warn against the dangers of "unanimism," of taking cultures to be monolithic and self-enclosed.[5] In surveying African historiography, Alan Isaacman notes that the premise of ahistorical organic unity

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3 Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 160. For Aristotelian humanism, see, for example, Erasmus's defense of the proposition "that a man without education has no humanity at all" in *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis declamatio* ("A Declamation on the Subject of Early Liberal Education for Children"), trans. Beert C. Verstraete, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 26, ed. J.K. Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 298; also pp. 298–313. For Levinas, see esp. Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 76–87.

4 Christopher L. Miller argues that "[t]he notion of nullity is a key to understanding European conceptions of Black Africa" (*Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985], p. 17). Also see V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 26–37, 72–92, 105–44, and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978) for similar arguments. For postmodern associations of culture with totalization, see Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascalle-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Also see John McGowan's commentary in *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 12–17.

5 See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 85–106; Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, trans. Henri Evans with the collaboration of Jonathan Rée (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), esp. 55–70; Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Also see Olakunle George, *Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 75–98.

anchored structural-functionalist anthropological writing about Africa from the 1930s to the 1950s, but recent scholarship challenges this legacy.[6] Elias Mandala has shown how Mang'anja peasants in Malawi, under Kololo and Matchinjiri rule from the 1860s to 1890s, generated cultural and material resistance, including their own independent history.[7] Discussing the northern Wallo territory of Ethiopia, James McCann notes, "[V]iolation of the rules of rest [free-born people's inalienable land rights] by elites or state intervention and the commoditization of that resource raised peasants' sense of injustice and formed the ideological basis for rebellion."[8] Pierre Bonte links the moral authority of sacred kings in pastoral cultures to their "generation" of material well-being through increasing numbers of cattle,[9] while Jean and John Comaroff reveal how Tswana reflections on the similarity and distinction between cattle and money ("cattle without legs") assisted resistance to incorporation into capitalist cultural economies.[10] Steven Feierman argues that peasants in the Shambaai region of Tanzania could resist soil-erosion schemes, and so initiate anticolonialist discourse, because they drew upon and modified pre-colonial models of political legitimacy, intellectual pluralism, and justified rebellion—the people of Bondei (in eastern Shambaai) overthrew Kilindi rule sometime after 1868 on grounds that the chiefs "were ignoring the rights of peasants, treating them as though they were slaves."[11]

Moreover, colonial African novelists drew self-consciously upon oral histories, myths, folktales, and proverbs that link political legitimacy to ethical practice. Behind specific contractual notions of political legitimacy lay broadly shared convictions that the propensity of cultures to totalize should be checked not just by pluralisms of competing, internally differentiated discourses and deliberations, but also by encountering culture's own limits, by being forced to "negotiate" with a difference, an "outside," that African cultures tend to locate in corporeality,

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6 Allen F. Isaacman, "Peasants and the World Economy," in Frederick Cooper et al. (eds), *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 210; also see pp. 205–317; Frederick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," in *Confronting Historical Paradigms*, pp. 84–201.

7 Elias C. Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859–1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 84; also see pp. 80–95.

8 James McGann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia: A Rural History 1900–1935* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p. 101.

9 Pierre Bonte, "'To Increase Cows, God Created the King': The Function of Cattle in Intralacustrine Societies," in John G. Galaty and Pierre Bonte (eds), *Herders, Warriors, and Traders: Pastoralism in Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 62–86.

10 Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "'How Beasts Lost Their Legs': Cattle in Tswana Economy and Society," in *Herders, Warriors, and Traders*, pp. 58–9; also see pp. 33–61.

11 See Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 69–93, 102, 118 cited.

the bush, bush-spirits, divine or spiritual forces, or nature.[12] Discussing the Maka of southern Cameroon, Peter Geschiere notes that disembodying oneself, divesting oneself of natural affections inscribed within human flesh, is conceived as integral to witchcraft.[13] The image of witches as "devourers" of their family's and neighbors' substance, as indifferent to ethical restraints understood as constitutive of embodied human subjectivity, is remarkably consistent throughout sub-Saharan Africa. R.S. Rattray, described by Kwame Gyekye as "perhaps the most perceptive and analytical researcher into Ashanti [or Asante] culture," characterized Asante understandings of witchcraft (*bayi*) in these terms: "The great desire of a witch is to eat people. … [T]hey suck blood …. Witches walk about naked at night. … They eat all together, each supplying the feast in turn. A witch can only kill in her own clan."[14] The essays collected in 1993 by John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff describe the cultural discourse of witchcraft from west to central to east Africa in similar terms.[15]

By characterizing witchcraft as a deformation or divestiture of human nature, African cultures stress the centrality of ethical sensibility to human embodiment. Indeed, the natural affections that mark a properly "human" being are exemplified in the devotion of mothers to children, understood as a transcendence of egotism that, while certainly open to exploitation,[16] was also subject to reverence. The same Fulani or Fulbe traditions that ascribe to women a direct relation to nature through *yurmeende*, the "compassion" that binds them to their children, also viewed such direct access to nature as potentially challenging and superseding social conventions.[17]

While ethical embodiment may breach the totalities that cultural-historical contexts tend to solidify, it also focuses attention on what humans need—materially, but also emotionally and intellectually—to flourish. The social theorist

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12 See Donald R. Wehrs, "Gendering the Subject and Engendering the Self: Mande Acculturation, Islamic Piety, and the Forging of Ethical Identity in Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir*," *Modern Language Studies* 35: 1 (2005): 8–27; Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 39–46; Andrew Apter, *Black Critics and Kings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

13 Peter Geschiere, *Village Communities and the State: Changing Relations among the Maka of South-eastern Cameroon since the Colonial Conquest* (London: Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 107–8.

14 Gyekye, *African Political Thought*, p. 95; R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969 [1927]), pp. 29–30.

15 See Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (eds), *Modernity and Its Malcontents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); also see Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), esp. pp. 19–22, 190, 193.

16 See esp. Buchi Emecheta's exploration of culturally encouraged maternal self-victimization in *The Joys of Motherhood* (New York: George Braziller, 1979).

17 Paul Reisman, *Freedom in Fulani Social Life: An Introspective Ethnography*, trans. Martha Fuller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 226–35, 255–7 and *First Find Your Child a Good Mother: The Construction of Self in Two African Communities* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 88–9, 182.

Anthony Giddens argues that "[p]ractical consciousness is the cognitive and emotive anchor of the feelings of ontological security characteristic of large segments of human activity in all cultures;" in order for the "chaos that threatens on the other side of the ordinariness of everyday conventions" not to plunge us into dread or despair, "[p]ractical consciousness, together with the day-to-day routines reproduced by it, help bracket such anxieties not only, or even primarily, because of the social stability that they imply, but because of their constitutive role in organising … modes of orientation which, on the level of practice, 'answer' the questions which could be raised about the frameworks of existence."[18] Giddens notes that while "far different cultural settings allow a 'faith' in the coherence of everyday life to be achieved through providing symbolic interpretations," such interpretations do not in themselves sustain ontological security: "[C]ognitive frames of meaning will not generate that faith without a corresponding level of underlying emotional commitment—whose origins, I shall argue, are largely unconscious. Trust, hope, and courage are all relevant to such commitment."[19] Answering the child's call for ontological security is at once a transcultural ethical imperative and a crucial test of a particular culture's ability to reproduce itself.[20] Just as cultures reveal themselves to be ethically deficient to the extent that they commonly disregard human needs for routinized love (for instance, through patriarchal and colonialist repression), so societies that fail to sustain structures of meaning within which consistency of character might be elaborated neglect the hunger for significance integral to human embodiment.[21]

While the oral storytelling, rituals, and moral reflection upon which colonial African prose writers draw articulate contexts that anchor significance and enable ontological security, they also direct attention to situations that resist simplified choices or unequivocal judgments.[22] Both folktales and oral histories legitimate resistance to oppression, and, like mythic cosmology, often encourage the acculturation of flexibility, skepticism, and resistance to hegemonic power. Chinua Achebe draws connections between Igbo mythology and the types of ethical subjectivity it encourages: one "must placate all the gods all the time! For

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18 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 11; also see Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 3–33.

19 Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 38.

20 Ibid., pp. 39, 40–41.

21 For elaborations of this theme, see Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 7, 9–10.

22 See T.O. Beidelman, *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 8–9; Simon Ottenberg, *Boyhood Rituals in an African Society: An Interpretation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), pp. 164–84, 290–94; Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 87–114; V.Y. Mudimbe, *Parables and Fables: Exegesis, Textuality, and Politics in Central Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 128; Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*, trans. Ralph Butler, Audrey I. Richards, and Beatrice Hooke (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 21.

there is a cautionary proverb which states that even when a person has satisfied the deity Udo completely he may yet be killed by Ogwugwu." Thus, in Igbo political, ethical, and aesthetic reflection, "all extremism is abhorrent."[23] African cultures embrace enriching commerce with exteriority or difference to the extent that they celebrate possibilities of an ethical transcendence, and to the extent that they seek to make acculturation ever more receptive to ambiguous "powers" encountered beyond the sphere of the familiar—in the bush, in the realm of spirits, or in the conceptual and imaginative spaces opened by the culturally other.

Since cultural discourse, in Africa as elsewhere, commonly speaks to disruptive and constructive dimensions of human ethical embodiment, what accounts for the cognitive imperialism that underwrites colonialism, ethnic hatred, and dogmatism? Cognitive imperialism issues from cognitive violence in Levinas's sense (absorbing the Other into pre-established categories) and manifests itself most obviously by refusing to take the Other seriously as an interlocutor. Foucault's power/knowledge formations and "regimes of truth" constitute discursive technologies that both naturalize and disseminate cognitive imperialism, while V.Y. Mubimbe's "colonial library" describes an archive of writings about Africa shaped by cognitive imperialism:

> Exploiting travelers' and explorers' writings at the end of the nineteenth century a "colonial library" begins to take shape. It represents a body of knowledge constructed with the explicit purpose of faithfully translating and deciphering the African object. Indeed, it fulfilled a political project in which, supposedly, the object unveils its being, its secrets, and its potential to a master who could, finally, domesticate it.[24]

This description resembles numerous accounts by Levinas of how totalizing intentionalities grasp the object of cognition in such a way as to flatten it out and master its depths.[25] Thus the relationship between colonial library and cognitive imperialism is that of symptom to disease. If there is a significant difference between Mudimbe and Levinas, it is that Mudimbe relies on the familiar Sartrean idea that one objectifies an Other in order to define oneself against it.[26] By contrast, Levinas traces the source of totalizing cognition back to an original delight in freedom that is corporeal as much as intellectual, that yields an unchecked rapacious egotism which "devours" others by, as it were, sucking the lifeblood,

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23 Chinua Achebe, "The Igbo World and Its Art," in Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), pp. 62–3. Also see Isidore Okpewho, *Myth in Africa: A Study of its Aesthetic and Cultural Relevance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

24 Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, p. xii.

25 See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 42–3, 44.

26 Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, p. xi. For a discussion of the Sartrean legacy in postcolonial theory, and its role in estranging postcolonial theory from non-Western ethical and political reflection, see Donald R. Wehrs, "Sartre's Legacy in Postcolonial Thought; or, Who's Afraid of Non-Western Historiography and Cultural Studies?" *New Literary History* 34, 4 (2003): 761–89. Also see George, *Relocating Agency*, pp. 49–53.

the alterity, out of them.[27] Paradoxically, given his lack of interest in non-Western culture and occasionally Eurocentric remarks, Levinas offer an analysis of colonizing cognition that resembles pre-colonial African accounts of the moral horror of witchcraft. Without suggesting that the two discourses are identical, one may acknowledge that in providing a way of critiquing Eurocentric limitations in Western thought, even his own, Levinas highlights (albeit unintentionally) the general philosophical relevance of pre-colonial African ethical reflection.

Literary Postcolonial Discourse and African Historiography

Because the historical fictions considered in this study explore pre-colonial cultural life and power relations, it would seem reasonable to consult professional historians specializing in African studies. However, the tendency of dominant modes of postcolonial theory to deflect attention away from the nuances of literary texts has also deflected attention away from historical specificity. Olakunle George observes that though

> a central idea in current theory is that third world literatures have a lot to tell us, it is hard to be certain of the conviction behind the idea. Despite the general celebration of otherness, the literatures emerging from the former European colonies seem not to be as securely in the forefront of analytical attention as the abstract theoretical claims made about them.[28]

Similarly, notable exceptions notwithstanding, literary studies have largely ignored African historiography,[29] affiliating themselves instead with critiques of colonialist discourse that, while not explicitly saying so, encourage the impression that non-orientalist African historiography is a contradiction in terms. One prominent recent example, Gaurav Desai's 2001 critique of texts from Mudimbe's "colonial library," begins by describing an 1848 exchange between the British lieutenant governor Winniett and the king of Asante, in which Winniett asks that human sacrifices be abolished. The king replies, according to Winniett's report cited by Desai, "[A]lthough human sacrifices were the custom of his forefathers, he was reducing their number and extent in his kingdom."[30] Desai comments, "The

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27 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 42, 302–4.

28 George, *Relocating Agency*, p. 6.

29 Critical problems arising from neglecting historiography are discussed at length in Wehrs, *African Feminist Fiction and Indigenous Values* and "Sartre's Legacy in Postcolonial Theory." There are, of course, exceptions, the most prominent being recent criticism on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, decisively influenced by Robert M. Wren's pioneering work integrating historiography into literary criticism, *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe* (Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1980).

30 Gaurav Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 1. Desai cites p. 235 of W. Winniett, "Journal of Lieutenant Governor Winniett's Visit to the King of Ashantee," in *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1949, pp. 230–36.

fact that this … utterance is as much a product of Winniett's official discourse as it is perhaps that of the Asantehene should be self-evident to any student of colonial discourse," for "the colonial uses of such tropes as 'human sacrifices' for the purpose of legitimation" are well-known.[31] Readers unfamiliar with Asante historiography receive no help in ascertaining whether human sacrifice indeed took place. Of course, Desai's book is not about Africa; it is a tour of items from the "colonial library." But its very method precludes any examination of the relationship between colonialist "tropes" and the African cultures they reduce and distort.

There is a fundamental scholarly problem here. Winniett's discourse may well employ colonialist tropes, but that does not mean one simply yields to "prejudice" in bringing up human sacrifice in relation to pre-colonial Asante. These are two logically distinct issues, subject to different kinds of scholarly evidence. Within current Asante studies there is no more doubt that humans were sacrificed than there is within current American studies that in nineteenth century America a civil war took place. Indeed, one leading Asante scholar, T.C. McCaskie, notes that when a major client, Kwasi Brantuo, of this particular Asantehene, Kwaku Duo (reigned 1834–1867), died in 1865, "some two hundred people were immolated in the funeral rites," and when Kwaku Duo himself died two years later,

> The royal funeral rites that followed were among the bloodiest in all Asante history. The huge number of victims (well in excess of a thousand) killed to honour Kwaku Duo *agyeman* ("defender of the nation") commemorated his longevity and authority, but the relentlessness, duration and savagery of the licensed violence that took place also vented underlying antagonisms.[32]

Even if this study wished to replicate the attitude toward African history that Desai's text encourages, the narratives of Balewa, Hazoumé, Fagunwa, Tutuola, and Achebe would not allow it. Each of these African writers calls our attention repeatedly to the material reality of everyday life in pre-colonial Africa, and especially to the conditions of the disempowered, those vulnerable to predation by elites—kidnapped children, enslaved mothers, friendless travelers, candidates for human sacrifice. Even when the elite are portrayed, their connection with the dispossessed is made thematically central—as in Okonkwo's relationship to Ifemefuna in *Things Fall Apart*.

Within the African contexts at issue here, writers from Balewa to Achebe reoccupy the position of oral storytellers, and so partake in the storytellers' task of making narrative a vehicle for acculturating its audience to resist both the cognitive imperialism that issues from one's own egoistic propensities, and that which is

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31 Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*, p. 2.

32 T.C. McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village 1850–1950* (Edinburgh/Bloomington and Indianapolis: Edinburgh University Press/ Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 58, 59; also see McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 17, 102, 201, 213–14; Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993), pp. 215–29.

naturalized in hegemonic power relations and ideologies, whether indigenous or colonial. Because this study follows the lead of the narratives it discusses, its focus is primarily upon Africa—African culture and history, African agency and subjectivity, social interactions among Africans, the relationship between African ideas and practices. There are other books about Western ideas, discourses, and practices regarding Africa. But this study focuses on narratives that describe both specific events and modes of life that have now—but not in the times when the works were written—passed from living memory. We will therefore consult the research of the "new" African historiography to seek better understandings of the cultural-historical contexts that the narratives could assume would be available to their original African audiences.

The "Africa" that appears in the new historiography bears little resemblance to the "Africa" that appears in much colonialist discourse critique, in part because the political conceptions of progressive scholarship shaping the two genres differ widely. As Desai's text illustrates, colonialist discourse critique conceives itself as progressive to the extent that it helps an "Africa" that remains an abstraction disrupt Western discourses. By contrast, the new historiography conceives progressive scholarship as a matter of recovering from neglect or marginalization the agency and rationality of Africans. Thus, we come to understand that Africans were the makers of their own histories and perfectly capable of interacting among themselves in ways that had little to do with Western influence or power. Thus, for example, John Thornton argues against the work of Walter Rodney, Immanuel Wallerstein, and others, which he sees as, although "sympathetic to Africa," reinforcing the view that "Africa was a victim, and a passive victim" of European interests, power, and cunning.[33] Thornton presents extensive documentary evidence that suggests the following conclusions:

> Europeans did not possess the military power to force Africans to participate in any type of trade in which their leaders did not wish to engage. Therefore all African trade with the Atlantic, including the slave trade, had to be voluntary. Finally, a careful look at the slave trade and the process of acquisition of slaves argues that slaves had long been used in African societies, that African political systems placed great importance on the legal relationship of slavery for political purposes, and that relatively large numbers of people were likely to be slaves in any one time. Because so much of the process of acquisition, transfer, and sale of slaves was under the control of African states and elites, they were able to protect themselves from the demographic impact and transfer the considerable social dislocations to poorer members of their own societies.[34]

Because enslavement, slave raids, exploitation of women and poorer members of society, and human sacrifice are thematically central to the narratives that Balewa,

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33 John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 4.

34 Ibid., p. 7. For similar arguments and documentation, see Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Hazoumé, Fagunwa, Tutuola, and Achebe wrote, it may be useful for readers to approach those texts with some historical-cultural contextualization. While the historians would readily acknowledge that our state of knowledge is imperfect, they would also claim that provisional knowledge is better than willful ignorance. Readers uninterested in empirical research, however, may wish to skip over the following sketch of the scholarship.

Slavery and the Naturalization of Cognitive Imperialism

The oral literature from which early prose African writers drew inspiration, like any ethically motivated literature, addresses injustices and moral failings normative within its own cultural-historical contexts. Cognitive violence and material exploitation in Africa, as elsewhere, took the forms of gender exploitation, "hatred of the other," witchcraft accusations, slavery, and clientage. Distinct to Africa, however, was the degree to which, from the sixteenth century on, political economies structured around the Atlantic slave trade vested a tremendous sanction in the hands of elites, a sanction whose recurrent exercise reinforced the material basis of their own power and authoritarian propensities within society.

Mudimbe argues that praise-songs recited by Luba brides and wives in the Congo (the former Zaïre) functioned as scripts that a young girl, often fourteen or fifteen years old, must learn to enact if she is to achieve a socially-sanctioned moral identity: "Nobody invites her to become a subject of a possible history in the making. On the contrary, she has to promote the respectability of her original family by practicing an ordinary life which fits into a discourse of obedience."[35] Although authoritarianism may well have intensified or calcified in specific societies as a result of the Atlantic slave trade, it would be naïve to attribute its existence to the slave trade alone. Lidwien Kapteijns notes that in northern Somalia, far from the areas involved in Atlantic commerce, oral literature inculcated wifely obedience through proverbs and stories communicating these messages: "[T]he obstinate woman cannot find a place in Somalia," "There are three things that are a disgrace in men but laudable in women: to be miserly, not to talk back, and to be afraid of one's spouse," "Women do not respect men who do not control them," "Respecting women brings no good."[36] In a similar vein, Jean Comaroff observes that pre-colonial Tswana society endorsed a social order in which women "provided for the physical subsistence of the community; but the men controlled the media that permitted the conversion of this material into more enduring social values."[37] The existence of such discourses do not demonstrate that African women were "nothing but" passive victims; it does,

35 Mudimbe, *Parables and Fables*, p. 139; also see pp. 139–57.

36 Lidwien Kapteijns with Maryan Omar Ali, *Women's Voices in a Man's World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature, c. 1899–1980* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), pp. 38–9, 41.

37 Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*, pp. 80–81; also pp. 49–77.

however, illuminate the norms into which patriarchal discourse and practice would enroll women.

In striking contrast to African oral traditions that valorize enriching contact with outside "power" and internal pluralistic differentiation, throughout Africa cultural constructions and practices surrounding sorcery, slavery, and strangers, as well as women, position what stands outside acculturated space as either hostile or exploitable.[38] Because slaves were, like witches, outsiders *par excellence*, their assimilation into the enslaving community could be understood as one instance among many of seizing what was at hand in the bush.[39] Most slaves in Africa were female, valued as domestic and agricultural workers, as well as sources of sexual pleasure and descendants without matrilineal affiliations—though the fertility rate seems to have been strikingly low.[40] Slaves also functioned as status symbols, and were sometimes killed at funerals and religious or political ceremonies.[41] Wars and raiding generated prisoners for both export and domestic enslavement. The

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38 See Beidelman, *Moral Imagination*, pp. 138–59; Mark Auslander, "'Open the Wombs!': The Symbolic Politics of Modern Ngoni Witchfinding," in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity and its Malcontents*, pp. 167–92; David Parkin, "Rhetoric of Responsibility: Bureaucratic Communication in a Kenya Farming Area," in Maurice Bloch (ed.), *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (London: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 113–39; Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 88, 90, 131. For further discussions of sorcery, see Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 112–27, 299–393; Geneviève Calame-Griaule, *Words and the Dogon World*, trans. Deirdre LaPin (Philadelphia: Institute for Study of Human Issues, 1986), pp. 498–557; Appiah, *In My Father's House*, pp. 112–36.

39 See Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A history of slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–8; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., pp. 1–9; Joseph C. Miller, "Lineages, Ideology, and the History of Slavery in Western Central Africa," and Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Mumbanza Mwa Bawele, "The Social Context of Slavery in Equatorial Africa During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Paul E. Lovejoy (ed.), *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (Beverley Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), pp. 41–98; also see Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold*, trans. Alide Dasnois (London: Athlone Press, 1991); David Northrup, "The Ideological Context of Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century," in Lovejoy, *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 101–22; Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, pp. 110–25.

40 See Herbert S. Klein, "African Women in the Atlantic Slave Trade," John Thornton, "Sexual Demography: The Impact of the Slave Trade on Family Structure," Claude Meillassoux, "Female Slavery," and Martin A. Klein, "Women in Slavery in the Western Sudan," in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 29–92; Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery*, pp. 78–84.

41 For one example among many, see Manning's account of the Calabar slaves' struggle to win immunity from being sacrificed at funerals in *Slavery and African Life*, pp. 108, 117, 118. Also see T.C. McCaskie's discussion of the ritual sacrifice of slaves in *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*.

more slaves produced, the more slavery became central to social, economic, and political life.[42]

The conditions of slaves within sub-Saharan Africa certainly varied, and are subject to scholarly debate. Thornton argues that, while clearly subordinate and dependent, slaves were defined "in some ways equivalent to permanent children," and because many slaves worked the land, "were often treated no differently from peasant cultivators" in Europe.[43] Lovejoy stresses the inherent vulnerabilities, even dehumanization, involved.[44] On one issue all leading scholars agree, however: the Atlantic slave trade was allowed to begin, maintained, organized, and regulated by Africans for the benefit of African states and African private interests. To acknowledge this does not imply that Europeans were somehow less morally responsible than Africans. Europeans would have been happy simply to snatch Africans by force, but as Thornton documents, each time they tried to do so, the results were militarily disastrous.[45] While, as Mudimbe has shown, there were strong ideological predilections within European culture for configuring Africans as "justly" subject to enslavement,[46] Thornton's work demonstrates that the Europeans lacked the military power to intimidate African kings; they were, on the contrary, dependent upon the good graces of African rulers for any commerce, in slaves or anything else.[47]

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42 See Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st ed., pp. 27–8, 2nd ed., pp. 24–9; Richard Roberts, "Ideology, Slavery, and Social Formations: The Evolution of Maraka Slavery in the Middle Niger Valley;" Paul E. Lovejoy, "Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate;" Gabriel R. Warburg, "Ideological and Practical Considerations Regarding Slavery in the Madhist State and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan: 1881–1918;" Frederick Cooper, "Islam and Cultural Hegemony: The Ideology of Slaveowners on the East African Coast," in Lovejoy, *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 171–307; John Ralph Willis, "Introduction: The Ideology of Enslavement in Islam," in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, 2 vols (London: Frank Cass, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 1–15; Akbar Muhammad, "The Image of Africans in Arabic Literature: Some Unpublished Manuscripts," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1, pp. 47–74; William John Sersen, "Stereotypes and Attitudes Towards Slaves in Arabic Proverbs: a Preliminary View," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1, pp. 92–105; Paulo Fernardo de Moraes Farias, "Models of the World and Categorial Models: The 'Enslavable Barbarian' as a Mobile Classificatory Label;" Bernard Barbour and Michelle Jacobs, "The *Mi'raj*: A Legal Treatise on Slavery by Ahmad Baba" and Constance Hilliard, "*Zuhar al-Basatin* and *Ta'rikh al-Turubbe*: Some Legal and Ethical Aspects of Slavery in the Sudan as Seen in the Works of Shaykh Musa Kamara," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1, pp. 27–46, vol. 1, pp. 125–59, vol. 1, pp. 160–81; Margaret Strobel, "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa" and Edna G. Bay, "Servitude and Worldly Success in the Palace of Dahomey," in Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, pp. 111–29, 340–67; Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 9; Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World,* p. 74.

43 Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, pp. 86–87.

44 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., pp. 35–6.

45 Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, pp. 36–40.

46 Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, p. 30.

47 Thornton, *African and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, pp. 53, 54–5.

Indeed, political power became linked to the export of one's enemies and economic power to producing commodities from slave labor.[48] Lovejoy argues that the need to create so many slaves fragmented political structures, generated warfare between every level of polity, and helped destroy the large empires of Songhay and Borno, even as it generated an economic infrastructure where profits from the slave trade supported the domestic expansion of slavery.[49] With so many slaves available, and the threat of enslavement ubiquitous, systems of dependency and clientage reinforced the power of local nobilities because everyone needed protection.[50] As Patrick Manning observes, "[W]e must imagine a situation in which everybody knew the value, as a captive, of everyone he or she met."[51]

Efforts by Western powers to suppress the Atlantic slave trade after 1800 led to an intensification of the plantation system, for slaves were replaced with commodities produced by slave labor, from kola nuts in the Senegambia to cloves in Zanzibar.[52] As West Africa lost its external trade, slaves were absorbed into the local economy. By 1820, Asante began shifting its slaves into kola production and gold mining.[53] Huge plantations producing palm oil and other commodities supported private armies and constant raiding kept a fluid supply of slaves to be sorted out into soldiers, concubines, and field hands.[54] Yoruba warlords

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48 See Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st ed., pp. 35–43, 2nd ed., pp. 36–61; also see John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

49 See Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st ed., pp. 66–87, 2nd ed., pp. 68–90; Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, pp. 127–40; also see Edward A. Alpers, "The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century East Africa," and "Appendix: Histoire d'une petite esclave enterrée vivante, ou L'Amour filial," in Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, pp. 185–219; Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, "The Songhay-Zarma Female Slave: Relations of Production and Ideological Status" and Curtis A. Keim, "Women in Slavery among the Mangbetu c. 1800–1910," in Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, pp. 130–59.

50 See Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st. ed., pp. 108–34, 2nd ed., pp. 112–39.

51 Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, p. 123.

52 See Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st ed., pp. 135–83, 223–7, 2nd. ed., pp. 165–90, 226–51; Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery*, pp. 239–93; Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, pp. 140–48; Frederick Cooper, "Islam and Cultural Hegemony: The Ideology of Slaveowners on the East African Coast," in *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 271–307; Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Margaret Strobel, "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa;" A. M. H. Sheriff, "The Slave Mode of Production Along the East African Coast, 1810–1873," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2, pp. 161–80.

53 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st ed., p. 163, 2nd ed., pp. 158–64, 167–76; also see A. Norman Klein, "The Two Asantes: Competing Interpretations of 'Slavery' in Akan-Asante Culture and Society," in Lovejoy, *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 149–67.

54 See J.O. Hunwick, "Notes on Slavery in the Songhay Empire," Polly Hill, "Comparative West African Farm-Slavery Systems," and R.S. O'Fahey, "Slavery and Society in Dar Fur," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 2, pp. 16–32, 33–50, 83–100.

and merchants enslaved Muslims from the north as Muslims from the Sokoto Caliphate enslaved Yoruba from the south.[55] In the northern Igbo territories, slave labor on plantations produced "rules that assured a permanent work force: Slavery was strictly hereditary with no amelioration over time."[56] After the *jihad* of al hajj 'Umar defeated Segu Bambara in 1861, the middle Niger valley was organized so that complementary ruling classes controlled lucrative, mutually reinforcing practices of enslavement, slave trading, and plantation management.[57]

Perhaps because slavery was central to wealth creation and state power both before and after the Atlantic trade, slavery ended in Africa as a consequence of European intervention.[58] Emancipation was hardly devoid of hypocrisy; it constituted one of the main "moral" arguments for colonialism. Nonetheless, African slaves did flee African masters. Ann O'Hear notes, "In the Sokoto Caliphate as a whole, a striking number of concubines took advantage of the opportunities for escape afforded by the British conquest of the area."[59] Even though, as Manning remarks, "slave raiders, slave merchants, and slave owners devised ways to distance themselves from the fact that they were dealing in bodies for cash" through "a hundred euphemisms, proverbs, equivocations, and outright lies,"[60] the framing of slavery as a moral issue by Western religious and political authorities gave African slaves a vocabulary for repudiating the institution while providing them hope that state power would cease to support it.[61] Babatunde

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55 See Babatunde Agiri, "Slavery in Yoruba Society in the Nineteenth Century" and Lovejoy, "Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," in Lovejoy, *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 123–48, 201–43; Mervyn Hiskett, "The Image of Slaves in Hausa Literature," in Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1, pp. 106–24; Toyin Falola and G.O. Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

56 Northrup, "The Ideological Context of Slavery," p. 104.

57 Roberts, "Ideology, Slavery, and Social Formation," p. 176; also see Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and Economy of the Middle Niger Valley 1700–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 76–134.

58 See Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., pp. 252–3.

59 Ann O'Hear, *Power Relations in Nigeria: Ilorin Slaves and Their Successors* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), p. 14; also Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves*, pp. 174–207; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st ed., pp. 246–68, 2nd ed., pp. 252–75; Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, pp. 149–67; Northrup, "The Ideological Context of Slavery," pp. 117–18; Agiri, "Slavery in Yoruba Society in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 136–44; Warburg, "Ideological and Practical Considerations Regarding Slavery," pp. 257–66.

60 Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, p. 102.

61 See, for example, the Rev. Samuel Johnson's discussion of slavery in *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. Dr O. Johnson (Westport, CN: Negro Universities Press, 1970 [1921]); also see Samuel Crowther and J. Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger* (London, 1859). For a discussion of Western equivocations about ending slavery, see Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers, "Introduction: The End of Slavery in Africa," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 3–27. For the impact of Western equivocations upon the flight of

Agiri notes that controversy within the Yoruba Christian community, where the need for converts and labor competed against the moral imperative of abolition, "probably did almost as much damage as an outright policy against slavery. The debate raised questions concerning the legitimacy of slavery which probably never were raised in traditional Yoruba society."[62] Manning observes, "Yet even where they were aware of their demographic decline, the only principles on which Africans opposed slavery were the narrow self-interest of a family, ethnic group, or state."[63]

Despite slavery's naturalization, there is some evidence, if only in the need for euphemisms, that slavery's evil was intuitively inescapable.[64] Certainly treatment of slaves varied widely. Thornton notes that slaves were "the preeminent form of private investment and the manifestation of private wealth" and "were used

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slaves, see Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves*, pp. 135–207; Martin A. Klein, "Slave Resistance and Slave Emancipation in Coastal Guinea," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 203–19; Thomas J. Herlehy and Rodger F. Morton, "A Coastal Ex-Slave Community in the Regional and Colonial Economy of Kenya: The WaMisheni of Rabai, 1880–1963," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 254–81; Richard Roberts, "The End of Slavery in the French Soudan, 1905–1914," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 282–307; James McCann, "'Children of the House': Slavery and its Suppression in Lasta, Northern Ethiopia, 1916–1935," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 332–61. For an historical overview of the emancipation process, see Raymond Dumett and Marion Johnson, "Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, and the Northern Territories," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 71–116; for specific cases, see E. Ann McDougall, "A Topsy-Turvy World: Slaves and Freed Slaves in the Mauritanian Adrar, 1910–1950," J.S. Hogendorn and Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Reform of Slavey in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria," Don Ohadike, "The Decline of Slavery among the Igbo People," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 362–88, 391–414, 437–61; for a theoretical overview, see Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Context of African Abolition," in Miers and Roberts, *The End of Slavery in Africa*, pp. 485–503. On British Lagos as a haven for slaves, see Agiri, "Slavery in Yoruba Society," pp. 141–43; for desertion, see Roberts and Miers, "Introduction," pp. 21–4; for "malingering," see Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 1st ed., pp. 206–14, 2nd ed., pp. 254–61; for resistance, see Strobel, "Slavery and Reproductive Labor in Mombasa" and Marcia Wright, "Bwanikwa: Consciousness and Protest among Slave Women in Central Africa, 1886–1911," in Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, pp. 246–67.

62 Agiri, "Slavery in Yoruba Society," p. 141.

63 Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, p. 88.

64 Ibid., p. 102; also see pp. 99–102. But for discussions of the vested interests of Africans, including otherwise oppressed women, in maintaining slavery, see Susan Herlin Broadhead, "Slave Wives, Free Sisters: Bakongo Women and Slavery c. 1700–1850," in Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, pp. 160–81; Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed, 1987), pp. 31–50; Carol P. MacCormack, "Slaves, Slave Owners, and Slave Dealers: Sherbro Coast and Hinterland," George E. Brooks, "A *Nhara* of the Guinea-Bissau Region: Mãe Aurélia Correia," and Bruce L. Mouser, "Women Slavers of Guinea-Conakry," in Robertson and Klein, *Women and Slavery in Africa*, pp. 271–339.

by state officials as a dependent and loyal group, both for the production of revenue and for performing administrative and military service."[65] Lovejoy suggests as a general rule, "Those most recently enslaved or traded were most like commodities."[66] Thus, it is arguable that common practice accorded room for, and even encouraged, ethical recognition of the humanity of, if not slaves as such, at least the slaves with whom one came into repeated contact. However, Lovejoy also underscores that the system required the constant renewal of treating humans ("those most recently enslaved or traded") as commodities. In her study of nineteenth-century slaves in the Yoruba city of Ilorin, Ann O'Hear found evidence of amelioration of both treatment and status over time, and evidence of abiding oppression and discrimination.[67]

Notably, abolitionist agency among Africans falls into two categories: individual Africans running away or otherwise escaping, and Christian free Africans contesting the institution as a matter of principle. The most prominent among the Christian free Africans were the Krios, the Western-educated, Christian elite of Sierra Leone, and the Saros or "recaptives"—West Africans (mostly Yoruba) who were captured by slave raiders but liberated from ships bound for South America by the British blockade, and then sent to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Among the most influential was Africanus Horton (1835–1883), a medical doctor with a degree from the University of Edinburgh, who wrote extensively against racism and in favor of "free[ing] [Africans] from the bloody and demoralizing influence of beastly superstition; from polygamy; from domestic slavery; from the paralysing effects, as regards productive industry, of customs and institutions which … prevent the creation of that capital by which alone the works necessarily attendant on civilization can be executed."[68] As Pieter Boele van Hensbroek notes, Horton saw as the two great enemies of African progress European racism and indigenous African cultures.[69] Horton viewed his own abolitionist discourse as not only alien to, but hostile to, indigenous African acculturation and values.[70]

Horton's position was not that of every Western-educated African. Both E.W. Blyden (1832–1912) and the Aborginals Rights Protection Society challenged Horton's repudiation of African cultures, but the notions of indigenous cultural practices and discourse they articulated seem both vague and romanticized. For Blyden, "the" African personality "is defined by contrast to the European one, which is identified as harsh, individualistic, competitive, combative, nonreligious, and materialistic," whereas Africans "are by nature softer and more cheerful,

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65 Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, p. 89.

66 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., p. 8.

67 O'Hear, *Power Relations in Nigeria*, pp. 39–44.

68 J.A.B. Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples, British, and Native. With the requirements necessary for establishing that self-government recommended by the Committee of the House of Commons, 1865; and a vindication of the Negro race* (London: W.J. Johnson, 1868, rpt. London: Frank Cass, 1970), p. vii; cited in Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Thought: 1860 to the Present* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1999), p. 35.

69 See van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Thought*, pp. 30–42.

70 Ibid., pp. 44–62.

they have sympathy, a willingness to serve, and are spiritual;" Mudimbe argues that "Blyden simply opposed one racist view to another racist view, precisely by emphasizing anti-mythologies of Africans, their cultures, and the necessity of unmixed Negro blood."[71]

In contrast to Blyden's monolithic vision, intellectuals in the "modernization-from-indigenous-roots" movement of the Aboriginal Rights Protection Society, according to van Hensbroek, "wanted to show the vitality of specific Fanti and Ashanti traditions as a basis for actually organizing social and political life on the coast."[72] Casely Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911) depicts the main character's "indigenous background and inspiration … [as] more humane, natural, sensitive, and logically consistent than the British-Christian influences," so that "the now strangled and frustrated African social system and culture" is presented as "in fact superior to what was imported: more humane, more civilized, and perfectly able to renovate itself in order to adjust to modern conditions."[73] While laudable in its resistance to racism and its nationalism, Hayford's work, as we shall see in Chapter 2, never mentions, much less critiques, either domestic slavery or slave trading.

If there were indigenous ethical condemnations of slavery, contrary to what Manning and Agiri suggest, the current state of empirical research has yet to uncover them. Neither oral traditions nor countless interviews with local informants, such as discussed in O'Hear's study of slavery in Ilorin, have uncovered a tradition of such discourse. What can be affirmed is that slavery solicited and naturalized an appropriative attitude toward the ethnically, culturally Other. Thornton notes that "the decision makers who allowed the trade to continue, whether merchants or political leaders, did not personally suffer the larger-scale losses and were able to maintain their operations."[74] On the one hand, slaves could be viewed as the equivalent of uncultivated land, available to anyone who would seize and hold it. On the other hand, slave raiding and trading (on any scale) seems to have facilitated and reinforced ethnic hatred. Any extended reading of historical research reveals the degree to which interlocking cognitive violence and material exploitation shape diverse social structures and ideological systems. Pre-colonial Africa is no exception. In his history of African poverty, John Iliffe notes,

> In the Kuba kingdom [in the later Belgian Congo] … "menials" included inhabitants of subjected villages (who paid more tribute and had less autonomy than free commoners), pawn wives (who had fewer rights than free wives and did the most menial household tasks), and slaves (who were obtained by capture or trade and did "all the hard work or all the boring tasks", including those otherwise reserved for women). Slaves could

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71 E.W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro race* (London: W.B. Whittington & Co., 1887, rpt. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), p. 120; cited in van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Thought*, p. 47; Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 130.

72 Van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Thought*, p. 56.

73 Ibid., pp. 57–8, 78–9.

74 Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, p. 73.

> be sacrificed at patrician funerals, but their descendants gained freedom after two generations. This pattern was characteristic of kingdoms with rich environments and complex economies. … "When I tried to explain to King Liwanika … that a poor '*matlanka*' (lowest slave) might be seated in the palace of God … he got very excited …", a missionary recorded in 1883. "… 'Those are not people', they say; 'they are our dogs.'"[75]

A few pages later, discussing the pastoral Tswana people, Iliffe remarks,

> During the nineteenth century the Tswana held several non-Tswana groups in subjection. Among them were the Kgalagadi, a related Sotho-speaking people who occupied the region before the Tswana entered it but were then broken up, subjected, and incorporated as hereditary servants. … The second non-Tswana servile group were known as (Ma)Sarwa. They were sections of the San whom both white and black were exterminating elsewhere in southern Africa at this time … "The Bamangwato [a Tswana group] are very cruel to the Bushmen [the San], whom they flog with sticks every 10 minutes", [the missionary John] Chapman recorded [in 1852]. "They hold the Bushmen as beasts, term them bulls and cows, heifers and calves. In speaking of a female who has borne a child, they say she has calved."[76]

Describing the consequences of the early nineteenth-century Fulani (Fulbe) *jihad* in "what later became Adamawa" (northern Cameroon), Victor Azarya notes,

> The defeated non-Fulbe groups were subjected, enslaved, or driven to the tops of hills inaccessible to Fulbe cavalry …. Among the non-Fulbe populations, those who tried to resist the Fulbe were mostly either utterly destroyed or driven off to areas inaccessible to the Fulbe. Those who were more or less successful in their resistance lived in the constant fear of Fulbe attacks. … They were reduced to remnants by slave raids; thousands of people disappeared each year, either being taken as slaves or dying in the massacres accompanying the raids or from the famine that followed because all crops were taken or burnt by the raiders.[77]

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75 John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 56–7; also see Jan Vansina, *The Children of Woot: A History of the Kuba Peoples* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 165–7, 180–81; Robert W. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaïre Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500–1891* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Iliffe cites Frederick Stanley Arnot, *Garenganze* (new ed., London, 1969), p. 73.

76 Iliffe, *The African Poor*, pp. 74–5; also see Martin Legassick, "The Sotho-Tswana Peoples before 1800," in Leonard Thompson (ed.), *African Societies in Southern Africa* (London, 1969), p. 116; Adam Kuper, *Kalahari Village Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 7; Shula Marks, "Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of African History*, 13 (1972): 55–80; quotation from John Chapman, *Travels*, vol. 1, p. 74.

77 Victor Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change: The Fulbe in Guinea, Nigeria, and Cameroon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 20, 24–5; also see Victor Azarya, *Dominance and Change in North Cameroon: The Fulbe Aristocracy* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976).

Recent historiography distinguishes between small-scale polities, governed by chiefs or elders and the "conquest-states" of the tumultuous nineteenth century, whether the product of Islamic fervor (as in Fulani and Mahdist states), military-merchant entrepreneurship (Samori in West Africa, Mirambo in East Africa), or redoubtable warlordship (Chaka's creation of the Zulu empire).[78] Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Mahmood Mamdani suggest that the small-scale polities elaborated institutional constraints upon material and cognitive violence that the conquest-states dissolved, and that the colonial state built upon the conquest-states' work. Coquery-Vidrovitch notes, however, that village pluralism needs to be distinguished from the "mythicized" notion of "the village community in all non-European societies as an untouched and untouchable entity, perfectly self-contained and living in absolute harmony."[79] She points out that the village council "was not a democratic organ but, rather, a gerontocracy, and the village chief was not simply a coordinator but the most influential member of the dominant lineage," that the village was tied to the outside world by trade and political bonds (tribute), and that the relative autonomy of the village was predicated upon African sovereigns

> exploit[ing] neighboring peoples, not [their] own subjects. … The sovereign did not depend for his subsistence on the agriculture of the village communities living under his dominion. He had his own lands, worked by his wives and his slaves. … The sovereign's prosperity was born of war and long-distance trade. … The state apparatus was at that time identified with external campaigns in search of booty—slaves, livestock, luxury articles—to be distributed to the army chiefs and the bravest warriors. It was an apparatus that remained relatively independent of village life.[80]

In the relative autonomy of the village, cognitive imperialism confronted restraints from pluralistic networks of authority or influence; nonetheless, the capacity of chiefs to engage in material exploitation and political repression should not be underestimated.[81] Nonetheless, cognitive imperialism and material exploitation in the conquest-states assumed a qualitatively more intense character.

> Beginning in the 1860s, Samori created an empire on the narrowest social and political base—a tiny group of more or less Islamized, wealthy merchants. … From the 1880s on, he undertook successive conquests with the aim of forming an army out of his new

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78 See Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, trans. David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 50–111; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 43–8.

79 Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa*, p. 50.

80 Ibid., pp. 51, 57–8.

81 Ibid., pp. 60–65; also see Emile Mworoha, *Peuples et rois de l'Afrique des Lacs: La Burundi et les royaumes voisins au XIXe siècle* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1977); also Robert Brain, *Bangwa Kinship and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 6–7; Richard G. Dillon, *Ranking and Resistance: A Precolonial Cameroonian Polity in Regional Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

> slaves. … Finally, faced with the French advances, Samori did not hesitate to pursue a scorched-earth policy, ever demanding greater numbers of soldiers, caravans, and porters. … A number of … slave-traders … radically transformed the concept and forms of government in Central Africa during the last third of the nineteenth century. They destroyed the old political forms, substituting new conquering, multiethnic empires.[82]

Although extreme totalizing efforts such as the Zulu chief Chaka's or those of the most repressive Asantehenes may have virtually suppressed dissent,[83] polities as diverse as the acephalous Igbo and the warrior-merchant Akan states were able to sustain moral sources of "pluralistic" cultural resistance to cognitive and material violence at the same time that predation and exploitation shaped relations with outsiders and with marginalized insiders.[84] Islamic discourse likewise contributed ethical sublimity and emancipating power to pre-colonial African cultures.[85] As is the case with Western humanism, however, there is in Islamic universalism a propensity to see it as one's duty to make others identical to oneself; at the same time, the distinction between the *dar al-Islam* and the *dar al-harb* replicates the village/bush distinction, allowing those "outside" to be conceived of as ripe for subjugation and assimilation.[86]

Whether Islamic or not, the pre-colonial state apparatus sustained itself through violent appropriation of external resources, human and otherwise. Although various pre-colonial disruptive and constructive ethical discourses aspired to denaturalize the habits of mind and conduct that underwrite cognitive imperialism, basic notions of property involved assimilating the bodies and productive, reproductive labor of others into economies that served primarily oneself and those "like" oneself. Coquery-Vidrovitch notes that

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82 Coquery-Vitrovitch, *Africa*, pp. 70–71; also see Yves Person, *Samori--une révolution Dyula*, 3 vols (Dakar: Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, 1968–75); H. Monoit, "Rabih" and J.-P. Chrétien, "Mirambo," in Charles-André Julien, Catherine Coquery-Vitrovitch, Magaly Morsy, and Yves Person (eds), *Les Africains*, 12 vols (Paris: Jeune Afrique, 1977–78), vol. 4, pp. 285–309; vol. 6, pp. 129–57.

83 Coquery-Vitrovitch, *Africa*, p. 73; also see Shula Marks, "Shaka Zulu," in Julien et al., *Les Africains*, vol. 2, pp. 279–309; E.V. Walter, *Terror and Resistance: A Study of Political Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*.

84 See Mazi Elechukwu Nnadibuagha Njaka, *Igbo Political Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); Emmanuel Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985); also see Achebe, "The Igbo World and Its Art," pp. 62–7; P.C. Lloyd. "Political And Social Structure," in S.O. Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 209–10; Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought*, pp. 97, 148.

85 See Wehrs, *African Feminist Fiction and Indigenous Values*, esp. pp. 69–104; "Gendering the Subject and Engendering the Self," pp. 1–27; "The 'Sensible,' the Maternal, and the Ethical Beginnings of Feminist Islamic Discourse in Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Loin de Médine*," *MLN* 118 (2003): 841–66; "Colonialism, Polyvocality, and Islam in *L'aventure ambiguë* and *Le devoir de violence*," *MLN* 107 (1992): 1000–1027.

86 See esp. de Moraes Farias, "Models of the World and Categorical Models;" Barbour and Jacobs, "The *Mi'raj*;" and Hilliard, "*Zuhar al-Basatin* and *Ta'rikh al-Turubbe*."

> when the British advocated the abolition of the slave trade and of human sacrifices in Ashanti [Asante] … they encountered a collective hostility for these rites were central expressions of the national culture. Similarly … in Dahomey the great feasts known as "the Customs," in which human sacrifices were offered, were … a basis for the entire civilization. … The king was quite sincere when he replied to the Western envoys that the sacrifices were such a sacred duty that nothing could make him decide to dispense with them.[87]

Anthony Giddens notes that pre-modern polities had limited means of surveillance and administrative control, neither territorial integration (clear boundaries, as opposed to vague, shifting frontiers) nor a vertical integration of classes into one "people."[88] Such states were, as pre-colonial African history attests, nearly always at war, with war both consolidating and decomposing the state.[89] People were exposed to direct violence (from raiding, conquest, subjugation, internal lawlessness—as in private armies, piracy, banditry) and were socially vulnerable to a much greater extent than citizens of modern states; by contrast, citizens in modern states are much more exposed to the indirect violence of administrative power and to indirect coercion from a capitalistic integration of political and economic life.[90] To speak of "indirect" violence in this context does not imply that capitalism lacks violence, including recourse to "direct" methods: the British opium wars and de facto child slavery in sweatshops are cases in point. Nonetheless, the difference between daily exposure to death, abduction, robbery and daily exposure to administrative pressures is analytically and experientially significant.

To the extent that the modern state and capitalism successfully distance the exercise of power from literal violence, they carry the promise of reducing, in an unprecedented way, a person's exposure to homicide, rape, pillage, subjugation, and plunder. At the same time, however, the modern state and capitalism extend, in unprecedented ways, the scope of indirect coercions. The colonial state in many ways merged the worse of both systems, producing what Mamdani calls "decentralized despotism," where reliance upon an ill-understood and sometimes fictional "customary law" allowed "traditional" forms of direct coercion by chiefs (appropriation of forced labor, distribution of land, exaction of tribute) to co-mingle with the modern state's indirect coercion (the need to pay head taxes forcing peasant men into migratory wage-labor).[91] Western preoccupations with ethnicity, which legitimated (even idealized) "tradition," merged with racial

87 Coquery-Vitrovitch, *Africa*, p. 76. Also see Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*.

88 Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 48, 51–2.

89 Ibid., pp. 56–7.

90 Ibid., p. 67; also see Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: Volume One: Power, Property, and the State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 49–68, 90–108.

91 Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p. 150.

assumptions that supported "grasping" the African as an object in need of total reformation. As Crawford Young remarks, "[T]he creation of the African colonial state coincided with the historical zenith of virulent racism. The colonial construction of the African as savage other permeated all spheres of policy thought." The material and psychological violence of racism helped create an experience of the modern state as an external, predatory force—what Young calls "Bula Matari," crusher of rocks. This helped valorize, wittingly or not, what Young calls "the integral state:" "[A] design of perfected hegemony, whereby the state seeks to achieve unrestricted domination over civil society. Thus unfettered, the state is free to engage in rational pursuit of its design for the future and to reward the ruling class amply for its governance."[92] The face of modernity that the colonial state presented undoubtedly helped naturalize a predatory attitude that Senyo B.-S.K. Adjibolosoo argues undermines the moral character, the self-discipline, needed for material prosperity.[93]

While it is unquestionably the case that the colonial state left a powerful, negative legacy to postcolonial Africa, it is too simple to attribute elite predation since independence exclusively to the violence of the colonial state. Julius E. Nyang'oro, Henry Bernstein and Bonnie K. Campbell, Thomas Callaghy, and others have noted and extensively documented how

> [f]orms (and uses) of appropriation by the bureaucratic bourgeoisie [in post-independence states] do not represent accumulation in the capitalist sense … but predatory exaction of a pre-capitalist type. … In this way, the bureaucratic bourgeoisie inherits the practices of the ruling class of the pre-colonial mode of production—the landed and military aristocracy.[94]

The colonial state's complicity with and institutionalization of cognitive imperialism should be self-evident, but it is naive to neglect how the pre-colonial state's own naturalizations of cognitive imperialism provided institutional and ideological resources upon which colonialism could draw. The historical fiction we shall consider explores both the operation and human cost of such state-sponsored naturalizations. Taken together, the narratives of Hayford, Balewa,

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92 Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 280, 288.

93 Senyo B-S. K. Adjibolosoo, *The Human Factor in Developing Africa* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995), p. 68.

94 Henry Bernstein and Bonnie K. Campbell (eds), *Contradictions of Accumulation in Africa: Studies in Economy and State* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985), p. 17; quoted in Julius E. Nyang'oro, *The State and Capitalist Development in Africa: Declining Political Economies* (New York: Praeger, 1989), p. 135. Also see Thomas M. Callaghy, "The State and the Development of Capitalism in Africa: Some Theoretical and Historical Reflections," in Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (eds), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Hazoumé, Fagunwa, and Tutuola provide a context for considering how Chinua Achebe's explicitly anticolonial novel *Things Fall Apart* creates a fiction that simultaneously exposes the violence of colonialism and depicts unsparingly the failure of indigenous society to check cognitive imperialism sufficiently to challenge effectively the colonizers' duplicitous offers of emancipation.

The Disruptive, the Constructive, and the Dialogic in Oral Storytelling

Discussing contemporary women's folktales from southern Africa, Harold Scheub argues that it is an error to reduce the stories of oral societies "to rudimentary Aesop's fable morality, to obvious homily, while missing the true message,"[95] for through pattern and rhythm, "the emotions of the audience are elicited and ordered," allowing stories to communicate "not so much an intellectual as felt experience."[96] Scheub points to how oral storytelling interweaves disruptive and constructive dimensions of ethical life, displacing attention and altering mood while opening us concurrently to acculturation and sociability. Moreover, by distinguishing the "obvious homily" from the "true message," Scheub introduces a distinction akin to Levinas's between the said and the saying. Saying, "[a]ntecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings," expresses the ethical sensibility that lies behind propositional language. The said is saying congealed into determinate conceptuality, ontology, themes, totalizing universalisms.[97] But just as the "real message" communicates itself through corporeal performance, so the saying impresses upon the said what exceeds, and undercuts, mere "homily" or ontological discourse.[98]

In African oral storytelling, the "real message" disrupting "homily" may support constructive ethics. Barbara G. Hoffmann argues that Mande griots and griottes seek to cultivate a balance in individuals and society between two principles: "*badenya* implies cooperation and social cohesion, while *fadenya* stands for rivalry and competition. … Too much *badenya* in society supports the status quo and can lead to social stagnation; a little *fadenya* livens things up and leads to heroic action. Too much *fadenya*, on the other hand, leads to social anarchy."[99] "Answering" disruption with construction, oral storytelling is dialogic in Bakhtin's sense of refusing the monopoly of a single voice, a single principle or center of

95 Harold Scheub, *Stories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 3, 14.

96 Ibid., p. 15. Jenefer Robinson articulates a similar argument regarding written literature, especially the nineteenth-century realist novel, in *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

97 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), p. 5.

98 Ibid., pp. 46–7.

99 Barbara G. Hoffmann, *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 33; also see Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 115.

value.[100] So understood, the dialogic should not be confused with open-ended subversion or infinite deferral. The human exceeds all "finalization" for Bahktin for the same reason that the face exceeds all totalization for Levinas—the Other's irreducible difference discloses to us that in "the other man," above all in the despised and marginalized one, we stumble upon the image of God. In contrast to the kind of universalism that, as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze notes, underwrites racism and ethnocentricism, and as Levinas notes, sustains anti-Semitism, a universalizing that at best construes duty as insisting that the other be just like us,[101] Bahktin and Levinas elaborate an ethical universalism—a recognition of ethical responsibility for any human being, irrespective of differences of race, culture, gender, class, etc.—predicated upon recognizing in the other's difference from us as the trace of the divine.

Such ethical universalism nurtures an anti-dogmatism specific neither to twentieth-century thought nor to the West. Furthermore, constructive ethics may emerge from dialogic interaction with enriching, and confounding, alterity. Michael Jackson notes that for the Mande West African Kuranko people narrative develops the complexity of vision associated with genuine "understanding," what the Kuranko call "*hankilimaiye*: cleverness, ingenuity, common sense, understanding. … Accordingly, *hankilimaiye* signifies *communis sententia*: common sense. It carries the connotations of respect, prudence, filial piety, and knowledge of customs. [but also] sometimes defines idiosyncratic abilities such as cunning, guile, and extraordinary perspicacity."[102] Just as the acquisition of *hankilimaiye*, what the Mande call skill in handling *nyama*, requires journeying into the wilderness (to "converse" with bush-spirits, thus gathering in raw energy or material), so receptivity to subversive complication cultivates sociable self-discipline alongside an appreciation of polyvalent multi-sidedness. In Mande terms, storytelling educates people in how to handle (*kala*) energies that are both creative and destructive (*nyama*). Thus storytelling, sorcery, and hunting are activities analogous to those of smiths, who transmute raw, ambiguous forces into stable, socially beneficial shapes.[103] Pascal Boyer notes that among the Fang of Gabon, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea,

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100 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 18, 62.

101 See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Achieving our Humanity: The Idea of the Postracial Future* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 3–111; Emmanuel Levinas, "Antihumanism and Education," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 277–88. Also see Patrick Colm Hogan, *The Mind and its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), for the differentiation of universalisms that are totalizing ethnocentrisms from other, non-ethnocentric universalisms. On the distinction between recurrences and universals, see Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 3–88.

102 Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 22–3.

103 See Patrick R. McNaughton, *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power, and Art in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 16–17, 71–2.

> [b]ecoming a singer [storyteller] is much conceived of as the equivalent of becoming a witch-doctor. The rituals are quite similar, as well as the ambiguous reputation. Both initiations enable one to master the domain of witchcraft, due to a special relationship with the ancestors; but this capacity may also be used for other, anti-social purposes, so that most villagers are rather leery of these uncanny practitioners.[104]

African societies are not naive about oppressive and manipulative uses of cultural discourse, but neither do they take subversion as an end in itself. Rather, the moral and cultural value of returning time and again to the "wild" ludic space of storytelling rests, as Beidelman argues, in the capacity of stories to enlarge our "moral imagination."[105] Much storytelling seeks to persuade people that disconnecting intelligence from affections of the soul estranges one from one's own humanity. In "The Abuse of the Killing Word" a young man, given a magical word by an old woman of the bush, is able to master and kill all the animals he needs to accumulate bridewealth. A year after the man uses the word to win his wife, he refuses to return it to the old woman, and instead begins to kill anyone who challenges his desires, depopulating the earth to the point that God must take the word from him lest humanity be destroyed.[106] Such stories seek to cultivate "perception (*aisthêsis*), in Aristotle's sense: a faculty of discrimination that is concerned with the apprehending of concrete particulars rather than universals."[107] Stories call upon us to make the discriminations (*kinesthai*) that underlie evaluative perception (*aisthêsis*).[108] Through *paideia*, one develops skill in "making" the discriminations (*kinesthai*) that shape the perception (*aisthêsis*) constitutive of practical reason (*phronêsis*). Similarly, Gyekye notes that the Akan "teaching of moral values embedded in proverbs and folktales" is linked to the conviction that "to acquire virtue, a person must practice good deeds so that they become habitual."[109]

Such a stress upon the constructive side of ethics need not slight the disruptive side. Jackson notes that no single folktale constitutes "the Kuranko worldview" and that the ambiguities inscribed in Kuranko conceptions of cleverness, the wild, and love are reflected in storytelling sessions themselves, in which "the actual sequence of narratives" permits "a kind of complementarity or adjustment of viewpoints [to be] reached." He describes how the playful competition between two master storytellers, Keti Ferenke and Kenya Fina, produced one evening a "process of statement and counterstatement. … Narrative skill consists as much

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104 Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 6.

105 See Beidelman, *Moral Imagination*, pp. 156–8.

106 Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness*, pp. 164–7.

107 Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 300–301.

108 See the discussions of "discrimination" in Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 492.

109 Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought*, p. 150.

in an ability to respond appropriately to other narrators as in an ability to discern and play upon the predilections and concerns of the audience."[110]

For just such reasons, oral literature, either in contemporary performances or in written versions, cannot disclose an Africa untouched by Western influence. The "traditional" societies in which recorded oral literature circulates have been penetrated, in subtle and unsubtle ways, by Western power and influence.[111] Still, one should be wary of exaggerating the West's importance. Thomas A. Hale points out that Ibn Battuta's 1352 description of griots in the Mali Empire shows that they shared many of the attributes of their present-day descendants.[112] Nonetheless, there is always the risk that written texts will obscure the role of storyteller and audience in shaping meaning. Discussing Ewe trickster tales, Zinta Konrad observes, "The skilled artist engages the audience, encouraging members to participate in the performance by singing, dancing, and freely interrupting and conversing with the performer as he or she performs."[113]

These caveats notwithstanding, oral literature offers an avenue otherwise unavailable into pre-colonial or indigenous self-understanding and evaluation.[114] Notably, religious-ethical visions of history that figure prominently in colonial writers' historical fiction are anticipated in such narratives as the Soninke short epic, "Gassire's Lute," which describes Wagadu's abandonment and return: "Four times Wagadu disappeared and was lost to human sight: once through vanity, once through falsehood, once through greed, and once through dissension."[115] Whether Wagadu (capital of the ancient empire of Ghana) will remain—whether military, political power will endure—depends upon the ethical practice of those who would preserve her. At the time that Wagadu is lost "for the first time through vanity," her people, the Fasa, are involved in an interminable war and Gassire waits impatiently for his father to die: "A jackal gnawed at Gassire's heart. Daily Gassire asked his heart: 'When will Nganamba die? When will Gassire be king?'" Gassire is the jackal and his desire for "the shield of his father," which ought to indicate his social identity, is linked to animal gnawing. Since jackals are scavengers, the implication is that Gassire understands kingship as a prey

110 Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness*, pp. 220, 222.

111 See the discussions of oral revision and transmission in Mudimbe, *Parables and Fables*; Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication*; Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), esp. 159–71; Jack Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

112 Hale, *Griots and Griottes*, p. 79.

113 Zinta Konrad, *Ewe Comic Heroes: Trickster Tales in Togo* (New York: Garland, 1994), p. 93; also see Megan Biesele, *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju/'horan* (Johannesburg/Bloomington and Indianapolis: Witwatersrand University Press/Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 9–37.

114 See Mudimbe's use of oral speech genres in *Parables and Fables* and Jan Vansina's discussion of oral sources in African historiography in *Oral Sources as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

115 "Gassire's Lute," in Roger D. Abrahams (ed.), *African Folktales: Traditional Stories of the Black World* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 233–8, p. 233 cited.

to be seized, or that he values it as a means to attain a life of scavenger-like predation.

After Gassire fights so well that the knights exalt him in song, he goes into a field and hears a partridge sing, "All creatures must die, be buried and rot. Kings and heroes die, are buried and rot. … But the Dausi, the song of my battles, shall not die." Distressed, Gassire orders the smith to make him a lute. The smith does so, but assures Gassire that the lute will not sing, for "It cannot sing if it has no heart. You must give it a heart. … The wood must absorb down-dripping blood, blood of your blood, breath of your breath. … Then will the tone that comes from your heart echo in the ear of your son and live on in the people …. But Wagadu will be lost because of it," to which Gassire responds, "Wagadu can go to hell!"

Determined to win unequaled fame, Gassire orders his sons and warriors into battle, where each fights "not like a human being, but rather like a Damo" [a spirit unknown even to the singer]; Gassire's eldest son is killed and his "heart's blood dropped on the lute." For the next seven days, he returns to battle, losing a son on each day, until the eighth day, when the assembled warriors tell Gassire, "We are willing to fight when it is necessary. But you, in your rage, go on fighting without sense or limit. … And while we do not wish to die fameless we have no wish to die for fame alone." In an Aristotelian manner, the warriors locate excellence in a rough mean between deficiency and excess: they are willing to fight, but not "without sense or limit."

The assembly invites Gassire to depart, which he does with "his last, his youngest, son, his wives, his friends and his Boroma" [slaves]. That night, Gassire "heard a voice. It rang as though it came from himself. Gassire began to tremble. He heard the lute singing." By attending to a disruptive voice, Gassire finally recognizes himself as more than a jackal. "When the lute had sung the Dausi for the first time, King Nganamba died in the city of Dierra; when the lute had sung the Dausi for the first time, Gassire's rage melted; Gassire wept." Nganamba can die because Gassire can at last assume the attributes of a man, his rage melting into tears.

After the lute has sung for the first time, "Wagadu disappeared—for the first time." One might expect Wagadu to re-appear when the melting of rage gives a heart to the lute and so ensures cultural memory through song, but the story underscores the moral ambiguity of cultural achievement; "Sleep came to Wagadu for the first time through vanity, for the second time through falsehood, for the third time through greed, and for the fourth time through dissension." The story situates the colonial present of oral performance in an extended moment of guilty loss, in the context of anticipating Wagadu's fifth return (perhaps the "new" Ghana of a postcolonial Africa). However, the foregrounding of that future good emphasizes the present unfinished, ethically deficient condition: "Dissension will enable the fifth Wagadu to be as enduring as the rain of the south and as the rocks of the Sahara, for every man will then have Wagadu in his heart and every woman Wagadu in her womb." The imagery of ethical-ontological completion recalls the messianic strain in the desert monotheisms, while the association of Wagadu with a powerful and just (powerful because just) community recalls the Islamic *umma*. That "dissension" should be the last, most virulent lapse might indicate an

accommodation of non-Islamic history to Islamic thought. Muslims describe the pre-Islamic era as *jahiliyya*, a time of dissension marked by a plurality of gods, incessant warfare, and surrender to blood lust and sensuality. By positing dissension as the ultimate challenge, the narrative presents history in a light consistent with Islamic piety, making self-criticism integral to tradition. Indeed, an ethical reading of political misfortune informs both Islamic and non-Islamic oral narratives.

Although African oral literature frequently articulates internal criticism by linking moral failure with political disaster, as long as political economies were structured along the lines that contemporary historiography suggests, as long as slaves functioned as the equivalent of landed property, and as long as physical security was tied to the ability to intimidate potential raiders, there were apparently limits, akin to those evident in pre-modern Western literatures, to the kinds of material-political orders that were culturally imaginable. Konrad notes that while trickster narratives are commonly read as lauding "ritualized rebellion and licensed aggression," such "ritualized rebellion served to criticize individual and particular authorities, never the fundamental systems of institutions themselves."[116] The significance of Konrad's distinction may be illustrated by examining an Igbo folktale, "The Disobedient Sisters."[117] The tale begins by recounting that long ago, "the people of a certain village lived in terror of the beasts of the land and of the sea, for these beasts occasionally invaded them and carried many of their children away." Clearly, the story evokes the slave trade. Simon Ottenberg notes that well within living memory young Igbo boys seldom left their compounds "for fear of being kidnapped by a stranger or an Aro slave dealer."[118] By presenting slave raiders as "the beasts of the land and the sea," the tale suggests that as "beasts," the slave raiders lack the attributes that "make" one human. On the other hand, as "beasts" they simply constitute an intractable fact of life. Two young girls, Omelumma and Omelukpagham, are left alone by their parents who must attend a distant market. Before they depart, the parents admonish the girls to stay inside and not join other children in an open field. However, the girls "were irresponsible and they did not listen to their parents' warnings." When the beasts of the sea and land suddenly invade the field, the sisters run in opposite directions, are captured separately, and placed in bondage: "Omelumma was later sold to a youth who loved her so well that he married her. Omelukpragham did not have the same luck. She was sold to one wicked person after another, and used for all sorts of odd jobs."

After some years, Omelumma has a baby boy and her husband buys a servant, who turns out to be Omelukpragham, though the sisters do not recognize one another. Omelumma treats her new slave harshly. If Omelukpragham attempts to complete her chores, the baby will cry and Omelumma will beat her; if Omelukpragham comforts the baby, she will not complete the chores and Omelumma will beat her. In desperation, Omelukpragham sings a lullaby that

116 Konrad, *Ewe Comic Heroes*, p. 139; he cites Max Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South East Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954), p. 20.

117 See Abrahams, *African Folktales*, pp. 143–5.

118 Ottenberg, *Boyhood Rituals*, p. 47.

recounts the story of how she and her sister were kidnapped. When Omelumma overhears the lullaby, she rushes out "weeping bitterly" and "warmly embrace[s]" her sister. "Both of them fell into each other's arms and wept, while Omelumma went on and on apologizing for her past brutality. From that day on, they both lived happily as tender sisters. And Omelumma resolved never to mistreat a servant again."

The folktale criticizes the girls for disobeying their parents and Omelumma for mistreating her servant, but its conclusion implies, in accord with the wide variability of treatment pre-colonial slaves could encounter, that any guilt in benefiting from slavery may be assuaged by personal rectitude. However, the middle of the tale notes how much institutionalized violence underlies social practices: two functionally equivalent sisters receive completely different treatment through "luck." While the material for a systemic critique is present, it remains undeveloped even though, by asking listeners to experience vicariously Omelukpragham's suffering and powerlessness, the tale calls forth and orders emotions that convey a "real message" of imaginative identification with the plight and perspective of the enslaved. By exposing the audience's ethical sensibility to the embodied humanity of the enslaved sister, the story insinuates into the audience's psyche a "felt experience" of kinship. Thus, the story's "real message" stands in tension with ways of configuring slaves the story itself depicts as long naturalized.

How far oral literature's evocation of "felt experience" may be pressed toward questioning of social order may be glimpsed by another story. Ananse, the Akan trickster pledges his life to heal the High God's, Nyame's, mother. When she dies, Nyame orders his executioners to kill Ananse, but he sends his son

> to burrow under the place of judgment, and at the last moment the son cries out as Ananse has bidden him:
>
> When you kill Ananse, the tribe will come to ruin!
> When you pardon Ananse, the tribe will shake with voices!
>
> Nyame's chief minister turns to the High God and says, "This people belongs to you and to Asase Yaa. Today you are about to kill Ananse, but Yaa, Old-mother-earth, says that if you let him go, it will be well." Nyame complies, and thus it is, the Ashanti [Asante] say, that the expression, "You are as wonderful as Ananse," has gained currency among them.[119]

The story reveals a world in which the "just" claims of the High God must be counterbalanced by the claims of "Old-mother-earth." If Nyame were the sole force in the cosmic order, the drive towards law and hierarchy would become unbearable; were Asase Yaa the sole force, the tendency of nature to generate chaos would become equally unbearable. The ethical-political significance of the tale lies in its affirmation of the need for constitutive difference. Indeed, the image of Nyame acting as judge, with a chief minister and executioners, suggestively evokes the Asantehene presiding at his court. McCaskie notes that "a favourite

119 Robert Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa: Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 1–2.

game" of pre-colonial children was "*ahenahene* ('who is the king?')," in which children would organize courts to try cases and punish offenders.[120] Against the backdrop of increasingly centralized power by the Asantehenes from the state's victory over the Denkyira in 1701 to the civil wars of the 1880s, the folktale may be seen as subtly subversive. When the chief minister tells Nyame that the people belong to him and Asase Yaa (mother earth), he implies an interdependence between culture and nature, male and female, that both celebrates the Asante experience of carving an agricultural space from a dense rain forest and in some ways speaks against the sense of individualistic triumphalism entwined with that achievement.[121] The folktale insists that "Old-mother-earth" remains independent of even Nyame, the "biggest man."

Further, although the Asante political economy encouraged aggressive individualistic acquisition, Ananse, frequently associated with "greedy, self-serving" conduct,[122] is saved because he can depend upon another (his son), because he is tied by bonds of loyalty and intimacy to others, and because he does not disdain what is low (he sends his son to burrow under the earth). Indeed, what is lower on the social hierarchy (the son) saves what is higher (the father). In suggesting kinship and reciprocity between high and low, the story sketches a model for social relations at odds with a state ideology predicated upon the distinction between free and slave, which McCaskie insists was also the distinction between human and non-human.[123]

By affirming an order in which Nyame tolerates Ananse, the folktale suggests that a wise ruler will not, despite his nominal power, try to reduce his subjects to servility, and that attempts to do so are self-defeating. Kwasi Wiredu argues that the Akan maxim, *Onipa na ohia*, "Man or woman is the measure of all value," and the Akan belief that by "possessing an okra, a divine element, all persons have an intrinsic value," imply an ethics that affirms "every human being" to be "entitled in an equal measure to a certain basic respect."[124]

An unsentimental reading of Asante history, however, would suggest that the folktale's "real message" hardly unraveled indigenous power inequities. This does not mean that the effect of such stories is negligible. The most oppressive of the Asantehenes were deposed, and the presence of moral commentary, even if expressed ironically, within Asante royal chronicles suggests that much of the discourse shaping pre-colonial Asante acculturation, contrary to the aspirations of the state, called into question rapacious, predatory practices and implicitly measured actual practices against standards of justice.[125] One chronicle tells of

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120 McCaskie, *Asante Identities*, p. 55.

121 Wilks, *Forests of Gold*, p. 56.

122 Konrad, *Ewe Comic Heroes*, p. 19.

123 McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, pp. 88–9.

124 Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, pp. 65, 158.

125 See McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, pp. 68–73. On oral history as moral discourse, see Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. pp. 38–65, 97–136; and Vansina, *Oral Sources as History*, esp. pp. 95–114, 186–201.

how an immoral advisor, Sampanne, talked Asantehene Osei Tutu Kwame into invading the Gyaman state after the Asantehene compared the Gyamanhene to a dutiful wife: "[A] man who intends to beat his wife can always find a pretext. … With your permission, I can travel there and provoke the King and his subjects to furnish you with the necessary pretext." The story ends with a sardonic remark that both emphasizes the vulnerability of the weak and invokes an ideal of justice against which the facts of history are assessed: "No King hates to amass wealth, so eventually he gave Sampanne permission to travel to Gyaman."[126] Precisely such a balance of hard-headed realism and ethical signification marks the historical fiction that colonial African writers produced between the 1930s and 1950s.

126 McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, p. 263.

Chapter 2

Hayford, Balewa, and the Representation of African Culture and Society

Cognitive Science and Ethical Signification in Oral and Written Narrative

Apparent contrasts between how oral storytelling and novelistic discourse shape and communicate meaning may appear less stark if Harold Scheub's discussion of the "real message" is connected with contemporary research in cognitive science. Scheub's insistence that images evoke specific emotions, and that patterned imagery is integral to moral judgment and practical rationality, is consistent with much current research in the cognitive sciences. Measuring involuntary changes within the autonomic nervous systems of people exposed to images of others in distress, Antonio Damasio's work reveals that individuals with brain damage producing flattened emotions and histories of poor practical reasoning "failed to generate any skin conductance response" to ethically "disturbing images," whereas individuals without such brain damage "generated abundant skin conductance response" to disturbing but not bland images.[1] Several implications follow. First, mental images are "somatically marked" in the sense that cognitive processing involves physiological affects. Second, somatically marked mental images are central to practical reasoning. Third, mental images of others in distress are so negatively marked somatically for most people—those neither suffering from specific kinds of brain damage nor with histories of sociopathetic indifference—that exposure to such images elicits involuntary autonomic physiological responses.

The shared appeal of oral storytelling and novelistic representation to somatically marked images implies a degree of ethical universalism internal to both.[2] This is not the universalism of thinking one has an obligation to make the

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1 Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994), p. 209, also pp. 205–22. For discussions of the value of cognitive science for studies of colonial literature, see Patrick Colm Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice: Cognitive and Cultural Studies of Literary Tradition and Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004) and *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa, and the Caribbean* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

2 See Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), esp. pp. 100–95.

other just like oneself (as in the versions of Western humanism that may nurture "hatred of the other man").[3] It is rather an inability to be indifferent to the image of another suffering, an inability subject to physiological measurement. Evoking this ethical universalism, oral and written narratives may yield an ethical critique of moralities that denature our spontaneous non-indifference. For such reasons, early African prose writers could embrace novelistic discourse as a continuation of the project of oral storytelling. They were not hampered by the notion, shared by much current critical discourse, that whatever violence may be characteristic of narrative in general must be intensified in novels. For example, Edward Said claims that while

> Richardson's minute constructions of bourgeois seduction and rapacity [do not literally] relate to British military moves against the French in India occurring at the same time … in both realms we find common values about contest, surmounting odds and obstacles, and patience in establishing authority through the art of connecting principle with profit over time … [T]he great spaces of *Clarissa* or *Tom Jones* are [both] … a domestic accompaniment to the imperial project for presence and control abroad, and a practical narrative about expanding and moving about in space that must be actively inhabited and enjoyed before its disciplines or limits can be accepted.[4]

Without discounting the complexities of *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*, one may observe that they do not present "bourgeois seduction and rapacity" as good things. Instead, they are centrally about the violence done by those who would colonize disempowered, marginalized others to their self-pleasuring schemes. Indeed, one could argue that Richardson and Fielding pioneer deploying novelistic discourse to elicit emotion-evocative images that contest cognitive violence, predation, and naturalized oppression in ways that colonial African writers extend in their depictions of pre-colonial "felt experience."

Novelistic Discourse and Anticolonial Cultural Politics in Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound*

The political potential of novelistic discourse in African contexts was noted as early as 1911, when J.E. Casely Hayford published *Ethiopia Unbound*. Hayford (1866–1930), the son of a minister born in the Gold Coast, educated in Sierra Leone

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3 The phrase, as employed by Emmanuel Levinas, indicates hatred of another because he is other, because he is ethnically or ideologically or temperamentally different from oneself. See, for example, the dedication to his *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981).

4 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 70. For related arguments, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1988).

and Cambridge, was an eminent nationalist journalist and advocate for the Gold Coast Aboriginal Rights Protection Society and its program of "modernization-from-indigenous-roots."[5] While trenchantly exposing the contradictions and corruptions of the colonial system and white racism, *Ethiopia Unbound* affiliates the protagonist with both progressive reform and Blyden's racialism as it seeks to vindicate pre-colonial African cultural values against racist dismissal. As a work of literature, the narrative is notable for its merger of novelistic and oral storytelling techniques, and for its anticipation of later African-authored depictions of the intimacy between colonialist cognitive violence and material exploitation (Achebe's early work, of course, but also that of Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Sembène Ousmane, among others).[6] However, the narrative significantly lacks any detailed depiction or consideration of pre-colonial culture and history.

Beginning with a discussion between Kwamankra, then a London law student, and his English divinity student friend, Whitely, the narrative presents Kwamankra as an "Ethiopian Conservative," at once steeped in his indigenous Fanti (Gold Coast) traditions and a scholar of global erudition and cosmopolitan sympathies. When Whitely expresses doubt concerning Christ's divinity, Kwamankra reveals the usefulness of West African piety for constructing a universalistic faith:

> According to our ideas, Whitely, one broad divinity runs through humanity, and whether we are gods, or we are men, depends upon how far we have given way to the divine influence operating upon our humanity; and … I must confess there was in the man Christ Jesus a greater share of divinity than in any teacher before or after Him.[7]

Drawing on Fanti variants of the Akan *okra*, Kwamankra affirms that "divinity runs through humanity," and at the same time draws upon Fanti variants of the Akan *sunsum* to affirm that our own ethical practice determines "how far" each individual gives way "to the divine influence" within the self. Reversing the representational structures shared by European fictions as diverse as Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Hayford depicts Kwamankra conveying the ecumenical and imaginative reach of West African piety, whereas Whitely discloses the "tribal" provinciality of European piety by being taken aback when Kwamankra suggests that Mary, the mother of Jesus, might have been black (10–11). Tethered to racist, ethnocentric assumptions,

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5 Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Thought: 1860 to the Present* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), p. 58. On the centrality of notions of modernization to conceptions of agency within African philosophical and critical discourse, see Olakunde George, *Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 73–104.

6 See esp. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* (New York: Fawcett, 1960); Ferdinand Oyono, *Vie de Boy* (Paris: Julliard, 1956); Mongo Beti, *Mission terminée* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1957); Sembène Ousmane, *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1971 [1960]).

7 J.E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1969 [1911]), p. 10. All further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

Whitely's religion reveals itself to be inferior to Kwamankra's in what the narrator describes as the ultimate measure of cultural, national value—"those elements which make for pure altruism, the leaven of all human experience" (2). Hayford's narrative explicitly affirms that the ethical ("pure altruism") is the standard against which national, ethnic moralities must be assessed.

Thus the narrative condemns another Fanti student in London, Tandor-Kuma, for abandoning his girlfriend, Ekuba, because as a "professional man, used to all the luxuries of English life and habit," he cannot start his "career in Africa" with a wife who is only a "nurse-maid" (13). Hayford has Ekuba underscore the connection between European-induced class consciousness and gender exploitation by declaring, "Uncultured women do not feel, do not think! They are just like clay in the hands of you men to mould—to make or mar" (14). However, Hayford's acute attention to class in English or English-influenced contexts is not matched by attention to indigenous Fanti class distinctions. Kwamankra is described as a natural leader, editor of the national newspaper at age nineteen, committed to modern education without westernization, a student of translation having "visited Japan, Germany, and America to study their methods" (18), and then, "Having private means of his own, he joined the University of Cambridge, read jurisprudence for a year, and … then joined the Inner Temple" (19). Even in the context of the achievements of nineteenth-century Krios and Saros, Kwamankra's accomplishments are fabulous. Moreover, given the narrator's and protagonist's stress upon the significance of indigenous African culture and history, it is remarkable that Kwamankra's "private means of his own" are never specified, never connected with the political economies of either the colonial Gold Coast or the pre-colonial Fanti and Akan coastal states. Nor is Kwamankra given parents, or any indication of class background. Similarly, Kwamankra's romantic interest, Mansa, is described simply as "born well," and able to put "the finishing touches to her education" by visiting Europe (20) with her father who had "a little business in the south of Germany" (24). The narrative leaves unexplained what it means to be "born well" in this context, so that while the characters meet at London performances of *Hamlet* and discuss comparative theology, the material and cultural roots of their privilege remain unexplored. The anxiety to present Africa positively, which goes back at least to eighteenth-century Abolitionist texts, and informs such works as Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789), in which the Igbo are described as cultivating attributes the British associate with themselves (chastity, frugality, piety, industry, and so on), precludes investigating material history and indigenous agency.[8] As a result, the narrative divides between a novelistic depiction of colonial society with its distinct material, social, and psychological structures, and a politically progressive version of Victorian-Edwardian domestic sentimental romance involving African characters. Mansa is married in "a simple African costume of her own design" (36), and "'so, these

8 See Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olauhah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* [1789], in Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1995), pp. 31–45.

were wed,' to employ Tennyson's words," after which "Kwamankra was not long in taking up the duties of life in grim earnest with his dear little wife to cheer and to comfort him" (37). Unhappily, Mansa dies after giving birth to her second child, who also dies, so that Kwamankra is left responding to his young son's questions of where is "Mudder" or "Sissie" by turning "aside his face, lest his little one might know the full extent of their woe" (38).

These untimely deaths provide Hayford an occasion to argue that West African notions of the afterlife are as psychologically comforting and as conducive to this-worldly moral efforts as Christian ones. Needing an unspecified operation, Kwamankra experiences while unconscious a vision or journey to the other world (remarkably, Buchi Emecheta employs the same device in her 1994 novel *Kehinde*). The narrative assumes the form of religious allegory:

> Gradually the light of understanding dawned upon his soul. He came to know that the spiritual side of love was of far greater value than all else beside, and read a spiritual meaning into the office of love. Sorrow was the path that led him to the innermost shrine where he met God, the Nyiakropon of his race, and understood. (42–3)

Though clearly influenced by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*—to reach the heavenly city, Kwamankra must walk, buoyed by faith, across a lake (44–7)—Hayford's city of the dead evokes West African notions of an afterlife in which the dead pursue activities parallel to those of this life, and departed relatives become spirits who guide the living. Kwamankra encounters Mansa, now a goddess, and his daughter, who is a growing, thriving child: "Meanwhile, his little daughter poured into his ear, child-like fashion, the story of the abodes of the ancient dead. But with all her childish ways, there was something remarkable in the way she put things" (53). While of course Hayford wants to stress how affecting it is to believe one's dead children live on in happiness (not a small matter given the extent of infant mortality in turn-of-the-century West Africa), he also stresses that the afterlife imposes ethical demands upon the living: Kwamankra senses that that gods have sent him among mortals to be "a witness unto the truth" (53). At the same time, Kwamankra sees that "the teeming multitudes represented every kindred, race, people, and nation under the sun" (55), and Mansa articulates the doctrine that "Love is of God, and God is Love" (57–8).

Although the narrative's vision of love for all people is moving, and contrasts pointedly with colonial versions of Christianity, the portrait Hayford paints corrects as well as recuperates West African notions of life after death. As Hazoumé's depiction of the Dahomey "customs" and Tutuola's accounts of his heroes' narrow escapes from ritual sacrifice will attest, West African afterworlds, precisely because they were conceived of as idealized continuations of this life, were not egalitarian places. Slaves were sacrificed because masters needed servants, because the hierarchies, wealth, and warfare of this life were replicated in the next. By creating a reformed version of such an afterlife, Hayford suggests that African cultural traditions offer "elements which make for pure altruism," which is certainly arguable and unquestionably noble. But by effacing the actual legacies of African piety's ambiguous relations with state and class power, Hayford makes unclear how,

should African characters inhabit novelistic worlds rather than those of domestic romance or religious allegory, they could move from "indigenous roots" to the kind of "modernization" that Hayford forcefully suggests is ethically imperative.

The narrative turns to a depiction of colonial "protection" as a "mighty Titan," who, "[t]o apply Tennyson's simile … only knows what the Titan wants, or what he means," and goes about the business of "dismembering [the African's] tribe, alienating his lands, appropriating his goods, and sapping the foundations of his authority and institutions" (69). Seeing the African Christians around him reduced to servility and poverty, Kwamankra "resolved to devote the rest of his life in bringing back his people to their primitive simplicity and faith" (75). However, Kwamankra is up against people like Whitely, who abandons the "life of penury as a curate in East London" (77) for the material and psychic rewards of colonial service. Notably, the Political Officer Kennedy Bilcox who recruits Whitely admits that his young daughter's concern that he treat the Africans properly touches and troubles him: "When I am alone, I do think of these things, and my better self whispers to me that the child's sentiments are right, and that they are directly contradictory to my line of official work" (80).

Here, Hayford constructs a novelistic scene that stresses how the ethical call impresses itself upon us despite our ideologies and selfish projects. The daughter's discourse makes clear that ethical sensibility is integral to human embodiment. Similarly, Whitely becomes, like Bilcox, habituated to colonial attitudes, dismissing his African assistant chaplain when the latter fails to support his acquiescence in European settlers' desire for segregated cemeteries (83–4), but is likewise exposed to the ethical call when an old woman tells him a story about a social-climbing Islamic cleric who refused to receive his impoverished brother in the faith: "Know thou, then, thou art the [social-climbing cleric] of my story. God hath exalted you above thy fellows that thou mightest be a guide unto us his forlorn little ones, and show us the way of love and the way to heaven" (90). Both the novelistic scene and the oral story underscore that individuals and social/cultural practices are necessarily measured against the imperative to acknowledge in the face of the Other the trace of God.

Colonial service is therefore intolerable because the price of success is deformation of one's own humanity. So the minor official David Macan, upbraided by Bilcox for bringing his Scotch honesty to dealings with Africans, reflects,

> He had encouraged national schools throughout the district, and supported the Chiefs to make bye-laws, requiring every child to attend the schools until the age of fourteen. … It had never dawned upon him that there was a theoretical policy and a practical one, the latter having as its aim such a shaping of circumstances as would for ever make the Ethiopian in his own country a hewer of wood and a drawer of water unto his Caucasian protector and so-called friend. (98–9)

Against such circumstances Kwamankra does public battle as a lawyer and private battle by trying to raise his young son, Ekra Kwow, to recognize and refute European racism. When asked what a "Political Officer" is, Kwamankra tells the Aesop's fable about a wolf who, drinking upstream from a lamb, accuses the

lamb of making the stream muddy (112–13). Hayford's choice of an Aesop's fable may have rhetorical value (the West's own moral traditions indict its colonialist practices), but it is consistent with his inattention to pre-colonial culture that Ekra Kwow's anticolonialism should be nurtured by European, rather than African, moral folklore. Continuing in his didactic vein, Kwamankra repeatedly cites the Japanese victory over the Russians in the 1904–1905 war as an occasion for racial pride, reading approvingly the following Japanese declaration: "The sacred duty is incumbent upon us, as the leading state of Asiatic progress to stretch a helping hand to China, India, and Korea, to all the Asiatics who have confidence in us, and who are capable of civilisation" (109–10). Here, as in neglecting indigenous African sources of wealth and class distinction, Hayford's inattention to non-Western contexts creates difficulties. Neither Kwamankra nor Hayford hear the paternalism in this declaration. While neither could be expected to anticipate the Co-Prosperity Sphere politics of the 1930s, one immediate outcome of the 1904–1905 war was the Japanese colonization of Korea, which included the suppression of the Korean language, something one could expect to be of concern to Kwamankra and Hayford, given their views on African languages.

Hayford attempts to address issues of class and gender by introducing Tom Palmer, heir of a wealthy Gold Coast family, who enjoys Western clothes and manners, and is apt to "think that love only comes when she is wooed in Parisian skirts and Regent Street high heels" (131), but conversing with Kwamankra leads Tom to accept that "any child of Eve, who has deliberately become the mother of your child is worthy of your love, and to treat her as an outcast is to be unworthy of the name of a man" (136), and so he marries "wives" who do not seek to be society ladies, but rather dutiful African mothers (137). Similarly, Tandor-Kuma, now prosperous and married, becomes ill and is nursed to health by Ekuba. Gratitude and remorse lead him to marry her in violation of the monogamous "understanding" subsisting with his first wife: "In that instant Ekuba held him spell-bound with a look so pitiful, so imploring, so passionate that he quailed before her gaze. He hesitated, then wavered. The next moment he completely broke down. Erring love had conquered, that was all" (146). Without exactly saying so, Hayford suggests that class and gender inequalities are, if not of European origin, at least radically intensified from what they were in pre-colonial times.[9] He certainly suggests that polygamy offers a solution to such problems. However, the sketchiness of the depiction of polygamous life is cast into relief by the precision of Hayford's analysis of the colonial political economy. When Bilcox, in typical racist fashion, refers derisively to the Chief Kobina Bua's drinking, Kwamankra notes that revenue from liquor supports the colonial state, and that the state allows substandard, unhealthy liquor to be imported and sold for precisely that reason (155).

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9 This follows the pattern established in Abolitionist discourse. For example, after Equiano notes the frequency of warfare in the world of his African boyhood, wars conducted "to obtain prisoners or booty," he speculates that such wars were "perhaps" "incited" by traders who "brought the European goods … amongst us" (*Interesting Narrative*, pp. 38–9).

The movement of the narrative towards race as master trope and agent of liberation is accentuated by Kwamankra's lecturing on Blyden at Hampton: "In the African school of thought, represented by Dr. Blyden, the black man is engaged upon a sublimer task [than seeking progress along the lines of the white man], namely, the discovery of his true place in creation upon natural and national lines" (164). Concretely, West Africans should "start a reform which will be world-wide in its effects among Ethiopians [black people], remembering as a basis that we, as a people, have our own statutes, the customs and institutions of our fore-fathers, which we cannot neglect and live" (174). Kwamankra urges the establishment of Ethiopian Leagues "much in the same way as the Gaelic League in Ireland for the purpose of studying and employing Fanti, Yoruba, Hausa, or other standard African language, in daily use" (175). While cultural revival and racial pride are good things, simply having one's "own" statutes, customs, and institutions does not, by Hayford's own standards, invest them with value.

Despite Hayford's own rich knowledge of pre-colonial history and culture, evident in his non-fictional works, his narrative and protagonist move toward an ahistorical and dematerialized vision of the African as a spiritual type. Kwamankra observes,

> I am writing this on the verandah of a house in the main street of Kumasi. Where once stood the palace of the King, now stands an ugly coast building with dirty blinds and a dirtier shop below. But the men and the women are not changed. The type is pronounced; and as I watch them passing up and down in different groups, it is easy to see that the men and women, who walked the banks of the Nile in days of yore, are not far different from the remnants of the sons of Efua Kobi. (185)

Contrasting the squalor of the colonial present to the glories of the pre-colonial past, Kwamankra evokes the power and majesty of the Asante state, but he reveals a remarkable incuriosity about the details of that past and their relation to the present and possible nationalist futures. Indeed, the details almost literally fade from view, in part to accord with such affirmative evocations of Africa as Equiano's, in part to give precedence to a Blyden-inspired racial essentialism: "[t]o-day the Ashanti goes unconcerned of the white man's religion and of the white man's ways, as ancient Egypt might have done" (186). Ancient Egyptians would view contemporary Europeans the same way as contemporary Ashanti because all differences fade away under the glare of a racial, cultural identity.

Hayford is too generous, however, to adhere to simple dualisms. Kwamankra, while supervising his son's classical education, notes similitudes between the ancient Greeks and the Fanti (204) and ends by projecting a post-racist future—by the year 1925 (207). Only in the last pages, in the context of praising "the temper of the people of the Gold Coast" (211), do details of pre-colonial West African history begin to enter the text. The reader learns that the Ashanti for "quite a century … were a martial power to reckon with, though without arms of precision; and when measures of repression have been removed, it is quite conceivable that their inherent virility will be turned into healthy channels of statecraft and race development" (212). Given the shadowiness of the African pasts of Hayford's

characters, this passage comes as a shock. Toward what ends and against what foes was Ashanti "martial power" directed? How did that "martial power" fit with the elements of West African piety and custom that the narrative notes? If the "inherent virility" of the Ashanti may be "turned into healthy channels," does that imply it was at times turned into unhealthy ones, and if so, with what consequences? Hayford implies a reading of actual pre-colonial history that allows for critical ethical assessment even as it affirms possibilities for reform. Pre-colonial culture and history perhaps cannot be resolved into domestic romance, religious allegory, or racialist polemic. Hayford notes that the Denkiras once "inspired terror in the breasts of the Ashantis, and it was the haughty demand of Intsim Gakiri that the Ashanti tribute for a given year should be accompanied by a tooth of the king and his 'best' wife that roused the Ashantis to the deadly struggle with the Denkiras which ended in the submission of the latter" (212). From this real history—involving violence, inequity, appropriation, vainglory, and perhaps unhealthily channeled virility—come the Fanti, who migrated from the lands of the Ashanti to the coast, established a great city, and developed "a system of government at once harmonious, progressive, and sympathetic—a system capable of infinite development" (213–14).

While Hayford articulates in 1911 an incisive novelistic critique of colonialist psychology and material exploitation that anticipates the great anticolonial novels of the 1950s, and pioneers the co-mingling of oral storytelling and novelistic discourse that mark much later African fiction, one must wait until the 1930s to encounter fiction willing to engage imaginatively what Hayford consigns to the margins of his text—the material, social texture and "felt experience" of pre-colonial history. Moreover, it is arguable that the task Hayford sets for *Ethiopia Unbound*—demonstrating how an anticolonial politics may emerge from indigenous African cultures and values—remains an aspiration, rather than an achievement, until the publication in 1958 of *Things Fall Apart*.

Balewa's *Shaihu Umar* and the Conflict of Genres

Hayford's project of "studying and employing Fanti, Yoruba, Hausa, or other standard African language, in daily use" (175) became, paradoxically, a principle of British colonial education. Further, essays in transposing African oral storytelling material and techniques into novelistic prose fiction not only occurred under colonial circumstances, but also at times were stimulated by direct colonial sponsorship. Indigenous writing addressed a public for whom reading was associated with both worldly power and religious-moral piety. The roman script of indigenous languages such as Twi and Yoruba, the normalizing of grammar and vocabulary for print transmission, was as much tied to evangelical projects as were the creation of German by Luther's Bible and the normalizing of English through the King James Version.

Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's Hausa-language narrative *Shaihu Umar* (1934) was one of several works produced as the result of a creative-writing competition "organized by Rupert East, superintendent of the Translation Bureau

in Zaria, through the Education Department of Northern Nigeria. … Most potential writers … junior teachers, were the product of one training college in Katsina where East had taught history and geography."[10] East's relation to his writers may be glimpsed through a letter he wrote to Abubakar Iman, the author of *Ruwan Bagaja*, a fantastic-quest narrative:

> I have sent a voucher for £1 (One pound sterling) to the Provincial Superintendent of Education by this mail, which is your share of the prize. You will get some more money as a percentage on the sale as soon as the book starts to be sold. I hope you will write another book. If it is as good as the last I will certainly get it published for you. … As soon as people get the idea of reading and buying books we shall be able to publish larger editions, and give a bigger percentage to the authors.[11]

Written in response to a colonial officer's interest in creating a Hausa written literature, dependent upon colonial institutions for its material production, early Hausa prose fiction did not simply transcribe or rework oral material, but reflected the multicultural context of its creation: East wrote to Iman and other authors, advising them not to lift stories from *A Thousand and One Nights*, while simultaneously encouraging them to read Western and non-Western folklore.[12]

Unlike the other prizewinning works of 1934, Balewa's *Shaihu Umar* does not weave together fantastic stories (derived from *tatsuniya* [folktale] traditions), but instead presents the autobiographical narrative of an Islamic "*malam*," holy man and teacher. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene argues that *Shaihu Umar* becomes "the very apotheosis of *mutumin kirki*, of the good man in Hausa," and Donald J. Consentino notes, "Balewa has attempted to work out in prose the kind of homiletic themes which are the hallmark of nineteenth century Hausa poetry."[13] In *Shaihu Umar*, as in early Western novels, there is a complex relationship between devotional genres and novelistic forms of communication and evaluation, between the homiletic and the dialogic word.[14]

The narrative begins with language evocative of Quranic verse, but transposed from the implied first-person of the Quran, the direct discourse of God, to the

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10 Graham Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 20.

11 Letter of October, 1934, cited in Addurrahman Mora (ed.), *The Abubakar Iman Memoirs* (Zaria: NNPC, 1989), pp. 24–5; quoted in Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture*, p. 25.

12 See Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture*, pp. 20–55.

13 A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Mutumin Kirkii: The Concept of the Good Man in Hausa* [Hans Wolff Memorial Lecture] (Bloomington: African Studies Program, 1974), p. 18; Donald J. Cosentino, "An Experiment in Inducing the Novel Among the Hausa," *Research in African Literature* 9, 1 (1978): 22; quoted in Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture*, p. 31.

14 See Leopold Damrosch, Jr, *God's Plot and Man's Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), for an exploration of this tension in the influence of spiritual autobiographies upon early British prose fiction.

third-person, to a human witnessing of God's attributes: "God is the king who is greater than all other kings in glory, He is the most holy of all things, He is the king unto whom there is none like."[15] By evoking Quranic discourse, Balewa subordinates his speech to divine speech at the same time that his use of the third-person speaks of God as he is spoken of in the West's scriptures—where access to God is mediated by human witnesses, by human examples. Geertz notes, "The Quran … differs from the other major scriptures of the world in that it contains not reports about God by a prophet or his disciples, but His direct speech, the syllables, words, and sentences of Allah."[16] The hermeneutics generated by Jewish and Christian scriptures are predicated upon the distance of God and ultimate truth from the human (albeit inspired) words that are effects of divine action; the hermeneutics sustained by Quranic verse are predicated upon presence, the immediacy and plentitude of God's speech experienced as distant only because of man's finite understanding.[17]

While Balewa begins his narrative with an act of submission (*islam*) to Quranic speech, the witnessing of this truth through the discourse of a wise, holy man, Shaihu Umar, depends upon interpreting properly the effects of divine action as they appear in his story. In this way, what happens in history, in the concrete, immediate realm of everyday life, matters because it discloses God's agency. Thus, Balewa's text, like the seventeenth-century Puritan spiritual autobiographies that were precursors to such novelistic prose fiction as *Robinson Crusoe*, involves what Charles Taylor calls an "affirmation of everyday life,"[18] the conviction that everyday reality has infinite significance because it reflects God's work through us in this life. At the same time, Balewa would evoke two Hausa oral genres, *kissa*, "'true stories' of the Prophets and other Islamic religious narratives," and *hikaya*, stories with "a didactic purpose," related to the Hausa word for wisdom (*hikima*), as opposed to *hululu* (idle chatter) and *almara* (amusing stories or dilemma

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15 Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Shaihu Umar*, trans. Mervyn Hiskett (London: Longmans, 1967), p. 18. All further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

16 Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 110.

17 On the Talmudic tradition, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Séan Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) pp. 59–96, 142–5, and Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer, 2nd ed., rev. (New York: Dover, 1956), esp. Part I, pp. 13–144. On Christian hermeneutics, see Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), esp. Book Three, pp. 78–117, and see Saint Thomas Aquinas's discussion of analogy and metaphor in the *Summa Theologica* I, question XIII, "The Names of God," in Anton C. Pegis (ed.), *Introduction to St Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Modern Library, 1948), pp. 97–125. On Christian humanistic hermeneutics, see Manfred Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutics of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). On Islamic hermeneutics, see Andrew Rippen (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ân* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

18 This is Charles Taylor's phrase from *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

tales).[19] Whereas *hululu* refers to scurrilous speech or carnivalesque irreverent laughter, *almara* refers to discourse that tests the brain by forcing us to negotiate with problematic, ambiguous truths. Mastery of *karin magana* ("folded/broken speech"), the artful use of proverbial utterances containing "hidden meaning that requires of the listener an interpretative leap,"[20] is associated with wit or skill (*azanci*). Both *azanci* and *hikima* demarcate dimensions of truth and human excellence for which different speech genres are appropriate: *almara* and *karin magana* in the case of *azanci*; *kissa* and *hikaya* in that of *hikima*.

Shaihu Umar is described as a *malam* "to whom God has given the gift of knowledge" (18). Knowledge (Arabic, *ilm*) refers to a literate education but more particularly "*ilm* encompasses the knowledge of all essential matters revealed by God, and belief in the truth of that knowledge. *Ilm* … is not just intellectual knowing, but knowledge charged with feeling."[21] *Ilm* leads to *hikima*, and regulates a life of disciplined piety: "None who had studied under Shaihu Umar had ever known him impatient …. He never became angry, his face was always gentle, he never interfered in what did not concern him, and he never wrangled with anyone, let alone did he ever show even the slightest cantankerousness" (18). Behind the Hausa ideal of the good man (*mutumin kirki*) stands the Islamic ideal of *'iffah*, the Arabic translation of Aristotle's *sôphrosunê* (moderation, temperance), which the eleventh-century moral theorist Ghazali defined as "refrain[ing] from anything in this world which does not directly aim at ultimate happiness."[22] Balewa's narrative aspires to cultivate *'iffah*, *ilm*, and *hikima*, but to the extent that the narrative invests sensuous particularities and emotion-evocative images with "their own" significance, it makes the cultivation of *azanc*i, the exercise of hermeneutic skills derived from the disruptive media of *almara* and *karin magana*, integral to achieving practical wisdom.

Shaihu Umar recounts how his father, "a tall light-skinned man whose craft was leather-working" (19–20), died before his birth, and then his mother was courted by "a certain courtier, especially close to the Chief, called Makau" (20). Shaihu Umar's mother marries Makau, following her own mother's advice: "I know that he is a modest man, who is in no way mean-minded, and certainly if you marry him your home will be a happy one" (21). In the mother and grandmother (who dies shortly after the marriage) religious piety and practical wisdom are integrated. Because desire follows from, rather than contests, *hikima* (the mother wants above all to be a good mother and wife), the grandmother's skill

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19 See Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture*, pp. 57, 31. See Taylor's discussion of the "Affirmation of Everyday Life" as a moral source of modern identity, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 211–302.

20 Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture*, p. 57.

21 Ira M. Lapidus, "Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of Adab and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam," in Barbara Daly Metclaf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of "Adab" in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 39.

22 See Mohamed Ahmed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), pp. 64–5.

in discriminating perception (Aristotle's *aisthêsis*), and the mother's receptivity to her mother's speech, make *azanci* the earthly servant of Islamic piety. The grandmother prefaces her advice by employing a proverb, "God has given you a long ground-nut" (21), that invites her daughter's "interpretative leap," for to perceive that the "long ground-nut" (the good thing) refers not to Makau's wealth and influence but to his character requires that one's "hearing" be guided by structures of right thinking and right feeling. Indeed, along with wit and skill, *azanci* implies "rhetorical ability, the opposite of the halting literalness of the child or the learner."[23] While describing a patriarchal society, Balewa portrays women judging and acting independently (consistent with Islam's original separation of free women from chattel[24]), and presents women's ability to act upon reasoned, independent judgments as conducive to a humane social order.

Masculine violence tears apart the sheltering world that female piety and judgment build. The Chief gathers his courtiers and tells them to "set out on my behalf to Gwari country. I am in dire need, and therefore I want you to make haste" (21). The normative presence of violence (constant raiding) rests upon the "dire need" for constantly renewed accumulation through warfare. Balewa's translator, Mervyn Hiskett, notes, "Gwari country was one of the main slave-hunting areas of Umaru Magwamatse and his successors" (21). While the particular instance Balewa describes fits the general pattern of slave raiding, Balewa stresses the psychic and social violence such a political economy inflicts upon its own people. Makau informs his family, "Whether I shall be killed there [on the raid], God knows best. For this reason I want to bid you all farewell," and his family bursts "out crying, so that none of us could hear the other!" (22).

Strikingly, the narrative's stress upon the vulnerability of the weak and marginalized (women and children) might seem to condemn the institutionalized violence from which the "good" Makau lives. Interpretation is complicated further by the novelistic description of the "pagans" harvested by the raid:

> At this season the rains had begun to set in, and all the farmers were about to clear their farms. Now there was no way that these pagans could sow a crop sufficient to feed them for a whole year, so they had to come out of their towns … to lay out their farms in the plain. Despite this however, they were not able to tend their farms properly, for fear of raiders. (23)

Because the farmers' actions imply their shared humanity, the violence of the raiders' actions is underscored even though the raid is described from their point of view:

> The raiders crouched silently, watching everything that they were doing. They held back until all the people had come out. Then, after they had settled down to work, thinking that nothing would happen to them, the raiders fell upon them all at once, and seized men and women, and even small children. (23)

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23 Furniss, *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture*, p. 70.

24 See David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change Among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 71.

The "even" here underscores that the image Balewa constructs is somatically marked, that it calls forth our non-indifference to human suffering. While Balewa does not pursue directly the political implications of its own discourse, that discourse suggests that any social order grounded upon violent accumulation generates structural injustice. When the raiders return home, Makau goes first to his compound rather than the palace, which allows the other courtiers to claim that Makau has captured more slaves than he did, so that when he offers slaves to the Chief he is viewed as intending to conceal some. The courtiers' malice results in his dispossession and exile. Makau accepts the sacking of his compound and banishment with equanimity, telling his family, "Well now, you have seen how God has decreed that this thing should happen to me" (27), giving his wives the option of leaving him in his misfortune, which they refuse to do (28). When Makau sets off, alone, to find a place of refuge, he is exposed both to the elements (nearly dying of thirst) and to enslavement. After coming upon him, giving him water, and hearing his story, a hunter declares, "I know well that had God caused you to meet with any of my brothers, and not with me, then for sure you would long ago have become a slave. But you see, since it was because of your honesty that this evil thing befell you, it has turned out not too badly" (31).

Makau, who was a warrior enslaving farmers, becomes a farmer, but the threat of enslavement comes from farmers as well as warriors. The hunter warns him to avoid "the farm of a certain man who is a very powerful sorcerer" who "captures" and "enslaves" anyone coming near his land (33). Makau overhears a band of raiders discussing a quarrel over who had captured a boy. One of the warriors had sliced "off the boy's head" and declared, "Take the trunk as the reward for your trouble; as for the two of us, the head will be enough!" (34). After the raiders gallop away, Makau finds "a purse that one of the men had dropped, and it was full of silver dollars" (34). This money is instrumental in Makau's renewal of fortune: "Makau settled at Makarfi. He tilled his farm, repaired his compound, and bought two slaves with the money that he had found, so that he began to prosper" (36). He is then able to send for his family. Balewa's 1934 depiction of material conditions of accumulation is consistent which the picture that emerges from contemporary historiography. Discussing the nineteenth-century central Sudan, Lovejoy notes,

> Slaves provided much of the labour for the new Fulbe ruling class and the Hausa merchants and craftsmen. … Despite the use of slaves in aristocratic households, merchant firms, and craft production, the most important contribution of slaves was in agriculture. … As in the western Sudan, plantations were common, although wealthy farmers owned slaves in small numbers too.[25]

The narrative would separate the good, pious, honest, hard-working Makau from the predatory sorcerer-farmer, but its own novelistic realism discloses their proximity: both enrich themselves through forced labor. Realism thus moves

25 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 203–4.

the narrative away from the sphere of *hikaya* (didactic stories) and toward that of *almara* (dilemma tales). Unlike the sorcerer-farmer, Makau is not motivated by antisocial greed, but within his socio-political world he can provide for his family only through involvement in predatory practices akin to those of the sorcerer-farmer. Balewa would defend tradition in a traditional way (reading Makau's good fortune as evidence of divine rewards for a life of faithfulness), but his novelistic discourse disrupts homiletic hermeneutical conventions with emotion-evocative images that suggest alternative, potentially subversive, sources of meaning and value.

Shaihu Umar's mother had left Makau's family during his absence, leaving her young son with family friends (38). Balewa again valorizes feminine affection and care: "And this Amina, the wife of Buhari, with whom I was living, never lost her temper with me. … She didn't like me to be separated from her, even for a moment, she always liked us to be together" (39–40). One day "a man dressed in a wide gown" appears who gives Shaihu Umar "some fried meat and some cowrie shells," inducing him into the bush with promises of taking him to his parents (40). Seduced through greediness, Shaihu Umar is taken to a cave (41). When he hears people shouting his name, the kidnapper puts a knife to his throat to keep him quiet. Amina

> burst out weeping, and they all [stood] round her, bidding her be patient, for this was God's will. … But when she saw the wooden bowl of *tuwo* which she had laid out for me, and the place where I used to sleep, the whole world became black with sorrow for her, and she fell upon the bed, and began to weep, all alone. (43)

Here the tension between the narrative as Islamic edification and as novelistic discourse is particularly acute. From the former perspective, Shaihu Umar's greedy preference for meat and cowrie shells over the wooden bowl and the maternal solicitude it signifies leads to the lessons that mold him into the pious teacher the narrative valorizes. But novelistic truth suggests a discordant "real message" through investing the "wooden bowl" with an ethical significance that valorizes women's truth in ways that indict a public world organized around masculine violence. The value conferred upon the "wooden bowl" accords with the value that *The Brothers Karamazov* confers upon the little boots and embroidered sash of the deceased three-year-old peasant boy whose mother seeks comfort from Father Zosimov.[26] What makes such a valorization of women's truth problematic here is that the disruptive modes of signification released by novelistic discourse, like those released by oral storytelling, threaten to introduce a "polytheistic" dimension in the sense of affirming competing, conflicting, polyvalent goods

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26 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 40. For a discussion of such depreciation of women's indirect speech in West African contexts, see Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Mother's Talk," in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 26–32.

potentially subversive of the hierarchical ordering of goods distinctive to Islamic monotheism.

Like the protagonists of many folktales, Shaihu Umar is providentially spared the consequences that would naturally follow from yielding to his animal appetites, for during the night the kidnapper is devoured by a hyena, an event which accords with the moral narrative logic of folktales: the kidnapper is undone by a figure exemplifying his own antisocial, inhuman attributes. Shaihu Umar is adopted by a family of Islamic farmers, but again masculine violence tears him from female sheltering arms as raiders on horseback invade the farm: "On seeing them each one of us ducked and took to his heels like a dog [literally, borrowed a dog's stomach]. The other women fled and left my [adoptive] mother who was carrying me on her back. She was unable to run because she had slashed her foot with a harvesting tool" (47). This scene recalls the description of Makau's raid, except that the point of view is reversed: "We traveled for about four days, and then found ourselves in Kano. Now this man was one of the head slaves of the Chief. He had become hard-up, and had taken a little trip to see what he could find to make ends meet" (48).

Shaihu Umar gains the interest of an Egyptian trader, Abdulkarim: "Sometimes, when I brought [food] to him, he would ask me whether I liked him. When I went away he would take hold of me and stroke my head, blessing me" (54). When Shaihu Umar's master praises the boy for his dutifulness, Abdulkarim replies, "[A]ny man anywhere in the world, if he has not got character, even if he is somebody, whether he be white, yellow, or black, is no better than an animal. For good sense, insight, and wisdom certainly never came from anything other than an excellent character" (56). After explicitly articulating an ethical universalism that renounces racism, Abdulkarim invites Shaihu Umar to accompany him back to Egypt, not as his slave but as something close to an adoptive son. When Abdulkarim explains that his trading takes him to Kano every year, and so Shaihu Umar could look for his mother, the boy agrees to accompany a caravan of "as many slaves as [Abdulkarim] could buy," as well as "some lengths of black turban, black cloths, and similar goods to use to buy provisions for the road" (57).

Like Makau's, Abdulkarim's involvement in slavery is presented as having no bearing upon his status as a good man. Describing the journey across the Sahara desert, Shaihu Umar notes, "I was overcome with pity for the slaves. Whenever I looked at them, I would see them toiling along through the sand, bent double, their buttocks swaying from side to side. O dear me, you know, it is a hard thing for a man who is used to the solid earth to have to walk through sand" (59). By the time they arrive in Egypt, "the slaves had become utterly exhausted. They were brought water and food, but they were not able to touch either, because of fatigue" (61). After a week's rest, Abdulkarim "said he wished to go down to the sea to sell his slaves. Originally he had set out with eighty slaves, but twenty-five had died on the road" (61). While *hikaya* frequently portray good men pitying slaves and other outcasts, the novelistic details ("bent double," "buttocks swaying") invites affective identification as a basis for ethical judgment. Shaihu Umar is "overcome with pity," for such images, like the evoked wooden bowl,

are somatically marked in ways that make meaning irreducible to either cultural imposition or subjective projection.

Although Balewa allows his text to confront the kind of material realities that Hayford notably avoids, the narrative does not issue a systemic ethical critique akin to Hayford's systemic critique of the British colonial order. It does not, for example, yield a psychologically realistic study of the effects of habitual cruelty upon Abdulkarim (in a manner equivalent to Hayford's psychological study of Whitely and Bilcox), but rather stresses his solicitude for Shaihu Umar. Such paternal care did befall some slave boys. David D. Laitin notes that in 1882, during one Yoruba civil war,

> a young Ife boy from the Adeosun family was captured and sold into slavery to a Lagos businessman. In Lagos, Adeosun took lessons in Arabic on his own, unbeknownst to his master. His master learned of this, was impressed, and, being without male issue, adopted Kaseem (the boy's Muslim name). Kaseem became rich—mostly by selling ammunition from Lagos and buying rubber from the interior. … [Returning to Ife, he] became *naibi* (second man to the imam) and succeeded Danielu as chief imam in 1922.[27]

However, Abdulkarim's care in winning the boy's affection by "fetch[ing him] some dates, and some other kind of food" (54), and his desire for physical proximity— "That night [before starting the Sahara journey] he made me go into the hut with him, and we slept together on one rug until first light" (58)—raises questions about Abdulkarim's motives. John Ralph Willis cites *Shaihu Umar* as depicting "the *ghulam* order" among Islamic slaves; not infrequently the *ghulam* (slaveboy) order was one "wherein young boys were shackled to the perverse tastes which the Prophet of Islam so roundly condemned."[28] Despite official condemnation, pederasty and homoeroticism, from the classical period on, became a prominent feature of a culture in which bonds between males were frequently valued above those between men and women.[29] Clifford Edmund Bosworth, in discussing the *ghulam* order, notes, "in considering the personal relationship between master and slave, the sexual aspect should certainly not be neglected."[30] Pederasty is a

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27 Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, pp. 51–2.

28 John Ralph Willis, "Introduction: The Ideology of Enslavement in Islam," in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa* (2 vols, London: Frank Cass, 1985), vol. 1, p. ix.

29 For extended discussions of the consequences—psychological, social, political—of the suspicion of heterosexual passion in Islamic cultures, the discouragement of emotional intimacy between men and women, see Abdelwahab Bouhduba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) and Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male–Feminine Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, rev. ed. (Bloomington and Indianapois: Indiana University Press, 1987). Also see Rashid Boudjedra, *The Repudiation*, trans. Golda Lambrova (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1991).

30 Quoted in Willis, "Introduction," in *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1, p. xi, n. 8. Also see Rudolf P. Gaudio, "Male Lesbians and Other Queer Notions in Hausa," in Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds), *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 115–28.

recurrent motif in Arabic genres of "*sukhf*, scurrilousness and shamelessness, and *mujûn*, levity and scoffing."[31] Bosworth points out that the *Kâghân*, "a pretty boy who makes a living as a male prostitute," is a stock character in medieval Islamic literature about the underworld of beggars (the *Banû Sâsân*), that beggars, antinomian dervishes, and other free spirits are assumed to delight in "copulating with beardless boys," and that by giving voice to the "beggar," these genres frequently urge readers to indulge similar tastes.[32]

Whether Balewa intends to suggest sexual aspects of the *ghulam*'s condition through portraying Abdulkarim's affection is not clear. The narrative certainly stresses his respect for the boy's character and interest in his Quranic studies. What can be said is that because Abdulkarim's befriending of Shaihu Umar wavers between that of a master to a *ghulam* and a patron to a client, Abdulkarim's position is either directly predatory or carries the potential of becoming so.

Shaihu Umar is unable to return to Kano because the Madhist uprising of the 1880s in Sudan blocks the caravan routes, so "as the days went by I began to forget our country and my kinsfolk, and even my mother" (63). When Shaihu Umar completes reading the Quran, Abdulkarim puts on a feast and buys him "trousers from Tunis embroidered as far as the waist band, and a kind of shirt made of silk, and a fez cap with a tassel of white silk, and a yellow turban" (63). Meanwhile, his mother has "not … a moment's peace of mind" and becomes "as thin as a skeleton" (65). Eventually she wins Makau's permission to seek for his son and goes to Kano where a merchant, Ado, pretends to befriend her, but only in order to sell her into slavery. When she discovers his plot, she appeals to the cadi, but he assumes that women's discourse is nonsense and tricks her into accompanying "a man from Tripoli whose name was Ahmad," who "redeems" her by buying her from the cadi (68). Once in Tripoli, Ahmad seeks to make his slave compliant by force: "Then he had her put in chains. All the hardest housework, she had to do it, and she was only given food at irregular intervals. … [W]hat always lay heavy on her mind was her failure to find her son" (69).

Addressing issues of class and gender that Hayford largely ignores or idealizes, Balewa makes clear how misogyny and treachery go together, how a public world structured around predation collapses the distinction between civilized space and the wild central to that public world's own cultural imagination. Islamic officials, bound by civic and religious law to protect free Islamic women, treat the mother as a "pagan" slave woman. Moreover, the mother's absolute devotion to her son seems to cast an unflattering light not just upon Shaihu Umar's youthful forgetfulness, but also upon his delight in mastering a body of learning that is reserved for males and that is the fruit of a life of privilege subsidized by the political economy that is exploiting his mother.

Shaihu Umar seems to acknowledge the guilt implicit in his position: "While I was enjoying myself … I forgot everything about Hausaland" (70). Falling asleep

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31 Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: The Banû Sârân in Arabic Society and Literature, Part One: The Banû Sâsân in Arabic Life and Lore* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 30.

32 Ibid., p. 39.

with the Quran before his eyes, Shaihu Umar dreams that a lioness is searching in vain for her cub. After "pondering" this dream so long that he can no longer "bear it," Shaihu Umar tells Abdulkarim that he must search for his mother, and Abdulkarim agrees to take a caravan back to Hausaland via Tripoli (70–71). While the dream is to be understood as a divine reward for piety, its ethical disruption of Shaihu Umar's intentional consciousness, his identification with a certain notion of constructing his own life around piety, raises the possibility that revealed religion has difficulty evading the propensity to become self-enclosed, to congeal into mere conceptuality or onto-theology. This in turn raises the possibility that ethical subjectivity emerges from an embodied life shaped by the maternal love, which threatens to complicate the valorization of male to male "spiritual" rebirth over female-male natural birth central to normative understandings of Islamic piety.[33]

When Abdulkarim is in Tripoli, he visits Admad. As in a fairy tale, the visit leads to discovering Shaihu Umar's mother, upon which Abdulkarim exclaims, "God is great. God is the One who disposes according to His will!" (73–4). The son is reunited with the mother, but no happy ending follows: "[H]er strength was already exhausted because of what she had suffered, and then on top of that the joy of seeing me had been too much for her. … Indeed it was God who had allowed us to see each other once again. After a few days, she died" (74–5). By having the mother die, the narrative refuses to dilute the reality of human suffering. At the same time that the reunion is understood as an effect of God's goodness, the immediate break up of union by death implies that genuine faith must withstand the loss of all that binds us to this world. The transcendence of the Absolute, and the insubstantiality of everything else, is brought home to the hero and the reader by a sand storm that destroys the caravan and kills everyone except Shaihu Umar. Alone in the desert, he is reborn into the absolute one-to-one relation with God that marks Islamic sainthood, thus subordinating his "rebirth" through the dream of the lioness searching for her cub to a higher "rebirth." A camel appears and Shaihu Umar exclaims, "Truly, God is Almighty!" (77). Making his way to a town, he learns of the death of a raiding warlord, Rabeh, at the hands of the French (78), which both underscores the marginality of Europeans—their power, their ideas—to the lives of the African characters, and suggests the coming to an end of the political economy shaping the world the narrative describes, a world removed both from Shaihu Umar's listening disciples and from the 1934 Hausa readership. Shaihu Umar briefly notes that he settled in Rauta and has spent the years since teaching the Quran. The narrative ends by enfolding itself into Shaihu Umar's voice in prayer: "Lord God, drive away from us sorrow and the envy of enemies, and deliver us from the evil of this world and the next, Amen" (79).

Quranic hermeneutics traditionally divides between *tafsîr bi'l-ray* (interpretation by reason or private judgment) and *tafsîr bi'l-ma'thûr* (interpretation according to "what is handed down," such as the *hadîth*, stories about the Prophet and his companions). *Tafsîr bi'l-ray* has traditionally been suspect, and has generally been

33 M.E. Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality and Sacrifice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 236–9.

subordinated to *tafsîr bi'l-ma'thûr*.[34] The edifying strand in Balewa's narrative, that which most obviously tends toward constructive ethics, conforms to *tafsîr bi'l-ma'thûr*. Shaihu Umar sees a camel and declares God is great because that particular camel is assimilated to traditions within which unexpected good fortune is "read" as proof of God's greatness. The novelistic and folkloric discourse within *Shaihu Umar* implicitly solicits *tafsîr bi'l-ray*, and implicitly communicates an ethical universalism that, like the ethical universalism underwriting *Ethiopia Unbound*, calls into question the entire socio-political world it portrays. Moreover, both the reasoned, private judgment and the ethical universalism the text's novelistic and folkloric dimensions evoke affiliate themselves with speech genres that Hausa culture tends to associate with women: *azanci* (skill/wit), *karin magana* (folded speech), *almara* (dilemma tales). Although the narratives discussed in this study were written by males, reflecting the gender inequities of access to education and publishing in colonial Africa, they draw heavily upon oral discourses associated with women's wisdom and values, and so frequently depict cultural and cognitive violence as entwined with a marginalizing of women's voices and all that is culturally associated with the maternal and the feminine. The ideal interfusion of *hikima* (wisdom) and *azanci* (wit) that Balewa posits at the beginning of his story is torn apart in the narrative by masculine violence. While there is certainly an effort to recompose order at the end, the narrative's inability to confront directly its own radical undermining of traditional defenses of traditional speech leaves *Shaihu Umar* brutally, if fascinatingly, ambiguous. Balewa wrote no further prose fictions. Instead, he became a leading Nigerian politician, Nigeria's first Federal Prime Minister, and was killed in the January 1966 coup that also brought to an end Nigeria's First Republic. The tensions Balewa's narrative reveals, in himself and in Nigeria, may provide some context for understanding both his subsequent literary silence and the tragedy of his political career.

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34 See R. Marston Speight, "The Function of Hadîth as Commentary on the Qur'ân, as seen in the Six Authoritative Collections," in Andrew Rippon (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ân* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 63–81.

Chapter 3

Articulations of Empire and Hatred of the Other Man in Hazoumé's *Doguicimi*

Paul Hazoumé and the Novelistic Interrogation of Pre-Colonial Experience

Ethiopia Unbound is fraught with tension between Hayford's desire to integrate novelistic and folkloric storytelling in a systemic critique of colonial society and his unwillingness, under the sway of Blyden's racial identity-politics, to apply similar narrative strategies to investigations of class, gender, and material accumulation among Africans. Similarly, the internal dissonances of *Shaihu Umar* reflect Balewa's position inside the religious, cultural world he describes but outside its political economy. By contrast, Paul Hazoumé creates a novelistic evocation of 1820s Dahomey in *Doguicimi* (1938) that is marked by a triple outsideness. A native of Porto Novo, a kingdom between Dahomey and Yorubaland, Hazoumé came to a lifelong ethnographic study of pre-colonial Dahomey as an African interested in reclaiming pre-colonial culture, but also as the descendant of potential victims of Dahomey's state policies. As a devout Catholic, he viewed from the outside both Fon polytheism and Dahomey's imperial project. As a Francophone writer, he sought to merge his extensive knowledge of pre-colonial Dahomey with the aesthetic demands of European historical fiction.[1]

Beginning the novel with the king's public crier's recitation at dawn of the history of the kingdom's nine reigns, Hazoumé emphasizes that Dahomey identity is inseparable from an imperial memory fashioned by the elite to naturalize power relations.

> Sur les lèvres des Danhomênous qui l'entendaient, se pressaient ferventes des prières à l'adresse des ancêtres dont ils imploraient les bénédictions pour le Danhomê qu'ils avaient fondé, agrandi, rendu puissant et prospère et qu'ils devaient continuer à protéger.

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1 For Hazoumé's biography, see Richard Bjornson's Introduction to Paul Hazoumé, *Doguicimi: The First Dahomean Novel (1937)*, trans. Richard Bjornson (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1990), xviii-xxi; on Porto-Novo and its relations with Dahomey, see W.J. Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey: A History and Ethnography of the Old Kingdom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 5–6, 23, 25–6.

> Upon the lips of those Danhomênous who heard him, fervent prayers addressed to the ancestors hastened to form, imploring their blessings for the Danhomê which they had founded, enlarged, and made as powerful as it was prosperous and which they should continue to protect.[2]

Just as the present king is a godlike patron to citizen-clients, so dead kings, ruling in the other, parallel world, are godlike patrons of the this-worldly kingdom.[3] Richard Bjornson points out, "since '*nou*,' when pronounced as a high tone, means 'thing' in Fon," "Danhomênou" denotes "thing of Danhomê" and "the '*anato*,' or commoners, were regarded as property of the king," though they could in fact acquire wealth and rise in status.[4] The story the crier celebrates is one of appropriative expansion:

> pour avoir refusé, avec menace de ses flèches, un terrain demandé par Daco-Donou, Agri, le maître du sol, repose, avec son carquois, dans les fondations du Palais construit contre son gré …. Houégbaja, le deuxième roi, songeant à construire une résidence à son héritier, avait essuyé aussi de la part de Dan, autre propriétaire, le refuse d'agrandir sa concession. Dan a subi le même sort qu'Agri dont il a renouvelé l'insolence. Houégbaja nomma Danhomê le nouveau Palais pour signifier qu'il a été édifié sur la dépouille de Dan. (17–18)

> for refusing to give Daco-Donou a piece of land that he had requested and for threatening him with arrows, the local ruler Agri was enterred with his quiver in the foundations of the Palace that was built against his will …. Desiring to construct a residence for his successor, Houégbaja, the second king, also encountered a refusal on the part of another land-holder, Dan, when he sought to enlarge his concession. Dan suffered the same fate as Agri, whose insolence he had repeated. Houégbaja named the new Palace Danhomê to indicate that he had erected it above the last remains of Dan. (3)

Grafted upon this idiom of empire, however, is the dissonant aspiration of the living king, Guézo: "[c]e roi signifiait … sa résolution d'agrandir, lui aussi, territorialement et moralement, le Danhomê de Houégbaja et de l'élever au-dessus

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2 Paul Hazoumé, *Doguicimi*, 2nd ed. (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1978 [1938]), p. 15; *Doguicimi: The First Dahomean Novel (1937)*, p. 1. All further citations will be to these editions and indicated parenthetically.

3 See esp. Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom* (2 vols, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967 [1938]), esp. vol. 1, pp. 194–238; vol. 2, pp. 49–69.

4 Bjornson, Introduction to *Doguicimi*, p. xxii. See Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 1–19, 27–56, and Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey*, pp. 142–4, on the relationship between slaves and citizens in Dahomey. T.C. McCaskie's account of the difference between slave and subject in Asante in *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 88–90, largely parallels Manning's and Argyle's, and is consistent with Lovejoy's general account of slavery, discussed in Chapter 1.

des ordures amassés par le règne précédent" (22) ["this king had announced his resolve to enlarge the Danhomê of Houégbaja in territorial as well as moral terms and to raise it above the muck that had accumulated during the previous reign" (6)].

Guézo, who succeeded to the throne in 1818, was the only king not selected by his predecessor from among his sons, having come to power by deposing the previous ruler, Adandozan, who lost favor with the royal family because of innovations they viewed as neglecting the expectations of the deceased kings and tending to consolidate his own power at the expense of entrenched interests.[5] Though Guézo could only maintain his legitimacy by continuing long-established policies of territorial expansion and ritual sacrifice, he sought, at least as portrayed by Hazoumé, for reasons the narrative only gradually makes clear, to "enlarge the Danhomê" in "moral" as well as in "territorial" terms.

Even as he portrays the hegemonic force of imperial discourse, Hazoumé suggests internal cultural resistance to totalization:

> La familiarité d'époux et les caresses d'épouses prenaient fin avec les nuit. Le roi rendu au Danhomê dès le point du jour devait être vénéré …. Sa volonté, qui pouvait recevoir la nuit toutes sortes de contradictions dans l'intimité de ses épouses, devenait maîtresse avec le jour que se levait. (28)

> The intimacy of spouses and their caresses ended with the night. When the king returned to Danhomê at the beginning of the day, he had to be treated with reverence …. Although his will could brook all sorts of opposition in the intimacy of the marriage bed at night, it became absolute master with the rising of the sun. (10)

The Fon "high God," Mawu-Lisa, combines or counterbalances female attributes in Mawu with male attributes in Lisa. Significantly, the female has precedence:

> Mawu, the elder, the woman and mother, is gentle and forgiving. Lisa, the male, the younger one, is robust and ruthless. During the day when he reigns, men are condemned to toil and strife, to feverishness and anger, for his symbol is heat. But during the night when Mawu reigns, it is cool … [T]hen … the pleasures of life are enjoyed by mankind—dancing and story-telling and love-making. … [I]n Mawu is concentrated the wisdom of the world, and in Lisa its strength.[6]

By underscoring how Dahomean imperialist discourse likens the king to the sun, Hazoumé suggests that it constructs him, and thus the state, as transcendent and irresistible. At the same time, the dualities of Mawu-Lisa, as well as tensions among the other Fon gods, suggest that, from perspectives internal to Fon

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5 On Adandozan and the apparent reasons for his overthrow, see Elisée Soumonni, "The Compatibility of the Slave and Palm Oil Trades in Dahomey, 1818–1858," in Robin Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 78–92, esp. 79–84; Bjornson, Introduction to *Doguicmi*, pp. xxvi; Argyle, pp. 34–8.

6 Herskovits, *Dahomey*, vol. 2, p. 103.

piety and moral education, the ruthless clarity of the imperial gaze is, by itself, inadequate. Pelton notes that Mawu works through intermediaries, especially, paradoxically, the extravagantly phallic trickster god Legba, to reconcile competing forces such as the sky and the earth, to maintain a diverse "family" of gods for whom diversity is both disruptive and a source of strength.[7] Many scholars have pointed out that the unmerged duality of Mawu-Lisa is reflected in the institutional structure of the Dahomean monarchy, where the palace world "doubled" the world of the kingdom, where female officials held offices parallel to those of males, where officeholders of "the right hand" were balanced by officeholders of "the left hand."[8] Typically, different members of a clan would belong to different cults, allowing each god (*vodun*) to be propitiated. Thus, even members of individual clans would have to recognize in each other an othernesss unavailable for assimilation. Pelton notes that in varied accounts of the creation story the strengths of various gods would be emphasized: "The … very coexistence of the variants is a vivid symbol of the successful reconciliation of the gods and their mutual creation of a world fit for humans."[9]

While such acculturation might seem to denaturalize cognitive violence, Hazoumé stresses through the first of many depictions of human sacrifice that the state's "official" discourse celebrated appropriative violence. The Migan (prime minister) brings forth "un captif de guerre aux bras ligotés sur le dos, les poignets joints" (28) ["a prisoner of war whose arms had been tied behind his back with his wrists bound together" (10)]; he makes him kneel "face au mausolée" (28) ["facing the mausoleum" (11)] of Guézo's predecessor Agonglo:

> La large lame du cimeterre de Migan déchira le sombre voile de l'aurore et s'abattit sur la nuque du captif. Sa tête roula à trois pas. Le tronc se redressa et se jeta violemment à terre sur le dos, le corps se tordit, les muscles claquèrent, les talons battirent

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7 See Robert D. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*: *A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 71–112. On imperial expansion and its ideological justification, see Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey*, pp. 1–119, and McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, pp. 37–65, 74–135. For the perspective of those threatened by imperial expansion, see Isidore Okpewho's account of Western Igbo oral literature about the Benin Empire, and his account of the Benin Empire's relations with its Igbo and Yoruba neighbors, in *Once Upon A Kingdom: Myth, Hegemony, and Identity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998).

8 On the prominence of the principles of dualism or counterbalancing forces and powers in Fon thought, see Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, esp. 88–112. For the conceptions of such principles in inside/outside, female/male distinctions in institutional and political life, see Argyle, *The Fon Of Dahomey*, pp. 62–80.

9 Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, p. 75. See Herskovits's discussion of the cultivation of secrecy regarding the stories of origin of Dahomean lineage groups (*Dahomey*, vol. 1, pp. 156–93), and his discussion of the diverse traditions and myths associated with diverse cults for various Fon gods (*Dahomey*, vol. 2, pp. 101–200). Herskovits points out that since different members of the same lineage group would be initiates of different cults, any given lineage would have available the diverse powers of different members of the Fon pantheon.

> frénétiquemont le sol. … Migan tâta le sol au chevet de la victime; puis il apprit au roi: "La figure de l'aurore a été bien lavée; elle ouvrira bientôt la porte au soleil: l'abondance du sang fait augurer une heureuse journée." (28–9)
>
> The [wide] blade of Migan's scimitar rent the somber veil of the dawn and fell upon the nape of the captive's neck. His head rolled three paces away. The trunk jerked erect and threw itself violently backwards unto the ground, where the body writhed, the muscles popped, and the heels beat frantically against the earth. … Migan touched the ground beside the victim's mat; then he informed the king, "the face of the dawn has been washed well; it will soon open the door to the sun—the abundance of blood augurs a felicitous day." (11)

The epic poetry of the "scimitar ren[ding] the somber veil of the dawn" is itself rent by the text's stress upon the materiality that is appropriated: that the head rolls "three paces," that the "trunk jerked erect," that "heels beat frantically" exposes an order of significance, a saying, a somatic marking, before which both the language of imperialism and the language of cultural relativism are found wanting.

As Richard Bjornson and John Erickson note, much of the relatively slight criticism on *Doguicimi* seeks to minimize Hazoumé's ethical assessment of precolonial practices by stressing Hazoumé's Catholicism and his support in the 1930s for the French presence in Africa.[10] By communicating ethical significance through viscerally affective images, however, Hazoumé challenges both racist and "progressive" suggestions that the violence Africans inflicted upon one another was of little importance or could be explained away through some larger "context." Hazoumé's description of the captive's decapitated body exposes the reader to the sensible in Levinas's strict sense by confronting us with an image that undercuts all "placing in perspective," all "official" discourse, onto-theology, and evasion. In *Ethiopia Unbound*, the story the old African woman tells Whitely about the social-climbing Islamic cleric calls for Whitely to recognize his own pandering to the European community's desire for segregated cemeteries. Similarly, Hazoumé's novel calls the reader to an ethical subjectivity anterior to subject-positions, a subjectivity rooted in the corporeality of a subject for whom ethical significance is inescapable. Of course it is possibly to treat such significance, in reading as in life, as an irksome imposition, but to do so is to read the way a sociopath lives.

Hazoumé combines ethical condemnation and cultural explanation. One may ask why the Asante Empire to the east and the Benin Empire to the west should

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10 See Richard Bjornson, "Alienation and Disalienation: Themes of Yesterday, Promises of Tomorrow," in V.Y. Mudimbe (ed.), *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947–1987* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 149–52; Jonathan Ngate, *Francophone French Fiction: Reading a Literary Tradition* (Trenton. NJ: Africa World Press, 1988), pp. 29–30; John D. Erickson, *Nommo: African Fiction in French South of the Sahara* (York, SC: French Literature Publications Company, 1979), pp. 111–30; Paschal B. Kyiiripuo Kyoore, *The African and Caribbean Historical Novel in French: A Quest for Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 33–55.

ritualize violence in similar ways.[11] Hazoumé implies an answer by having the Migan tell the king that since "the face of the dawn has been washed," the "door to the sun" would "soon open." Divine powers, like their human counterparts, live from consuming what is seized. Dahomey's power and prosperity are unimaginable apart from violent accumulation. Both protection and prosperity demand the "practical" naturalization of a cognitive imperialism that, as Hazoumé notes, issues equally in hatred of outsiders and contempt for women.

Stylized, official discourse is extravagantly ethnocentric. Just as the king is "Master of the Universe," so the Mahinou, a decentralized farming people in the mountainous north, are termed "ces viles bêtes de montagnes," "bêtes puantes de Kinglo" (40) ["those vile beasts from the mountains," "the foul beasts of Kinglo" (19)]. Arguing in secret council, the prince Toffa describes white men as "Troncs-blancs" and "immondes bêtes de mer" (42, 41) ["White Bellies" and "foul beasts from the sea" (21, 20)]. Toffa cannot distinguish between legitimate reasons to distrust Europeans—"Seules les personnes qui présenteraient une valeur commerciale ou dont ils pourraient tirer un profit quelconque arrêteraient leur attention" (41) ["They are only interested in people who have a commercial value or from whom some profit can be extracted" (20)]—and disgust at unfamiliar customs: "Le fait pour un homme de vivre avec une seule femme et de se laisser commander par cet être à sept paires de côtes est le signe indiscutable de sa veulerie" (43) ["The fact that a man can live with a single woman and allow himself to be governed by a creature with seven pairs of ribs is indisputable proof of his debility" (22)]. Toffa's ethnocentric misogyny does not prevent him from arguing cogently, however, that Europeans habitually sacrifice principle to interest (40–50/23–6).

The king's response notably transgresses the limits of official discourse: "Chaque pays a ses moeurs et ses coutumes. Si les Blancs veulent critiquer les nôtres, ils y trouveront aussi à reprendre et à notre grande honte" (51) ["Every country has its own customs and manners. If the white men want to criticize ours, they will, to our great shame, find much with which to find fault" (27)]. Unlike Toffa, Guézo is able to place himself imaginatively in the place of the Other, and to acknowledge the role of white men in Dahomey's expansion and in his own ascension:

> [L]eurs armes nous avaient aidés à agrandir ce royaume jusqu'à la mer …. [N]'oubliez pas que la part des Blancs dans notre triomphe fut grande aussi. Les richesses (pagnes, liqueurs, cauris) mises généreusement à notre disposition par l'un d'eux ont grossi le groupe de nos partisans. (52)

> [T]heir weapons helped us extend this kingdom to the sea …. [D]o not forget that the role the white men played in our triumph was also a large one. The wealth in cloth, alcohol, and cowries that one of them generously placed at our disposition swelled the ranks of our supporters. (28)

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11 See McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, pp. 17, 102, 201, 213–14; Okpewho, *Once Upon a Kingdom*, pp. 10–26.

Guézo alludes to the considerable role played by the mixed race slave trader Francisco Felix da Souza. Owed money by Adandozan, who imprisoned him, da Souza was rescued by Guézo, and in return provided European weapons and goods to Guézo and his supporters. Once in power, Guézo placed Da Souza, under the name Chacha Ajinacou, in charge of all European trade.[12] According to Bjornson,

> Chacha … convinced Guézo to channel a good deal of slave labor into large palm-tree plantations in the coastal provinces, a decision that allowed Danhomê to prosper even after the abolition of the international trade in slaves around the middle of the century. In return for the privileges he received from Guézo, Chacha supplied the new king with an enormous number of guns to reequip an army that eventually became the largest … in West Africa.[13]

In Hazoumé's novel, Guézo's relationship with Chacha is emblematic of the king's ability to view Dahomean practices and discourse from the outside.

If Guézo can flexibly see beyond his cultural world, Doguicimi, Toffa's wife, initially identifies absolutely with the subject-position assigned her. Noting Toffa's discontented, she declares,

> Que mon maître se console de ses ennuis en s'en vengeant sur moi, comme il est de règle dans ce Danhomê. … Je suis ta propriété, seigneur, et prête à souffrir tous les supplices qu'il te plairait d'exercer sur moi afin d'oublier tes peines. (69–70)

> Let my master take consolation from his troubles by avenging himself upon me, as is usually done in this Danhomê. … I am your property, my lord, and I am prepared to suffer all the torments it might please you to practice upon me as a means of forgetting your sorrows. (41)

Rather than beating her, Toffa indulges in a diatribe on "la félonie des femmes" (75) ["the faithlessness of women" (45)], for he can only account for the king's reluctance for war through assigning it to the influence of women at the court (75/45). Doguimici replies,

> [I]l n'est pas juste que mon maître … juge toutes les femmes sur l'inconduite de quelques-unes …. Il est absurde aussi le préjugé d'un sexe à sept paires de côtes: l'examen de l'ossuaire empilé dans le Fossé ne permet plus de distinguer, d'une façon infaillible, le sexe des personnes que le cimeterre de Migan a décapitées. (76)

> [I]t is not fair for my master … to judge all women on the basis of several who conducted themselves badly …. The prejudice that one sex only has seven pairs of ribs is equally absurd: the sex of those decapitated by Migan's scimitar can not be accurately determined by an examination of the bone pile in the Ditch. (46)

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12 See Bjornson, Introduction to *Doguicim*i, pp. xxvii–xxix; Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey*, pp. 37–41.

13 Bjornson, Introduction to *Doguicim*i, pp. xxix. Also see Soumonni, "The Compatibility of the Slave and Palm Oil Trades in Dahomey, 1818–1858," pp. 78–92.

Having internalized imperial rhetoric, Toffa is blind to all in Fon culture and daily experience that contests totalization. Paradoxically, by living out with relentless consistency the identity she has been given, Doguicimi becomes, through an escalating series of ordeals, an agent rather than a thing, a heroine rather than a victim. In theme, structure, and manner, Hazoumé's treatment of Doguicimi is remarkably similar to Richardson's treatment of Pamela and Clarissa. Like those English eighteenth-century heroines, Doguicimi answer back to misogynistic tormentors, in part because she takes seriously ideas and values that others only use, in part because she possesses an independent rationality that can "unmask" conventional nonsense.

Doguicimi knows that women do not have seven pairs of ribs, because there is evidence, independent of cultural, linguistic constructions. Moreover, cultural discourse is itself diverse. On the one hand, women are conceived of as inferior because of their (putative) missing ribs; on the other hand, the Dahomey of Guézo's time had female warriors (referred to in the scholarship as "the Amazons"[14]). Doguicimi asks, "Sur les champs de bataille, les femmes le cèdent-elles en héroïsme à leurs maîtres à neuf paires de côtes?" (76) ["On the battlefield, does the heroism of women lag behind that of their masters with nine pairs of ribs?" (46)]. Hazoumé stresses, however, that his heroine's critical rationality has no effect upon the social world she inhabits. From the beginning to the end of the novel, women are called creatures with seven pairs of ribs. The obduracy of imperialistic Dahomean culture is prefigured in the novel's final representation of Toffa: having awakened in the night to find Doguicimi gone, he assumes that she has—of course—been with a lover. In fact, she has been making a sacrifice for his protection. Toffa goes off to war "[t]out à sa rancoeur" (90) ["[c]ompletely absorbed in his rancor" (56)], immured in misogynistic musings.

Spectacle and the Blocking of Progressive Politics

Toffa's reflections mirror the political culture around him. Awaiting the outcome of their attack upon the Mahinou, the royal party is seduced into optimism by a queen, herself Mahinou, singing a song of triumph: "Quelle folie abuse ces immondes bêtes de montagne? / Insensées, pensez-vous pouvoir vaincre le Danhomê?" (100) ["What mania has possessed these wretched beasts of the mountain? / Madmen, do you think you can conquer Danhomê?" (65)]. Hazoumé remarks, "Les ministres déliraient de joie; 'C'est vrai! C'est vrai! le Danhomê de Houégbaja a toujours été invincible!'" ["The ministers were delirious with joy: 'It's true! It's true! The Danhomê of Houégbaja has always been invincible!'"], a boast belied by a Mahinous counter-attack that forces the royal party to beat an ignominious retreat, leaving Toffa and two other notables captive (100–101/66–7). When the army returns to the capital, Migan announces,

14 For accounts of the "Amazons," see Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey*, pp. 63, 86–8.

> Danhomênous, la mauvaise foi des espions que [nous] … avait envoyés pour nous renseigner sur la force de nos ennemis, nous a jetés dans la gueule des bêtes puantes de montagne. Mais grâce à la protection de nos ancêtres et fétiches, ces montagnards n'ont pas pu tirer de leur victoire tous les profits qu'elle leur offrait. (104)

> Danhomênous, the bad faith of the spies, who were sent … to gather information about the force of our enemies, delivered us into the jaws of the stinking beasts from the mountain. But thanks to the protection of our ancestors and our fetishes, these mountain people were unable to reap all the profits they have derived from their victory. (69)

Official discourse admits of no errors: there is treachery (the disloyal spies) and delayed triumph, but no outside event can wrest from the inside the configuring of meaning.

Doguicimi, swept away by grief over Toffa's capture, publicly denounces the king, claiming he had become drunk on the idolization that official discourse lavishes upon him (108/71). While the novel presents Doguicimi as mistaken about Guézo personally, it suggests that her characterization of the subject-position of the king is prescient. Hazoumé places in her mouth a prophecy that his 1938 readers might view as having come true: "En expiation de ses crimes, ce pays tombera de la plus haute puissance à la plus basse servitude" (108) ["In expiation for its crimes, this country will fall from the summit of power to the most abject servitude" (71)]. Although Guézo's successor, Glele, enjoyed a long, triumphant reign, his successor, Behanzin, lasted only a few years before the French in 1894 forced him into exile.[15] By suggesting that the "country will fall from the summit of power" "in expiation for its crimes," Doguicimi evokes the historiography of Hebrew scripture, where political failure reflects communal punishment for national ethical failure. Such a reading of politics is consonant with Hazoumé's Catholicism, but also with the view of history offered by "Gassire's Lute." Although Hazoumé may invite his readers to see colonial conquest as "expiation," it does not follow that doing so justifies colonialism: Hebrew prophets could see their people's subjugation as "expiation" without embracing the official stories of the Babylonian and Persian Empires.

The Danhomênous expect Doguicimi to be summarily executed, and they fear for themselves (109/72). Terror turns to bloodlust as the crowd demands that Doguicimi be struck down, but the king refuses on grounds that her words "sont … suggérées par la douleur d'une femme qui idolâtre son mari" (111) [are "prompted by the grief of a woman who idolizes her husband" (73)]. In pardoning Doguicimi, Guézo seems to acknowledge loyalties that contest totalizing state power, which makes incongruous his presiding over the "great traditional celebration" honoring the previous kings. Hazoumé's portrayal is consistent with McCaskie's account of the similar Asante *odwira* festival: spectacle articulates an "official" history of triumphant violence.[16]

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15 See Argyle's accounts of the reigns of Glele and Behanzin, *The Fon of Dahomey*, pp. 44–54.

16 See McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante*, pp. 144–242.

State power is articulated upon the body in spectacle, just as Foucault describes the execution of Damiens; the body is "made" and "unmade" in rhetorical gestures that Elaine Scarry's analysis of torture as ideological inscription has elaborated.[17] A prisoner is obliged to flatten himself

> docilement dans la pouissière … la tête vers le pays "nago", les membres écartés. D'un coup de massue, le victimaire cassa un bra à la victime, puis le second, une jambe ensuite, l'autre à la fin. (134)

> in the dust, his head toward "nago" [Yoruba] country and his limbs spread out. With the blow of a large club, the sacrificial priest broke one of the victim's arms, then the other one, then one of his legs, and finally the other one. (90)

Migan declares, "Tous les Nagonous, ennemis du Danhomê, sont incapables de prendre des armes pour combattre le royaume … durant nos fêtes" (134) ["All Nagonous, enemies of Danhomê, are incapable of taking up arms to fight against the kingdom … during our celebrations" (90–91)].

Through ethnographic detail, Hazoumé reveals the thoroughness with which the Other was fashioned into aestheticized objects of imperialistic rhetoric:

> Il était réjouissant le spectacle des "chiens sacrificés": dix Mahinous décapités à l'aurore, suspendus par les pieds largement écartés de fortement liés à une longue potence que supportaient deux poteaux! … Les mouches de toutes grosseurs et de toutes couleurs jouaient de la musique autour des "chiens sacrificés" et qui ne portaient même pas une simple ceinture. (152–3)

> The spectacle of the "sacrificial dogs" was edifying: ten Mahinous who had been decapitated at dawn were hanging upside down with their feet spread apart and firmly attached to a long pole suspended between two posts! … Flies of all colors and sizes were playing a sonorous melody around the "sacrificial dogs," who were not even wearing a simple belt. (104)

As with the dawn sacrifice, Hazoumé's prose communicates ethical condemnation. The echo of "joy and enjoyment" in "réjouissant" and "jouaient" links aestheticizing dehumanization and appropriative exploitation. The reaction of the Danhomênous reveals identification with the flies who blanket

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17 See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), pp. 3–69; Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). For accounts of hegemonic textual inscription upon the body, and resistance to such inscription, see esp. Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). Behind such studies lies the assumption, deriving especially from work affiliated with Stephen Greenblatt and Stuart Hall, that culture is appropriated by the state for the purpose of hegemonic inscription. For a representative argument, see David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

> les bras, les troncs et les jambes des cadavres et guettaient le moment où s'éloigneraient leurs compagnes repues. Lassées d'attendre, celles qui n'avaient pas encore goûté aux mets fonçaient sur les gourmandes et les bousculaient. Presque toujours un troisième larron s'installait à la place de celles qui se disputaient. (153)

> the arms, legs, and torsos of the dead bodies, watching impatiently for the moment when their satiated companions would leave. Tired of waiting, those who had not yet tasted the various dishes swooped down upon the gluttons and began to harass them. Nearly always a third pillager installed himself at the place over which the others were fighting. (104)

Just as the flies are "larrons," "pillagers," so the Danhomênous anticipate feeding like flies ("les gourmandes") upon the king's plunder:

> "Si, aux mouches, le Père des Richesses offre dix cadavres, quelles ripailles et quelles libations ne réserve-t-il à ses sujets pendant les sept journées de fête qui se suivront sans interruption!" Cette pensée remplissait les Danhomênous de joie. (153)

> "If the Father of Wealth offers ten cadavers to the flies, what lavish feasts and libations he must be reserving for his subjects during the seven days of uninterrupted celebrations!" That thought filled the Danhomênous with joy. (104)

In order to configure themselves as grateful beneficiaries of the triumphant state, the Danhomênous must assign themselves the subject-positions of clients structurally parallel to, but more privileged than, the flies. But the cultural fiction that the Other man is non-human is belied by his access to language. In the procession of captives, "[u]n 'cheval' dit à son porteur," ["[a] 'horse' said to the man carrying him,"] that he would like to address the king. In response, he is told, "Ferme la bouche, bête puante de montagne" (159) ["Shut your mouth, stinking beast of the mountain" (108–9)], but the prisoner creates such a disturbance that he wins the opportunity to sing, "Mais suis-je un bélier / Pour être immole?" (159) ["But am I a ram / To be sacrificed?" (109)]. While the "présidente de l'orchestre royal" (160) ["leader of the royal orchestra" (109)] immediately improvises a parody of the Mahinou's lament and the Migan later devises a gag to prevent such disruptions, Guézo seems to acknowledge the question's justice, ordering the captive spared and commanding his retinue to pick up his lament (160/109). Nonetheless, the best the king can do is moderate bloodlust. When the Migan wants to sacrifice captive Mahinou children, Guézo, in "une grande colère" ["furiously angry"], orders the "victimaire de faire rebrousser chemin à ces innocents" (167) ["the executioner to send back these innocents" (114)].

After the king distributes booty and receives elaborate homage (167–71/115–17), after song and dance celebrates the state's power (172–8/118–24), the queens demand that Doguicimi be struck down, noting,

> C'est une infime minorité de Danhomênous qui sacrifie pour Mawou. Tandis qu'ils sont légion ceux qui comblent "Lêgba" d'offrandes. Pour ce peuple adorateur de la force, la bonté est de la faiblesse et le faible est méprisé. (180)

> No more than a tiny minority of Danhomênous sacrifice to Mawou [Mawu], whereas those who heap offerings upon Legba are legion. For a people which worships power, kindness is a sign of weakness, and the weak are despised. (125)

Guézo argues that Doguicimi "incarne le courage et l'audace, les plus hautes vertus aux yeux de ce peuple" ["incarnates courage and audacity, the highest virtues in the eyes of the people"]: executing her would imply that the nation no longer honors "la force, le courage et l'audace qui l'avaient créé" (187–8) ["the power, courage, and audacity that created it" (131)]. In effect, Guézo suggests that if "official" discourse does indeed acquire a monopoly over not only the words but also the thoughts of the people, it will produce a nation of craven time-servers.

In private conversation with his heir, the Vidaho, Guézo puts Doguicimi forward as a model for the kind of citizens he would produce: "Puisque l'anoblissement de l'âme de ce peuple ne tient pas moins à coeur à nos ancêtres que l'agrandissement du Danhomê, ma vie se vouera à ces deux programmes" (223) ["Since the ennoblement of this people's soul is no less dear to the hearts of our ancestors than is the aggrandizement of Danhomê, my life shall be consecrated to the attainment of these two goals" (157)]. Ironically, Vidaho comes to desire Doguicimi because he recognizes that the king values her; however, his desire places her within the very imperialistic frameworks the king warns him against:

> Son august Père … venait de lui révéler … [that her rebukes] étaient l'indice du courage …. Plusieurs fois dans la journée, l'image de Doguicimi se présentait à son esprit …. "Elle est le courage personnifié …. Qui a le bonheur de la posséder ne peut plus rien désirir. … L'on ne peut que gagner dans le commerce de cette femme: dans les moments de défaillance, on puisera auprès d'elle l'energie, le courage, la persévérance …. Le fils qui naîtra de Doguicimi pour un roi réunira toutes les vertus requises pour acheter le Danhomê et l'agrandir par des conquêtes. (224–5)

> His august Father … had just revealed to him that [Doguicimi's outburst] was a sign of courage …. Many times a day the image of Doguicimi appeared to his mind's eye …. "She is courage personified …. Whoever has the good fortune to possess her could desire nothing more. … One could only benefit from being with this woman: in moments of weakness, one would draw energy, courage, and perseverance from this woman's presence …. The sons Doguicimi bore to a king would unite all the qualities needed to acquire Danhomê and to enlarge it through conquest. (159–60)

Doguicimi becomes, in Lacanian terms, the Other who is the metaphor of the Thing anchoring meaning and value.[18] Vidaho values Doguicimi as an agent of empire (her sons would be great conquerors) and he wants to assimilate Doguicimi's virtues into himself, just as the kingdom draws slaves from its frontiers and the capital draws wealth, labor, and harem girls from the countryside. In

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18 See esp. Lacan's discussion of courtly love poetry in the context of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992).

feminist terms, reading Doguicimi as a "sign" has the positive value of allowing a woman to be the bearer of qualities that command respect. However, the desired Other that Vidaho makes of Doguicimi is a narcissistic self-image. In his erotic obsession with the personification of "masculine" virtues, Vidaho reveals not only desire to assume his father's place, but also the kind of psychic economy structured by love of the Same that Irigaray characterizes as "hom(m)osexuality."[19]

While the king regrets not having chosen Doguicimi as a wife, he entertains no thought of possessing her. Vidaho, by contrast, schemes to seduce her. He recruits a princess, Noucounzin, to get Doguicimi to believe that he can use his influence to rescue Toffa. This allows him to gain entry into Doguicimi's house, where he proposes that she become one of his wives. Like Richardson's Clarissa, Doguicimi shows herself impervious to flattery, but whereas Clarissa identifies above all with abstract qualities such as virtue or honor, Doguicimi defines herself by absolute devotion to a man the reader knows to be undeserving of her idealization.

Like Lovelace, Vidaho raises to an epic level the refusal to take no for an answer.

He tries flattery and social bribery (256/183), attempts to place love potions in her food, and threatens retribution (258–9/185–6), all to no avail. Finally, he contrives to destroy Doguicimi socially. A spy sent by the king to Mahi country, Zanbounou, secretly visits Doguicimi and tells her that, in exchange for the skull of a chief captured in the ill-fated attack on the Mahinous, he will intercede on Toffa's behalf. Doguicimi knows that she can obtain the skull from Vidaho, but also knows the likely price would be to consent "à perdre [s]on honnêteté" (273) ["to renounce [her] honesty" (197)]. To her surprise, he gives her the skull without condition, which she gives to Zanbounou (275–6/199). Upon his return, Zanbounou gives Doguicimi a flattering account of Toffa's impatience to be reunited with her, but professes to be worried about being double-crossed, and so demands that Doguicimi enter into a blood-oath with him, which would involve ritual nudity and, as Zanbounou notes, "Pour terminer, nous nous démontrerons que nous ne saurions rien refuser à un 'frère' ou à une 'soeur' par le pacte" (279) ["In the end we will show each other that there is nothing we can refuse to a 'brother' or a 'sister' of the pact" (202)]. Doguicimi refuses, believing that Toffa's "noblesse d'âme" ["nobility of . . . soul"] would lead him to approve of her choice of honor even at the cost of his life (286/202). Doguicimi does not know that Zanbounou is Vidaho's tool. As with similar scenes in Richardson, the heroine must draw upon her capacity to see through sophistry. Doguicimi reflects,

> Me prostituer? … Ah! mes ancêtres! … Quelle faute insoupçonnée de moi faites-vous expier? … Le Destin a bien des secrets pour nous, simples humains, mais mon esprit se refuse à admetter cette infamie comme l'expiation de fautes commises dans une vie antérieure! (284)

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19 See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), esp. pp. 98–112 and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), esp. 170–97.

> Prostitute myself? … Ah, my ancestors! … What unsuspecting offense are you obliging me to expiate? … Destiny conceals many secrets from us simple mortals, but my mind refuses to admit that such infamy could serve to expiate crimes committed in some former life! (205)

For the second time, Doguicimi introduces the concept of expiation, which follows from the idea, intrinsic to Fon piety, that we must make up for any occasion when we fall short of the ancestors' expectations of us, but she gives the notion an ethical sense not necessarily implied by the patron–client model for relations among ancestors and the living. While resisting transgressions she cannot imagine either Toffa or the ancestors would want, Doguicimi seeks to reconcile herself with Zanbounou by offering him her adolescent maid, the exemplary moral and loyal Evêmon, in marriage, but only after she has assured herself that both genuinely desire and value one another (285–6/207–8). The queens and princesses, angered at the way Doguicimi's conduct reflects upon their own, conspire to create an "official" story that Doguicimi has procured Evêmon for Zanbounou (298–9/216–17), which leads to her arrest by Migan's men, during which it is discovered that she has a flask of mercury. Taken before the king, Doguicimi is accused by an obviously terrified Zanbounou of stealing the skull, drugging him into compliance, and plotting to poison the king (306–9/224–6).

As with the traditional celebrations, spectacle is contrived to inscribe an "official" truth. For reasons of state, the king presides over injustice. He can prevent a sentence of execution or forced prostitution, but he must offer the sadistic crowd a flogging. Migan lashes Doguicimi with a switch soaked in hot pepper sauce (319/233). Chained in the filth and darkness of the state prison, Doguicimi is visited by Vidaho: "Le remords le torturait. L'épouse de Toffa vit dans la tristesse du prince plutôt la compassion que le malheur a toujours suscitée dans toute âme sensible" (328) ["He was tormented with remorse. Toffa's wife interpreted the prince's sadness more as the compassion that suffering invariably provokes in any sensitive soul" (240)]. Fearing rape in prison, Doguicimi is tempted to yield to avoid violation: "Mais une voix intérieure lui rappela aussitôt sa dernière conversation avec son époux. … Sa chute ne confirmerait-elle pas le préjugé de Toffa sur les femmes qu'il nommait des escargots, des chiennes, que sait-elle encore?" (336) ["But an inner voice immediately reminded her of her last conversation with her husband. … Wouldn't her fall merely confirm Toffa's prejudice against the women whom he called snails, bitches, and who knows what else?" (246)]. Doguicimi begins to see herself, as the king and the Vidaho have come to see her, as a sign, but not of the courage of Dahomey, rather of the integrity of women.

In her single-minded focus upon being reunited with Toffa or, failing that, impressing him in the other world, Doguicimi lacks Clarissa's preachiness and Pamela's tendency to parade her humility, but she also falls short of the ethical universalism she at times seems to intuit. In the same notably long chapter in which Hazoumé describes Doguicimi's persecution, he recounts the reception of an English delegation. When Doguicimi hears of the delegation, she views it only in terms of its possible effect upon rescuing Toffa (356/261).

The delegation is received with song and spectacle because the people perceive it initially as a means of obtaining weapons for more conquest (363–4/266–7). But at the palace, the head of the delegation delivers a speech that infuriates his audience:

> Il est dans les moeurs du Danhomê des coutumes contraires au droit sacré de tout homme à la vie et à la liberté; j'ai nommé l'odieux sacrifice humain et l'inique esclavage. … On nomme pillage le fait d'enlever de force à autrui les fruits de son labeur. … Une grande partie des captifs est vendue comme un bétail. … L'homme est né libre et c'est une injustice de la réduire en esclavage; la vie humaine est sacrée et c'est un odieux crime de la supprimer sans raison légitime. (369–72)

> Among the traditions of Danhomê are customs that contravene the rights of all men to life and liberty, namely the odious practice of human sacrifice and the iniquitous one of slavery. … The act of forcibly depriving others of the fruits of their labors is called pillage. … A substantial number of captives are sold like cattle. … Man is born free, and it is an injustice to reduce him to slavery; human life is sacred, and it is a heinous crime to extinguish it without legitimate reason. (271–3)

Hazoumé makes clear that Europeans now view themselves as knowing that wealth-creation through direct violence is backward. After having encouraged an Atlantic slave trade that contributed mightily to the West's enrichment, Europeans came to hold Africans in contempt for clinging to practices from which the West over a period of centuries drew enormous benefit at the expense of Africa. In his 1863 account of a subsequent British mission, Sir Richard Burton notes that "the more sanguine declare that the great slave port might, if she pleased, export 10,000 tons of palm oil … per annum."[20] The "if she pleased" indicates how to Burton it seemed that only bloodlust could account for Dahomey's resistance to British demands. Hazoumé underscores the unconscious mingling of idealism and exploitation in the mission he describes by having its head conclude,

> Quand le Danhomê repentant aura retrouvé sa prosperité, il devra faciliter le commerce aux Glincis surtout, diminuer les taxes qui leur sont imposées, leur accorder la liberté de circuler dans tout le royaume … donner … la préférence à leurs merchandises. (373)

> When a repentant Danhomê regains its prosperity, it will have to facilitate trade, especially with the Glincis [English], decrease the taxes that are imposed on them, allow them to circulate freely throughout the kingdom … and give preference to their merchandise. (274)

Rather than replying to the speech, the court serves refreshments, provided by beautiful young girls:

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20 Sir Richard Burton, *A Mission to Gelele King of Dahome*, ed. C.W. Newbury (New York and Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966 [1864]), p. 44.

> Chez toutes ces jeunes filles, l'orgueil de voir braqués sur elles de gros yeux d'envie, même des jeunes princesses, l'espoir aussi de pouvoir rapeller, au soir de leur vie, que dans leur jeunesse, leur beauté les avait fait distinguer et qu'elles avaient été désignées à l'honneur de servir à table … épanouissaient leurs figures. (374–5)
>
> The faces of all the young girls, even those of the young princesses, beamed in the pride of seeing eyes bulging with desire fixed upon them and in the hope as well of being able to remember, in the evening of their lives, how they had been singled out for their beauty and how they had been chosen for the honor of serving refreshments. (274)

After they leave, men enter, placing trays before their guests upon which rest the severed heads of the girls.

> Sur toutes ces têtes coupées, les faces conservaient encore une apparence de vie et montraient éloquemment quel avait été … l'attitude suppliante de ces innocentes victimes. … Une bouche s'ouvre, la langue en sort, remue, rentre et ressort: cette enfant continue à crier. On ne l'entend plus, mais on la comprend: elle crie son innocence, elle crie son droit à la vie, elle implore pitié pour sa jeunesse. (376)
>
> On all the severed heads, faces still retained the appearance of life, eloquently revealing what had been the imploring expressions of these innocent victims …. A mouth opens, the tongue emerges, moves about, goes back inside, and reemerges; the child continues to cry. She can no longer be heard, but she is understood; she is proclaiming her innocence, her right to life, and imploring pity for her youth. (275)

Hazoumé again communicates through somatically marked images. At the very moment of showing, in a manner consistent with Hayford's critique of colonial Christianity, how the putative ethical universalism that circulated within European discourse was compromised by ethnocentric ideology and exploitative commercial interests, Hazoumé uses the court's manner of rejecting that discourse to expose the reader to the disruptive authority of ethical significance.

There is no suggestion that Europeans are "better" than Africans, or that their rhetorical ethical universalism grants them moral superiority. After the English delegation departs in horror, Guézo reflects that he, like his father before him, seeks "l'adoucissement des moeurs de ce peuple" (379) [to "temper the customs of this people" (278)]. Speaking only to himself, Guézo notes, "Vous me reprochez avec véhémence la traite des esclaves! Mais n'est-ce pas vous … qui en avez donné l'idée et le goût à ce pays?" (379) ["You vehemently reproach me for trading in slaves! But didn't you … (all the European powers) introduce the idea and develop a taste for it in this country?" (278)]. Writing on Igbo history, Elizabeth Isichei observes,

> The long centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade had created patterns of behaviour which did not cease to exist when the external stimulus which created them died. …

> Capturing slaves was easier, more exciting, and more profitable than squeezing palm oil by hand or cracking thousand upon thousands of palm kernels.[21]

Both Hazoumé and Isichei suggest that once "a taste" is developed for slavery, it acquires a hold over people exceeding strictly economic interests. As the sadistic aestheticism of beheading the young girls indicates, there is a thrill in unconstrained self-assertion, in reducing another to a thing.

Good intentions, moreover, can make matters worse. In his imaginary dialogue with the English, Guézo notes that he too wanted to find "le moyen de restreindre le sacrifice humain," ["a means to curtail human sacrifices,"] but the sacrifices "ont leur origine dans notre croyance à la survie" ["trace their origins to our belief in the afterlife"] and so lie at the heart of cultural identity. By attacking tradition so ethnocentrically, the English ensure a backlash (380/278). Indeed, it appears that the number of human sacrifices increased under Guézo's successor, apparently in part in response to European demands that it cease.[22] Guézo portrays himself as forced to sacrifice the girls to avoid greater bloodshed, including the beheading of the delegation. His monologue implies that he finds himself trapped between the imperialistic bloodlust of the court on the one hand and imperialistic encroachments by the West on the other.

In a meditation that Hazoumé acknowledges to be improbable (509/382), Doguicimi reflects that if Dahomey must be colonized, it would be better done by the French, who "sympathisent avec les humbles" (397) [have "compassion for the humble" (290)], as opposed to the self-interested English. Distinguishing the English from the French, Hazoumé is able to contrast a bad European colonization (based on Eurocentric condescension and economic exploitation) with an idealized good one. While accommodating himself to the 1938 conditions of French publication, Hazoumé also articulates an ideal against which the realities of French colonialism could be, and were in his journalistic, political writings, measured.[23] Through Doguicimi, Hazoumé suggests that if there must be European colonialism, it should respect indigenous culture and the "merveilles de l'âme et de l'esprit que ses ancêtres ont accumulées" ["marvelous intellectual

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21 Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1976), p. 95.

22 On evidence that human sacrifices increased under Glele, see Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey*, pp. 50–51; for a contemporary description of the traditional celebration under Glele, see Burton, *Mission to Gelele*, pp. 200–53.

23 On Hazoumé's views of French colonialism, see Bjornson, Introduction to *Doguicimi*, pp. xix-xxi. Erickson also notes that Doguicimi was accused of apologizing for French colonialism, but he notes how the text portrays the West's role in cultivating a "taste" for power and materialism that corrupted indigenous virtues (see *Nommo*, pp. 112, 125–6). Kyoore argues that colonialist and anticolonialist impulses shape Hazoumé's novel (see *The African and Caribbean Historical Novel in French*, pp. 33–55). Consistent with the argument presented here that *Doguicimi* provides an ethical critique of the complicity of ethnocentrism and egocentrism in any imperialistic culture is Bjornson's observation that Hazoumé's favorite proverb was "the injustice that my brother does to my enemy makes me the enemy of my brother" (*Doguicimi*, p. xxi).

and spiritual gifts that their ancestors have cultivated"] by undoing the material, moral, and psychological effects of the slave trade:

> Votre societé a imposé à nos grands-pères une nouvelle vie et placé la puissance de l'argent et la supériorité de la civilisation matérialle au-dessus de leurs préoccupations qui étaient exclusivement d'ordre moral. (397–8)

> Your society imposed a new sort of life on our grandfathers, while elevating money and material well-being to the top of their preoccupations, which had until then been exclusively moral in nature. (291)

Doguicimi suggests that the stylized, "official" story, correlated to the rise of a slave-trading empire, is itself a reflection of Western corrupting influence, effacing or distorting earlier humane values. An ideal colonialism would reconnect the people with their genuine traditions (402/294).

Writing in the colonial context of the late 1930s, Hazoumé suggests that the exploitative and bloody pre-colonial practices that his own ethnographic research disclosed were "imposed" upon Dahomey by the temptations of the Atlantic slave trade, so that Europeans bore responsibility for the very circumstances that their colonialism presented itself as "rescuing" Africans from. Such a message powerfully contests the racism of the 1930s and usefully reminds Hazoumé's European readers of their societies' complicity in the state-sponsored violence his novel depicts. Current historiography, however, complicates this picture. Although there is disagreement about the extent to which the Atlantic trade "transformed" slavery within Africa (Lovejoy suggests that treatment of slaves became increasingly worse; Thornton questions whether the available evidence supports a strong "transformation" thesis), there is agreement that while the Atlantic trade undoubtedly stimulated state-sponsored violence and demographic decimation in localized areas and societies (especially the West African regions dominated by Asante, Dahomey, Benin, and the Yoruba Oyo Empire), slavery was integral to economic life and political power both before and after the Atlantic trade.[24]

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24 On the "transformation" thesis, see Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. xx–xxii, 9–12, 276–89; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 43–125, esp. 98, 102–3 and *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). On the demographic impact of the slave trade, see Lovejoy, *Transformation of Slavery*, 2nd ed., pp. 62–7; John Thornton, "The Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Angola: Effects on Demographic Structures," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 14, 3 (1980): 417–27; Patrick Manning, "The Enslavement of Africans: A Demographic Model," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 15, 3 (1981): 499–526. On pre-Atlantic trade, see Lovejoy, *Transformations of Slavery*, 2nd ed., pp. 1–45; Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, pp. 43–97; Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 47–73.

Hazoumé's claim that prior to the Atlantic slave trade, the preoccupations of Africans were "exclusivement d'ordre moral" is not consistent with present-day research and interpretation. The claim rather reflects a desire, akin to Hayford's and equally understandable as a response to European racism, to identify an unproblematic, idealized African past with which one could oppose racist caricatures and dismissals. Whereas Hayford locates this unproblematic past in pre-colonial times in general, Hazoumé locates it in pre-Atlantic trade times, which allows him to explore material and cultural life in ways Hayford can not, ways that implicitly call attention to pre-colonial roots of colonial-era class and gender distinctions within particular African communities.

No sooner does Hazoumé sketch his ideal of a "good" colonialism than he calls its likelihood into question. Doguicimi lapses back into hatred of the other, making no distinctions among white men: "Elle n'établissait plus de distinction: elle ne voyait que de viles bêtes de mer qui étaient cause de son malheur" ["She no longer had any preferences; she only saw the vile beasts from the sea who were the cause of her unhappiness"] by delaying "la campagne projeté pour délivrer son époux, prisonnier des Mahinous" (403) ["the planned expedition to liberate her husband, a prisoner of the Mahinous" (295).] That such a long chapter ends with a reiteration of the complicity between ethnocentrism and egocentrism suggests how acutely Hazoumé was aware of all the historical and psychological forces allied against the visionary future he "fancie[s]" (509/382) his heroine might briefly entertain.

No Exit: The Nightmare of Nineteenth-Century Pre-Colonial History

For all the king's good intentions, political pressure from the court ensures incessant warfare. Spies are sent into Mahi country, not only for intelligence but also to plant gris-gris that will render Mahi fetishes impotent. Hazoumé relates how the Mahi have relaxed their defenses:

> Aussi, à l'aurore de cette grande saison humide, la huitième depuis cette injuste agression des Danhomênous qui avait pieteusement échoué, tout Hounjroto s'était-il vidé, comme d'habitude, dans les champs où le labourage et les semailles absorbaient toute l'activité de ce peuple de cultivateurs. (426)
>
> Thus, at the beginning of this long rainy season—the eighth since that unjust aggression on the part of the Danhomênous had failed so abysmally—all Hounjroto had, as usual, abandoned the city for the fields, where this agricultural people was completely absorbed in tilling the soil and sowing seeds. (313)

The text shifts from echoing Dahomean ethnocentric discourse to echoing Mahi ethnocentric discourse, even as it portrays an aged Mahinou's, Dêê's, warning that the Dahomeans are returning. Like Cassandra, he is ignored, significantly because his fellow Mahinous dismiss him as a marginalized Other: "Mon avis est qu'on assigne à tous ces corps séniles une colline d'où ils ne descendraient que

pour rejoindre leurs sepultures" (429) ["My opinion is that all these decrepit old bodies ought to be relegated to a hill, which they would only descend in time to fall into their graves" (315)]. The image of death as descent, falling into graves, recalls the Danhomênous' mode of sacrificing Mahinous, just as Dêê's singing a song, describing how youths brought ruin to the land by inducing the king to kill all the "useless" old people (435–4/320–29), recalls how the Mahi "horse" sang before the king. By giving the reader an example of Mahi oral literature, Hazoumé stresses the moral culture of the "beasts" so despised by the Dahomeans, even as he shows the poignant inability of that discourse to disrupt habituated egotism (444–6/330–31).

A brutal punishment for cultural arrogance follows. The Dahomeans attack at dawn, setting huts on fire (449/333). As with the descriptions of slave raiding in *Shaihu Umar*, novelistic details emphasize violence to women and children:

> Quelques mères s'empoignaient violemment les seins et frappaient fortement le sol de leurs pieds en suppliant qu'on daignât sauver leurs enfants qui dormaient encore dans les cases en feu. … Une Mahinou, sortie d'une case avec deux enfants, voulut y retourner pour sauver le troisième. La toiture s'effondra. La femme tomba le tronc dans la case, les pieds au dehors. (450)

> Several mothers were violently grabbing their breasts and stamping their feet on the ground as they implored anyone to please save their children, who were still asleep in the burning houses. … Another mahi woman had just carried two children from a hut and was returning to save the third. The roof collapsed. She fell, her upper body inside the house and her feet outside. (333–4)

The victorious Dahomeans learn that Toffa has long been dead, executed for raising his hand against his captors. When the prisoners are brought in triumph before the people and king, a fellow captive of Toffa's describes his death and the Mahi chief's desecration of his severed skull (474–5/354–5). Learning of her husband's death, Doguicimi immediately declares her resolve to die (476/355). The Vidaho and his allies assume once again that her words are just words. Once again, they have misjudged her (480/359).

Hazoumé returns again to spectacle, in part to reiterate its centrality, in part to suggest that it has become, like slave trading, a "taste" that, like drug addiction, requires larger and larger dosages to remain satisfying. In a theatrical display, Guézo refuses to accede to clamorous demands that he execute Cotovi, the Mahi chief responsible for Toffa's death. Instead, he challenges Cotovi to hand-to-hand combat, but this is hegemonic theater: Cotovi is sickened either with despair or undernourished, while Guézo is slickened with oil (485–7/362–4). Guézo throws him and breaks his back, declaring, "Bête de montagne, va apprendre à mes ancêtres que … Hounjroto a été entièrement consumé" (487) ["Beast of the mountain, go and tell my ancestors … that Hounjroto had been utterly devoured" (364)]. Migan arranges for a "jeune Mahinou" ["young Mahinou"], fitted with a "choke-pear" gag, to be placed on his knees and arms; into his rectum two assistants "avancèrent un pal de six coudées. … La foule trépignait de joie" (488) ["pushed a six-cubit long stake. … The crowd danced with joy" (364–5)].

Elaborating upon this demonstration of power, the Migan promises genocide: "Les Danhomênous vont remplacer les Mahinous et vendre leurs marchandises. … Hounjroto ne sera plus habité" (489) ["Danhomênous shall replace the Mahinous and sell their merchandise. … Hounjroto will no longer be inhabited" (365)].

By concluding the political story on this note, Hazoumé expressed a historical judgment that readers in our time are quite likely to find disturbing. Whether Hazoumé's historical judgment is accurate, whether it is a reasonable inference from all available historical evidence that by the nineteenth century the forms of state-sponsored violence that his novel depicts could not be stopped or significantly reformed by internal cultural and moral sources, is a question that goes beyond the scope of this study. It is a question for historiography, not literary criticism.[25] What can be affirmed is that Hazoumé's historical judgment on this point was one shared by many thoughtful, well-informed Africans of his generation, and of the previous generation. While some who held this view, like Africanus Horton, dismissed pre-colonial culture and history, others, like the Rev. Samuel Johnson (who we will discuss in the next chapters), did not. To understand the prominence of this historical judgment among members of Hazoumé's generation, the generation Achebe proposed to write about in a projected (but never completed) sequel to *Things Fall Apart*, the generation Wole Soyinka celebrates in his memoir about his father, *Isárá: Journeys around "Essay"*,[26] not only helps us understand African narratives that fall between the racialist nationalism of Hayford's 1911 *Ethiopia Unbound* and the anticolonial nationalist fictions of the mid to late 1950s; it also helps us understand the attitudes toward colonialism of African scholars of pre-colonial culture and history such as Johnson and Hazoumé and of the generations whose experience they reflect. Notably, Johnson's generation experienced directly both pre-colonial and colonial rule, and Hazoumé's generation grew up among people whose living memory of pre-colonial times was strong and specific. While certainly not every member of those generations shared the same views, it is perhaps significant that those most emphatic in the conviction that pre-colonial cultures either needed no reform or could achieve any desirable reform through

25 Here, my reading departs from Erickson's, who sees Guézo as a master semiologist, Doguicimi a literalist, and—in a reversal of deconstructive premises Erickson does not pursue—Doguicimi teaches Guézo how to read more wisely (121–2). While this seems plausible, Erickson goes further, presenting in an entirely positive light Guézo's wrestling, and so suggests that "[i]t is not his body alone that is handsome—it is his conscience (or consciousness of rightness) and his humanity. The precedent opens the way for a more humane, enlightened rule, in which customs and tradition will be less harsh" (123). However, Hazoumé's stress upon the theatricality and the unfairness of the wrestling match, to say nothing of the innovative torture imposed upon the young Mahinou, and the fate meted out to the Mahinous generally, suggests that good intentions and private "semiological" insights cannot engender, in the socio-historical world portrayed, the kind of systemic reform that alone could open "the way for a more humane, enlightened rule." Instead, the novel suggests, with considerable regret, only a cataclysm from outside the Dahomean "universe" might do that.

26 See Wole Soyinka, *Isárá: Journeys around "Essay"* (New York: Random House, 1989).

internal cultural resources alone tended to be people, like Blyden and Hayford, who were themselves the products of westernized family and political-economic backgrounds, and whose evocations of pre-colonial society were frequently vague and idealized. By contrast, Johnson and Hazoumé, who lavished enormous scholarly attention upon the details of pre-colonial culture and history, were devout Christians whose views on colonialism, while progressive for their times, would seem to later generations, coming of age in the nationalist context of the 1950s and 1960s, and the postcolonialist contexts thereafter, as compromised, if not inexplicable. Indeed, Achebe's inability to write the projected sequel to *Things Fall Apart* and Soyinka's deferral of imaginative engagement with his father's generation until the late 1980s is consistent with the relative neglect of Hazoumé's novel and other narratives by Africans of his time.

By ending the novel not with political spectacle ritualizing "devouring" the Other, but with Doguicimi's transcendence of communal expectations, Hazoumé suggests, perhaps, that historical judgment is not the last word. At the same time, he does not idealize Doguicimi to the same problematic degree that Richardson idealizes Pamela and Clarissa. Doguicimi participates in what the novel presents as her society's ethical failures. Going before the king, she declares,

> Daigne le Roi Prédestiné se contenter de répandre sur ses grigis le sang de ces Mahinous et d'ordonner que leurs cadavres soient jetés en pâture aux hyénes et aux charognards ou suspendus à toutes les portes de la ville tout comme des "chiens" sacrificés aux fétiches. (494)

> May the Predestined King deign to be satisfied with smearing the blood of these Mahinous on his gris-gris and ordering that their bodies be discarded as fodder for the hyenas and vultures or hung from all the doors of the city just like the 'dogs' that are sacrificed to the fetishes. (369)

Despite this final association of Doguicimi with ethnocentric hatred, Hazoumé stresses her divestment of self in demanding to be buried alive with her husband's skull (494/369). She places an absolute being-for-another ("He must need my attentions") above "this world" and "its pleasures" (499/373). Doguicimi makes her culture's stated values the means for an empowerment and transcendence, the source of an ethical gesture that commands respect independent of either the author's or the reader's assessments of the Dahomean afterlife and that afterlife's gender, class politics. The novel leaves the reader wondering how a society might emerge capable of doing justice to the human potential that Doguicimi, in her best moments, reveals, and wondering how a political culture might develop that would allow the best intentions of Guézo, rather than the imperialistic egotism of Vidaho, to structure institutional, communal, and moral life.

Chapter 4

History, Fable, and Syncretism in Fagunwa's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*

Dancing, Discernment, and Receptivity to the Speech of the Other

Even as Hazoumé was publishing a Francophone novel suggesting that externally stimulated slave trade deformed pre-colonial societies, D.O. Fagunwa was publishing in Yoruba, albeit on the London, Church Missionary Society Press, a seemingly "fantastic" quest-narrative that charts a potential escape from political and psychic impasses similar to those Hazoumé delineates. In *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmule* (1938), translated in 1968 by Wole Soyinka as *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, Fagunwa blends Yoruba concerns about ethical sociability with an intense commitment to Christianity. Although Fagunwa has often been linked with Amos Tutuola, for both rework Yoruba folktales into continuous but episodic prose quest narratives, the thematic and structural centrality of Christianity to their works has been, until recently, little stressed.[1] In contrast to Balewa's *Shaihu Umar*, but expanding upon the ecumenicalism Hazoumé briefly allows Doguicimi to "fancy," Fagunwa and Tutuola suggest that internal convergences between Yoruba and Western moral intuitions yield a reflective, non-colonized syncretism. Far from retreating to some timeless, fantastic realm, Fagunwa's and Tutuola's narratives confront history with an unsparing moral realism even as they sketch in their protagonists' spiritual journeys potential paths to individual and national redemption.

Forest of a Thousand Daemons presents a fictional Yoruba narrator who transcribes the autobiographical discourse of an old man, Akara-ogun. Describing

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1 For discussions linking Fagunwa and Tutuola, see Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 37–66; Viktor Beilis, "Ghosts, People, and Books of Yorubaland," *Research in African Literatures* 18, 4 (1987): 447–57; Abiola Irele, "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer: D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka," in Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 174–97. Olakunle George, in "Compound of Spells: The Predicament of D.O. Fagunwa (1903–63)," *Research in African Literatures* 28, 1 (1997): 78–97, does address Fagunwa's Christianity, arguing that the fatalism of his faith is in conflict with his confidence in secular modernity, hence the "predicament" of George's title. George's essay appears in revised form in Olakunle George, *Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 105–44.

the story as "a veritable *agidigbo*," Yoruba music played on plucked strings upon social occasions, the narrator stresses the work's indirection, and so the need for reasoned judgment: "[A]s men of discerning [*omoran*] … you will yourselves extract various wisdoms from the story as you follow its progress" (7).[2] Indirection notably underlies Ifa divination and the interpretative role of Esu, the Yoruba trickster deity who translates between human and divine speech. For his "dance to be a success," the narrator declares, readers must participate imaginatively in the narrative (7). Fagunwa evokes the participatory responsiveness of oral storytelling, but also the intimacy characteristic of printed words. Indeed, as Richard Darnton notes in studying the transposition of Calvinist hermeneutics into readings of Rousseau's fiction, responsiveness to novels reflects pious habits of reading.[3] Significantly, the Calvinist tradition, through Bunyan, was no less central to Fagunwa's imagination than Yoruba oral literature. Moreover, Fagunwa suggests that by letting another's speech work upon us, we open ourselves to wisdom (*ogbón, imo, oyé*), understanding (*imò, òyé*), prudence (*oyé, ogbón*), and discernment (*iwoyé, imo-iyato*).

Fagunwa's narrator describes the morning of his encounter with Akara-ogun in religious terms evocative of both indigenous and evangelical thought: "[T]he sun rose from the East in God's own splendour …. As for me, I sat in my favourite chair … enjoying my very existence" (8). There is a supreme God in the Yoruba pantheon, Olórun (Owner of Heaven) or Olódùmáre, who, according to N.A. Fadipe, "upholds the moral order of the universe," and to whom numerous proverbs attribute justice, for example, "Fí ijà fún Olórun jà fi owó l'érán," which means, "Commit your cause to God to champion, and rest your chin on your hand in expectation."[4] The evangelical tradition, from which the written Yoruba language derives, associated Olórun with an indigenous "pre-understanding" of the Judeo-Christian God, just as it associated, with much less sense, Esu with the devil.[5] Strikingly, the profound joy of knowing himself anchored in a world constituted by God's goodness allows the narrator to be receptive when

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2 D.O. Fagunwa, *Forest of a Thousand Daemons, A Hunter's Saga*, trans. Wole Soyinka (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 7. All further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically. George points out that Fagunwa's actual word, *ogidigbo*, denotes "a ceremonial drum associated with important communal festivals" (*Relocating Agency*, p. 116), and that *omoran* is ungendered (pp. 121–2).

3 For the revolutionary effect of vicarious emotional intimacy in novelistic discourse, see esp. Robert Darnton's discussion of reading Rousseau in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 215–56, which reveals how giving oneself over to a novelistic text was legitimated by analogy to the modes of giving oneself over to sacred texts encouraged by Calvinism and other forms of Protestantism. George notes that the narrative was originally composed in 1936 for a writing contest organized by Gladys Plummer, a superintendent of education in Nigeria, and that Fagunwa was an elementary schoolteacher (*Relocating Agency*, pp. 109–13).

4 N.A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, ed. Francis Olu. Okediji and Oladejo O. Okediji (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), p. 279.

5 Bernard I. Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero: Preadaptations in Nigerian Economic Development* (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp. 33–4.

Akara-ogun asks him to record his story, as he is "concerned about the future" and fearful that he will die and his story with him (8). The narrative presents itself as a collaborative project between an old man who is a bridge to "a bygone age" (9) and a younger man who is a bridge to modern forms of self-empowerment and self-understanding.

Neither the narrator's nor Akara-ogun's Christianity need be viewed simply as a consequence of colonialism, for Christianity in Yorubaland preceded colonialism by more than half a century. By 1830, "after nearly two centuries of sporadic contacts between Christianity and Yoruba society, contacts became systematic," for many Yoruba, "harvested" by the civil wars that enveloped Yorubaland as the Oyo Empire (the dominant Yoruba polity of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) declined, were sold into slavery, but freed from ships bound for South America by the British, who sent the "recaptives" to Freetown, Sierra Leone, which had been founded as a refuge for freed slaves (hence the name) by the British abolitionist Wilberforce: "Many recaptives saw the Christians as the responsible agents for their freedom, and allies in their attempts for personal enrichment," since the literacy and job training provided by mission schools opened considerable opportunities.[6] In the late 1830s, some recaptives, or "Saros," arranged for ships to return them to Yorubaland, where they settled in Abeokuta, a center for people uprooted by warfare, especially from Egbaland (a region south of Oyo), which had been a tributary to Oyo during the eighteenth century, but which rebelled near the end of the century. According to Egba tradition, "Lisabi, a war-chief of Igbein in the Alake province of Egbaland," led an uprising following "the massacre of the Alafin's [Oyo's king's] representatives who had come to collect the annual tribute, over 600 of whom are said to have been killed."[7]

By the 1830s, power struggles at the center and rebellions at the periphery so weakened the Oyo Empire that it disintegrated, which allowed Fulani control of the northern city of Ilorin, encouraged a Fulani project of spreading Islam to the sea, and gave rise to incessant struggles among diverse Yoruba polities.[8] In 1841, missionaries arrived in Yorubaland, including Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a recaptive,

6 David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change Among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 42.

7 Ibid.; also Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600–c. 1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 138–40, 266–7.

8 On the collapse of Oyo, and Fulani penetration into Yorubaland, see Law, *The Oyo Empire*, pp. 245–99; on the impact of nineteenth-century Yoruba civil wars on everyday life and political order, see Toyin Falola and G.O. Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001); J.D.Y. Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom 1890s-1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 76–86; J.F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Rev. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. Dr O. Johnson (Westport, CN: Negro Universities Press, 1970 [1921]), pp. 188–537.

and a year later Thomas Birch Freeman, who was part African: "In Abeokuta, ties with the missionaries led to British support in the face of an invasion from Dahomey in 1854." Through the efforts of missionaries like Samuel Crowther, who between 1864 and 1877 evangelized "virtually alone in the upper Niger," "most Yoruba towns had a CMS [Christian Missionary Society] mission and a school or hospital, as well as an established connection with international Christianity" by the turn of the century.[9] Discussing the town of Ijesha, J.D.Y. Peel notes that by the 1850s "returnees from Sierra Leone" had established a Christian presence; by 1914 Christians "came to be found in virtually all Ijesha communities of any size," and as of 1974, 86.3 percent of the population described themselves as Christian.[10]

The receptivity of the Yoruba to conversion has of course multiple explanations, including quite mundane ones. Dislocations occasioned by nearly a century of civil war certainly contributed, for Yoruba religion was tied to diverse "ancestral cities." Laitin notes that "ancestral city" in a Yoruba context refers to

> the city in which a Yoruba traces his family origins after the conquests of today's Yorubaland by the descendants of Oduduwa, the mythical founder of the Yoruba people. The Yoruba word for city, *ilu*, like *polis* in Greek, connotes "community' and is the root of the Yoruba word for politics, *iselu*. … An *ilu* is an aggregate of corporate descent groups or lineages (*idile*) that has an organized government of king (*oba*) and chiefs.[11]

According to traditions, which varied among polities,

> Oduduwa's descendants eventually spread out across the savannah and into the forest, founding imperial outposts. … In each of the cities founded by the descendants of Oduduwa, Yoruba traditions suggest that the conquering band incorporated many indigenous peoples into their social and political system. Yoruba, the language of Ile-Ife, became the language of the conquered cities; as did reverence for the tradition of Oduduwa, which formed the basis of a complex and theologically rich religion.[12]

Through the migrations occasioned by the nineteenth-century wars, cities of "multi-ethnic" Yoruba refugees such as Abeokuta became new claimants to imperial power, to the legacy of Oduduwa. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith note that as a result of the 1858–1862 Ijaye-Ibadan war, Ijaye was

> effectively eliminated. The ambitions of the Ijebu-Ode people and the Egba were to see that Ibadan did not become too powerful by increasing its power outside those areas. In particular, [they wished] to eliminate Ibadan's most important and most direct access to the coast. … The two invading armies met outside Makun …. They laid seige to it in leisurely style, but within six weeks … the people opened their gates

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9 Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, pp. 42–3, 44.
10 Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, pp. 166, 164.
11 Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, p. 109.
12 Ibid., p. 111; also see Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, pp. 3–25.

> to avoid being starved out. Soon, prisoners of war were reported arriving in Abeokuta slave markets. The allies occupied Makun and made it their principal base. … Then the core of their armies moved to Iperu, a town friendly to the allies and whose rulers had invited them in.[13]

Under such conditions, the forms of identity associated with ancestral cities came to seem increasingly unreal.[14]

As *Shaihu Umar* suggests, a socio-political world marked by vulnerability to violent dispossession tends to increase the appeal of religions that cannot be shaken by this-worldly calamities. Peel observes,

> It is easy to suppose how out-migration might serve to estrange a person from a religion much of whose meaning and power had to do with the concerns and environment of home …. But this cannot explain their eagerness to propagate their new religion at home or their ability to persuade others there.

He argues that one common explanation Yoruba informants offered for conversion, that it was "'because of civilization (*nitori olaju*)' … really indicate[s] no more than that by then Christianity had become a mass movement, able to assign meaning because it was deemed to possess power."[15] Fagunwa's narrative suggests, however, that receptivity to Christianity and concern about civilization could derive from less crass motives. The narrator's ability to enjoy a beautiful morning in peace is contrasted with the world evoked by Akara-ogun:

> My name is Akara-ogun, Compound-of-Spells, one of the formidable hunters of a bygone age. My own father was a hunter. … It was the spirits who guarded the house when he was away, and no one dared enter that house when my father was absent …. But deep as he was in the art of the supernatural, he was no match for my mother, for she was a deep seasoned witch from the cauldrons of hell. … She became so ruthless in her witching, that … before the year was out, eight of my father's children were dead and three of his wives had gone the same way. Thus was I left the only child and my mother the only wife. (9)

Fagunwa presents "a bygone age," the pre-colonial world, as marked by violence from without (the threat that someone will invade the house) and violence from within (the wife's witchcraft). Noting "the glorification of various antisocial, even anarchic heroes" in Yoruba hunters' poetry (*ijala*), Isidore Okpewho argues that "reckless terrorism was condoned, even applauded, as the inevitable way to survive in those precarious days when nation-states were in the infancy of formation, and the machinery of social control had not been fully formed or recognized."[16]

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13 Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*, pp. 111–12.

14 Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, p. 114.

15 Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, pp. 167, 168.

16 Isidore Okpewho, *Once Upon A Kingdom: Myth, Hegemony, and Identity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 47–8.

Okpewho reads a West Igbo folktale about a hunter being weaned away from misogynistic instincts by a cunning wife in the context of how

> in heroic myth the union of the man of action and a woman marks the termination of the heroic life …. The hunter … is being prepared by the beneficent lady for a more cultivated role, that of rescuing the community (with his two sons) and settling it under a properly constituted civic authority.[17]

In Akara-ogun's account, however, the wife discloses how much the rapaciousness of the bush has infiltrated the "settled," "civic" world of home, which suggests that, in Fagunwa's view, pre-colonial state formation did little to diminish unpredictable violence. Toyin Falola and Akanmu Adebayo note that in the Oyo Empire of the late eighteenth century,

> citizens were subjected to … much cruelty by a handful of authoritarian leaders. It was in this era that many slaves were sold into the Atlantic systems. Commoners' wives and property were appropriated openly, and young women were debauched at puberty. … Oyo at this time offered an extreme case of the coarseness of life in Yorubaland, but the crisis in the social stratification produced far-reaching consequences.[18]

Akara-ogun's story begins with the failure of his parents' marriage to exchange virile self-sufficiency for sociable, "civilizing" influences.

Akara-ogun notes that "God has created them [women] such close creatures that there hardly exists any manner in which they cannot come at a man" (9–11). Yoruba misogyny, the association of women with witchcraft, may arguably be connected to cultural devaluations of women's work as local traders ("they are *ajapa*, literally 'tortoise,'" the animal equivalent of the trickster Esu), for the market was frequently seen not as a site of wealth-creation, but as where "real" wealth—i.e. wealth produced by masculine activities such as warfare, hunting, farming—was removed from sociable redistribution through the hoarding of misers (*ahun*); witches were associated with unrestrained, inhuman greed (they are "angry eaters," "grim devourers"), and so the "'closed hand,' (*hawo*) of the miser (*ahun*), drains wealth out of the customary redistributive round …. Such antisocial behavior is frequently attributed to … Esu, the trickster," whose animal counterpart's form, "its head withdrawn [into its shell], suggests the closed fist of the unsocialized miser."[19] By "devouring" his father's children and co-wives, Akara-ogun's mother consumes his social wealth (*olowo*). Bernard I. Belasco argues that Ifa divination and the Oro secret societies (charged with finding and executing witches), as well as state offices for controlling commerce, emerged in the context of increasing Yoruba participation in overseas trade, which created non-traditional sources of wealth and gave women access to potentially

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17 Ibid., pp. 50, 51. Also see George, *Relocating Agency*, pp. 121–3.

18 Toyin Falola and Akanmu Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money Among the Yoruba* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2000), p. 87.

19 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, pp. 26, 65, 35; also see Falola and Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money*, pp. 79–80.

independent and unprecedented power, a development conducive to cultural anxiety.[20]

Without discounting the misogynistic currents within the Yoruba cultural imagination informing Akara-Ogun's portrait of his mother,[21] we may nonetheless discern more than a misogynistic fable. While hunting, the father confronts "a stocky figure … with sword in hand" who threatens to kill him; when the father asks "in the name of the immortal God, do not fail to tell me the nature of my offense," the man or spirit replies that God holds him accountable for his children's and wives' deaths (11–12). The father replies, "Truly I see now that I have sinned" (12). Hearing this repentance, the figure relents. The father resolves to kill the mother, but on the way home shoots an antelope and follows the trail of blood back to his own doorstep. Akara-ogun witnesses his father finding the mother, antelope from the shoulders down, dead, "all covered in blood and swarms of flies" (13). The story evokes both Western and Yoruba patriarchal themes. The father "sins" by not being the head of his own household; he "repents" by re-asserting his rightful authority. The male figure with the sword emerges from the world of hunting, and so is affiliated with masculine activity. An exercise of masculine skill, shooting the antelope, brings to an end the conflations of town and bush, human and animal, interfering with "civilizing" settlement and domesticity.

Despite its misogynistic overtones, the story indicates that Akara-ogun was born into a world where insatiable self-aggrandizement tears apart the material and social conditions necessary for the "open-hand" (*olawo*) and ethical sociability among kin (*iranlowo*).[22] Discussing Tutuola, Patrick Colm Hogan notes,

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20 See Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, pp. 40–76; Falola and Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money*, pp. 80–94. Oyèrónké Oyéwùmí, in *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), argues that English gender ideologies were imposed upon Yoruba culture by translating gender-neutral pronouns (*on*, he, she it, emphatic; *ó*, he, she it, non-emphatic; *tiré*, his, her, its own) and terms (such as *oba*, ruler; *omo*, offspring) in ways consistent with Western patriarchal notions. While Oyéwùmí makes an important case that the "englishing" of Yoruba culture has given gender a distorted signification, her further argument that there was no patriarchy in pre-colonial Yorubaland is inconsistent with other research. Falola and Abebayo, for example, note, "Whereas wives were required to work on their husband's farms, the reverse was not true and children were not compelled to work on their mother's farms. Moreover, men had access to their wives' earnings from farming, food processing, or trade" (*Culture, Politics and Money*, p. 80). Indeed, Oyéwùmí's own stress upon the articulation of hierarchy through seniority and lineage affiliation reveals how patriarchal relations could be maintained without a linguistic thematizing of gender, since husbands were generally older than wives, and since wives were generally incorporated into the male lineage.

21 See George, "Compound of Spells," pp. 78–97, for a discussion of the misogynistic overtones of the parents' story. Also see Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*, p. 50.

22 See Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, p. 35.

> In Yoruba society, a crucial principle defining ethical prescriptions is reciprocity. The mechanisms of life fail when there is a failure of ethical reciprocity. This typically occurs when a society or some members of a society have become greedy, not so much about necessities as about excess. … More generally, in Yoruba myth and folklore, devastation is most often understood to result from excessive appropriation of abundance, from greed regarding something which is in excess of need.[23]

Such notions structure Fagunwa's imaginative evocation of Yoruba pre-colonial history. Notably, in the "bygone era" Akara-ogun describes, mere self-assertion is self-defeating: "hardly a month" passes between the mother's death and the father's "follow[ing] her" in death (13). The two parents die, in effect, together because they embody two sides of a shared world of anarchic violence and rapacious state-formation, a world that leaves Akara-ogun "orphaned, fatherless and motherless" (13).

The First Journey: Yoruba History and the Adventure of Male Aggressivity

Fagunwa underscores in Akara-ogun's "first sojourn" the futility of appropriative violence. By describing his gun as "swallowing" animals (14), Fagunwa associates its power with witch-like "devouring." The "magic" of guns depends upon iron, which became associated with gods of war (Ogun) and imperial expansion (Sango, the deified Oyo king).[24] The association of hunting with war, and war with imperialistic state power, is indicated by how at Oyo "the chief title (*asipa*), of the hunters' association and of the cult of Ogun merged."[25] At the same time, however, unease with the confluence of personal aggression and imperial state power may be seen in the contrast between "hot" gods, such as Ogun and Sango, and the "cool" god Obatala, the embodiment of serenity, reconciliation, moderation, "whiteness" as opposed to bloody red. In coastal traditions, Obatala arrests the destructive expansion of Olokun, god of the sea and wealth.[26]

While connections between hunting and war are important in Fagunwa's narrative, hunting is also associated with Obatala, particularly among people at the periphery of the Oyo Empire.[27] J. Lorand Matory points out that

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23 Patrick Colm Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 31, 4 (2000): 334–58. A revised version of the essay appears in Patrick Colm Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice*: *Cognitive and Cultural Studies of Literary Tradition and Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 125–56.

24 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, p. 64; J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire that is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 6–7; S.A. Babalola, *The Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 3.

25 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, p. 125; also see Babalola, *The Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala*, pp. 3–18.

26 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, p. 99. Also see p. 98.

27 Ibid., p. 125; Fadipe, *Sociology of the Yoruba*, p. 331.

> [i]n the Oyo territories best shielded from the nineteenth-century warfare, including Oyo North, Ogun is now associated primarily with hunters. … By contrast, in the Ibadan sphere of influence, where the generals ruled in the nineteenth century, Ogun altars featured prominently at the headquarters of the mighty. … The Ogun of the blacksmiths and of the war boys reigned during the nineteenth century. … Ogun is not only a fixture but a metaphor of Ibadan's reign. Mythically, Ogun inevitably abandons the political and judicial duties of government, for he is less an administrator than a pathfinder, road maker, and warrior.[28]

On the one hand, hunting is associated with witch-like imperialistic drives for power; on the other hand, hunting allows human power to confront its limits, to make contact with unmediated nature, and so opens "paths" to realms of power and truth outside what is "culturally constructed" or authorized by state power and human hierarchies.

Akara-ogun's insatiable appetite for hunting leads him to "the very abode of ghommids" (14)—*iwin, oro*, which Soyinka defines as "beings neither human nor animal nor strictly demi-gods" (4). Insulted by Akara-ogun's trespassing presence, the ghommids look upon him with predatory pleasure (16). Quickly, Akara-ogun uses a spell to return himself to his room, but immediately repents:

> Is this not indeed matter for shame? I call myself a hunter …. The witch who seeks to devour me will find her teeth all dropping off, the sorcerer who dares to look me in the eye will provide the next meal for my gun, any ghommid who wants to test the keenness of my sword will lose a hand in the encounter. (16–17)

Fagunwa recalls a world where the outside is saturated with predation. Lovejoy points out that in the eighteenth century

> [t]he stretch of territory where the Akan, Aja, and Yoruba states were the dominant powers, including the areas that experienced wars caused by refugees or other enemies of Oyo and Asante, supplied about 2.4 million slaves, or 58 per cent of West African exports. … Oyo's conquests were along the savanna corridor that stretched from the Niger to the coast. The Yoruba and other people who lived within striking distance of this route were raided, and the prisoners were sold to Europeans.[29]

Fagunwa follows the pattern we have observed in folktales of invoking history indirectly, where slave-raiders are configured as "beasts of the sea and land." But Fagunwa develops oral narrative patterns of indirect representation and philosophical meditation into an extended prose fiction of extraordinary artistry and insight.

When Akara-ogun uses his spells to return to the forest, he finds animals in his sights, and is about "to make a kill," when a "singular being," who is both

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28 Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, pp. 16–17.

29 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 80–91.

small and ridiculous-looking, begins to weep so loudly that the animals scatter (18). Incensed, Akara-ogun declares,

> "What a rotten race you ghommids are …. If you don't shut your mouth this instant I'll shoot you where you stand," to which the little creature replies, "Even so do you children of earth behave, you who have turned kindness sour to the charitable. … [Y]ou chase emptiness all your life. … And when we think of your plight, we pity you, we weep for you … but instead of earning your affection … you … [merely] despise us. (18–19)

Akara-ogun's contempt for the ghommid may elicit for a 1930s Yoruba readership not just images of ethnocentric hatred in general (as in British colonial racism), but specifically the contempt of the Oyo toward the *ara oko*, "bushmen" ignorant of Oyo culture: Falola and Adebayo note such proverbs as "*Ohun ti ara oko ba se ti o ba dara, eesi l'o se* [The 'bush man' cannot do anything right, except accidentally]."[30] Here, however, hunting opens a road to an outside that chastens us with the unexpected. Akara-ogun is penetrated ("his words had hurt me deep inside") because he recognizes their justice. The "imperialist" here is Akara-ogun, and by implication all who emulate, as did nineteenth-century Ibadan generals and other "war-boys" (*omo-ogun*),[31] the imperialistic dimensions of Ogun. Chastened, Akara-ogun pretends his insults were mere teasing, and then asks a "boon" by "prostrat[ing]" himself; the ghommid, pleased, gives him magical pepper pods (19). By implication, we are "enriched" by the very outside whose unexpected depths rebuke our egoism.

Still, delighting in appropriative violence is "natural." Akara-ogun hunts and eats until his "belly protruberate[s] most roundly" (22). His drive to consume exteriority (literally) is only checked when he encounters Agbako, a "sixteened-eyed dewild" (*ewele*), whose physical strength and command of spells matches his own (22). Their battle continues until the earth sucks them "into the void" (26), where Akara-ogun finds a house whose walls begin to squeeze him. He first goes blind; then when his sight is restored his body is so deformed that he cannot feed himself (27). When he hears laughing voices, he pleads for help, being reduced to the level of a dependent infant. At this moment, he acknowledges God: "You who laugh over there, I implore you in the name of God …. It was ignorance which led me to fight with Agbako …. I appeal to you, kindly release me" (28). Akara-Ogun's body returns to its human shape, although he remains trapped in the house. In Yoruba contexts, the earth is associated with kinship and lineages (the *ilu*, the *idile*), with ethical goods governed by "white" divine powers, with the Ogboni secret society, and thus with the political struggle of descent lineages to evade "colonization" by pre-colonial state power.[32] Reducing Akara-ogun to

30 Falola and Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money*, p. 84.

31 See Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, pp. 77–79; Falola and Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 1–28.

32 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, pp. 98–99; Falola and Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money*, pp. 80–94.

infantile status suggests that ethical sociability comes, first of all, from our need for maternal care, from "feminine" qualities associated with Obatala.

Indeed, after Akara-ogun fails to escape, a beautiful woman appears, who describes herself as a daemon named Helpmeet: "[H]e who loves my God with a great love I care for in as great a proportion … for whoever sows well shall harvest goodness, and whoever sows evil, evil shall come unto him" (29). Helpmeet's discourse is in the idiom of evangelical Christianity; her name suggests Bunyan. Guided by a woman, Akara-ogun is initiated into a moral logic—whatever ye sow, so also shall ye reap—predicated upon the revelation that God is love. Taking him to a crossroads, the female figure tells him to enter a city: "never fear and be not cowed by terror, my name is Helpmeet, I will never desert you on this earth" (30).

The city Akara-ogun enters is filled with corpses. He encounters a woman, Iwapele, who tells him that the city is called Filth, that it is "a city of greed and contumely" (30). Because the people responded to God's "pity" in ending a drought by eating and drinking "to satisfaction" and acting "in any manner that pleased them," God sent "his emissaries to enquire into the misdeeds of this city of blood; they came in the guise of men and they lodged at [her] house;" because she treated them well, she was spared while all the others were turned into "a race of the dumb and punished … with blindness" (31). Iwapele's story echoes Genesis 18–19, where God sends two angels to judge Sodom, but the city's crimes associate it with Ogun and Sango, patrons of imperialistic aspirations. Divine punishment, as in Dante, literalizes moral metaphors. A socially debilitating blindness overwhelms the inhabitants (32–3). Because the city is characterized by unrestrained greed, God in effect gives it over to Esu, to demonic forces "springing from pernicious individual acquisitiveness."[33]

As Helpmeet leads Akara-ogun out of the imprisoning effects of his own rapaciousness, so recognizing the social effects of moral blindness leads Akara-ogun "to consider seriously taking [Iwapele] to wife," but she becomes suddenly ill and dies: "[O]nly when she had thus died did I acknowledge that children and aged alike, none can escape the hand of death. After her death I wept till I nearly went blind" (33). Once Iwapele is gone, Akara-ogun escapes magically, finding himself transported back to his own room, but with "a bag of money" in the corner, which he spends on himself, in food, drink, and "decent clothing" (34). While "enriched" by his journey into the forest, that Akara-ogun spends his "wealth" entirely on himself indicates that his education is far from complete.

The Second Journey: Predation and State-Formation

After the narrator tells his neighbors Akara-ogun's story, they come to his house early the next day to hear its continuation, which suggests how storytelling generates sociable communities. Akara-ogun explains that, unable to stay away from hunting, he "plunged into this forest and began to seek game" (37). Upon

33 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, p. 103.

wounding an antelope he follows into a cave, he is seized by a "man" with "fins cover[ing] his body so that it had the appearance of a fish" (38). "[H]e ordered me to stoop and place my hands on my knees …. [S]o he mounted my back, kicked me and ordered me to bear him about as if I was a horse. … [H]e … brought out a raw, uncooked yam … and told me to kneel and eat it directly with my mouth" (38–9). Akara-ogun is enslaved. The half-fish nature of the master associates him with power from the sea, with cowries, and so the Atlantic slave trade. His desire to "mount" Akara-ogun particularly suggests the enslaving, colonizing activity of the Oyo Empire. Lovejoy notes,

> The Oyo aristocracy … had learned the secret of military success in the savanna the hard way. The horse had to be the basis of the military. … Once Oyo reoccupied the district near the Niger, where a fortified capital was built, the king and nobles pursued policies to guarantee access to horses for the cavalry. Oyo established commercial relations with the coastal ports in order to sell slaves and import cowries, textiles, and other goods. These in turn were used to purchase horses from the north.[34]

Matory argues that Sango, "reportedly an early ruler of the Oyo Empire" and "symbol of Oyo royal might," was, unlike Ogun, a possessing god (as are Yemoja, the divine patroness of witches, and Obatala); initiates are known as

> "brides of the god" (*ìyàwó òrìsà*). … The god is said to "mount" (*gùn*) those he possesses. … The mounting priest [of Sango] may be called a "horse" (*esin*), recalling the importance of cavalry in Oyo's imperial expansion. … [W]ife-like palace delegates, known as *ìlàrí*, served as diplomatic observers, toll collectors, messengers, cavaliers, royal guards, and priests …. Hence, ritual manipulations of gender created a corps of male "wives".[35]

The connection between mounting (*gùn*) and spirit possession (*òrìsà gígùn*) links imperialist appropriation with symbolic emasculation. Matory notes that one of the oddities of British indirect rule was that it reinstated the authority of the Oyo king and thus gave new life to the bureaucratic-symbolic matrix associated with Sango at the expense of the claims of Ibadan generals and other "war-boys" (*omo-ogun*) associated with Ogun.[36]

Rather pointedly, Fagunwa invites his Yoruba readers to associate imagery evocative of Oyo expansion with dehumanizing, invasive violence. Falola and Adebayo note that among "ten ideals" the Yoruba associate with money are notions that "money should be acquired in an honest, 'clean' way" ("*Owo eru kii gb'oro*"), that a "clean" way involves "hard work (*ise*)," and that "money is death, or the reckless search for it could end in death."[37] To illustrate the last point, Falola and Adebayo cite an Ifa verse in which Obatala demonstrates that

34 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., p. 81.
35 Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, pp. 5, 7, 9.
36 Ibid., pp. 26–56.
37 Falola and Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money*, pp. 58–60.

"brothers and sisters would kill each other for money."[38] As Hogan remarks, central to Yoruba culture is the theme that unrestrained greed destroys ethical reciprocity and so leads to infertility (in multiple senses) and thus death.[39] Fagunwa links imperialistic political economies to bestiality and barbarism (not knowing that yam can be cooked), and depicts Akara-ogun's "virile" efforts to emancipate himself, first through force, then through magic (an indirect use of force), as coming to nothing (41). As in the first sojourn, Akara-ogun realizes that he "had failed to reckon with God," and so prays (41).

"[I]nspired by God," he asks the man why he does not cook his yams, which produces "wide-mouthed astonishment" (42), amazement that a colonized Other could become an interlocutor. Cooking for his master, bringing civilizing arts and assuming "female" duties, Akara-ogun gains the master's respect, so that when the latter asks how his gun works, Akara-ogun replies that water will come out of the barrel if he puts his mouth on it. He does so, and Akara-ogun pulls the trigger, killing his captor (43). Duping his master, Akara-ogun assumes attributes of Tortoise, the animal trickster who, Ropo Sekoni argues, in contesting normative social injustice functions as a "folk hero." At the same time, Akara-ogun is gradually dissociated from the side of the Tortoise embodying antisocial greed and unethical cleverness.[40]

Akara-ogun comes upon a settlement of ghommids, whose king rejects ethnic hatred (44) and whose hospitality proves to be "self-enriching." While Akara-ogun is treated "truly as a son," he learns that the king's favorite wife is conspiring with people in the town to kill him (45); thrice, Akara-ogun saves the king's life (46–50). However, Akara-ogun incurs the jealousy of the courtiers, who contrive to blame him for the disappearance of the king's dog (52). Akara-ogun finds himself betrayed by his "bosom friend" (54). Overwhelmed by a crowd, he is tortured, whipped, put in the ground up to his head; honey is poured "over [his] head so that flies of all kinds buzzed round it in swarms," and the people, like witches, "instead of taking pity on me … redoubled their jeers" (56–7).

Fagunwa's fable again appeals to his Yoruba readers' historical memory. The portrait of a king subject to constant threats of assassination, and courtiers constantly vulnerable to jealous peers, recalls the internal dissension that ultimately destroyed the Oyo Empire, as well as similar dissension in smaller polities.[41] As in the first sojourn, dilemmas that seem intractable from within determinate socio-historical contexts give way to new, unexpected roads to freedom or salvation. Only a divine suspension of political logic saves Akara-ogun: "But God had seen their act of wickedness and resolved in his mind to rescue me" (57). By having liberation come miraculously, from an outside force, Fagunwa encourages his Yoruba readers to associate Akara-ogun's narrative with the experience of

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38 Ibid., pp. 62–3.

39 See Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" pp. 33–4.

40 For the contrast between folktales that present Tortoise as a folk hero and those that present him as a villain, see Ropo Sekoni's *Folk Poetics: A Sociosemiotic Study of Yoruba Trickster Tales* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1994).

41 See Law, *The Oyo Empire*, pp. 245–60.

recaptives or Saros, who, like Samuel Crowther, might understandably attribute their liberation to divine intervention. Akara-ogun's experience of betrayal by his "adoptive" people recalls the intensification of "Yoruba-on-Yoruba" violence during the nineteenth century.[42] Matory calls the nineteenth century the "Age of Ogun," as opposed to the Oyo-dominated "Age of Sango:"

> By the 1840s, former imperial subjects had fled southward in large numbers, and slave traders had captured tens of thousands of refugees, many of whom reached Cuba and Brazil …. In the mid-nineteenth century, town after town was overrun by enemy troops and forced to regroup in huge new urban centers …. Private traders—many of them women—and military commanders each established their private fiefdoms without the authorization or supervision of royal elites. … Personal leadership (rather than birth) and the services of war captives (rather than of wives and "mounted" men) determined the extent of one's authority.[43]

Since Akara-ogun's service to the king resembles "the services of war captives," the betrayal he encounters is consistent with a peculiar political logic: powerful strangers, by strengthening the leader, threaten those who are either fearful of a leader's ability to consolidate power or interested in assuming his place.

Akara-ogun is freed from the logic of history by divine intervention. God makes it rain, so the ground in which he is imprisoned becomes mud. Discussing a parallel scene in Tutuola, Hogan cites Geoffrey Parrinder's account of how "one method of human sacrifice among the Yoruba" involved burying the victim with "'with the head just showing.'"[44] Hogan notes that slaves were sacrificed, sometimes literally, sometimes symbolically "put 'on the side' of death, excluded from human social life," in expiation for a community's greediness in order to restore fertility. This particular method "plants" the sacrifice, which suggests a restoration of agricultural fertility.[45] In this case, however, the text offers no indication of any desire on the town's part to expiate excessive greed. Instead, they appropriate and consume an outsider. By evoking imagery of religious sacrifice, Fagunwa suggests how much nineteenth-century political economies naturalized unrestrained greed.

Akara-ogun is washed into the pit where the townspeople deposited "their dead livestock," coming to rest on a goat's carcass (57). There could hardly be a more graphic image of history as a charnel house. Embedded in such a world, "death seemed preferable to life:" "But my Creator again took pity on me and sent a messenger to me; it was a most beautiful woman" (58). Like Helpmeet, she leads him out of imprisonment. She is "the head of [a] household" and has Akara-ogun bathed and fed, taking "such care" of him that Akara-ogun forgets his suffering, but on the third day she becomes suddenly ill, dies in his arms, and her

42 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, p. 164.

43 Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, pp. 14–15.

44 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" p. 42; Hogan cites Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religions: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples* (London: Epworth Press, 1964), p. 72.

45 Ibid., pp. 37, 42.

servants follow her in death. Akara-ogun endeavors "to die also" but cannot (58). Because God is love, His "messengers" lead us out of the imprisonment to which either our own self-centered violence (as in the first sojourn) or socio-political "realities" governed by violence (as in the second sojourn) have delivered us. These messengers show us a "new path" radically different from those exemplified by Akara-ogun's parents.[46]

Fagunwa associates God's love with companionability between men and women. Unable to die, Akara-ogun cries "up to his mother," bids her to "come out of heaven:" "Mother, dear mother, true mother, most complete mother … far from wicked mother … do not fail to let my eyes behold you" (58–9). The earth is "rent" and his mother appears, suggesting a new birth (59). Upon seeing Akara-ogun in tears, the mother cries, declares that God will grant him long life and riches, and then admonishes him, "but try, try to benefit this world before you die and leave it better than you entered it" (59). She leads Akara-ogun to a tunnel that takes him home (60). As the messenger of God, she is at once the promise that her son will receive physical, material blessings and the voice through which ethical obligation—the imperative to "better" the world—becomes constitutive of identity. As a pathfinder, the mother assumes the (putatively masculine) role of hunter, in effect separating the hunter (Ogun's original vocation) from the patronage of war and iron.

Following his mother's direction, Akara-ogun encounters Lamorin, a hunter with whom he becomes friends (60–61). Appreciative connection with the feminine allows masculine spiritedness to become sociable and civilizing, as is underscored when Akara-ogun and Lamorin encounter Ijamba, who is also a hunter, but who is "stark naked," and thus outside civilized space: Ijamba (Peril) "had fathered Loss who lived in the household of Starvation" (61). Akara-ogun kills "Peril," enters into a communal life with Lamorin, and encounters a variety of ghommids who are deformed or exiled by God as a result of "arrogance before God" (62) or "reject[ing] the laws of God and His ways and engineer[ing] chaos in heaven" (63). Encountering "a remarkably beautiful woman" (64), Akara-ogun determines to marry her. When she refuses, he seeks to intimidate her, but without success. After she tests his courage by changing shapes while he holds her, she agrees to marry the "fearless hunter" (64), and Lamorin "officat[es] as priest" (65). But this new community is unraveled by Lamorin's wanting to sleep in a deep hole in the forest, which turns out to be "Tembelekun," from "the Bottomless Bog," whose son's "name is Chaos" (65); Tembelekun "eats neither yam nor maize, the human head alone is his meat" (66). The implication is that human community is always fragile because reversion to antisocial aggression is a constant temptation. Karin Barber notes that the very "creation of a town is a triumph over the bush," that a "sense of the encompassing vegetation always being contested at the margins of civilisation" shapes an understanding of humanized space as an arduous

46 This strand of the work contrasts with the conservative male-centered gender implications of the text developed in George's reading in "Compound of Spells," pp. 78–97.

achievement, just as "the traces of whole ruined settlements … remain as a warning that at any time the conquest of the bush can be reversed."[47]

The precariousness of mastering the bush in the outer world informs an appreciation of the precariousness of mastering the "bush within." Curbing one's own affinity for the bush becomes complicated, however, because the world of the bush is the source of social wealth. Without Lamorin, Akara-ogun is no longer content in the forest; when he comes upon "a little trail" that takes him home, he wants to return, but his wife, as a ghommid, cannot accompany him, and so goes back to the Bottomless Bog (67). Though "grieved," Akara-ogun packs the possessions "which had accumulated since [he] was lost in the forest," returns home, and is "resolved never again to go hunting," in part because he has had enough hardship, in part because what he has accumulated in the wild makes him rich (67). Fagunwa emphasizes that the source of wealth is the threatening, ambiguous, predatory world "outside" the realm of civilized restraints; thus, the sphere of enrichment and the sphere within which a bearable human life may be sustained are mutually exclusive.

Fagunwa's Relation to His Readership: Why "Words of Truth are as Thorns"

The next day a huge crowd gathers to hear Akara-ogun, which prompts him to declare that he did not know if the iroko would yield enough planks to bury so many, but not all would die in bed. This observation offends those convinced they will die peaceful deaths (68). Akara-ogun remarks, "Words of truth are as thorns, the honest man is the foe of the world," and then asks the crowd if they know the circumstances of their future deaths (69). Fagunwa implies that his relationship to his readership is similarly fraught with tension, for the story he unfolds does not conform to British colonialist, negritudist, or early nationalistic versions of the past. Nor does it conform to what many Western intellectuals then or now expect to hear. Speaking of our time, Rosemary Marangoly George notes that "[t]he pressures on 'Third World' writers to produce novels that can be easily fitted into the established framework of the western academy and western publishing houses are tremendous."[48]

Ironically, given contemporary assumptions that colonialist discourse always debunked pre-colonial culture, Fagunwa's narrative subversively problematized the largely positive picture of the Yoruba past encouraged in colonial schools. A.I. Asiwaju points out that the Yoruba under British colonialism, unlike the Yoruba under French rule in neighboring Dahomey, were taught in Yoruba alongside the colonial language:

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47 Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow; Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 43.

48 Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 119.

> English was introduced to the pupils in Nigerian schools only after they had shown enough proficiency in the reading and writing of the Yoruba language. … Along with the study of the local language, lessons were given in the cultural values expressed in the language. This was so especially with the stories and poems of didactic and historical value taught verbally in the lower classes and available in Yoruba textbooks in use in the upper classes. … This bilingual education system owed much to the Christian missions, especially the CMS …. British administration in Nigeria … ultimately became the principal force behind the development of the "vernacular" as a major subject in the schools.[49]

Colonial valorizations of Yoruba language and culture were not entirely benign. It fit into British strategies of bolstering the authority of the Oyo king and "traditional" chiefs.[50] Nonetheless, when Yoruba faced the French alternative, they voted with their feet.[51]

Contemporary Anglophone readers, shaped decisively by two generations of French theorists,[52] tend to assume that African fiction must be centrally concerned with the evils of colonialism and rehabilitating pre-colonial culture and history from ethnocentric, racist slander.[53] While such projects are important, and worthy, they are not the only possible ones. In the Yorubaland of the 1930s, the racism of individuals notwithstanding, British colonial policy dictated official respect for a version of the pre-colonial past. By challenging the version that British colonial policy cultivated, Fagunwa risks wounding an ethnic pride that colonial policy deliberately encouraged, and that served the interests of colonial African elites.

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49 A.I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule 1889–1945: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976), pp. 246–7, 248.

50 On indirect rule and support for a version of the pre-colonial past, see Matory, *Sex and the Empire that is No More*, pp. 26–56; Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yorùbá Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 1–40; Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, pp. 89–113, 175–96; Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*, pp. 79–107.

51 See Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*, pp. 134–44.

52 See Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "Présence Africaine as Historiography," in V.Y. Mudimbe (ed.), *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947*–1987 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 95–117; Wehrs, "Sartre's Legacy in Postcolonial Theory; or, Who's Afraid of Non-Western Historiography and Cultural Studies?," *New Literary History* 34, 4 (2003): 761–89.

53 The structure of Edward W. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) implies such as view, where the colonialist "consolidated vision" elaborated in Chapter 2 is countered by "resistance and opposition" from third-world and colonized peoples' discourse in Chapter 3. Also see Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*: *Migant Metaphors*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1st ed. 1995, and the editorial introductions in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), esp. 85–6, 117–18.

The Third Journey: Finding the Path to Socializing Masculine Energy

Akara-ogun recounts receiving a message from the king, who wants the renowned hunter to seek out the city of Mount Langbodo, whose king was said to present hunters "a singular object" that would grant its possessor "abundance of peace and well-being" (72). Akara-ogun agrees to seek "the thing" not out of personal desire, but to serve his country (72). A sojourn motivated by king and country opens the way for comradeship. Acknowledging the insufficiency of his personal power, Akara-ogun requests that other excellent hunters accompany him, and the king agrees (73). Through characterization evocative of both epic catalogue and Yoruba *oriki* "praise poetry," Fagunwa emphasizes the difficulty of transforming masculine assertiveness into civilizing energy. The great hunter Kako, "a veritable strongman," "his mother, a gnom; his father a dewild" (73), responds to his wife's reluctance at being left behind by slicing her in two with a machete. "Next" to Kako was "Imodoye," significantly a "maternal relation" of Akara-ogun's, who is so "well versed in charms, wise and very knowledge" that his name means "knowledge fuses with understanding;" another hunter is "the finest singer and the best drummer," another is a great archer (78–9). Once the hunters assemble, Imodoye presents an oration that makes clear what is at stake:

> [I]f our city is filthy and looks more like a dung-heap yet the city is our city, if our nation is backward so that its citizens have not experienced civilisation, yet our nation is still our nation and only its own people will administer it; it is the people who will turn the dirt to cleanliness, they who must turn the small town into an important one. … My comrades who go now to Mount Langbodo, make your minds resolute and act like men of strength. What glory is there to him who merely lives in luxury but does not service for his land? (80–81)

Fagunwa implies that big men must displace "luxury" with "service" as the foremost mark of "glory," reflecting a "transvaluation of values" that accords with what Karin Barber notes in comparing the *oriki*—"praise poems" that define the attributes, or "call forth" the power, of prominent people—addressed to nineteenth-century "big men," with those addressed to the "big men" of 1934–1984:

> Personal magnificence, generosity, self-reliance, ruthlessness, destructive power and its obverse, the capacity to offer protection, were not erased from the definition of big men; but a new and apparently dominant set of values was written into it, associated with the education which was the new big men's principal avenue to power: values of Christianity, literacy, honesty, public spiritedness, helpfulness.[54]

Okpewho points out that in Yoruba contexts hunters were put "in the vanguard of cultural history," viewed as introducing new arts and sciences, diffusing

54 Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, p. 243.

traditions establishing national identity, and working for "social justice" by opposing oppression.[55]

The road to service, however, is filled with obstacles. As soon as the band enters the forest, they find themselves "surrounded by a dense thicket" (82). One of the hunters, Elegbede, overheard two birds saying that Kako "was the cause" of the "present predicament" on account of "the guiltless woman whom he had killed" (82–3). Elegbede shoots one of the birds, for it had said that he must be sacrificed (83). Elegbede performs the sacrifice and "[t]he heart of God softened towards us—not because of the sacrifice itself, but because he knew that we would worship him in a more befitting manner if only we had a better understanding than this" (83).

Elegbede saves the hunters because he attends to words from the outside, and because he is intimately connected with nature. Moreover, the "heart of God" softens not because of the sacrifice, not because God is rightly understood in terms of patron–client politics, but because God takes such religious rites as signs of readiness for more "befitting" worship. While Fagunwa presents a syncretic vision in which aspects of Yoruba, Christian, and Islamic religious experience co-mingle, his narrative insists that religious practices that would affiliate divine power with a big man's or warlord's patronage can soften God's heart only because, generously, God reads such practices as promises of a future "better understanding."

In a community shaped by pursuit of the good, ethical insight is infectious. Soon after Elegbede's actions, Akara-ogun calls Helpmeet from "the bowels of the earth," and then asks for her assistance in releasing them from their "present bondage" (83). She leads them back to the right road, but there they encounter a horrific figure called Fear, Eru (84). The hunters bring their various skills to bear upon combat against Fear, but without success; in desperation, Imodoye advises Olohun-iyo to sing "a melody full of pathos which would soften the man's heart towards us" (84), so Olohun-iyo sings about "how God created earth and heaven, how God loved mankind so well … that … any one who made himself a hindrance to his fellow men was the greatest sinner of all," for "it were best that a millstone be hung from the neck of such a man, and he be cast into the ocean" (84–5). As he sings, Olohun-iyo interweaves "the occasional spell;" "before long," Eru "turn[s] tail" and flees, upon which Akara-ogun comments, "Thus did we overcome by mere song a foe who was impervious to guns and bows, for whatever it is that man attempts by gentleness does not come to grief, but that which we handle with violence rebounds on us with equal toughness" (85).

Akara-ogun's commentary underscores connections between spiritual and historical dimensions of the hunters' journey. Like Hazoumé, Fagunwa articulates a historical judgment that readers in our time may find politically unpalatable. The resolution of this scene suggests that a particular kind of Christian ethical humanism, co-mingling with ethical dimensions of Yoruba piety, offered Yoruba men the "power" to combat "monsters" otherwise insurmountable. Of course, one need not agree with Fagunwa views, but critical understanding of his work requires consideration of how his sense of history informs his fictional narrative.

55 Okpewho, *Once Upon A Kingdom*, p. 52.

It is also important to recognize that Fagunwa's assessment is hardly unique. The Rev. Samuel Johnson, the Yoruba Pastor of Oyo, wrote in 1897 (published in 1921) a monumental *History of the Yorubas* (indeed, the book was pivotal in creating Yoruba national identity). Johnson describes in detail the disastrous consequences of unrestrained aggression under titles such as "Prosperity and Oppression," "A Succession of Despotic Kings," "Spread of Anarchy," "Fratricidal Wars," "Failures at Reconciliation," "Abortive Measures to Terminate the War," and "The Dark Before the Dawn," the dawn being British-imposed peace. Describing the characteristic violence of the Ijebu, Johnson notes,

> The caravan route at that time was notoriously unsafe from brigands and Egba kidnappers …. The action of Ijebu men towards Oyo maidens need not be referred to …. As to flogging at the toll gates—that was so common and indiscriminate that Ijebu youths were frequently found to come up to the gates on market days with whips, ready to find exercise for their arms with or without any cause.[56]

While Johnson's depiction reflects Oyo partisanship, its presentation of a world of constant exposure to unpredictable violence is consistent with other contemporary sources and later research.[57] Lovejoy cites Joseph Wright,

> another Yoruba slave who has also left his account … "The enemies satisfied themselves with little children, little girls, young men, and young women; and so they did not care about the aged and old people. They killed them without mercy … Abundant heaps of dead bodies were in the streets and there were none to bury them."[58]

Lovejoy adds that the Yoruba civil wars created "an internal frontier of enslavement, while the northern trade, connected to the Sokoto Caliphate, permitted the importation of slaves from an external frontier. Especially in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Yoruba merchants travelled to Ilorin to buy slaves."[59] Johnson describes the effects of British conquest of the Ijebus in 1892 in these terms: "Even among the Ijebus themselves, very few if any outside the high officials of the capital who had hitherto maintained the iron system

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56 Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, pp. 611–12.

57 On Johnson's use of Oyo oral traditions and generic conventions, see Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri* (Bloomington and Indianapolis/London: Indiana University Press/James Currey, 1997), pp. 20–43. On violence in nineteenth-century life, see Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*; Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians*, pp. 76–86; Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, pp. 13–25; Falola and Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 31–172.

58 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., p. 147; Lovejoy cites J.F. Ade Ajayi (ed.), "The Narrative of Samuel Ajayi Crowder," in Philip D. Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered: Narratives of West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 289–316, at p. 301.

59 Ibid., pp. 162–3; Falola and Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 159–72.

of inexorable exclusiveness and rigour suffered much from the change …. But the escape of slaves which was inevitable was their greatest cry. Slavery as an institution, however, was doomed to disappear" even as "[t]he door was open to the preaching of the gospel. There was already a small congregation of Christians, the work of Ijebu citizens who had been converted at Lagos and Abeokuta …. These, who hitherto dared not show their faces or profess their religion openly were now released from fear."[60] Asiwaju notes, "Up to the 1880s … the peace which the Western Yoruba so badly wanted continued to elude them. Defensive military coalition, tactical submission and alliance, had all failed as methods for achieving peace;" as a result, "Initially, the declaration of the French and the British protectorates was everywhere embraced by the local people."[61]

The absence of any European agency, pressure, or influence in Fagunwa's account is striking, and may reflect a rhetorical-didactic exclusivity of focus upon Africans as the makers of their own history intended to correct both British sponsored "official" versions of history and such deflections and mystifications of history as are evident in Blyden's racialism and Hayford's nationalism. In any event, making an orthodoxy of the notion that Africans must be either victims or dupes of Europeans is alien to the tenor of Fagunwa's discourse, and undermines the tragic dignity of Johnson's history, whose importance to Yoruba self-understanding, even when contested in its details, cannot be underestimated.[62]

Having overcome fear through piety, the hunters arrive at a town with a notice at the gates declaring that whoever has "wantonly killed a bird" is forbidden to enter (86). In this city of birds, with an Ostrich for king, a red mark "rather like a blood smear" appears before any one "guilty of the needless killing of a bird." Since all the hunters had "stoned birds" in their childhoods, they are all marked and brought before the king (86). When Imodoye offers to perform any task to demonstrate that the hunters have come in "friendship," the Ostrich king notes that "a certain wild animal" had taken possession of "his father's shrine," whereupon Kako offers to battle this "lizard-shaped creature" with "the size of four huge men" (86). Through Kako, Fagunwa underscores both the antisocial propensities of masculine spiritedness, and its potential social benefits. Standing in front of a tree, he lets the single-horned beast charge him, then dodges at the last moment, allowing the horn to become stuck in the trunk; with his adversary immobilized, he clubs the creature to death (87). While valorizing these qualities, Fagunwa stresses their insufficiency. The king proposes another task, a battle against small but numerous sand-elves. Kako again volunteers, the other hunters protest, Helpmeet (or Iranlowo, Yoruba for "sociability, generosity among kin") appears, giving Kako a bag of sand (89). As soon as Kako enters battle, however, he forgets Helpmeet/Iranlowo's words and instead relies upon his club, whereupon the sand-elves cover him "like a pulsating swarm" (90). Iranlowo tells Olohun-iyo "to sing a reminder to Kako," who then uses the sand and prevails (90). Olohun-

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60 Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, pp. 623–4.

61 Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*, pp. 32, 53.

62 See, for example, Fadipe's relationship to Johnson in *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, pp. 3, 33–6, and the frequent citations of Johnson in Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*.

iyo's song "reminds" the embodiment of heroic masculine self-assertion of powers that come from others. The king then assigns a third task, a battle against "Were-Orun, Lunatic of Heaven" (90), a man so wicked that God "expelled him from heaven" in hope that the birds' songs would civilize him; instead, the birds employ him as an executioner (91). Kako struggles against him, but Were-Orun uses an incantation to set himself aflame. When Kako retreats, Elegbede and Aramada the Miraculous Man take his place. Elegbede cannot bear the flames, but Aramada's "nature was different; the more he fought the colder he felt" (91); thus he is able to grapple with Were-Orun (who seems not to have the flexibility to vary his tactics) until the latter is dead (92). The capacity to bring heterogeneous attributes to bear upon the struggle yields victory. In the three challenges, Fagunwa traces the process by which archaic heroic energy may help produce a modern community, but, unlike Western versions of history as progress, regression remains a constant possibility. At a victory feast, Kako becomes so drunk that he insults the king, which leads to a wasteful war against the birds (92).

They leave "the kingdom of animals," cross "the river of blood," and then encounter Agbako who, as in the first sojourn, cannot be countered by superior force: "Desperate," Akara-ogun calls "upon God and he answer[s]," turning Agbako into a serpent who can then be killed by Kako (93). They then face Egbin, an absolutized image of barbarism and beastiality: "Egbin never bathed …. The oozing from his eyes was like … vomit" (94). Unable to overpower Egbin, the hunters must beg "him kindly to depart," which he does, but one of the hunters follows him, apparently to pursue a similar way of life (95). The others reach the road leading to Mount Langbodo, where they are warned by youths dressed "in shining white" to avoid both the road to hell and the road to heaven (which is reserved for the dead), though Mount Langbodo is close to heaven (95). The beautiful music from heaven, Siren-like, nearly seduces the hunters until Imodoye asks Olohun-iyo to sing to "recall [them] to [their] mission" (96). Fagunwa's description of the youths "in shining white" recalls Bunyan's description of the country of Beulah, where "the Shining Ones commonly walked, because it was upon the borders of Heaven;" like the hunters, Christian and Hopeful hear beautiful music from the City, become "sick" with "desire," but are told that full participation in such blessedness is reserved for the dead.[63]

The "shining white" robes evoke conventional depictions of Christian angels, but the "whiteness" also suggests the Yoruba "white spirits" of reconciliation, serenity, balance, among whom Obatala is first and paramount. Whereas Bunyan portrays Christian and Hopeful having "no want of corn and wine; for in this place they met with abundance of what they had sought,"[64] Fagunwa presents the hunters as being in danger of starving until Akara-ogun remembers to use a magic cloth his second wife gave him to create a feast. Masculine prowess, even when sublimated into spiritual self-discipline, still needs the aid of appreciative connections to women.

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63 John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 195–7.

64 Ibid., p. 196.

The king promises to help the hunters, but first sends them to "spend seven days with Iragbeje whose house ha[s] seven wings," a man whose "sagehood came with him from heaven" (98). The "seven wings" evoke the seven days of the Christian week. Iragbeje dwells in each wing in succession, indicating that wisdom involves heterogeneity and movement within ordered space. The value of a man, Iragbeje implies, is revealed by the character and social usefulness of his children. Thus masculine energy should serve purposes beyond self-aggrandizement (103).

The duties of parents to children are complemented by duties of children to parents (105). To drive home the point, Iragbeje tells the story of Ajantala, who as soon as he is born declares, "Ha! is this how the world is? Why did I ever come here? I had no idea it was such a rotten place" (106). He names himself, seizes whatever he wants, and flogs whoever interferes (107). When his desperate parents bring in a *babalawo*, "a most experienced man and well-versed in magic" (108), to help, Ajantala flogs him (108). Finally, his mother gives him the slip in the bush (111). Elephant, Lion, Leopard, Hyena, and Goat adopt Ajantala as a servant. Each day one of them goes with him into the bush for food; each day Ajantala beats up the "master" he accompanies, so that the animals, blaming each other for taking Ajantala in, fall into discord, and scatter (114–15). The Creator, seeing that Ajantala's "nature did not fit into the ways of human beings" brings him to the "outskirts of heaven" (115). The story resembles the Kuranko folktale, "The Killing Word," in its resolution; divine intervention is needed to save the world from absolutized aggression. In Yoruba contexts, Ajantala is a *tohosu* child, whose "excessive consumption and disregard of his/her parents," Hogan notes, "provide a prototypical example of a disruption of the principle of reciprocity."[65]

The next day Iragbeje takes the hunters to "a different room" and admonishes them about the dangers of immoderation (116). He tells the story of a lion who, as king, summons the other animals, tells them that each "has been allotted his diet by the Creator," and that he wants to avoid the trouble of hunting: "I suggest that you all come to some arrangement whereby you will of your own accord come to me, one by one, to be killed for food" (118). A hyena notes that he "does not eat less meat than the king himself," and so "a third of the animals" should come to him, and the rest to the king (118), to which a leopard observes that "if one-third goes to the hyena," surely "a half" should come to him, since he is the hyena's superior (119). The fox makes up a list, and puts his name at the head, but does not appear at the appointed time. When the nobles inquire about his absence, the fox explains that "by that tree live four beasts just like you: a lion, an elephant, a leopard and a hyena; they molest us animals …. and if you do not make the effort to get rid of them, hardly any animal will be able to come to your highness to fill his dinner table" (120). The fox leads them to a deep well, in which they see animals just like them: "In the end they resolved to charge their own images," and so drown.

65 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" p. 35; Hogan cites A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (Ooserhout, Netherlands: Anthropologie Publications, 1970 [1894]), pp. 120–22.

If the political order articulates only a structure of predation, then the example of exploitation from the top will be mirrored all the way down. Iragbeje recounts how another man, left a hundred pounds upon his father's death, spent all the money on "breakable things like jars, drinking glasses, all kinds of flasks, mirrors" (121), then began imagining trading his goods, making more money, becoming so rich that all the town would admire him, and he would be able to marry a princess. Imagining the pleasure of bending her to his will, he reflects, "I will reject the food she has prepared—this will surely make her unhappy. … Undoubtedly I shall feel some compassion for her, but I ought to demonstrate my importance so I will kick her, thus" (122–3), whereupon, like the milkmaid in Aesop's similar fable, he kicks over the fragile goods which smash to bits. Both of Iragbeje's stories emphasize that the immoderate ones are undone by immersing themselves in their own images, by narcissistic self-love.

From immoderation of appetites, Iragbeje turns to immoderation of judgment. Iragbeje recounts how a man journeying in a strange land came upon a leopard in an iron cage. The leopard pleads with the man to release him, declaring, "True, the whole world calls me a wicked brute but I know that I am a kindly animal. You know yourself that the tongue of mankind is most inconstant" (124). The man stupidly takes the leopard's statement of one truth, that the tongue of mankind is inconstant, as proof of the rest of his discourse. As soon as he opens the cage, the leopard leaps "at the man to devour him," but the man begs that the leopard submit their case to the judgment of five people, and the leopard agrees (125). They first encounter a goat, who upon hearing the story, replies, "Slanderers by nature are the men of this world," and then cites human mistreatment of goats as evidence (125). They then encounter a horse who responds in similar fashion (126); an orange tree and a dog similarly note that man's excessive greed. Finally, they come upon a fox, and the man addresses the fox with extreme politeness, and mentions, as though in passing, his good intentions in relation to foxes (128). The fox tells the leopard that he needs to have the story demonstrated. The leopard returns to cage and "demonstrates" how he could not escape by letting the man lock the door, after which the fox laughs, "Go your own way my good man and don't forget the fowls which you promised" (129). The man escapes because he has learned to see himself as others see him. By contrast, the leopard's cleverness serves only a "devouring" selfishness.

On the seventh day, the hunters enter a room entirely in white, and Iragbeje is "dressed in a white robe" (131), suggestive of connections between ultimate wisdom and the "powers" of Obatala and other "white spirits." Iragbeje instructs the hunters about "our Creator" through the story of a king who one day hears a beautiful hymn in "a different language he did not understand" (132). When he asks what the words mean, someone translates it thus: "He removes the mighty from their throne and exalts the humble above them" (132). The king is furious: "What chieftain dare refuse to reckon with my will? God has his own seat in heaven and I have mine on earth. I cannot remove him from his throne and I am certain that he also cannot unseat me on this earth" (132). But God sends an angel to earth who makes the king fall into a deep sleep, turns all the king's clothes "to rags," and assumes the king's likeness (132, 133). The angel

simulating the king tells the court that the tramp is not mad, but only a jester, so the king becomes "his own clown" (134). As a year passes, the moral significance of his transformation gradually becomes apparent to the king: "After a while, he understood at last where he had erred and he was gravely smitten with the fear of God" (134). In the church, when he hears again the same verse, he lets out "a bellow of anguish," "a most virile cry" (135), that provokes laughter. Soon after, the angel appears before him "as the messenger of the God of Glory" (135), and declares, "Inasmuch as you have today repented, his displeasure is ended for He is a merciful God. Therefore do I order you now, in the name of the God of Hosts, rise, ascend your throne" (136). This final story completes the narrative's systematic transvaluation of masculine excellence. When the king releases "a bellow of anguish," he lets out "a most virile cry," for genuine virility lies in the conquest of one's self-love and in understanding that power serves justice.

Their education finished, the king of Mount Langbodo offers the thing the hunters have sought, which turns out to be "counsel" (137). The "answer" to politically debilitating self-aggrandizement is the "self-respect" that comes from "lov[ing] one another," inscribing ethical practice into daily life. Through a brief description of the journey home, Fagunwa makes clear that simply receiving the "counsel" is not the same as living it out. Not all the hunters return home. Kako, Elegbede, and Aramada become ghommids or otherwise "lost." Imodoye, Olohun-iyo, and Akara-ogun reach home and fulfill their mission.

After Akara-ogun finishes his story, the narrator and townspeople see him no more; he leaves behind only his words and an enigmatic written message, "Akara-ogun, Father of Born Losers" (139).[66] The narrator concludes by addressing the "men and women of Yorubaland," making explicit the relationship between the narrative journey and the reader's moral-spiritual journey: "[E]ach of you has his Mount Langbodo to attain …. [A]ccept everything cheerfully, behave like men and remember that God on High helps only those who help themselves" (139–40). The narrator takes his leave by saluting his readers with "three cheers," accentuating the sociability of speech: "the world shall become you, your nation will wax in wisdom and in strength, and we black people will never again be left behind in the world" (140).

Albeit obliquely, Fagunwa addresses critically the negritude, Pan-Africanism, and nationalism of his time by implying that the genuine, or ultimate, reasons for black people being "left behind" have been delineated by the narrative—in which, remarkably, Europeans play no part. Some readers may find his exclusive focus upon African agency excessive, even insensitive. Others may find in it a salutary, tough-minded correction of the propensity to idealize the African past notable in Hayford and evident even in Hazoumé. Regardless of such judgments, the sophistication of his artistry and the complexity of his moral vision cannot be doubted. Rightly or wrongly, for Fagunwa European actions are beside the point. The past becomes a source of empowerment, as opposed to an occasion

66 See George's commentary on this enigmatic appellation in "Compound of Spells," pp. 78–97. George notes that the original, *baba omule-mofo*, denotes "patriarch to those who reach out only to grab a void."

for useless regret or problematic excuses, only if we learn to “read” the ethical significance that history has *for us*, which means focusing on our agency and responsibility, not somebody else’s. Only by participating in the dance of wisdom such inquiries encourage might we hope to perceive what Fagunwa takes to be divinely opened paths out of bondage.

Chapter 5

The Ordeal of Cognitive Imperialism in Tutuola's Early Fiction

Between Canonization and Marginalization: Tutuola's Peculiar Critical Reception

Like Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola has suffered a fate of critical marginalization, even though he wrote in English and his early work, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), enjoyed remarkable commercial success in the West. While Western reviewers acclaimed Tutuola's work, assimilating it to paradigms of mythic psychoanalytic criticism (such as those popularized by Joseph Campbell), Nigerian reviewers noted with disapprobation Tutuola's peculiar English, questioned whether a recasting of folkloric material into prose fiction did not present a "backward" image of Nigeria, raised the issue of whether Tutuola plagiarized oral sources, and accused him of doing in awkward English what Fagunwa had done in eloquent Yoruba.[1] In a seminal essay, Abiola Irele notes that Tutuola was credited with creating

> a new form of expression, a new kind of novel, whereas in fact … he merely took over a form developed out of the folk tradition to a new level of expressiveness by Fagunwa. … The echoes of Fagunwa in Tutuola's works are numerous enough to indicate that the latter was consciously created from a model provided by the former.[2]

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1 On Tutuola's publishing history and initial reception, see Olakunle George, *Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 134–7; Harold R. Collins, *Amos Tutuola* (New York: Twayne, 1969), pp. 19–22; on the assimilation of Tutuola's narratives to Western critical models, see ibid., pp. 26–52, and Viktor Beilis, "Ghosts, People, and Books of Yorubaland," *Research in African Literatures* 18, 4 (1987): 447–8; on Tutuola and Fagunwa, see Oyekan Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1999), pp. 63–8, 81–2, 91–7; Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, and Ben Okri* (Oxford/Bloomington and Indianapolis: James Currey/Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 50–52; Collins, *Amos Tutuola*, pp. 67–8; Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 182–4.

2 Irele, *African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, pp. 182, 184.

Irele also insists, however, that "Tutuola's work achieves an independent status" reflective of "the force of his individual genius."[3]

Once the West's infatuation with mythic psychoanalytic criticism waned, so did interest in Tutuola. Writing in 1987, Viktor Beilis argues that Fagunwa and Tutuola write books that present "a series of episodes that are rather weakly interconnected …. The narration is interrupted arbitrarily; it could be continued or stopped somewhat earlier."[4] Discussing *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1977, Achebe notes the convergence of Nigerian and Western forms of dismissal.[5] Oyekan Owomoyela offers a scathing assessment in *Amos Tutuola Revisited* (1999), which portrays Tutuola crassly associating "the civilizing project" with Western materialism while advocating an "ethics of loot."[6]

Achebe claims, on the contrary, that what makes Tutuola's narrative appear "childish" to his Nigerian students, and "childlike" to Dylan Thomas, is their shared inability to understand a writer who "has his two feet firmly planted in the hard soil of an ancient oral, and moral, tradition."[7] Arguing similarly, Patrick Colm Hogan maintains "both the novel and the [Yoruba] culture largely center around fertility, the continuation of human life through the growing of food and the birth of children."[8] Ato Quayson notes that Tutuola, like Fagunwa, draws upon "an uncommon type of cautionary tales told to children . . . . Cautionary tales often draw on traditional travel narratives and on the experiences of hunters in the forests. The bush is the antithesis of settled communities and is conceived of as the problematic 'Other' harbouring all sorts of supernatural forces."[9] Thus, the tales themselves presuppose that a "civilizing project" can be more than a "colonizing project," that a constructive ethics can be more than hegemonic cultural conditioning. Olakunle George argues, "Taken together, the novel's religiosity and celebration of hard work and self-discipline add up to a rhetoric of collective prosperity as the just consequence of work, communal will, and God's providence."[10]

An apparent distaste for the conceptual underpinnings and generic attributions of Yoruba cautionary tales seems implicit in Owomoyela's impatience with

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3 Ibid., p. 184. This judgment was reiterated by Quayson, but sharply challenged by Owomoyela.

4 Beilis, "Ghosts, People, and Books of Yorubaland," p. 448.

5 Chinua Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," in Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), pp. 100–101.

6 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, pp. 12–27.

7 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," p. 101.

8 Patrick Colm Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 31, 4 (2000): 33–58, 34 cited. A revised version of the essay appears in Patrick Colm Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice*: *Cognitive and Cultural Studies of Literary Tradition and Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 125–56.

9 Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, p. 46. Also see Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 41.

10 George, *Relocating Agency*, p. 137.

Fagunwa's didacticism ("He never misses an opportunity to call his reader's attention to the edifying import of his story") and his critique of Tutuola's "Otherization:" "The grotesqueness of the contrary spirits and monsters … reflects his hostility to difference; and since his norm is Western and European, the result is … a pronounced anti-African strain."[11] While the details of Owomoyela's critique will be addressed subsequently, his assimilation of the village/bush antithesis into Western tropes of hostility to difference seems a striking instance of the Eurocentricism he decries. Although Tutuola lacks Fagunwa's control of language and clarity of narrative, what is valuable in Tutuola comes into view when an appreciative reading of Fagunwa discloses the generic and thematic patterns he reworks. In response to the question of what *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is "about," Achebe argues that it explores what "happens when a man immerses himself in pleasure to the exclusion of all work …. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a rich and spectacular exploration of this gross perversion, its expiation through appropriate punishment and the offender's final restoration."[12] For Hogan, the narrative describes how "[t]he mechanisms of life fail when there is a failure of ethical reciprocity," in accord with "Yoruba myth and folklore" that understands "devastation … to result from excessive appropriation of abundance, from greed regarding something which is in excess of need."[13]

The Politics of Consumption and the Birth of Sociability in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*

Tutuola firmly situates the Drinkard's vocation of having "no other work than to drink palm-wine" in pre-colonial times: "In those days we did not know other money, except COWRIES."[14] The Drinkard's father gives him "an expert palm-wine tapster" and "a palm-tree farm which was nine miles square" (191). Achebe observes, "Thanks to the affluence of a father … the Drinkard is enabled to buy a slave and press him into a daily round of exploitative and socially useless work."[15] Owomoyela rightly notes that Tutuola writes that the father "engaged" rather than "bought" the tapster.[16] However, Owomoyela's inference, that there is no textual evidence that the Drinkard was a beneficiary of pre-colonial power inequities, does not follow. Some twenty years before the British demonetized cowries in 1904, European currency began to circulate along side cowries.[17] Imported from the

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11 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, pp. 87, 17.

12 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," p. 102.

13 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" pp. 34–5.

14 Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard/My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), p. 191. All further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

15 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," p. 103.

16 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, p. 59.

17 Toyin Falola and Akanmu Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money Among the Yoruba* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2000), pp. 19–20.

Indian Ocean, cowries were probably introduced to Yorubaland in the fifteenth century and were the currency of the Atlantic slave trade:

> The exchange of cowries for slaves, and the popularity of the shells as currency … [pitched] the Ijebu in commercial competition with their neighbors in the hinterland. … Oyo expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries toward the Atlantic coast was due partly to the interest of the business elite to, among other reasons, take control of the sources of the cowry currency. … Before the introduction of modern (European) currency, the Yoruba referred to cowries simply as money: *owo*.[18]

Money had the primary value of allowing

> the recruitment of slaves, which provided the opportunity to exploit labor more than other [non-monetary] means. The wars of the nineteenth century produced thousands of slaves, who were used to expand private armies and productive enterprises. Wealthy merchants were also able to buy slaves to expand their economic activities and consolidate their political status.[19]

The abolition of the Atlantic trade led to "an increasing use of domestic slaves" in Yorubaland, as throughout Africa, to produce commodities for "legitimate" trade:

> For the greater part of the nineteenth century, the Yoruba supplied palm oil and palm kernels to the international market. … Those who profited from it used slaves in large numbers, not just to produce but also to transport the oil to the coastal market in Lagos. … Merchants and warriors spent large sums of money on large houses, food, clothes, imported items, and lavish entertainments. The poems about individuals composed during the period emphasized money, prestige, fame, and grandeur.[20]

Within this context, the Drinkard is extraordinary only in his consumptive capacity (150 kegs in the morning, 75 in the afternoon). Belasco argues that coastal trade with the West moved the Yoruba from a traditional reliance upon war and agriculture to an intensification of enslavement and increasingly labor-intensive farming (of European-introduced crops such as maize, cassava, and peanuts).[21] Thus, the concern with agriculture and the fertility of land that Hogan notes in Tutuola may have a historical context; the political turmoil of the Oyo Empire's rise and decline, and the subsequent civil wars, tended to make agricultural labor at once precarious and lacking in prestige. Since the "gathering of supporters" was central to power and wealth, consumption involved at once sensual enjoyment of the fruits of slave-labor and a social process of securing the "supporters" necessary

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18 Ibid., p. 32.

19 Ibid., p. 15.

20 Ibid., p. 18.

21 Bernard I. Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero: Preadaptations in Nigerian Economic Development* (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp. 65–6; also see Falola and Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money*, pp. 88–94, 156–67.

to reproduce wealth. Under such circumstances, Yoruba hospitality, instead of reflecting an ethics of reciprocity, might easily be deformed into ideological "covers" for exploitive patronage.

Notably, after the Drinkard's father and tapster die, and he no longer has abundant palm wine to offer his friends, they leave him, "because there was no palm-wine for them to drink" (192). Unable to find another tapster of equivalent skill, the Drinkard reflects that since "old people were saying that the whole people who had died in this world, did not go to heaven directly, but they were living in one place somewhere in this world," he should go into the bush to bring back the tapster (193). Like Fagunwa, Tutuola portrays the initial adventurousness of his hero as an effect of greed—with the difference that Akara-ogun is motivated by delight in conquest, while the Drinkard is motivated by indolence. Quayson suggests that by differing from Fagunwa in his choice of heroes, Tutuola "problematizes the culturally derived structure of heroism."[22] Certainly, Tutuola magnifies the appropriative aspects of that structure. When the Drinkard reaches a town where he asks a man about the tapster, the man, who says that he is a god, asks the Drinkard's name: "I replied that my name was 'Father of gods who could do everything in this world'" (194). When the man then proposes that the Drinkard bring "Death" to him in a net, the Drinkard sets off "on Death's road" (195).

The Drinkard attempts to defeat Death directly, but as in Akara-ogun's battle against Agbako, which Tutuola's description virtually paraphrases, force is countered by equal force, magical spells by counter-spells. Thus Death tries to defeat the Drinkard by ruse (pretending hospitality and attacking him while he sleeps), but the Drinkard counters with his own ruse, spreading a net over a pit in the road (196–8). Hogan argues that because Death is tied up with the ropes of yams from his garden, the story implies that Death may be "subdued by crops, by farming."[23] What happens after the Drinkard captures Death, however, suggests a different emphasis. When the Drinkard returns to town carrying Death over his shoulder, the man and "the whole people . . . ran away for their lives" while Death escapes from the net: "So that since the day that I had brought Death out from his house, he has no permanent place to dwell or stay, and we are hearing his name about in the world" (199). Death comes into "town" through the Drinkard's need to prove that he is indeed the god-like force his words describe, but his very success has unintended, self-defeating consequences. The townspeople become refugees and so the Drinkard does not receive the help he had counted on. Tutuola creates a parodic image of the consequences of warlordism, of becoming the master and bearer of Death.

Arriving at another town, the Drinkard goes to the house of its head, where he is received "with kindness" and given food and palm-wine (200). Asked his name, the Drinkard again replies that he is called "Father of gods who could do anything in this world," and then his host offers to tell him the "whereabouts" of his tapster in return for retrieving "his daughter who was captured by a curious creature from the market" (200). Whereas the man/god sent the Drinkard to Death

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22 Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, pp. 51–2.

23 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" p. 43.

with a view of destroying him, the head of the town wants his daughter back, apparently because he loves her. Though love motivates the head of the town's request, the Drinkard's agrees out of shame: "when I remembered my name I was ashamed to refuse" (201). Owomoyela argues that for Tutuola "the civilizing project" is co-extensive with "his association of Westernesque, Europeanesque, or modern material paraphernalia and institutions with the good life,"[24] but Tutuola here portrays the civilizing process beginning with the confluence of love and shame.

The daughter was captivated before she was captured. The curious creature at the market appeared as "a beautiful 'complete' gentleman, all the parts of his body were completed, he was a tall man but stout" (201–2). She followed him "inside an endless forest" (203), and then discovered that all the beautiful parts of his body were only rented, that he is himself only a skull: "[S]he began to say that her father had been telling her to marry a man, but she did not listen to or believe him" (204). In wanting to marry "more" than an ordinary man, the daughter ends up captive both of a fragment of a "true" man and of his equally distorted, diminished people, the Skulls, who tie a cowrie to her neck that "would raise up the alarm with a terrible noise" (205–6) should she try to escape, even as it deprives her of voice, making her dumb (206). As Hogan argues, "Allegorically … the woman has refused marriage and, implicitly, children, and thus has (unwittingly) followed death."[25] This action also, however, has a specific historical context. Stephen M. Tobias suggests the story may be read as a critique of a monetized economy, materialistic temptations, and thus the "death and enslavement" that "structures of colonialism" entail,[26] but a monetized economy and (literal) enslavement long predated colonialism in Yorubaland. Indeed, cowries were specifically associated with a kind of social death. Given the connections between cowries and the slave trade, Tutuola's fable suggests the dehumanizing effects of a predatory social order upon both slaves and enslavers: the former have no voice, the latter become only Skulls.

The Drinkard follows the "complete gentleman," whose beauty he also finds beguiling: "After I looked at him for so many hours, then I ran to a corner of the market and I cried for a few minutes because I thought within myself why I was not created with beauty as this gentleman, but when I remembered that he was only a Skull, then I thanked God that He had created me without beauty" (207). For the first time, the Drinkard mentions God, who appears in the Drinkard's discourse at the moment he separates himself from the enchantment that had enslaved the daughter. The Drinkard uses juju to enter the Skull family's house as a lizard, but when he tries to liberate the daughter, the cowrie alarm sounds; he brings the lady back to her father by turning them both into birds (209–11). However, the cowrie is still sounding, and "she could not talk, eat or loose away the cowrie on her neck" (211). Returning to the Skulls as a lizard, the Drinkard

24 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, pp. 12–13.

25 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" pp. 43–4.

26 See Stephen M. Tobias, "Amos Tutuola and the Colonial Carnival," *Research in African Literatures* 30, 2 (1999): 66–75.

overhears the magic he must perform to free her from the cowrie; once he does so, she can again speak, and her parents give him "the lady as wife and two rooms in that house in which to live with them" (213).

Through saving another, and allowing her a "voice," the Drinkard enters social space, but he soon is discontented by not having enough palm-wine. After three and a half years, his wife's thumb swells up and she gives birth to child who can talk and names himself, "'ZURRJIR' which means a son who would change himself into another thing very soon" (214). Zurrjir's appetites absolutize the Drinkard's. He eats voraciously until a man tells him to leave the kitchen: instead, "this wonderful child flogged the man" (215). When townspeople come to the man's aid, the child "smash[es] everything on the ground to pieces … still all the people could not conquer him" (215). Like Fagunwa's Ajantala, the Drinkard's son threatens the continuance of human life. As Hogan argues, he is a *tohosu* child,[27] and thus exemplifies the threat to fertility, to material and social reproduction, of natural energy unmodified by constructive, socializing ethics. At the same time, Zurrjir acquires attributes of a "war-boy" (*omo-ogun*): "Now he became our ruler in the house, because sometimes he would say that we should not eat till night … [H]e began to burn the houses of the heads of that town to ashes" (216). Because the townspeople call upon the Drinkard to put an end to his son's "havocs" (216), he burns down his house while the son is sleeping, which returns the town to peace, but the Drinkard wants to continue his quest for the tapster. As the Drinkard and his wife are about to leave, the wife sifts through the ashes for her gold trinket, despite the Drinkard's protests. When she does so, the ashes form a "half-bodied baby," who forces himself upon them: "As we were going on the road, he told my wife to carry him by head …. All the time that he was on my wife's head, 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" (218, 219). The parents fall victim to this monstrous offspring because of shared acquisitiveness: the wife wants to retrieve gold; the Drinkard wants a life of consumption without work. The half-bodied baby's exploitation of his parents parodies the relationship between a warlord and his slave warriors. They extract food from terrorized towns, food which the half-bodied baby monopolizes, so that he becomes an ever more oppressive burden for those who "carry" him (220).[28]

As in the Kuranko tale of "The Killing Word" and Fagunwa's story of Ajantala, God rescues humanity from the consequences of its own rapacity. Tutuola has God work through the indirect means of "Drum, Song and Dance," who make such beautiful music that the half-bodied baby leaves his father's head to dance. Involuntarily, they follow the three figures dancing until they reach the entrance of a "premises:" "only the three fellows and our half-bodied baby entered the

27 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" p. 46.

28 Owomoyela argues that the Zurrjir story is an inferior version of Fagunwa's Ajantala story, but he offers no reading of the Zurrjir episode; instead, he contrasts Fagunwa's story with another version of the folktale that Tutuola provided for an anthology of tales. See Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, pp. 63–8.

premises, after that, we saw them no more" (221). Freed from enslavement, the Drinkard and his wife start "a fresh journey," but have no money. The Drinkard remembers that he is "Father of gods who could do anything in this world," carves a paddle and then uses juju to change himself into a canoe, and has his wife ferry people across the river; in a month, they have "£56:11:9d" (222) and so continue their journey. Achebe points out that Tutuola "consistently plac[es] work and play in close sequence," arguing that "the poet/drinkard who has just sung a lofty panegyric to the three personifications of music … now suddenly becomes a practical man again concerned with money and 'food etc.'"[29] Tutuola associates the Drinkard's acquisition of a humanizing moderation (he is unlike both the absolute personifications of music and the absolute personification of self-indulgent acquisitiveness, the half-bodied baby) with a movement from accumulation through terror to accumulation through commerce. The first of many appearances of British currency, as opposed to cowries, occurs at this point. This need not indicate, as Owomoyela would argue, that Tutuola presents British colonialism as a good thing, but rather that he links the world of "work" in Achebe's sense with a modern dissociation of accumulation from direct violence.[30]

While the Drinkard earns money, he does so only to continue his search for the tapster. Thus, he leads his wife back into a bush filled with malevolent entities, where they are captured by "field creatures" who torture them until their king sends the Drinkard to their "gods of war." By contrast to the field creatures, the people of "Wraith-Island" receive the Drinkard and his wife "with kindness" (228). Within this sphere of ethical reciprocity, the Drinkard becomes "a farmer" and plants "many kinds of crops" (229). But a monstrous creature begins destroying the crops. When the king of the Wraith-Island neglects to choose a tiny creature to help clear his cornfield, he finds the fields magically covered with weeds at the tiny creature's command. The king "made excuses to him, after that he went away" (232). As Achebe remarks, "the king … who neglects to invite the smallest creature in his kingdom to join in communal work … is compelled to offer apologies to the little fellow for the slight."[31]

Despite the people's hospitality, the Drinkard again becomes restless to retrieve the tapster, and takes his wife into the "greedy" bush (233), where a "Spirit of Prey" kills animals simply by focusing his light-casting gaze upon them and then closing its eyes. The Drinkard and his wife are caught in this death-gaze: "But I was praying to God by that time not to let this 'Spirit of Prey' close his eyes, because if he closed them, no more, we had perished there. But God is so good he did not remember to close his eyes by that time" (236). Again, only divine intervention prevents the Drinkard's conduct from yielding consequences at once natural, logical, and lethal. A slow learner, the Drinkard enters a "ruined town," sees a

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29 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," pp. 104–5.

30 See Anthony Giddens' argument to this effect in *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

31 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," p. 108.

basket full of kolas, hears a mysterious voice say, "DON'T TAKE IT! LEAVE IT THERE!" (237), but takes the kola, and is confronted by a giant with a whip (237). They then find themselves at the "Unreturnable-Heaven's Town," whose inhabitants "were very bad, cruel and merciless" (238). Through being tortured (their heads are shaved raw, they are buried up to their necks, and an eagle is set upon them to pluck out their eyes), the Drinkard and his wife encounter the utmost limit of violence.

They escape exactly as Akara-ogun escapes a similar death: "God is so good … a heavy rain came and … the holes became soft …. But when I shook my body to left and right, then I got out and ran to my wife and pulled her out of her own too" (243). God frees the Drinkard from the "imprisoning" consequences of his own actions. In pausing to save his wife, the Drinkard discloses some moral progress, though once free, he sets the Unreturnable-Heaven's Town's houses on fire at night, so that "about ninety per cent of them also burnt with the houses and none of their children were saved" (244). The story enforces a "message" frequently reiterated in folktales,[32] that the refusal to acknowledge ethical obligations to disempowered strangers invites retribution. Thus, Tutuola suggests that a political order founded upon acquisitive violence cannot sustain over time the very power relations that its predation presupposes.

Encountering the "Faithful-Mother:" Maternal Love and Ambiguous Freedom

Back in the bush, the Drinkard and his wife encounter a huge tree "almost white as if it was painted every day" (246). Aware that the tree is "focusing" on them, the Drinkard and his wife attempt to flee (246), but are stopped by hands and a voice that draws them inside the tree, at the door of which they sell their death "for the sum of £70: 18: 6d," and lend their fear "on interest of £3: 10: 0d per month" (247). Greeted by an old woman called "FAITHFUL-MOTHER," they are given food and drink, and they enter a "dancing hall" filled with people, decorated with "one million pounds (£) and there were many images" including the Drinkard's and his wife's: "But our own images that we saw there resembled us too much and were also white colour" (248). Adjoining the dancing-hall and kitchen is a hospital, where the Drinkard and his wife are treated until their hair grows back:

32 See, for example, the Ituri story of a Pygmy in search of a wife who encounters an old, ugly, diseased woman who calls him to her. Telling her that he is afraid of catching her disease, the Pygmy refuses to go near her and so refuses to hear what she has to say. In the next village, he meets an elder who offers him his beautiful daughter, but during the night he kills the Pygmy. When the Pygmy's brother goes in search of him, encountering the old woman, he reacts similarly and meets a similar fate. Finally, a third brother encounters the old woman and replies, "Well, mother, what can I do for you?" She informs him of the danger awaiting him in the next village. The third Pygmy is spared because he is willing to aid an old woman with sores—that is, someone who belongs to three marginalized categories: the aged, the female, the diseased. See Roger D. Abrahams (ed.), *African Folktales: Traditional Stories from the Black World* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 299–300.

"[W]ithin a week that we were living with this mother, we had forgotten all our past torments and she told us to go to the hall at any time we liked" (249–50). After "one year and two weeks," the Faithful-Mother tells the Drinkard that they must continue their journey. When they beg to stay, she replies "that she had no right to delay anybody more than a year and some days," but provides the Drinkard with "a gun and ammunitions and a cutlass," gives the wife "many costly clothes" and gifts of food, drink, and cigarettes (251). The Drinkard and his wife take back their fear from the borrower but cannot buy back their death (252).

This scene has long perplexed criticism. Harold R. Collins remarks, "Faithful-Mother in the white tree looks rather like a strangely indulgent missionary and her establishment like a combination mission compound and luxury hotel or night club."[33] Achebe argues,

> It … seems quite appropriate that after [their suffering at the hands of the Unreturnable-Heaven's Townspeople] the travellers should enjoy their most elaborate rest. But the ease and luxury they do encounter in the White Tree surpass all expectations. Free food and drink in a cabaret atmosphere and a gambling casino are among the amenities of this European-style haven of conspicuous consumption. … And naturally also [the Drinkard] loses the will for the quest, so that when Faithful Mother tells him that it is time to resume his journey.[34]

Owomoyela reads the episode as illustrative of Tutuola's "Westernesque, Europeanesque" sensibilities.[35]

The interpretative difficulties become even more perplexing when we consider how closely Tutuola follows Fagunwa. Akara-ogun escapes death at the hands of the ghommid city through the divine intervention of heavy rain, followed by the "Creator again" taking pity on him and sending "a messenger," a "most beautiful woman," who restores him with such hospitality that he forgets "all the suffering" he has experienced. When this woman suddenly dies, Akara-ogun prays for his mother's aid, and she suddenly appears, not as the malevolent witch of the first episode, but as at once a source of maternal comfort who "embrac[es]" and "caress[es]" him, and as a messenger from the God of love: "try to benefit this world before you die and leave it better than you entered it." She leads him to a tunnel and throws a stone into it, as "white as cotton fluff," which he follows to continue his quest (*Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, pp. 58–60).

Tutuola blends into the Faithful-Mother some of the attributes of Fagunwa's beautiful woman and mother, while adding others (the dance hall, the gambling, the gifts of weapons and cigarettes) seemingly inconsistent with those attributes. In Fagunwa's narrative, whiteness evokes the qualities of Obatala and other related "spirits"—serenity, harmony, reconciliation—which Fagunwa associates with the "good news" that God is love, an association well-established in missionary traditions. Like Akara-ogun, the Drinkard encounters maternal care not at the

33 Collins, *Amos Tutuola*, p. 78.
34 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," pp. 109–10.
35 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, p. 13.

beginning but in the middle of his story. But that such care should be linked to both the materialistic indulgences and patronizing tutelage of a "white" world may seem unaccountable.

Within the context of a retelling of history, however, the incongruous elements acquire coherence. Tutuola was a native of Abeokuta,[36] not only a refugee center during the Yoruba civil wars, but also the place where "recaptives" from Freetown, Sierra Leone returned to Yorubaland in the late 1830s.[37] Through literacy and job training, the "recaptives" or Saros were able to acquire the sorts of goods the Faithful-Mother bestows upon the Drinkard and his wife. Indeed, a political alliance with Christian forces had material benefits.[38] In the world of the White Tree, Tutuola seems to combine elements of the Yoruba experience in nineteenth-century Freetown, where emancipation and solicitude were juxtaposed with deeply ambiguous material benefits. The very whiteness of the tree evokes Freetown, by the 1830s characterized by "white dwellings and prolific gardens. … The style in which the houses are generally built … thr[ew] an oriental character over the view; they [were] as often of wood as of stone, and [were] washed white or yellow."[39] The heterogeneity of the populace, from white missionaries and administrators to Creole repatriates from Novia Scotia and the West Indies to Muslim traders to indigenous peoples, was striking, as were the heterogeneity of evangelical enterprises and their juxtaposition with institutions serving more earthly needs:

> The piety of the Freetown blacks was not always matched by sobriety. One Wesleyan "God-palaver house" stood opposite to a building of at least equal popularity, a rum-house. "These two fashionable resorts seem to be upon cordial terms, playing into each other's hands as it were. A tide of votaries flows backwards and forwards; the languid spirit seeks from spirituous energy a spiritual fervour," one missionary noted.[40]

The mixture of piety and licentiousness, high-minded charity and fleecing of newcomers was pronounced. Freetown offered a bewildering combination of intense danger and extravagant opportunity: "The black ruling class in Sierra Leone during the nineteenth century was formed from the recaptured slaves. … [However,] the first recaptives had to fight for a place in society …. As late as 1855, Governor Kennedy reported to Parliament that many apprentice children

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36 See Tutuola's autobiographical sketch in the Grove edition of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, pp. 303–7.

37 David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change Among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 42.

38 Ibid., p. 43.

39 F.H. Rankin, letter from 1832; quoted in Richard West, *Back to Africa: A History of Sierra Leone and Libera* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 175. On the founding of Freetown, see Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London's Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement 1786–1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994).

40 West, *Back to Africa*, p. 177; West cites Thomas Eyre Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs in Sierra Leone and the Gambia* (London, 1850).

were sold up-country as slaves."[41] Nevertheless, "black people took part in the management of a modern state. Black businessmen, doctors and lawyers … competed as equals with whites. There were black officials, at once a partly-black governor, as well as the first black bishop, Samuel Adjai Crowther, and knight, Sir Samuel Lewis. … The Yoruba Syble Boyle, who had taken his name from the H.M.S. Sybille that rescued him and from Dr. Boyle his first master," became an internationally recognized expert in manufacturing cloth and medicine from vegetable fibers, and as an old man "belonged to the 'Upper Ten' of the colony," his house resembling those built "in rich bourgeois quarters in Europe."[42]

If the world of the White Tree resembles nineteenth-century Freetown, the Faithful-Mother, like the mother who appears in Fagunwa's narrative, both comes to the aid of her children and insists that they "grow up," that they separate themselves from her. At the same time, the mother figures in both texts set the "sons" upon a road that ultimately leads "home," that transmutes desire into ethical sociability. However, Tutuola's treatment of the maternal figure is complicated both by his depiction of how indulgent solicitude can engender unhealthy dependence and by his linking of the "Faithful-Mother" with a "white" world that associates happiness with material gratification and that creates "white images" of those it rescues.

In the next episode the Drinkard and his wife come upon the Red-town where, after receiving hospitality, they learn that the people are red because the king caught a red-fish and red-bird in the bush who started "talking like human beings, saying that [the king] must not put them in the fire" (256); as the king paid no attention, smoke consumed the town, turning everyone red, and every year thereafter both red creatures exacted human sacrifice (257). Not believing that the Other captured in the bush could say anything worth hearing, the Red-king brands himself and his people with the blood red associated with Ogun and related spirits. When the Red-king asks for a volunteer sacrifice, the Drinkard turns to his wife and asks, "what could we do now?" (257). Whereas Owomoyela argues that the Drinkard's wife "is in fact not much more than a trophy,"[43] here, for the first time, the Drinkard treats her as a potential source of wisdom. Not knowing how to interpret his wife's response: "This would be a brief loss of woman, but a shorter separation of a man from lover" (257), the Drinkard volunteers, remembering that they "had sold away" their deaths (257–8). Even as the scene suggests the return to Yorubaland of Christianized Saros, it also suggests the "rebirth" inscribed in Yorubaland initiation ceremonies. Hogan points out that in shaving his head and painting it white or red, the Drinkard resembles an initiate who is "reborn" into manhood.[44] At the same time, the gun and ammunition provided by the Faithful-Mother prove quite useful in dispatching the creatures (259–60).

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41 Ibid., p. 161.

42 Ibid., pp. 160, 163.

43 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, p. 132.

44 See Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice*, p. 150. Hogan cites Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performance, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 66.

Once the predators are dead, the Red-king begins to fear the Drinkard as a potential rival (260). Just as Akara-ogun's service for the ghommid city leads to his being perceived as a danger, so the Drinkard's unexpected victory leads the Red-people to burn their town, move 80 miles away, and become red trees. Since they take the Drinkard's wife with them, he pursues them, demanding her return. By pursuing his wife rather than his own pleasures, the Drinkard comes to understand her speech and to play a constructive role in a flourishing community. The Drinkard becomes within a year a wealthy man, able to hire "many labourers to clear bush," upon which cleared land he plants seeds acquired in the Wraith-Island (264). The Drinkard uses hired labor and seeds acquired from elsewhere (suggesting both trade and European-introduced cash crops) to secure a yield that can be translated into capital, which permits the hiring of more labor. Indeed, wealthy indigenous planters and farmers appeared throughout West Africa from the 1920s to the 1950s. Tutuola appears to associate the transformation of the material conditions of life with powers brought to Yorubaland by Freetown "recaptives" (loss of a fear of death and acquisition of guns and ammunition), and with at least the beginnings of a transformation of gender relations.[45]

As in the episode of the Faithful-Mother, Tutuola presents the "magic" of Western capitalism as deeply ambiguous. One night, a man comes to the Drinkard's door who declares that he has always heard "the word—'POOR,' but he did not know it and he wanted to know it," so he proposes to work for the Drinkard as "a 'pawn' or as permanent hired labourer" (265). When the Drinkard consults his wife, she says that he will be a "WONDERFUL HARD WORKER" but in the future a "WONDERFUL ROBBER" (265). The pawn, called Give and Take, only works at night, but then does a miraculous amount of work, for he is actually head of all Bush-creatures. But when the Drinkard, "think[ing] over how this man was working like this and did not ask for food etc.," invites the pawn to "take some yams, corn, etc.," he takes not only all of the Drinkard's yams and corns, but also those of his neighbors (268), so that his neighbors "raise up an Army" against the Drinkard to drive him out of the town (269). The Drinkard's wife tells him that "it would be the loss of lives of the natives, but it would save the two non-natives" (269). The Drinkard appeals for help from Give and Take, and he and his followers descend upon the town at night destroying everyone except the Drinkard and his wife, thus fulfilling the latter's prophecy (270).

Achebe argues that this episode reveals how "a community which lets some invisible hand do its work for it will sooner or later forfeit the harvest."[46]

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45 The Drinkard's increasing attentiveness to his wife contrasts with studies such as Ifi Amadiume's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed, 1987), where colonialist Victorian notions of domesticity are portrayed as diminishing the pre-colonial, institutionalized authority of women's organizations. The two points need not be in opposition, however, since Amadiume's argument refers to public life while Tutuola's text here concerns private life. On the paradoxes of institutional masculine authority and ministering to women in Yoruba Christianity, see Laitin's discussion of gender relations in the church (*Hegemony and Culture*, pp. 59, 70–71).

46 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," p. 111.

Countering Achebe, Oyomoyela claims that the story is simply an example of Tutuola's incompetence. Give and Take serves only the Drinkard, but destroys everyone's crops; he destroys everyone except the Drinkard.[47] However, in the economy Tutuola is describing, the enrichment of one member of a community indirectly enriches others. Owomoyela himself notes that "Give and Take provides meat in overabundance for everybody."[48] The production of overabundance describes the difference between a subsistence economy, where zero-sum logic may apply, and a capitalist, market economy, where the creation of wealth, measured by growth rates, at least in principle creates a "magical" situation in which more for one need not imply less for others. Under these circumstances, the Drinkard alone thinks of compensating Give and Take, of including him in the circuit of ethical reciprocity. While it is peculiar that Give and Take "takes back" so unrelentingly, it is clear that the Red-people are destroyed at the moment they are raising an army against an exploited Other. Even though the Invisible Pawn occasions an extraordinary productivity revolution, the townspeople are willing simply to "take" what he produces. That the Drinkard's concern about economic justice seems to trigger Give and Take's rapacious consumption appears odd. However, Achebe's reading and the folklore upon which the episode is based[49] both suggest the underlying lesson that wealth not generated by hard work is illusory and so can disappear without explanation. Perhaps Tutuola's story appears incoherent because it fuses together two themes: first, that unearned wealth vanishes as quickly as it appears; second, that capitalist accumulation institutes social injustice unless the wealth generated is shared fairly with those who produce it.

Arriving at the Deads' Town, the Drinkard and his wife discover that people walk backwards and speak through signs the living do not understand (275–6). The tapster greets his former master hospitably, gives him abundant food and palm-wine, but tells him that after "two years in training," he had "qualified as a full dead man," that though "both white and black deads were living in the Deads' Town, not a single alive was there," for "everything that they were doing there was incorrect to alives and everything that all alives were doing was incorrect to deads too" (278–9). Upon hearing this, the Drinkard is "unable to drink the palm-wine," because he "knew already that deads could not live with alives." (279). Achebe notes that throughout the book "boundaries play a decisive role in the plot." The spirits cannot transgress their geographical limits.[50] By encountering the boundary between the living and the dead, the Drinkard encounters the ultimate check to egocentric appropriation.

Instead of returning with the Drinkard, the tapster gives him an egg that will grant him anything he "wanted in this world" (279). The way home, as in *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, is filled with dangers that suggest the constant possibility of regression. The Drinkard and his wife are captured by a gigantic man "as slaves" to work the man's farm (283). Abused by nine terrible fellow captives,

47 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, pp. 59–60.
48 Ibid., p. 60.
49 Ibid., pp. 62–3.
50 Achebe, "Work and Play in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*," pp. 109–10.

the Drinkard fights them until he faints of loss of blood; but his wife sees the leaves used by one of the nine to heal himself, so she heals the Drinkard: "As she had managed to take our loads … and followed us to the farm, we escaped from that farm" (284). Just as the Drinkard saved his wife from enslavement, so she saves him.

In the bush they encounter an insatiable "hungry creature" who could not stop crying "hungry-hungry-hungry" (286); fearful that he would harm them, the Drinkard turns his wife into a wooden doll, but the hungry creature nonetheless swallows her: "As I stood in that place … I thought that my wife, who had been following me about in the bush to Deads' Town had not shrunk from any suffering, so I said that, she should not leave me like this and I would not leave her for the hungry-creature to carry away" (287). The Drinkard confronts the hungry-creature and is swallowed in turn, but uses his juju to turn the wooden doll back into his "wife, gun, egg, cutlass," and uses the gun to kill the creature and the cutlass to cut his way out of the stomach: "So we left him safely and thanked God for that" (288). The Drinkard defeats monstrous embodiments of antisocial tendencies through a combination of love for another, indigenous magic, and weapons provided by the Faithful-Mother.

They reach a "mixed" town of humans and non-humans, where the Drinkard is obliged to rest because his wife falls ill. Attending the "native court" (288), the Drinkard hears the case of a man who refused to repay a £1 debt, stabbing himself to death rather than violating his practice of never repaying debts, whereupon the debt-collector stabs himself to death to pursue the "debitor" into the other world (290). The Drinkard is asked to decide who is guilty. In another case, a man with three wives dies, the senior wife decides to die with him, the second wife goes to a Wizard who can awaken the dead, and the third wife guards the corpses from wild animals. Once the Wizard resurrects the husband and his first wife, he asks for one of the wives as payment (291–2). The Drinkard is asked to decide which should be sacrificed, but, as with the first case, he defers judgment until his wife is well enough for him to leave the "mixed" town: "So I shall be very much grateful if anyone who reads this story-book can judge one or both cases and send the judgement to me as early as possible" (292–3). By placing dilemma tales, in which an oral storyteller calls upon the audience to deliberate upon a matter that does not yield simple conclusions,[51] in a courtroom, the institutional site where (ideally, at least) speech displaces violence, Tutuola suggests that surmounting unrestrained acquisitiveness leads to "grasping" diverse ways of judging the same situation. Moreover, in these cases, in which men commit suicide for trivial reasons and women try to transgress the boundary between living and dead, the assignation of culpability is less important than remaining focused on the living (as in the Drinkard's concern for his wife) and on the practical problems of the here-and-how (as in the Drinkard's concern with returning home).

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51 For discussions of dilemma tales, see Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

As they approach home, the Drinkard and his wife encounter "more than a million mountain-creatures" (293), who insist that the Drinkard's wife dance with them unceasingly. The Drinkard saves his wife from being danced to death by turning her into a wooden doll, described by Hogan as a "talisman which wards off a child's death," and so is emblematic of the preservation of fertility.[52] He places her in his pocket, upon which the mountain-creatures begin to pursue him, so he turns himself into a pebble and throws himself along until he leaves them at a river's edge: "So from that river to my home town was only a few minutes to reach" (295). Just as the Drinkard must overcome a figure of absolutized appropriative violence (the hungry-creature) and must renounce dogmatism and legalistic minutiae, so he must "move beyond," the mountain-creatures, the embodiment of unrestrained play, if he is to return to a human sphere in which constructive and disruptive ethics are intricately interwoven.

Tutuola, Fagunwa, and the Question of Communal Ethical Redemption

Once home, the Drinkard discovers that a great famine has killed millions and "even parents were killing their children for food so as to save themselves" (296). Destitution abrogates social bonds. The famine has been caused by a quarrel between Land and Heaven, formerly "tight friends," who are now angry because their hunting had so exhausted the game that only one mouse was left: "[T]his mouse was too small to divide into two and these two friends were … greedy" (296). Immiseration follows from unrestrained acquisition. The Drinkard, however, has his egg capable of anything; he uses this to feed the entire world, but it proves a mixed blessing. The Drinkard becomes "the greatest man" in the town, but he cannot sleep because people are always demanding food and drink. Unearned well-being undermines itself: "[W]hen these people ate the food and drank to their satisfaction, they began to play and were wrestling with each other until the egg was mistakenly smashed" (299). The Drinkard is suddenly as unpopular as he was after the tapster died. That his townspeople have not changed during the time of the Drinkard's quest suggests that Tutuola may be less than sanguine about the Drinkard's moral itinerary serving as a model for national or cultural progress. The Drinkard is himself not worried about the egg's damage, because he had used it to acquire money, but when his efforts to repair it leads to its producing "only millions of leather-whips" (300), he goes to the king, tells him that he has a new egg, and invites everyone to come feast at his expense. When they arrive, the Drinkard sets the whips upon them, which start "to flog them all at once …. All the king's attendants were severely beaten by these whips and also all the kings. Many of them ran into the bush and many of them died there" (301). Like "Give and Take," the Drinkard exacts a fearsome retribution upon those who live at the expense of others. Hogan notes that the Egungun, "members of the community who take on the identities of important ancestors for ceremonial purposes,"

52 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" p. 39.

used whips to administer justice, to restore the community to the kind of ethical practices that would sustain or renew the fertility of the land.[53]

After the egg disappears, the famine continues until the Drinkard tells "the old people" to make a sacrifice of fowls, kolas, and palm oil "to be carried to Heaven in heaven" (302). Quayson notes that "[i]t is significant that the Drinkard is moved to join forces with his people on seeing how the famine was ravaging the helpless aged."[54] At the same time, however, the Drinkard must tell the old people about the need for sacrifices, which suggests that he has learned what they have forgotten—the need to acknowledge powers beyond human willfulness and desire. Tutuola concludes the narrative on a rather sardonic note. No one is willing to carry the sacrifice to Heaven, so one of the king's slaves is selected for the journey. Upon his return, it begins to rain heavily but no one will take him in because they fear that he "would carry them also to Heaven as he had carried the sacrifice to Heaven" (302). While the Drinkard has been "acculturated" into ethical sensibility by his journey, the community to which he returns has not. In contrast to Fagunwa's optimism about the people's potential reformation through heeding the wise "counsel" of the king of Mount Langbodo, Tutuola intimates that the Drinkard's reformation, itself imperfect, is *not* a "national allegory."[55] Rather, the narrative presents itself as delineating a path that only the Drinkard, and perhaps the reader, but pointedly not the community, have been willing or able to take.

Negotiating External Predation in Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*

While not a sequel to *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) is its logical counterpart. The opening scene, like Akara-ogun's father's story, plunges the reader into a world where history and domestic life take on nightmarish attributes. The narrator describes how he was seven before he "understood the meaning of 'bad' and 'good,'" because at that time he "noticed carefully" that his father "married three wives as they were doing in those days, if it is not common nowadays."[56] Only the narrator's mother, the last married, has given birth to sons, so the other wives "hated" his mother, brother, and himself "as they believed that no doubt my brother and myself would be the rulers of [the] father's house and also all his properties after his death" (17). Thus, the narrator "quite understood the meaning of 'bad' because of hatred but not the meaning of 'good'" (17). Tutuola introduces two important ideas. First, the "meaning of

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53 Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice*, p. 140.

54 Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, p. 54.

55 For the modified applicability to Fagunwa's fiction of Fredric Jameson's well-known claim that third-world narratives constitute national allegories, see George, *Relocating Agency*, pp. 105–9.

56 Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard/My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), p. 17. All further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

'bad'" may be evident without "the meaning of 'good.'" Second, the story may be read as a quest for that meaning.

The narrator remarks that in "those days … there were many kinds of African wars and some of them are as follows: general wars, tribal wars, burglary wars and the slave wars which were very common in every town and village and particularly in famous markets and on main roads of big towns at any time in the day or night" (17–18). Tutuola describes the likely fate of those captured: "These slave-wars were causing dead luck to both old and young of those days, because if one is captured, he or she would be sold into slavery for foreigners who would carry him or her to unknown destinations to be killed for the buyer's god or to be working for him" (18). By coupling "working" for a slave-master with being "killed for the buyer's god," Tutuola situates his narrative during the nineteenth century after the end of the Atlantic slave trade.[57]

The narrator enters a "life in the bush" through the commerce between domestic hatred and external predation. When their mother is at the market, her co-wives abandon the narrator and his brother to the fortunes of war (18). As the sound of guns comes closer, the brothers run to "a kind of African fruit trees which stood by the road" (19–20). The elder tries to carry the narrator, but in vain: "[T]hen I told him to leave me on the road and run away for his life" (20). Urging his brother to save himself and thus aid his mother, the narrator retreats to the bush, "under this fruit tree. This fruit tree was a 'SIGN' for me and it was on that day I called it—THE 'FUTURE SIGN';" the brother is captured, but "only captured as a slave and not killed," for the narrator hears his voice shouting "louder for help" (21).

Being "too young to know 'bad' and 'good,'" the narrator goes inside a house whose portico was "made of golden plate" (23). Finding himself before three rooms, one with "golden surroundings," the second with silverish, and the third with copperish, the boy is attracted by the smells of food coming from each room, and especially by the smells of African food coming from the copperish room: "[T]hree kinds of ghosts peeped at me, every one of them pointed his finger to me to come to him" (24). Like the kidnapper in *Shaihu Umar*, the ghosts appeal to the boy's sensual appetites. Like the "Spirit of Prey" in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, each ghost casts its own color of light over the narrator. Just as *Shaihu Umar* describes competing raiders cutting a slave-boy in two, so the three ghosts nearly "cut [the narrator] into three as they were pulling [him] about the room" (26). In response to his crying out, "all the ghosts and ghostesses of that area" arrive "to settle the misunderstanding" (26): "[T]hey forced me to choose the

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57 See Frederick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," in Frederick Cooper et al., *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 84–201, and Emmanuel Terray, "French Marxist Anthropology of the 1960s and African Studies: Outline for an Appraisal," in V.Y. Mudimbe (ed.), *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947–1987* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 250–52, on the co-existence of pre-capitalist and capitalist systems of accumulation in pre-colonial Africa, and thus the limits of modes of production analysis for Africa.

silverish-ghost as he was the ghost that my heart throbbed out to their hearing to choose" (27–8). The reasons for this choice remain obscure. Nonetheless, anarchy ensues when the ghosts refuse to respect the narrator's heart throbbing. The three ghosts continue "fighting on fiercely until a fearful ghost who was almost covered with all kinds of insects" comes upon the scene, attracted by the "noises" of their dissension (28). This "Smelling-ghost" (29), like Egbin in *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, embodies bestiality. He seizes the boy, thrusts him in his hunting-bag, and carries him into the bush (30).

The narrator is threatened with being devoured, literally. But luckily for the boy, the Smelling-ghost comes upon a "totally helpless" (31) dying animal, and so satisfies his appetite, while giving the remains to snakes covering his body. The Smelling-ghost takes the narrator to a "smelling town" (34) where people eat smelly food, drink urine, and have an annual exhibition of bad smells (35). On the one hand, the narrator experiences the kind of cultural disorientation that must have been the lot of innumerable slave-boys; on the other hand, the inversions of natural human preferences suggest, as does Fagunwa's portrait of the City of Filth, a society grounded upon predation. The Smelling-ghost displays the narrator like a trophy, and then dehumanizes him by transforming him into various animals (36). While the usefulness of turning a slave into a monkey who can pluck fruit is clear, it might seem surprising that the Smelling-ghost would also turn the narrator into a lion and bull with horns. However, Tutuola could expect Yoruba readers familiar with Johnson's history to be aware of the role of slave-warriors in reproducing nineteenth-century warrior-regimes.[58] Recent scholarship confirms the general picture. Discussing mid-nineteenth-century Yorubaland, Lovejoy notes, "Thousands of slave soldiers were assembled on a permanent war-footing. … Slave soldiers were given parts of the spoils, and they could advance in military rank if they proved themselves in battle."[59] After a communal feast, the narrator is transformed into a horse, mounted, and flogged (37). Like Fagunwa in describing Akara-ogun's capture by the man who mounts him but has never heard of cooked yam (see *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, pp. 38–43), Tutuola employs imagery suggestive of the "mounting" (*gigun*) ideologically central to Oyo imperial power.[60]

As a horse and a camel (soldier and porter?), the narrator is repeatedly beaten, starved, and exposed to the elements (38–40); he escapes servitude only through a combination of personal cunning and divine intervention. He sees the juju the Smelling-ghost uses to transform him. One day "God is so good, he did not

58 Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600–c. 1830: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 189.

59 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 180. Also see Toyin Falola and G.O. Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords in the Nineteenth Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

60 J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 9, 12.

remember to take the juju when he came out from the house" (40), so the narrator steals it and attempts to flee (41). Pursued by the ghost, the narrator turns himself into "a cow with horns" (42) outrunning the Smelling-ghost. Unhappily, the boy does not know how to reverse the spell, so he is pursued until he comes upon cow-men: "They thought I was one of their lost cows and put me among the cows as I was unable to change myself to a person again" (42).

If the world of the Smelling-ghost evokes patterns of predation suggestive of the Oyo Empire, the narrator's victimization at the hand of the cow-men suggests an encounter with Fulani imperialism, since the Fulani were originally pastoralists. Fulani ethnocentrism—predicated upon disdain for "black" Africans—shaped an imperialistic expansion during the nineteenth century from Guinea and Senegal in the north to Cameroon in the south. Discussing his research in Guinea, Paul Reisman notes the Fulani "stereotype" that "'captives' or ex-slaves … are black, fat, coarse, naive, irresponsible, uncultivated, shameless, dominated by their needs and emotions. … A corollary of this attitude is that all the other blacks (*haabe*, sg. *kaado*, non-Fulani blacks …) already possess the principal attributes of slaves."[61] Fulani efforts to extend their conquests from Hausaland through Yorubaland to the sea, coupled with constantly raiding Yorubaland for slaves, meant that exposure to Fulani predation was a central feature of nineteenth-century Yoruba experience.[62] By noting how the narrator was "illtreated as a wild or stubborn cow by these cow-men" (43), Tutuola brings out the pathos implicit in being treated as less than human, the cruelty of which finds its logical conclusion in ritual sacrifice. Unable to make the boy a successful cow, the cow-men seek to sell him, but he is such a poor commodity that the only buyer is an old woman who wants to sacrifice him (45). Again, the narrator wants to reveal that he is "not a real cow but a person" (47), but this is impossible. The old woman must offer a kola before performing the sacrifice, which she has forgotten, and so the ceremony is delayed while she returns home. In the interval, "a joke-man" began "joking funnily" at the narrator-cow. The people holding him laugh so uncontrollably that the narrator is able to bolt away (48). Once free, the narrator runs until he encounters a pond: "But to my surprise, immediately I saw my shadow in this water that I was a cow in form I changed to a person as before" (48). The shock of seeing himself as a cow impresses upon him that he is not a cow.

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61 Paul Reisman, *Freedom in Fulani Social Life: An Introspective Ethnography*, trans. Martha Fuller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 117.

62 See Law, *The Oyo Empire*, pp. 230–60, 284–96, and Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, pp. 38–42, on the Fulani role in the fall of the Oyo Empire. On Fulani ethnocentrism and ideology, see A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, "Maudo Laawol Pulaaku: Survival and Symbiosis," in Mahdi Adamu and A.H.M. Kirk-Greene (eds), *Pastoralists of the West African Savanna* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 42–54; Victor Azarya, *Aristocrats Facing Change: The Fulbe in Guinea, Nigeria, and Cameroon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 15–47. See Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, pp. 13–17, on the frustration of Fulani expansionism into Yoruba territory. See Paul E. Lovejoy, "Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," in Paul E. Lovejoy (ed.), *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981), pp. 201–43, on Sokoto predation in Yorubaland.

The predatory, anarchic world of the bush, however, makes any return home highly precarious. The narrator attempts to sleep in a dead wood log, but a "homeless-ghost" carries off the log while the narrator is sleeping (49). The narrator begins to cry, but the ghost takes the voice as "lofty music" and begins to dance. Other ghosts attracted to the "music" also start to dance (50–51). While the cow-men assimilate the narrator to the realm of beasts, the homeless-ghost and his friends seem to assimilate him to the realm of mechanical objects, or consumer products. The dead wood is treated like a radio. At a birthday ceremony, the narrator is expected to cry to entertain the guests, but since he has had neither food nor drink since his capture, his voice is "entirely stiffened or dead" (52). In frustration, the ghost takes an axe to the wood and thus, unwittingly, frees the narrator (53). In this instance, an inability to "hear" the voice of the other undermines the appropriation such "deafness" would seem to facilitate.

The narrator enters a new town where he receives food and hospitality (53). His host explains that everyone in the town is and is not human, because they are "burglars" (53) who take the place of unborn human babies, pretend to be "good or superior" babies (54), so that the women will develop an intense emotional attachment to them, after which they become ill so that the women will sacrifice large amounts of money and goods to "all kinds of gods" (54) in vain efforts to save them. Instead, the burglar-babies will return to their town with the woman's expropriated goods (54–5). Tutuola blends together a mythic explanation of infant mortality, the Yoruba belief in *abiku* children, who like Igbo *ogbanje* children, delight in tormenting their mothers by being born and dying over and over again,[63] with a fairly "novelistic" account of how a predatory culture renews its human (and thus material) resources by assimilating slaves and refugees into clients. After the fall of Oyo, "[p]ersonal leadership (rather than birth) and the services of war captives … determined the extent of one's authority. In this age of endemic warfare, mobility, and nonethnic, non-kin-based, non-marriage-based authority, the god Ogun reigned supreme."[64] The interpenetration of sociability and predation is stressed when, despite the burglar-ghosts' exploitation of the living, the narrator becomes so much a member of their community that he marries "a very beautiful young ghostess" (57).

Tutuola makes clear that, despite its resemblances to a sociable world, the ghost community is in fact its inversion. The "Reverend who preached or performed the wedding ceremony [is] the 'Devil'" (59); baptism is performed with "hot water and fire" (60); and the wedding reception is attended by predatory figures from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (62). "Skull" and "Spirit of Prey" start "to fight fiercely" to the encouraging clapping of the other ghosts (62), and the narrator becomes so

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63 Hogan, "Understanding 'The Palm-Wine Drinkard,'" pp. 46–7. Hogan cites Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religions: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples* (London: Epworth Press, 1964), p. 98, and A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (Ooserhout, Netherlands: Anthropolgie Publications, 1970 [1894]), p. 111.

64 Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More*, p. 15; see Falola and Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 31–67.

intoxicated that he "mistakenly smash[es] a small ghost to death" (63). By folding colonial social customs into the burglar world, Tutuola may be intimating that colonial society continues the "parody" of sociability characteristic of nineteenth-century predatory polities. If so, his work would subvert colonialist ideology, as Tobias suggests, but only in the context of following Fagunwa's refusal to posit an unproblematic, "authentic" African past akin to Hayford's or Hazoumé's.

In any event, the narrator, able to live with his new wife only until he remembers his mother and brother again (63), rejects such parodies of sociability, but at the cost of again exposing himself to the violence of the bush. A band of ghosts seize him "by violence or rape at the same time" (66), and the narrator again fears that he will be eaten. Instead, he is placed inside a pitcher and receives animal sacrifices, which sustain him, for the ghosts began to worship him as "their god" (70). His divinity, however, is a travesty. Covered with the smelly blood of animals, he is set at a crossroads, "repeatedly beaten by rain and scourged by the sun" (70), while dogs lick "all the blood poured on to [his] head" (71). By having the narrator's pitcher placed "on the centre of these roads" (70), Tutuola evokes the custom of placing shrines to Esu at crossroads.[65] If the narrator's "divinity" is associated with Esu's, the grotesque worship he receives may reflect the ghosts' thankfulness for their own successful predation.

> *Ore* designates a sacrifice to God or thanksgiving. … Humans, particularly males, were offerings par excellence. … [a]imed at the *orisa* who, in the context of communal crises, might accept the victim's life in order to spare that of the worshippers. … [T]here is a symbolic exchange of the victim's head (*ori*), the seat of his fortune, for the unclarified destiny of the sacrificer's.[66]

One night the narrator is stolen by "River-ghosts," who carry him to their town, where he is given a sacrifice (72). Tutuola's parody of religious fervor hinges upon his sharp distinction between "earthly gods" and "the heavenly God." Owomoyela reads such scenes as emblematic of Tutuola's colonialist Christianity.[67] However, even if we reproach Tutuola for slighting the ethical core of Yoruba piety, we ought to acknowledge that Tutuola follows Fagunwa in insisting on the difference between forms of piety that assimilate the divine to a figure of patron for clients and forms of piety that gesture toward what Fagunwa calls a "better understanding:" "[T]hese river ghosts or sceptical ghosts hate the heavenly God most and love earthly gods most" (72–3). The rivers in Yorubaland are themselves "earthy gods:" "the *orisa* Yemoja … is the river Ogun, as well as the mother of waters and fishes" and the "*orisa* Osun … is the river Osun, as well as its goddess."[68] By alluding to both Esu and river gods while describing the narrator's experience

65 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, pp. 102–3.

66 Ibid., p. 53. Also see R.E. Dennett, *Nigerian Studies* (London: Cass, 1968 [1910]), pp. 193–4; J.O. Awolalu, "Yoruba Sacrificial Practise," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 5, 2 (1973): 87.

67 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, pp. 19–24.

68 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, p. 56.

of divinity as one of being covered with blood, Tutuola strongly implies that much of Yoruba pre-colonial piety, at least in its nineteenth-century articulations, ought not be taken, as both Fagunwa and the missionary tradition at times suggest, as "pre-understandings" of a "better understanding" of God, but rather as its complete misunderstanding. Perhaps it might be more accurate to suggest that Tutuola distinguishes between an ethical piety tied to connecting reciprocity to fertility (in multiple senses), and a historical religious practice that increasingly came in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to conceive the divine in its own image—as a predatory war-lord demanding tribute in return for protection. Notably, the narrator is stolen by "another kind of ghost" (78). When fighting ensues, the pitcher breaks and the narrator escapes (80). He frantically washes away the signs of his divinity, the "rotten blood" caking his body (82), and finds sleep in the hole of an armless ghost (83).

Ubiquitous raiding allows the hunted easily to become the hunter: fleeing the armless ghosts, the narrator begins to pursue an ugly ghostess in order to see how ugly she is (86–7), but unable to "capture" her sight, he finds himself caught in a "spider web bush" (89). When the ghost collecting spiders discovers the narrator, he takes him to be the dead body of his father who died in the bush. As the ghosts prepare a coffin, the narrator tries to disabuse them of their error, but once again he cannot communicate his living humanity to others. Putting all "hope on God," the narrator's "thoughts bec[o]me the truth," for a "resurrectionist" digs up the coffin, intending to eat both the spiders and the corpse (92), but as soon as the ghost puts the narrator's web-enclosed body upon a fire, the web catches fire, freeing the narrator (93–4). He unwittingly takes shelter "inside the pouch of a kind of … animal," who in turn is taken "to the 13th town, which only belongs to short ghosts" (95). Like Akara-ogun and the Drinkard, the narrator is spared death through seemingly fortuitous events immediately after acknowledging dependence upon God.

The Perversion of Maternal Solicitude and How Things Fall Apart

When the short ghosts discover the narrator, they bring him before the "flash-eyed mother:"

> There was no single house built in this town as she alone filled the town as a round vast hill …. All these short ghosts were just exactly a year and an half old babies, but very strong as iron … [and] had no other work more than to be killing the bush animals with short guns like pistols which were given to them by the "flash-eyed mother" …. Millions of heads which were just like a baby's head appeared on her body …. [A]ll the short ghosts of this town who were under her flag were killing the bush animals and bringing them to her, although all of them were feeding on these animals as well. (97–100)

The "flash-eyed mother" coercively recruits the narrator:

> Whenever we were killing an animal we would bring it to "flash-eyed mother" who was supposed to be our mother or guardian …. Having cooked it, the first thing she was doing was to serve the fleshy part of the animals to all the heads that surrounded her body …. Within a minute all the heads would finish their own, then would be asking for more immediately … so for this reason the mother was not serving us with enough food. (101)

The relationship between the flash-eyed mother, the heads on her body, and the short ghosts evokes the relationship between a nineteenth-century warlord, his courtiers or clients, and his slave warriors. Tutuola's portrait recalls the role played by female warlords or war-financiers, the *Iyalode* (women-chiefs), in Yorubaland's post-Oyo civil warfare.

> In the nineteenth century, the famous Omosa and Efunsetan of Ibadan and Tinubu of Abeokuta rose to power as traders and war financiers in these cities created by imperial dislocation. … The great female entrepreneurs of the nineteenth century were often childless …. [T]hese women enriched and empowered themselves through the command of numerous slaves and the exploitation of the new forms of trade generated by nineteenth-century militarism. … Over two thousand slaves worked the farms of Madame Efunsetan of Ibadan, while others served in her urban compound, which was one of the 104 large compounds in the city. … Her trade and farms flourished, such that she commanded her own large army …. Her character was not only unwifely and militaristic but legendarily antireproductive. … Efunsetan became strangely cruel to her pregnant female slaves. … Like the powerful men of their age, the *Iyalode* of Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta were mobile, militarized, and more in control of than under control by royal institutions.[69]

For the reader of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the flash-eyed mother takes to an extreme all the negative or ambiguous attributes of the Faithful-mother. Each brings the hero into her world, feeds him, and supplies him with weapons. However, the flash-eyed mother recruits slave-warriors to feed herself and her "heads," whereas the Faithful-mother takes in the sick and wounded to heal and provision them. The flash-eyed mother enforces a perpetual servitude, while the Faithful-mother provides weapons and goods so that her charges, once healed, can go their own way. Under the guise of "taking care" of others, the flash-eyed mother ensures her own "monstrous" monopoly on power.

The narrator remains enslaved for three years until the flash-eyed mother receives a warrant from the town the narrator escaped demanding his return.

69 Matory *Sex and the Empire that is No More*, pp. 18–19; also see Bolanle Awe, "The *Iyalode* in the Traditional Yoruba Political System," in Alice Schlegel (ed.), *Social Stratification* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 144–60, and "The Economic Role of Women in Traditional African Society: The Yoruba Example," in *La Civilisation de la femme dans la traditione africaine*, Colloquium in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 2–6 July 1972, pp. 271–2; S.A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland 1840–1891* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971); Rev. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. Dr O. Johnson (Westport, CN: Negro Universities Press, 1970 [1921]), p. 393.

Rather than yield him up, she decides to fight, calling the "Spirit of prey," the "Invisible and invincible Pawn," the Hungry-creature, and other figures from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to her aid (107). The flash-eyed mother sends her troops

> to the battlefield, so she was following [them] as a commander. … And as it was a powerful war … many of the heads were cut away from their mother's body …. Of course, the "Invisible and Invincible Pawn" replaced them back on their mother's body, and this means the 13th town won the victory. (108–9)

The description of battle recalls nineteenth-century Yoruba wars, as does its cause—a struggle for control of clients or slaves. When the narrator's own head is cut off in combat, a ghost's head is "mistakenly" put on his neck, so that the narrator's identity is split (literally), and his interior life, his "free" inner thoughts, are exposed to external surveillance: "Whether I was talking or not [the ghost's head] would be talking out the words which I did not mean in my mind and was telling all my secret aims" (109).

Tutuola could hardly have created a more concentrated image of psychic colonization. When the narrator complains to the flash-eyed mother that his head is not his own, "she simply replie[s]—'Every head is a head and there is no head which is not suitable for any creature'" (110), a statement in which the reduction of the other to the same is fully exposed. The narrator continues in this woeful condition "until the 'faithful mother' … came and settled the misunderstandings between the two parties" (110). When the narrator begs "her respectfully" to replace his own head on his neck, she does so, and then returns to the "white-tree" (110). Apparently shorn of any imperialistic dimension, the Faithful-mother returns home, leaving the socio-political order as she found it.

The narrator learns that the flash-eyed mother is "the mother of the 'Invisible and invincible Pawn'" (110). Presenting her as "mother" of the presiding "spirit" of an anarchic and predatory world, Tutuola may be associating the flash-eyed mother with the *orisa* Yemoja, "described as 'the queen of witches.' Witches are said to be devourers of children, spoilers of procreation, destroyers of embryos. Their power was supposedly born in the world as a result of the incest of Yemoja and her son Ogun."[70] In his rapacity and relentlessness, the "Invisible and Invincible Pawn" possesses Ogun's energy, violence, and creative-destructive ambiguity. By contrast, the Faithful-mother's actions find their political consummation in restoring to the narrator his "own" head, whereupon he begins to separate himself—mentally—from the totalizing realm to which his body is enslaved: "I was remembering my mother at this time always" (111). The Faithful-mother's ethical responsiveness to the other as Other, giving back to the narrator the "difference" that is peculiarly his own (his own "head," with all its Yoruba connotations), "gives birth" to ethical sensibility by reconnecting, literally, mind and body, head and heart. Such a restoration allows the self its own

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70 Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero*, pp. 110–11; also see Peter Morton-Williams, "Yoruba Responses to the Fear of Death," *Africa* 30 (1960): 35.

narrative trajectory. The narrator starts looking for opportunities in his coerced hunting to find "the way" to his own town.

Instead, one day he sees "an antelope" that changes "to a very beautiful lady" (112–13). When she abruptly asks him to marry her, he refuses because she is a ghostess, but he follows her in hope that she will show him the way home (113). The "super-lady" describes how she is the daughter of the most powerful of wizards among the ghosts. Overhearing one day an earthly woman complaining about being accused of witchcraft by a neighbor, and requesting as revenge the death of the neighbor's only son, a request her parents grant, the super-lady protests: "I told my father that—'this is a sin' and I reminded him again that—'you ordered her to go and kill the son on whom his mother depends?'" (116). The father's response is striking: "Yes … it is more than a sin or worse, because I am living on such evil works and you are living on it as well through me" (116). Predatory, witch-like practices become culturally naturalized if people cannot imagine a "living" apart from them, even though external violence frequently washes back into domestic life. The super-lady overhears her parents discussing killing her for food at their next meeting (117). Happily, her grandmother had given her shape-shifting powers, so she flees as "an invisible bird," taking refuge "permanently in this Nameless-town, which belongs only to women" (118).

The town, populated by women with "long brown moustaches," who marry women "because there are no men to marry them" (123), is close to the "Hopeless-town," where people speak only through gestures rather than words. To return to the Nameless town, the narrator and super-lady must cross a "deep valley" spanned by an extremely narrow "stick" bridge (131). To do so, they must leave their clothes behind and wait on the other side until someone going to the other way must do likewise. Thus they leave clothes costing "more than £100" (131). British currency is introduced, and is immediately associated with commodity exchange. The valley is called "Lost or Gain Valley" because people either "lose" or "gain" by exchanging clothes with those going the opposite way. The narrator and super-lady must wait until "a couple ghosts" appear and disrobe, but they are the losers in the exchange, surrendering fine clothes for animal skins (132–3). The narrator is discontented because he hears "that those ghosts etc. of that area could not lose but gain" and is thus "eagar to find out the right way of how to cross this 'Lost or Gain Valley' without any loss except gain" (133). Convinced there is some secret to wealth through exchange that he does not know, the narrator entertains the disturbing feeling that he has been had.

After a year, the super-lady gives birth to a son who resembles the narrator "with half of his body and the rest of his body resemble[s] his mother" (134). The ghosts give him a ghost's name and the narrator gives him an earthly name. This child becomes "Son Divides Us" because the narrator "hate[s] him" for doing everything "in the half method that ghosts are doing" and "the half method that the earthly persons are doing," wishing "him to do everything completely in the method that the earthly persons are doing," while the mother "hate[s] him" for not doing "everything in the full way that ghosts are doing their own things" (134–5). One night, the narrator, while "joking," declares "earthly people" to be "superior to the ghosts and ghostesses," which offends the super-lady (135).

Unlike the half-bodied baby of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, this child does nothing to destroy civilized space other than to embody diversity. Unlike the Faithful-mother, who gives the Other his "own" head, both the narrator and super-lady want the child to be another instance of themselves, and so violate the ethics of reciprocity upon which fertility depends. Indeed, fertility implies—literally, materially—that difference is sacred, the principle upon which life, community, and justice depend. Here, the Yoruba traditions behind Tutuola's portrait are consistent with Levinas's account of the ethical significance of "fecundity," which he describes as divesting the I "of its tragic egoity."[71]

Christianity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Transformation of Daily Life

Reaching a town that resembles an earthly one, the narrator encounters his dead cousin, who is particularly respected because he "brought Christianity to their town" (144). The cousin explains how he negotiated an agreement with "H.M. the King of the Bush of Ghosts" to establish a Methodist church (146). The cousin's career recalls the lives of such pioneering Yoruba preachers as Samuel Crowther and Samuel Johnson (147). His diligence rewarded with an increasing congregation, the cousin establishes a school. Like his nineteenth-century counterparts, the cousin effects a transformation of daily life: "After some years I have had more than fifty ghost teachers out of these scholars and over nine hundred scholars were attending the school regularly. … In my leisure hours, I taught many scholars who had been passed out from the schools sanitary work, surveying, building, first aid" (148). Upon a foundation of piety and education, the cousin produces material prosperity, "many churches, schools, hospitals and many houses which are built in modern styles" (149), significantly linked to the education of women and the transcendence of ethnic insularity. The cousin married a Zulu woman who was, before she died, a qualified doctor, so "she established hospitals in this town and acted as the Director of Medical Services." (149). To the narrator's question of who ordained him as bishop and how he gets supplies, the cousin answers, "As I am carrying on this Christianity work for many years … so one night, I dreamed a dream and heard the holy voice from heaven that I am ordained as a bishop from heaven as from this night" (150). The medical supplies, books, and building material are provided by deads who were engaged in those activities while alive.

The cousin's ordination touches upon the white missionary establishment's reluctance to promote black ministers. Laitin notes that by

> the end of the nineteenth century, the next generation of European missionaries, imbued with a Darwinist ideology, argued that the Africans were not yet at the stage in civilization where they could run their own church. These young men successfully demoted Crowther …. To the astonishment of the CMS authorities in London,

71 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 273, 277.

> Crowther, shortly before he died and deeply disturbed by the racism of the Church, gave his support to the Delta church in Lagos—a church which claimed to be independent and African.[72]

Nonetheless, Tutuola portrays the cousin's endeavors in mostly positive terms. The cousin's successful, socially useful children—the "two sons were still attending the school, but the four daughters had passed out from the school and also qualified as nurses and doctors" (151)—contrasts with the narrator's own neglect of his son.

Indeed, the cousin sends the narrator to one of his schools, where he starts "to learn how to read and write," eventually becomes so proficient in jurisprudence that he teaches others law, and finally becomes "the chief judge of the highest court which is the 'Assize court'" (152). Nonetheless, the cousin's energy and clarity of purpose is marred by a certain obtuseness suggestive of the flash-eyed mother's indifference to individuality. Advertising for spouses for his children in earthly newspapers, he composes the text, "So do you like to marry one of them? If it is so, please, choose any and only one of these numbers—733, 744, 755, 766 and 777, 788 respectively, so that his or her picture may be sent to you or to come to you personally" (153).

Tutuola stresses the need for reforming zeal to recognize the claims of individuality by portraying how the narrator's newfound contentment is disrupted by dreams about his brother and mother. The narrator becomes restless to go, but the cousin "totally refuse[s]" (156), forcing the narrator to tell him, deceitfully, that he will return. The implication seems to be that no matter how appealing a public, social realm may be, it will be unsatisfactory unless it accords a space for nurturing affective bonds with particular others, and accords differences an appropriate respect. The cousin exemplifies the kind of universalism, so prominent in missionary Christianity, that conceives duty to the Other in terms of making the Other just like oneself. Thus, the cousin's comic numbering of his children in the newspaper advertisement anticipates his inability to understand why the narrator feels compelled to return home.

Like Fagunwa through his portrait of the hunters' journey home, Tutuola implies that reversion to predation is a temptation that no civilizing process can obliterate. The narrator's desire to help an old ghost who accords him hospitality becomes entirely lost in his delight in proving his mastery over a rival "magician" (157–60). The narrator is recalled from egotistical pleasure by "a ghostess who was crying bitterly," covered in "sores with uncountable maggots" (161). The narrator's first impulse is to rid himself of an irritating intruder. However, unable to "bear her cry" (161), he asks why she is crying, to which she replies, "I am crying because of you" (162), and then explains that her disease can only be cured by "an earthly person" lost in the Bush of Ghosts, that she needs him to lick her sore for ten years, after which he can return home (162). When he refuses, she opens her palm, which was "exactly as a television," in which the narrator sees his "town, mother, brother" (163). The "Television-handed ghostess" confronts the narrator

72 Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*, p. 46.

with a stark choice: either perpetual imprisonment in the bush or care for one who is both a stranger and repulsive. Looking at her television-hand again, the narrator witnesses, "luckily, a woman [bringing] her baby who had a sore on its foot to [his] mother," who goes to a bush near the town and cuts a certain leaf which cures the sore: "But as I was looking at them on the television I knew the kind of leaf and also heard the direction how to use it" (165). Thus, the narrator looks for the same bush and uses its leaf to cure the Television-handed ghostess, who opens her palm and the narrator finds himself "under the fruit tree" where his brother left him "when he was running away from the enemies' guns" (166). Since he can "not bear" the cry of a suffering stranger, he comes to see, through that stranger's "television," his own mother's act of kindness. Imitating the mother, re-enacting her ethical service, frees him from the bush.

But to return home is to return to history. The narrator is seized by "slave-traders because the slave trade was then still existing" (167). Tutuola's narrative circles back to the capricious, everyday violence of nineteenth-century Yoruba life. The difference between "then" and "now" is repeatedly stressed: "But as there was no other transport to carry loads more than by head as now-a-days, so I was carrying heavy loads which three men could not carry at a time" (167). The narrator's body becomes so full of sores from abusive overwork that he is rendered ineffective as a porter. After being put on the market several times, the narrator is finally sold to a rich man who does not want him for labor: "I will buy you, because I ought to sacrifice to my god with a slave for some months to come, so that I may kill you for the god" (169). Neither man knows that the rich man is the narrator's brother.

That the rich man wants to sacrifice his unrecognized brother to his god suggests that piety, when grounded in an extension of patron–client politics, does not challenge but reinforces all that "blinds" us to our kinship with the Other. The narrator is placed in a slave yard, far from the rich man's house, and continuously beaten: "[I]t was their rule that every useless slave should be severely beaten every day, because every slave buyer recognised slaves as non-living creatures" (170). Listening to the master's voice one day, the narrator recognizes it as his brother's, but is "unable to talk to him at all, otherwise he would order the rest slaves to kill [him] on the spot" (170). Remembering the song he and his brother sang when they were "eating the two slices of cooked yam" their mother left for them when she went to the market (170–71), the narrator begins to sing, mentioning the brother's name in the song. Since slaves are forbidden to speak their master's names, the brother is called. He demands to hear the song, intending to kill the narrator "on the same spot" once his name is mentioned. But when he hears the song, he recognizes his brother, tells his "orderlies to wash" him, brings him "many costly clothes," and sends for their mother and his friends (171).

Tutuola's narrative is virtually identical to the Igbo folktale, "The Disobedient Sisters." Indeed, Tutuola reworks Yoruba versions of the story. Unlike the folktale, however, Tutuola calls attention to the ethical violence of slavery as an institution, repeatedly stressing that the narrator's experiences are normative within socio-historical worlds where predatory economies naturalize dehumanization. Indeed, after the mother arrives, she recounts how she was captured, sold repeatedly,

mistreated, and finally freed after eight years' captivity (172–3). Tellingly, the mother has apparently, despite her own hardships as a slave, lived happily for years with the brother whose wealth rests upon slave labor.

The book concludes, ambiguously, with the narrator's happiness upon his return being contrasted with hints that he might go back into the bush to be present when the "'Secret Society of Ghosts' is performing" (174). While hinting at a future narrative, the present one concludes with the cryptic phrase, in quotes, "'This is what hatred did'" (174). Owomoyela argues that this concluding sentence "gives a nod to the didactic intention in Yoruba story-telling" but is a *non sequitur* in context because if the narrator "can contemplate returning [to the bush of ghosts] … then hatred did nothing unbearable to him" and because hatred is not shown doing harm to the mother's jealous co-wives.[73] It is more plausible, however, to take all the predatory political economies the narrator describes as instances of "what hatred did." The jealous co-wives need not be specifically punished. Just living in the historical or ghost worlds Tutuola describes would be punishment enough. As for the narrator, his hankering to return to the bush does not show that "nothing unbearable" was done to him (who would want to undergo similar experiences?), but rather that, as Fagunwa also emphasizes, the civilizing process, the constructive work of ethics, is never secure.

If we read Tutuola as communicating a "real message" in the manner of oral storytelling, how may we account for the text's peculiar critical reception? To the extent that Tutuola evokes a pre-colonial Yoruba past and specifically Yoruba structures of meaning and value, it is understandable that readers unaware of that past and those structures would tend to find the work fantastic and incoherent. But such explanations do not account for the hostility that Tutuola has encountered from his fellow Nigerians, starting with the early reviews of the 1950s through Owomoyela's 1999 study. Even if one acknowledges his peculiar English, his perceived garbling of tales, a certain embarrassment about "fantastic" stories being presented to the outside world at a time when Nigerians wanted to stress their modernity, and irritation that Tutuola was receiving attention that Fagunwa deserved, it is difficult to understand why Tutuola's discourse seems not to have generated much sympathetic response from a 1950s Yoruba readership for whom the nineteenth century still belonged to living memory.

It is always precarious to speculate about unstated motives. However, the unease, even hostility, that Fagunwa appears to have anticipated exploded instead against Tutuola. Perhaps Fagunwa was protected by the exclusivity of the Yoruba language and by his unquestioned verbal artistry. By contrast, Tutuola's words seem indeed to have been taken as "thorns." The specificity of Tutuola's evocation of pre-colonial Yoruba history works against the tendency of nationalist discourse to construct, as Benedict Anderson famously argues, "imagined communities," whose unproblematic pasts become the basis for legitimating political narratives.[74] The carefully selected and "corrected" image of pre-colonial African culture and

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73 Owomoyela, *Amos Tutuola Revisited*, pp. 75, 77.

74 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

history in *Ethiopia Unbound* is a case in point. Like Fagunwa, Tutuola pointedly refuses any such unproblematic image of the past.[75] Moreover, the context of 1938 was not that of 1952 or 1954. A sobering vision of pre-colonial history in 1938 might risk, as Fagunwa seems to suggest, wounding a colonially cultivated ethnic pride, but such a vision articulated in English in the 1950s might well have appeared a kind of "washing of dirty linen in public," and even racial betrayal. Worse, in contrast to Fagunwa's guarded optimism about communal progress, both of Tutuola's narratives suggest that pre-colonial patterns of power inequities were far more intractable than commonly imagined. Such a view, of course, reflects Tutuola's historical judgment. Assessments of historical judgments belong to historical scholarship. While the appreciation of literature does not depend upon agreement with the historical judgment shaping it (endorsing the philosophy of history articulated in Books XI and XII of *Paradise Lost* is not required to value Milton's poem), it is easy to see how such a judgment might have been perceived as scandalous in the Nigerian political climate of the 1950s, and how the politics behind refusals to give Tutuola's discourses a hearing continue to shape their critical reception.

75 George notes the prevalence of the theme of needing to "catch up with cultural modernity" in much nationalist mid-century African discourse (see *Relocating Agency*, pp. 75–80, 76 cited).

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Chapter 6

Pre-Colonial History and Anticolonial Politics in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe's Ethical Entwinement of Pre-Colonial History and Anticolonial Fiction

As we have seen, both oral and written narratives contest at an experiential, even physiological, level the denaturalizing ideological work of cognitive imperialism. Both the constructive and disruptive dimensions of ethics affirm that ethical concern for the Other is not something "added on" to our humanity, but constitutive of it. Within this context, African writers' subverting of colonialist stories may be seen as extensions of the modes of acculturation internal to African oral storytelling and diverse forms of indigenous speech. As Hayford was among the first to note, not only did European colonizers fail, by their own lights, to treat Africans as humans; colonial exploitation was facilitated by impoverished conceptions of moral practice. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) holds a preeminent place in historical and critical accounts of the African novel in part because it so skillfully transposes the resistance to cognitive imperialism internal to pre-colonial oral discourse and social practice into novelistic discourse, thus making novelistic modes of pressing readers into ethical deliberation lead seamlessly into an explicitly anticolonial politics.

This transposition of oral storytelling techniques into novelistic narrative asks European readers to surrender not only colonizing attitudes, but also, paradoxically, the easy kind of anticolonialism that simply sees other cultures, other ethnic groups, as isolated, incommensurate, collective selves who need only be allowed "their own perspectives," a view that anchored "progressive" functionalist-relativistic anthropology dominant from the 1920s through the 1960s.[1] Patrick Colm Hogan points out that "[d]espite [Achebe's] much-quoted denunciations of universalism," and despite "the academic unfashionability of the notion that blacks share with whites universal rights, duties, and so on," there is an important current of "ethical universalism in Achebe's work."[2] We need to distinguish between Achebe's rejection of the kind of universalism that conceives of duty as making the Other just like oneself and his insistence that, regardless of what the modern West may think, there are "hierarchies above self" which make

1 See, for example, E.D. Hirsch Jr, "Faulty Perspectives," in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Critical Theory* (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 254–63.

2 Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa, and the Caribbean* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 123, 124.

ethical sensibility integral to human embodiment. Achebe argues that viewing society as "a prisonhouse from which the individual must escape in order to find space and fulfillment" ignores how "fulfillment is not, as people often think, uncluttered space or an absence of controls, obligations, painstaking exertion. No! It is actually a presence—a powerful demanding presence limiting the space in which the self can roam uninhibited; it is an aspiration by the self to achieve spiritual congruence with the other."[3]

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe portrays the contestation of cognitive imperialism internal to Igbo ethical sociability as a precarious cultural achievement, under stress not only from such self-willed men as Okonkwo, but also from an increasingly militarized and appropriative tenor of life. Colonial conquest accelerates the weakening of ethical assessments of moral practice already evident in the Igbo world Achebe portrays in the novel's first part. While "colonialism breeds despair," as Hogan notes, by rendering "one's former aspirations … no longer attainable," so that "one's manners of interaction and expectation no longer hold good,"[4] the ethically constructive but non-totalizing values integral to Igbo culture are recuperated in the anticolonialism of Achebe's fiction. Thus, Achebe manages to combine the critical specificity of Balewa, Hazoumé, Fagunwa, and Tutuola with the nationalistic optimism of Hayford by suggesting that Igbo resistance to colonialist domination need not be rooted in imitations of Western progressive ideologies (cultural relativism, liberal individualism, Sartrean liberation), but may rather be anchored in a recovery of the ethical basis of pre-colonial politics. Achebe's novel undertakes the work of "recovery" in ways that separate his narrative from uncritical imaginings of pre-colonial community while evoking a past rich in possibilities for "modernization-from-indigenous-roots."

The Ambiguous Preservation of Peace through Bloodshed

Given Achebe's well-known intention of redressing the colonialist portrait of Africa presented in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*,[5] it might seem strange that he would structure the novel's first section, where both Igbo pre-colonial life and Okonkwo's character are introduced, around the adolescent boy Ikemefuna's three-year stay in Okonkwo's compound before he is sacrificed to atone for a

3 Chinua Achebe, "The Writer and His Community," in Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 51.

4 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 105.

5 See Berth Lindfors (ed.), *Conversations with Chinua Achebe* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997), pp. 3–4, 7, 13–14, 25; Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 44; Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), pp. 17–23; C.L. Innes, *Chinua Achebe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 4–41; Abdul R. JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983).

murder he did not commit. Critics have pointed out that Ikemefuna's death anticipates the "falling apart" of both the Igbo social order and Okonkwo's personality, for the boy combines attributes (gentleness and strength, sensitivity and forcefulness) that have become estranged from one another in other characters, and the circumstances of his murder betray Okonkwo to his worst tendencies—thus foreclosing any relationship between Okonkwo and his son Nwoye not predicated upon hatred and fear.[6] Through Ikemefuna's story, Achebe suggests both how Igbo society maintained sufficient peace and prosperity to sustain stateless village polities, and how Igbo society had become, by the late nineteenth century, psychologically and morally open to penetration and reconfiguration from the outside.

Unlike the Hausa, Dahomean, and Yoruba pre-colonial worlds portrayed by Balewa, Hazoumé, Fagunwa, and Tutuola, Achebe's Igbo world of forest and village is not already, in obvious or explicit ways, shaped by the world economy or by encounters with external cultures. Instead, Igboland enjoyed relative isolation from the rest of West Africa, much as each network of autonomous villages was relatively isolated from other Igbo polities. The first sentence of *Things Fall Apart* notes, "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond."[7] The "even beyond" indicates the contracted nature of space, just as the observation that Okonkwo's wrestling match with Amalinze the Cat was one of the fiercest "since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights" (1) indicates the contracted nature of time. Elizabeth Isichei notes,

> The centuries that lie between the ninth century and the nineteenth are the most difficult period for the historian of Igboland to write about. For the ninth century, we have the vivid detail of archaeological discoveries. For the nineteenth, we have an ever-swelling stream of evidence, both oral and documentary. But the thousand years which lie between are full of question marks and obscurities.[8]

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6 See Robert M. Wren, *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe* (Boulder, Col.: Three Continents Press, 1980), p. 59; David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe*, 2nd ed. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 42–9; Umelo Ojinmah, *Chinua Achebe: New Perspectives* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1991), pp. 11–24. Damian U. Opata argues in "Eternal Sacred Order versus Conventional Wisdom: A Consideration of Moral Culpability in the Killing of Ikemefuna in *Things Fall Apart*," *Research in African Literatures* 18, 1 (1987): 71–9, that Okonkwo's actions, while morally indefensible, do not constitute an offense against Ani or lead to his decline. Emeka Nwabueze contests an overly harsh judgment of Okonkwo's action by stressing the extent to which he is the victim of circumstances (or gods) in "Theoretical Construction and Constructive Theorizing on the Execution of Ifemufuna in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: A Study in Critical Dualism," *Research in African Literatures* 31, 2 (2000): 163–73.

7 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992, rpt. London: William Heinemann, 1958), p. 1. All further references will be to this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

8 Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1976), p. 17.

The thick forest of southeast Nigeria protected the Igbo from external invasion while ensuring internal diversity. Isichei observes that far from having any "sense of pan-Igbo identity," the normative Igbo "view of external reality" involved "a sharp dichotomy, 'them and us' …. The people of Owerri felt superior, as warriors, to the neighboring Isu, who were traders. The smiths of Agulu-Umana looked down on the neighboring 'Oheke' who did not share their skills. … The many local differences in Igbo culture" problematize any generalized description.[9] Don C. Ohadike argues that yam cultivation created "a population explosion in the Igbo heartland," which led, from about the ninth century on, to "lineages and clans" moving out "in all directions, almost imperceptibly at first, but more rapidly later. … Oral traditions confirm that the arrival of each Igbo-speaking group was contested by neighboring inhabitants."[10]

As the story of the founder's battle suggests, acquiring civilized space involved expelling "a spirit of the wild," just as the cultivation of land involved reclaiming agricultural space from the bush. Both acts demanded aggressive masculine self-assertion. Once space is acquired for village and fields, an autonomous, politically and culturally distinct polity could emerge. The preservation of that polity required sufficient capacity for violence to repel those who would expand into one's own territory, but also sufficient restraint of violence to prevent one's own community from being torn apart by competing "big men." Ohadike notes that the West Igbo communities of Ogwashi-Ukwu and Ogboli describe their origins in terms of a founder's forced migration: "Spilling the blood of a kinsman was a serious offence and, according to the law of the land, the offender must either go into exile or be hanged."[11] The opening of *Things Fall Apart* stresses both originary violence (replicated but contained in Okonkwo's celebrated wrestling match) and the need to exclude violence from the social order through sublimating it into sacrifice. Because "achievement was revered" (5), it fell to the communally respected Okonkwo "to look after the doomed lad who was sacrificed to the village of Umuofia by their neighbors to avoid war and bloodshed" (6).

Because violence is at once an ever-present temptation and a constant threat to the cohesion upon which clan identity and survival depends, it is logical that violence within a clan would entail severe penalties, and would be understood in terms of transgressing the civilizing laws of the maternal, life-giving Earth Goddess, Ani, whose "compassionate care for the living and the dead" issued in

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9 Ibid., pp. 19–20. See Olaudah Equiano's characterization of mid-eighteenth-century Igbo village life in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* [1789], in Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York: Penguin, 1995), pp. 32–43.

10 Don C. Ohadike, *Anioma: A Social History of the Western Igbo People* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 11–13; also see F. Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 121–3.

11 Ohadike, *Anioma*, p. 16.

"time-honored principles of behavior."[12] Consistent with patterns discussed by René Girard, Derrida, and others,[13] sacrifice at once sates and contains "thirst for blood" (9). At the beginning of the novel, this "thirst" has been stimulated by the killing of a daughter of Umuofia at the Mbaino market. A representative boy, Ikemefuna, becomes the symbolic bearer of Mbaino's collective guilt. In the paradoxical manner indicated by the Igbo saying that where one thing stands, there its opposite stands also, Ani's maternal, feminine concern for the preservation of a community founded and protected by masculine aggressivity demands that a life be taken "to avoid war and bloodshed." In this case, the maternal care necessary to sustain the community demands that a particular boy be deprived (literally, as Achebe emphasizes) of his mother's care.

While emphasizing that the sacrifice of Ikemefuna is irreducible to colonialist tropes of "primitive barbarism," Achebe's own novelistic depiction of Ikemefuna's individual value and subjective experience puts into question any easy morality of the needs of the many outweighing ethical obligations to the few. Simply placing Ikemefuna at the center of the story separates Achebe's depiction of Igbo culture from such portraits as Olaudah Equiano's, which is at pains, in accord with Abolitionist discourse generally, to present indigenous cultural virtues in forms easy for European readers to assimilate and approve: so Equiano emphasizes sexual morality, religious piety, simplicity of dress and manners, pacific agricultural labor, familial affection and communal loyalty.[14] In Achebe's novel, by contrast, there is, most strikingly, on the part of the village elders and their deities a remarkable carelessness in, on the one hand, configuring Ikemefuna as a sacrifice to prevent bloodshed and, on the other, giving him to Okonkwo for three years to "look after." The cognitive imperialism involved in seeing Ikemefuna as "nothing but" a sacrifice is radically compounded by "seem[ing] to … [forget] about him" (45), which asks Okonkwo and his family to find no significance in their daily contact with Ikemefuna, to experience his individual nature as morally and psychologically inconsequential. While much critical attention has focused, rightfully, upon Okonkwo's anxiety about his masculinity and thus his disdain of the balancing of masculine and feminine forces that Igbo acculturation would cultivate,[15] the village discloses in its handling of Ikemefuna a stark indifference to how "looking after" another (a maternally inflected term) makes ethical

12 Wren, *Achebe's World*, p. 32.

13 See Michael Valdez Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 115–16; René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 1–67, 250–73; Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 63–171.

14 Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, pp. 33–45.

15 See Carroll, *Achebe*, pp. 39–61; Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, pp. 39–44; Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, pp. 106–22; Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, "Chinua Achebe Writing Culture: Representations of Gender and *Things Fall Apart*," *Research in African Literatures* 30, 2 (1999): 148–64; Biodun Jeyifo, "Okonkwo and his Mother: Things Fall Apart and Issues of Gender in the Constitution of African Postcolonial Discourse," *Callaloo* 16, 4 (1993): 847–58.

indifference impossible. Underscoring the point, Achebe brilliantly elicits and orders emotions through patterns of images so as to induce the reader to "feel" how ethical sensibility is entwined, universally, with human embodiment. Hogan notes that "universal principles need not be derived from other cultures. Their universality means precisely that they are already present in each culture, that they are already felt by people everywhere."[16] Achebe's evocation of what is "already felt by people everywhere" is consistent with Levinas's argument that contact and proximity preclude, on the most somatically inflected levels, the reduction of the Other to abstract conceptuality (as demanded by the logic of sacrifice). Thus the community treats Okonkwo violently by expecting him to behave, by acquiescence at least, as though he really were coincident with his own "unwomanly" self-image. In doing so, the community deprives Okonkwo, as well as the rest of his family, of the very maternal care—the guarding of distinctly civilized, humanized life—that the laws of Ani are intended to secure.

The problem is not simply that a traditional, heroic culture has values inconsistent with those of liberal individualism, or that the dominant ethos of heroic culture resembles Nietzsche's "master morality" while the values of liberal individualism presuppose a cultural revolution in which a "slave morality" becomes dominant.[17] Rather, the ways that Nietzschean "master morality" of Umuofia have come to be articulated impose an intolerable ethical unease upon the masters themselves—Okonkwo, his friend Obierika, his maternal uncle Uchendu, the elder Ezeudu. In the tension between large-scale narrative structure (the story of Ikemefuna) and small-scale scenes stressing the cultivation of dialogism and ethical answerability in daily life, Achebe delineates a process of historical deformation, in which the estrangement of the anxiously aggressive Okonkwo from moderating, counter-balancing currents of Igbo acculturation comes to be seen as emblematic of a dangerous drift of the society as a whole.[18]

Paradoxically, the first hint the novel provides of an increasing coarsening and rigidity in Igbo life comes from its portrait of Okonkwo's non-aggressive father, Unoka. Okonkwo's tendency to "pounce on people" derives in part from his lack of verbal dexterity in a society that prizes skillful speech and in part from his impatience "with unsuccessful men," exemplified by his father (2). Not only "lazy and improvident," Unoka is characterized by an ultimately decadent cynicism: "He always said that whenever he saw a dead man's mouth he saw the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime" (2). While he "makes merry" by sharing palm-wine with neighbors whenever he has money, and while he is a skilled flute player who, when young, enjoyed playing with a band, loving "the good fare and the good fellowship" and the beauty of the season, Unoka's sociability and aesthetic appreciation of music and nature are self-centered vehicles of escape

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16 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 125.

17 See Alan Levine, "Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a Case Study in Nietzsche's Transvaluation of Values," *Perspectives on Political Science* 28, 3 (1999): 136–41; Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, pp. 122–9.

18 See Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, pp. 126–8; Wren, *Achebe's World*, pp. 88–9.

from both communal expectations and moral demands. He fails not only in the "masculine" pursuits of war and title-taking, but also in the "feminine, maternal" sphere of caring for his family: "He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat" (3). By describing in detail the ceremonious rituals involved in the creditor Okoye asking for payment and Unoka's manipulation of his culture's stock of proverbs to refuse payment, Achebe presents Unoka as an artist of irresponsibility.[19] Unoka does more than fail by the standards of Igbo master morality. Like the practitioners of modern subjective irony described by Hegel and Kierkegaard, he takes any morality to be an "optional" standpoint.[20] Sociability, like hedonism and aesthetic delight, becomes for Unoka a form of self-indulgent compensation, a means by which he may temporally block out external demands that are, in Levinas's terms, sometimes moral and sometimes ethical.

Unoka's dismissal of both determinate moral claims and transcendent ethical obligations provokes Okonkwo's opposite but mirroring action of collapsing uncritically the ethical into Igbo master morality: "And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness" (11). Of course, as Hogan also argues in describing Okonkwo's "reactionary masculinity,"[21] Okonkwo displays a rigid, totalizing tenor of mind by refusing to discriminate between gentleness and idleness, and his need to totalize is motivated psychologically by "fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father" (10). In order to preserve an image of himself as an undifferentiated whole (manly all the way through), Okonkwo embraces monological discourse and a monolithic notion of value ironically at odds with the dialogic, pluralistic understanding of the good characteristic of Igbo society.

If one asks what, aside from his personal weaknesses, accounts for Unoka's radical alienation from his cultural world's construction of value, one may find hints in Achebe's portrait of that world. Okonkwo thinks of himself as "a man of action, a man of war. Unlike his father he could stand the sight of blood. In Umuofia's latest war he was the first to bring home a human head. That was his fifth head; and he was not an old man yet" (8). The way this is phrased suggests that the possession of a head proves one's manhood and that bringing "home a human head" is a central objective of the war. Both details connect Okonkwo's aggressive masculinity with a particular legacy of pre-colonial appropriative

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19 See Gikandi's discussion (*Reading Chinua Achebe*, pp. 32–3) of rituals as "semiotic codes," and Irele's discussion of Unoka as a defiant rebel in *The African Imagination*, pp. 127–8.

20 See G.W.F. Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, ed. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 99–103; Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. Lee M. Capel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), esp. pp. 289–335. Given the centrality of music to Unoka's characterization, it is useful to recall the role music plays in Kierkegaard's portrait of infinitely ironizing, aestheticizing subjectivity in *Either/Or*, vol. I, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, rev. Howard A. Johnson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), esp. "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic or the Musical Erotic," pp. 43–134.

21 See Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, pp. 106–22.

violence. From the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, the Aro Igbo of Arochukwu embarked upon a policy of accumulating wealth and securing cultural hegemony through trade in slaves.[22] Lovejoy argues,

> Aro expansion occurred rapidly in the eighteenth-century, closely associated with the growth in slave exports from the Bight of Biafra after the 1730s. … The Aro clans … negotiated alliances with various sets of villages that allowed them to monopolize trade and establish market-places and fairs, and they promoted their oracle as a supreme court of appeal in judicial and religious matters. … The oracle settled disputes and legitimized agreements, in part through divine interpretation of the social order and in part through secular deals based on information supplied by the commercial network of the Aro traders.[23]

By the nineteenth century, the Adam, Edda, and Ohafia Igbo, inhabiting the region around the Cross River, developed an intensely military culture, hiring themselves out to the Aro to harvest slaves and attain glory.[24] Isichei notes, 'The Ohafia sought only the concrete symbol of military prowess—human heads. Ohafia adult male society was divided into heroes, *dike*, and cowards, *ujo*."[25] Similarly, the Ezza, a northeastern Igbo people, pursued a policy of "total war" for territorial expansion: "Defeated foes were beheaded, or offered in religious sacrifices. Enemy villages were often razed, their populations put largely to the sword."[26] Lovejoy observes,

> In the northern frontier areas, new settlers carved out huge tracts of land, which usually involved wars with the Igala. In this way, the Nike and the north-eastern Igbo captured slaves for sale and their own use, although counter-raids also resulted in the enslavement of these Igbo. … In the southern and central Igbo districts, most newly enslaved people were pawns, victims of kidnapping, or captives for oracles. Parents sold their own children because of debts, laziness, and insubordination: the distinction between slave and pawn disappeared in some places, such as Nguru, where both were called *ohu*, the usual term for slave. In Enugwu-Ukwu and elsewhere, domestic slaves could be sold, despite a traditional prohibition against selling those born into slavery.

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22 See Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, pp. 58–66; Susan Martin, "Slaves, Igbo Women and Palm Oil in the Nineteenth Century," in Robin Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce: The Commerical Transition in Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 172–94.

23 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 85.

24 See Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, pp. 81–91; Ohadike, *Anioma*, pp. 34–6.

25 Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, p. 82. Odadike argues, "Headhunting was not an organic part of the Igbo social organization but a recent invention whose origin can be traced to the expansion of the Aro trading activities in the era of the Atlantic slave trade" (*Anioma*, p. 35).

26 Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, p. 89.

> Kidnapping was so common that in many places parents did not let their children play outside their walled compounds.[27]

Assuming that Umuofia is largely a fictionalized version of Achebe's natal town of Ogidi, located some 30 miles east of Onitsha, Umuofia would be situated on the western side of eastern Igboland, far from the center of this militarization of culture. However, the prestige given to taking heads, the fear of travel and of night, the presence of certain trade goods, the need for a protective alliance among the nine villages, taken together, suggest both pressure from and influence by these then-ascendant societies. Wren comments, "Ogidi tradition notes that the exchange of slaves for cloth introduced clothing to the town many years ago. The merchants in this case were Umudioka, but they were strictly middlemen; they got their cloth from the Aro, and it is beyond doubt that they paid for the cloth with slaves."[28] As Isichei notes, the decline of external markets for slaves "did not mean that the slave trade ceased to exist in Igboland," but rather that "the slaves had to be absorbed, either in the Delta, or in Igboland. Slaves became cheaper and their numbers increased vastly."[29] The devaluation of human life that comes with overpopulation and the contempt for weakness that comes with militarizing culture make the kind of alienation exemplified by Unoka both understandable and likely.

Thus, Okonkwo's intense aggressiveness and cultural conservatism may be seen less as representative of Igbo values than as emblematic of their deformation. The idleness to which Unoka is given seems to be experienced by the village as an increasingly pronounced temptation. When he asks the wealthy farmer Nwakibie for yams to plant, the young Okonkwo notes that he is not like other young men "these days," who are "afraid of work," and Nwakibie replies that "these days … our youth has gone so soft" (18). Hogan argues that "there are many suggestions in *Things Fall Apart* that the culture of Umuofia has decayed, that it has become weak and emasculated," and so "Okonkwo's masculinity is not only a violation of gender norms, but also a corrective to the opposite, feminizing tendency of his fellow Igbos."[30] While Hogan's point about the "corrective" value of Okonkwo's masculinity is well taken, "softness" seems to accompany, rather than work against, an increasing coarsening and militarizing of life. Nwakibie observes that he frequently turns down young men, not because he is "hard hearted," but because so few impoverished youths can now be trusted to put in the sustained labor necessary to cultivate yams: "Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching. I have learned to be stingy with my yams" (18).

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27 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., p. 148.

28 Wren, *Achebe's World*, pp. 88–9.

29 Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, p. 95; also see Martin, "Slaves, Igbo Women and Palm Oil in the Nineteenth Century," and Kristin Mann, "Owners, Slaves and the Struggle for Labour in the Commercial Transition at Lagos," in Law, *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce*, pp. 144–71.

30 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, pp. 107–8.

This proverb, suggesting that good judgment requires flexibility in the face of changing circumstances, leads paradoxically to a description of how Okonkwo's exercise of the traditional virtues of hard work and repayment of a creditor (Nwakibie) are entwined with inflexibility. The year that Nwakibie gives Okonkwo yams the seasons "had gone mad" (20), destroying crops through drought and rain. Okonkwo avoided succumbing to "despair" through sheer will: "He knew that he was a fierce fighter, but that year had been enough to break the heart of a lion" (20). From his experience of rising from poverty to wealth and social prominence, Okonkwo takes the lesson that, as the proverb puts it, "when a man says yes, his chi says yes also" (23), a conviction that makes Okonkwo intolerant of "less successful men" (22). The very power of Okonkwo's will to dominate circumstances exposes him to the calamity that Ikemefuna represents: "The elders of the clan had decided that Ikemefuna should be in Okonkwo's care for a while. But no one thought it would be as long as three years. They seemed to forget all about him as soon as they had taken the decision" (23).

It has often been noted how Homeric the atmosphere and characterization, how close to Greek tragedy the structure, of Achebe's novel.[31] Certainly, Okonkwo's virtues lead to his being singled out for a test, exposure to the ethical call of the Other, that he is singularly unable to meet, but the curious idleness and irresponsibility of the elders in allowing Ikemefuna to remain three years in Okonkwo's care before abruptly demanding his sacrifice suggests that the leadership of the clan has taken on attributes akin to those of Unoka which, as in Unoka's influence on Okonkwo's personality, generates self-destructive rigidity. The lack of motivation, and the lack of responsibility, revealed in Achebe's account of the elders' actions contrasts with the clarity of consequences he delineates: Ikemefuna

> gradually became popular in Okonkwo's household, especially with the children. Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, who was two years younger, became quite inseparable from him …. Even Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy—inwardly of course. … Sometimes when he went to big village meetings or communal ancestral feasts he allowed Ikemefuna to accompany him, like a son … And, indeed, Ikemefuna called him father. (24)

The proverb about Eneke the bird suggests that the community ought to modify its view of Ikemefuna in response to changing circumstances. What authorizes the revision of cultural practice (learning to fly without perching) is the imperative of survival, conserving the life of the clan. The primacy of this principle is stressed when, after Okonkwo beats his third wife during the annual Week of Peace, the priest of the earth goddess, Ezeani, demands that he pay a fine in reparation: "We

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31 See Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, pp. 110–13; Richard Begam, "Achebe's Sense of an Ending: History and Tragedy in *Things Fall Apart*," *Studies in the Novel* 29, 3 (1997): 396–411; Alastair Nivan, "Chinua Achebe and the Possibility of Modern Tragedy," in Kristen Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (eds), *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990), pp. 41–50.

live in peace with our fellows to honor the great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. … The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish" (26). Okonkwo's actions provoke a discussion in which Ogbuefi Ezeudu, "the oldest man in village" (27), describes how penalties for breaking the Week of Peace have evolved: "My father told me that he had been told that in the past a man who broke the peace was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. But after a while this custom was stopped because it spoiled the peace which it was meant to preserve" (27). He also contrasts the custom in Umuofia with that practiced in Obodoani:

> If a man dies at this time he is not buried but cast into the Evil Forest. It is a bad custom which these people observe because they lack understanding. They throw away large numbers of men and women without burial. And what is the result? Their clan is full of the evil spirits of these unburied dead, hungry to do harm to the living. (27)

Michael Valdez Moses notes that by showing Ezeudu comparing and evaluating diverse customs, "Achebe calls into question the racist stereotype of the African as hopelessly mired in superstition and irretrievably bound to [uncritically accepted] tribal customs" even as he shows the possibility for transcultural "dialogue" by using the priest to suggest that "an intellectual distinction can and should be made between a good custom and a bad one."[32] While measuring practice against the standard of what best preserves the clan might seem to serve will to power or survival at all costs, Ezeudu's examples and mode of reasoning disclose that material well-being and ethical sociability follow from customs that meet transcultural standards of reason and justice. To punish breaking the Week of Peace by dragging to death the guilty party does violence to the point of the Week of Peace, which is to emulate the maternal compassion upon which material well-being depends. To throw away the dead without burial likewise does violence to the ethical basis of community by institutionalizing a form of injustice that threatens the community by breeding a thirst for revenge. The prospering of the clan depends upon justice, and justice requires both the constant, dialogic exercise of reason in assessing moral practices against the demands of the ethical, and the cultivation of a communal practical rationality skilled in discerning the right relation between a general principle and a particular case. Citing Azuka Dike, Hogan notes that precisely such "discrimination" was expected of Ozo title bearers, who had the power "to decide on matters 'without any precedents' and to 'amend local customs';" according to Dike, "The Ozo men, because of their accumulated honour and esteem, often initiate new rules and standards of conduct."[33]

Achebe delicately portrays how the kind of reasoning that culminates in the Ozo title society's "judicial function" of "both allowing and regulating change"

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32 Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, pp. 117, 118.

33 Azuka Dike, *The Resilience of Igbo Culture: A Case Study of Awka Town* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1985), pp. 110, 111, 110; cited in Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 111.

is cultivated through daily discourses and practices, and how Okonkwo, although a member of the Ozo society,[34] is from the beginning of the novel estranged from such cultural work. During the New Yam Festival, "an occasion for giving thanks to Ani" (31) by feasting and fellowship, Okonkwo, ill at ease because he would rather be working on his farm, beats his second wife on a slight pretext and impulsively shoots at her when she mocks him, but he immediately throws "down the gun and jump[s] into the barn" where she has taken refuge, and "heave[s] a heavy sigh" of relief when he finds her unharmed (33). Okonkwo cannot acknowledge how much he values the wife, Ekwefi, which suggests both his estrangement from and intuitive respect for the qualities she exemplifies. Ekwefi is portrayed as, first of all, loving Okonkwo and indeed choosing him as a husband: "Many years ago when she was the village beauty Okonkwo had won her heart by throwing the Cat …. She did not marry him then because he was too poor to pay her bride-price. But, a few years later she ran away from her husband and came to live with Okonkwo" (34). She is then depicted developing her daughter's, Ezinma's, reasoning abilities through a series of questions (35) as they prepare a meal together. By impulsively taking a shot at Ekwefi when she answers him back, Okonkwo reveals his intolerance of the give-and-take that Ekwefi's traditional education of Ezinma valorizes. Ekwefi's participation in the constructive dimension of ethics is consistent with her ethically disruptive "answering back" to Okonkwo. Similarly, Okonkwo's alienation from an education in discernment, his inability or unwillingness to grasp the interplay of construction and disruption, reinforces a contempt for women that makes his own affection for Ekwefi, evident in his "heavy sigh," unaccountable to himself.[35]

A similar shaping of discernment through sociability is exhibited by Ikemefuna when he, by directing a stern look at Okonkwo's sons, prevents them from telling Okonkwo that one of his daughters broke her water pot while trying to show off (38). Through Ikemefuna, the binding of affection to hard work and dialogic discrimination to social duties that characterize Ekwefi's and Ezinma's relationship, and the relations among women more broadly, comes to interfuse the lives of the males: "He seemed like an elder brother to Nwoye, and from the very first seemed to have kindled a new fire in the younger boy" (45). Ikemefuna's influence allows Nwoye to aspire to become what "his father wanted him to be" (46)—a man. Okonkwo's very delight in sharing stories with the boys, and in eating and working alongside them (47–8), suggests a need for intimacy, affection, and reciprocity that his conscious self-image and conceptual vocabulary cannot accommodate.

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34 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 111.

35 See Irele, *The African* Imagination, pp. 129–32. Gender relations and ideology becomes the subject of detailed explorations by later female Igbo novelists. See esp. Flora Nwapa, *Efuru* (London: Heinemann, 1966); Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (New York: George Braziller, 1979) and *Kehinde* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994). For extended readings of *Efuru* and *Kehinde*, see Donald R. Wehrs, *African Feminist Fiction and Indigenous Values* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 37–51, 170–97.

At the moment when Ikemefuna's positive influence begins to impress itself upon Okonkwo's mind, Ogbuefi Ezeudu informs Okonkwo that Umuofia "has decided to kill" Ikemefuna because the "Oracle of the Hills and Caves has pronounced it" (49). Significantly, no reason is given for either the decision or its timing. Since it immediately follows the once-in-a-lifetime arrival of the locusts, one might suspect that the elders have been reminded of the passing of time, which might remind them that Ikemefuna is approaching an age at which a young man would begin his own yam farming. If overpopulation and internal slavery have led to a cheapening of human life, Umuofia may wish to preclude sharing land with a stranger. That the Oracle pronounces Ikemefuna's death sentence raises a number of questions. Wren points out that the Oracle resembles the Oracle of Awka, written about by G.T. Basden (a sometimes guest of Achebe's grandfather and model for the missionary Mr Brown). The deity Agbala "was the 'daughter' of 'Igwe-ka-Ani' (i.e. the Aro 'Long Juju'), and therefore female, [but] she was called 'Father' and took the masculine pronoun."[36] The Oracle of the Aro had remarkable cultural influence throughout Igboland in the nineteenth century. Associated with Arochukwu commercial and political power, it was not only used to legitimate accumulation through slave trading, but also constituted a mechanism for harvesting slaves. Many who went to consult the Oracle never returned.[37] Lovejoy argues that during the Atlantic trade the Oracle "was directly or indirectly responsible for the transfer of thousands of slaves to European ships waiting at the coastal ports. … [T]he slaves 'eaten' by the oracle in recognition of the services rendered were easily passed along a path that followed the stream to the Cross River and the waiting ships of the Europeans."[38] That Agbala is the daughter of Igwe-ka-Ani suggests that the Oracle is an effect of Aro influence, that both the specific oracle and the institution of oracles represent efforts to harness some of the Aro "magic" through cultural imitation. Basden's reading is consistent with such a derivation: oracles "were priestly deceptions designed to bilk the credulous of wealth, freedom, or life."[39]

Achebe does not entirely repudiate such implications. When the young Okonkwo visits Nwakibie, there is discussion of one Obiako, who consults the Oracle and is told that his dead father wants a sacrifice of a goat, to which Obiako responds by asking if his father ever had a fowl when alive. "Everyone laughed heartily" (17), which seems to acknowledge that oracles may be manipulated to appropriate material goods. At the same time, however, in contrast to Basden, Achebe portrays the Oracle as offering something like therapy for the unlucky and lonely, as well as communal admonishment to the wayward (14): Unoka is told that his own weaknesses, not the gods or luck, are to blame for his problems (14).

36 Wren, *Achebe's World*, p. 41.

37 See Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Achebe*, p. 4; Wren, *Achebe's World*, pp. 41–2, 88; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, p. 59. On the cultural effect of the Aro oracle upon other Igbo peoples, see Donatus Ibe Nwoga, *The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought* (Ahiazu Mbaise, Nigeria: Hawk Press, 1984).

38 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., pp. 85, 86.

39 Wren, *Achebe's World*, p. 41.

Complicating interpretation is the fact that the priestess of the Oracle, Chielo, is "very friendly with Ekwefi" and is "particularly fond of Ekwefi's only daughter, Ezinma" (42). She clearly resents Okonkwo's rough treatment of his wife and sexist deprecation of his daughter. The Oracle's role in Ikemefuna's murder may indicate the extent to which the Aros' exploitive relations with non-Aro Igbos established models for treating any and all outsiders. Lovejoy points out that

> [s]laves were … sacrificed to religious deities, at funerals or on other occasions; these practices too promoted social control. … The taking of titles, especially *ozo* titles, required the death of slaves too. The 400 title-holders at Asaba in 1881, for example, had each sacrificed a slave on assuming their titles; two more slaves were to be killed at the funeral of each of these men. … The cheapening of human life symbolized in these practices was perhaps most gruesomely displayed at the house of skulls in Bonny and the shrine of Ibinukpabi at Aro Chukwu, which was lined with the heads of slaves.[40]

The Oracle's role may indicate that secret judgments by the elite were increasingly being mystified and legitimated in ways that circumvented the quasi-democratic decision-making of assemblies. Ikemefuna might have met a different fate. Lovejoy notes that in the central Igbo country, "where slave holdings were small, the treatment of slaves … varied," with some slaves being "readily incorporated in lineages," others allowed to "acquire land from the lineage and start their own homestead," but nonetheless "[d]omestic slaves were the first to suffer when the family or village faced difficult times. If a sacrifice was needed for a shrine, a slave would be bought for the purpose, but if poverty prevented this, a domestic slave would have to be used. Slaves were held as hostages, too, and even after many years they were not allowed to join the community fully."[41]

The Oracle's role may also indicate how investing individuals with the power of gods opens the way for intoxicating unchecked power. Whatever the case, because the community construes Ikemefuna's sentence as Agbala's demand, there can be no discussion about its justice, a prohibition that effectively relieves the human agents involved of any moral responsibility. Nonetheless, Ezeudu recognizes the primacy of an ethical relation for which, Achebe suggests, there is no cultural vocabulary when he tells Okonkwo "to have nothing to do with it. He calls you his father" (49). Notably, unlike Ezeani when he tells Okonkwo that he must pay a penalty for breaking the Week of Peace, Ezeudu offers no justification of the edict; instead, his phrasing, "Umuofia has decided …. The Oracle … has pronounced," blocks any recourse to rational deliberation.

Okonkwo does not take Ezeudu's advice, but he does fall to the rear of the procession of Umuofia men leading Ikemefuna into the bush, which suggests a desire to avoid active participation in the murder.[42] By depicting Ikemefuna's thoughts and feelings as he is being, he thinks, returned to his native village, Achebe conveys somatically marked images that communicate behind or against

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40 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., p. 186.
41 Ibid., pp. 188–9.
42 See Nwabueze, "Theoretical Construction and Constructive Theorizing."

ideological conceptualities. In an almost iconic way that anticipates the almost iconic dramatization of colonialist violence at the end of the novel, Achebe illustrates how novelistic discourse can conjure up the kind of participation through which oral storytelling exposes its audience to ethical obligation. "Seeing" Ikemefuna at this point in the narrative is inseparable from being concerned about him, wanting him to live. Novelistic discourse situates the reader in a viscerally maternal relation to the orphaned character.[43] Even as they are perfectly aware that he is "only" a character in fiction, readers find it morally impossible not to want to protect Ikemefuna.[44] Moreover, the structure and argument of Achebe's text presupposes that the reader encounters Ikemefuna here in a manner consistent with Levinasian proximity. The significance of Ikemefuna's story impresses itself immediately upon the reader, non-arbitrarily, regardless of the reader's own cultural background or ideological, conceptual assumptions.[45]

Ikemefuna, whose name means, "My strength should not be dissipated," "could hardly imagine that Okonkwo was not his real father," but wonders what his mother would now look like as he anticipates how she will want "to hear everything that had happened to him in all these years" (51–2). From this initial upsurge of desire for affectionate intimacy, Ikemefuna is led to anxiety that his mother might have died, which he tries to relieve, in a way he himself recognizes as childish, by singing to himself a song in which the king is urged not to eat lest he "will weep for what [he] ha[s] committed /There, where the Ant crowns his king / And the sands obey the drum [dance]."[46] Poignantly, the song articulates Igbo cultural recognition that the powerful (kings) cannot just consume (eat) whatever they may seize, that unrestrained acts of appropriation can lead to weeping. Just as the men do not hear the song Ikemefuna sings only to himself, which exemplifies what is lost when the wisdom of stories are taken to be just the "foolish" discourse of women and children, so the men do not see what the reader cannot avoid experiencing—that Ikemefuna, who calls Okonkwo father and feels "like a child once more" because of "the thought of going home to his mother" (52), is everyone's child in the sense of incarnating an ethical demand that is

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43 See Levinas's treatment of the maternal relation as paradigmatic of ethical contestations of intentional egoistic cognition in Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans, Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquense University Press, 1981), pp. 61–97.

44 For a discussion of how narrative activates spontaneous modes of non-egocentric empathetic cognition, see Patrick Colm Hogan, *Cognitive Science, Literature, and the Arts: A Guide for Humanists* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 166–90.

45 See Levinas's argument in "Meaning and Sense" that "before Culture and Aesthetics, meaning is situated in the Ethical, presupposed by all Culture and all meaning. … [Although cultural works are] steeped in history … the norms of morality are not embarked in history and culture. They are not even islands that emerge from it—for they make all meaning, even cultural meaning, possible, and make it possible to judge Cultures" (Emmanuel Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 34–64, 57, 59 cited.

46 See Wren's translation in *Achebe's World*, pp. 58–9.

absolute. As Hogan argues, the novel perhaps "is best understood as … advocating the preservation of Igbo customs and beliefs … purged of whatever violates … common or universal humanity—the murder of innocents, the outcasting of people by birth, and so forth."[47] Thus, Achebe's novelistic discourse discloses ethical universalism to be not a philosophical tradition or lifestyle option, but the necessary consequence of the psyche's maternal structure: "Justice refers to a psyche, not, to be sure, as a thematization, but as the diachrony of the same and the other in sensibility."[48]

Okonkwo, who cuts down Ikemefuna as he runs toward him crying, "My father, they have killed me!" (53), is—in Levinas's precise sense of the terms—obsessed and persecuted by Ikemefuna.[49] Not tasting "any food for two days," he becomes "so weak that his legs could hardly carry him" (55). What cannot be conceptualized or said is articulated physiologically, prior to and behind speech. Indeed, whenever the narrating voice moves from a generalized communal knowledge to inside someone's head, the conflict between what Levinas describes as saying and said is dramatized. The problem is not that the Igbo "said" is inadequate to do justice to the ethical one-for-the-other communicated by "saying." Levinas is insistent, despite his own occasional lapses into eurocentrism, that any particular historical-cultural morality betrays the unconditional ethical transcendence of saying.[50] But the degree of estrangement between said and saying has become in the historical Igbo world as Achebe portrays it so intense that the reproduction of the symbolic order, the continuation of the culture and the clan, is imperiled.

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47 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 125; also see Irele, *The African Imagination*, pp. 134–5.

48 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 71. Understood in these terms, it becomes clear how the killing can be, as Opata argues, at once unconscionable and not a social offense. See Opata, "Eternal Sacred Order versus Conventional Wisdom," pp. 71–9. Moses observes, "Achebe appears to accede to the Aristotelian precept that a universal human capacity—reason—is called upon to determine which particular conventions are best suited to a given local condition" (*The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, p. 119). He goes on to note that reason, so understood, seems to be linked to a primordial ethical sense; Moses quotes Achebe as insisting that "the frontier between good and evil must not be blurred; … that somewhere, no matter how fuzzy it may be to us, there is still a distinction between what is permissible and what is not permissible" (*The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, p. 119; Charles H. Rowell, "An Interview with Chinua Achebe," *Callaloo* 13 (1990): 88). Similarly, in "The Truth of Fiction," Achebe argues, "And yet, in spite of local and historical variations, we do not know of any society which has survived and flourished on totally arbitrary notions of good and evil, of the heroic and the cowardly. Our very humanity seems to be committed to a distinction between these pairs however fuzzy the line may sometimes appear" (*Hopes and Impediments*, p. 146). Achebe's conviction that the ethical is non-arbitrary and primordial, and that it involves a "fuzzy" sense to which more articulate discourse must be answerable, is consistent, in general terms at least, with Levinas's insistence that reason derives from ethics, and that striving to make the said answerable to a "fuzzy" saying, to make the moral responsive to the ethical, allows signification to be irreducible to conventionalist, ethnocentric semiotic codes.

49 See Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, pp. 45–59.

50 Ibid., pp. 5–9, 37–8, 65–72.

"Despair," as Hogan defines it, precedes contact with the British: "It is … a loss of hope in the future. Despair is the feeling that one's aspirations no longer make sense, that one's actions are pointless."[51] Nwoye no longer wishes to become what his father wants him to be: "[S]omething seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp" (53). There are no structures of meaning or value that Nwoye can invest in; there is no subject position worth desiring. Despair here follows from ethical universalism. Hogan goes so far as to insist that Achebe "is an extreme universalist," for he posits "a universal ethical principle that condemns the slaughter of innocents and tells us outcasting is wrong …. That is why Nwoye is troubled by the exposure of twins and by the sacrifice of Ikemefuna."[52] Nwoye experiences "the same kind of feeling" he had known when, during the harvest season, he had heard the crying of abandoned twins (53–4). Like Okonkwo after Ikemefuna's death, Nwoye experiences physiological unease, "[a] vague chill," and "something … given way inside him" (53–4). The body's hunger for comfort, security, intimacy and the psyche's exposure to the Other are interfused in an emotionally abandoned boy's identification with physically abandoned infants and the murdered "son" Ikemefuna.[53] The effacement of ethics into morality, or custom, leaves those who identify themselves with the cultural said, like Okonkwo, emotionally wounded and intellectually baffled, and those who cannot do so, like Nwoye, abject, bereft of the faith in signification that psychic coherence, agency, and the capacity for love demand.[54] In the movement from Unoka to Okonkwo to Nwoye, Achebe reveals decadence breeding reactionary masculinity breeding anomie, which suggests a communal trajectory compromising the resiliency that had for centuries characterized Igbo village life.

Dialogism and the Possibility of Reformation from Within

Like Okonkwo himself, the narrative turns to Ezinma and Obierika as possible sources of healing and renewal. He intuitively recognizes that Ezinma has the qualities that would allow her to assume the role, both in the life of the community and in his affections, that Ikemefuna might have occupied, but he cannot imagine how a female could take the place of a male. Visiting Obierika, he envies his friend's positive relationship with his son Maduka, which Achebe intimates is connected to the qualities that led Obierika to decline participation in Ikemefuna's murder. When other men agree that Maduka is "as sharp as a razor," Obierika remarks "somewhat indulgently," that he may be "too sharp:" "He hardly ever walks. He is always in a hurry" (61). Obierika's brother replies, "You were very

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51 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 132.

52 Ibid., pp. 123–4.

53 So Levinas argues, "It is most important to insist on the antecedence of [ethical] sense to cultural signs" ("Meaning and Sense, p. 57).

54 See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1–55.

much like that yourself .... As our people say, ‘When mother-cow is chewing grass its young ones watch its mouth.’ Maduka has been watching your mouth” (61). Maduka combines attributes associated with Okonkwo and masculine energy (prowess at wrestling and being in a hurry) with attributes associated with the “feminine” dialogical dexterity of Ezinma and Ekwefi (being as sharp as a razor). Both set of attributes are ascribed to Obierika’s good parenting, which is likened to that of a “mother-cow.” The brother’s use of the proverb implicitly valorizes maternal qualities in fathers. Apparently intuiting his shortcomings in relation to Obierika, Okonkwo criticizes his friend’s non-participation in Ikemefuna’s murder, provoking Obierika to reply, “What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families” (58). Obierika’s comment, which describes well the effect Okonkwo’s action has already had on his family, implies the kind of critical rational analysis that Ezeudu employed to assess diverse customs, but with the crucial difference that Obierika does not allow his analysis to enter into public discourse. Because the death sentence is ascribed to the Oracle, it is politically and conceptually impossible for Obierika to dispute the decision, even though he can avoid implementing it personally.

Obierika notes with approval that the elder Ndulue, who has just died and is immediately followed in death by his beloved first wife, was known for being unable to do anything without telling her, to which Okonkwo responds, “I thought he was a strong man in his youth.” Obierika replies, “He was indeed” (60). Okonkwo cannot reconcile interdependence between husband and wife with independent manly strength. He cannot see, despite the example of Obierika before him, how participation in “feminine” attributes can make one more, rather than less, of a man—that is, more able to achieve excellence in spheres that Igbo culture associates with masculinity. When asked in an interview if there was not something of himself in Obierika, Achebe observes that the society in *Things Fall Apart* “believes in strength and manliness and the masculine ideals.” Okonkwo accepts this “in a rather literal sense,” which allows him to be “betrayed” by the culture for “doing exactly what [it] preaches,” for the culture is “devious:” to survive, it “has to be ambivalent, so it immediately raises the virtues of the women, of love, of tenderness and so on .... [E]ven though the cultural norm says you must do it [kill Ikemefuna], you *cannot* [my stress]. ... Obierika is therefore more subtle ... and ... not as likely to be crushed, because he holds something in reserve.”[55]

While Obierika understands, as Okonkwo does not, that value is not monolithic, his own articulation of ethical rationality is constrained by the dogmatism attendant on the self-legitimatization of traditions in pre-modern societies,[56] and, paradoxically, by Igbo habits of cultural tolerance and relativism.[57] While it is true,

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55 Lindfors, *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, p. 118; also see Biodun Jeyifo, “For Chinua Achebe: The Resilience and the Predicament of Obierika,” in Petersen and Rutherford, *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, pp. 51–70.

56 Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 4–7.

57 See Moses’s discussion of Igbo cultural relativism, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, pp. 120–22.

as Hogan argues, that Ezeudu's account of how punishment for breaking the Peace of Ani was moderated demonstrates "the way in which traditional Igbo society could and did change and develop internally, according to universal ethical and rational principles, without the interference of external agents," and while "it is clear that Obierika's mind is moving toward a universal ethical principle—that the innocent should not be made to suffer or die,"[58] Achebe also notes the presence of social and psychological impediments to systemic reform within Igbo society. In complaining about the Umuofia custom of allowing men of title to tap short palm trees but not climb large ones, Obierika points out its illogic: "It is like Dimaragana, who would not lend his knife for cutting up dogmeat because the dog was taboo to him, but offered to use his teeth" (60–61). In discussing bride-price customs, Obierika's brother observes, "But what is good in one place is bad in another place," but then adds, "In Umunso they do not bargain at all … The suitor just goes on bringing bags of cowries until his in-laws tell him to stop. It is a bad custom because it always lead to a quarrel" (71). Just as the brother does not bring the principle that "a bad custom" is one that leads "to a quarrel" into dialogue with the maxim that what is good in one place is bad in another, neither does Obierika allow the conviction that Okonkwo's participation in Ikemefuna's murder will offend Ani to challenge the Oracle's decision.

While standing outside the reactionary literal-mindedness characteristic of Okonkwo, Obierika does not put things together in a manner analogous to Achebe's own novelistic discourse. Instead, his habits of mind reflect the patterns of narratives such as "Gassire's Lute," where ethical critique of a character's individual social conduct need not entail "a questioning of the social order" that, Konrad notes, is rarely evident in oral stories: "In the Ewe context, for example, there is little evidence for this particular line of reasoning."[59] The written word, as Achebe's text exemplifies, holds in place what is said at one time, making its difference from what is said at another evident, so as to generate a problem for reflection, a "puzzle" in Aristotle's sense.[60] By dramatizing the impasses in Obierika's thought, and implicitly contrasting them with the consistent ethical universalism of his narrative, Achebe implies that systemic critique is impossible as long as the non-totalizing tenor of Igbo thought is tied to discursive forms that reinforce the discreteness of insights, maxims, and observations.

While the desire to believe that Obierika's "questioning might have been the beginning of internal change, if missionaries had not come,"[61] is understandable, Achebe's stress upon the tentative, intermittent, and disjointed nature of Obierika's questioning, as opposed to the stable, even-handed, and unrelenting moral

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58 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 126.

59 Zinta Konrad, *Ewe Comic Heroes: Trickster Tales in Togo* (New York: Garland, 1994), p. 140.

60 On Aristotle's "puzzles" (*aporiai*) and their dialectical exploration, see T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 40–43. Irele notes that the "insistence of the narrative voice on the fundamental weaknesses of the traditional cognitive system is … unmistakable" (*The African Experience*, p. 139; also see pp. 137–41).

61 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 126.

orientation of the narrative itself, suggests that systemic reform requires the kind of denaturalizations of the present that literacy, and exposure to cultural difference mediated by literacy, makes possible.[62] Certainly, it would be difficult to argue that current research discloses unequivocal evidence of such internal development; on the contrary, late nineteenth-century Igbo history offers striking instances of what Lovejoy calls the "cheapening of human life" and a widening of the gap between privileged and marginalized: "By 1900, one wealthy Aro merchant at Aro Chukwu, Okoroji, owned thousands of slaves, according to local traditions;" another man, "Jaja, accomplished in a single life-time a transformation in status from humble Igbo slave boy to powerful ruler, owning over a thousand slaves, including slave subordinates who had large holdings themselves."[63]

Okonkwo's lack of imagination may thus be seen as an intensification of broader social tendencies. He dismisses, as a typically "silly" women's story, the folktale of how, after Ear calls Mosquito "already a skeleton," Mosquito buzzes each time he passes to remind Ear "that he was still alive" (66). By warning the strong against underestimating the resiliency of the weak, the tale articulates a feminist counter-discourse to Igbo masculinist speech. Notably, the narrative relates this story soon after Okonkwo is described as feeling "like a drunken giant walking with the limbs of a mosquito" (55). Not only does Okonkwo disregard the overt moral of the story, he identifies with Ear without considering that he may resemble Mosquito in many respects. While Okonkwo would dismiss women's discourse and thus any values or home-truths that would contest the sufficiency of his self-image, as soon as he learns from Ekwefi that Ezinma is gravely ill, he "spr[ings] from his bed, push[es] back the bolt on his door and r[uns] to Ekwefi's hut" (66), an alacrity indicative of depth of feeling.

Against the background of ritually reproduced sociability and reciprocity illustrated most forcefully by the ceremonies surrounding Obierika's daughter's wedding (97–105) and Ezeudu's funeral (107–9), there are intimations that containing masculine aggressiveness is becoming increasingly difficult. The chapter describing how the *egwugwu*, the masked spirits of the clan ancestors, adjudicate a case of wife-beating concludes with one elder wondering why such "a trifle should come before the *egwugwu*," to which another responds, "Don't you know what kind of man Uzowulu is? He will not listen to any other decision" (83). The implication is that more mediated forms of cultural authority have proven unable to restrain his violence. During the wedding ceremonies, Obierika and a friend, Nwankwo, discuss the great market at Umuike, which evokes both admiration and fear. Obierika associates commercial acquisition with rapaciousness, "The people of Umuike wanted their market to grow and swallow up the markets of their

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62 See esp. Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) and *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Modes of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizings of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

63 Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 2nd ed., pp. 184, 185.

neighbors. So they made a powerful medicine," and he describes the market as a site of rampant thievery, telling the story of a man who led a goat by a rope to the market and turned around to find the goat gone and the rope tied to a log (100). Both domestic and inter-clan life seems to be marked by threats to civility.

The death of Ezeudu sends "a cold shiver down Okonkwo's back," for the last time the old man visited him he had warned Okonkwo against participating in the killing of a boy who called him father (107). Like the death of the devoted husband, Ndulue, in a neighboring village, Ezeudu's death indicates the end of a life that balanced assertiveness and deliberation, achievement and sociable moderation, the kind of life that Ikemefuna might have led, and that the loss of Ikemefuna tends to preclude. While ceremonies and ideology stress the predication of Igbo moral economies upon the reciprocity between the living and the dead—"The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. … A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors" (108)—the society Achebe portrays is under considerable strain to make up for the loss of old men of character.

Notably, doing what his culture preaches, celebrating Ezeudu's martial valor by firing his gun, leads Okonkwo to an inadvertent, "female" "crime against the earth goddess" (110); his gun explodes, killing Ezeulu's sixteen-year-old son. To cleanse the land, Okonkwo must be exiled for seven years. He flees "to his motherland," to the village of "Mbanta, just beyond the borders of Mbaino," Ikemefuna's village (110). Obierika had warned Okonkwo that the earth goddess would revenge herself for his role in Ikemefuna's death. If she is seen as doing so, it is by means of shedding the kind of blood that sacrificing Ikemefuna was intended to prevent. Two youths are killed, without malice, but in ways that follow naturally from a militarization of culture, which suggests that an unbalanced ascendancy of aggressively masculinist values and habits of thought threatens to "devour" the very future "life" that martial valor aspires to protect.

Again, we see that Igbo culture has within itself internal correctives. Just as Mosquito buzzes around Ear, so the maternal Ani forces Okonkwo, who dismisses the "silliness" of women, to take refuge in his motherland. Achebe implies that the crisis of Igbo society, the "falling apart" evident prior to the appearance of British colonizers, involves more than an imbalance between masculine and feminine goods. The novel's first part concludes not with Okonkwo, but with Obierika, who, after having participated, as custom dictates, in the destruction of Okonkwo's compound, finds himself perplexed and dissatisfied—intellectually and emotionally. He "was a man who thought about things" and so wonders why a man should "suffer so grievously for an offense he had committed inadvertently;" finding "no answers," he is "led into greater complexities" (110). He wonders what "crime" his wife's twin children had committed (111). Clearly, Obierika wants answers that meet standards of cross-cultural ethical rationality, but he is left with proverbs that only say that if the goddess is offended the entire community will suffer, not why twins are guilty of crimes.

In seeking a justification of cultural practice, Obierika's reflections take as their starting point the premise that twins are owed justice. The work of reason, the drive for explanations and for coherence, is initiated by the demand for justice.

Even though the systematization of literacy may encourage the consolidation of the cultural said into totalizing onto-theology, the absence of that systematizing impulse works against dialogism, and thus against the responsibility of the one for the Other. For this reason, Levinas argues, "Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing as before a court of justice."[64] Igbo culture is vulnerable to colonial subversion because it leaves Obierika unsatisfied, for his subjectivity, rooted in repeated, traumatic exposure to the Other (Okonkwo, the twins, their mother), elicits rational demands, compels discourses of justice, makes non-arbitrary the need for a praxis that cultivates *phronêsis* in individuals and in communities, and brings the disruptive dimension of ethics into reformative contact with ethics' constructive dimension.

Colonialist Ethical Violence and the Prologue to a Suicide

In the second part of the novel, Achebe juxtaposes Okonkwo's refusal to allow his misfortunes to modify his thinking with the British missionaries' refusal to allow experience of Igbo society to modify their ethnocentric positioning of Africans. While Okonkwo's maternal relations give him land to farm, he is so despondent that Uchendu, Okonkwo's uncle, delivers a speech in the high rhetorical style of the elders to both comfort and chasten his nephew. Okonkwo's faith has been shaken, for he comes to believe, "Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things. … The saying of the elders was not true—that if a man said yes his chi also affirmed" (114). Okonkwo has understood the value of Igbo culture exclusively in terms of its providing opportunities for a man to say yes, for enabling individual masculine achievement. Moreover, his conception of a "man saying yes" reduces "yes" to aggressive assertion. While Okonkwo may not have directly challenged his chi, his constant fighting against going in directions that his spirit would lead him—toward loving interdependence with his family, toward refusing to participate in Ikemefuna's murder, toward acknowledging his affection for Ezinma and Ekwefi, toward thinking through the intuitions implicit in his admiration of Obierika—is of a piece with his general impatience with hearing out the words of others. He experiences others as irritating disruptions of actions and perceptions he takes to be natural, unassailable, self-evident, and self-justifying. By, in effect, reducing his chi to an echo of his intentional consciousness, Okonkwo dismisses it as an Other, a source of intuition or speech that exceeds determinate, potentially totalizing conceptuality.

The way Achebe portrays Okonkwo's refusal to heed intuitions communicated through bodily sensations and unsolicited emotions strongly suggests that the chi communicates along the lines of oral storytelling, Damasio's somatic marking, and Levinasian saying. Indeed, Donatus Nwoga describes the chi as legitimating radical transcendence: through a personal chi, "[t]he Igbo person is therefore

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64 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, p. 159.

independent of other deities and forces as far as his existence is concerned. To quote Arinze's version: This idea is even embedded in a proverb. *Chi onye odili n'izu, ma onwu egbuna ya* ('If one's chi is not party to the arrangement death will not kill that person')."[65] By refusing to acknowledge either the otherness or the authority of his chi, Okonkwo falls into the self-pitying conviction that his society and its gods have let him down.

That Okonkwo has a distorted or shallow understanding of his own culture becomes evident when Uchendu asks him why Nneka or "Mother is Supreme" is a common name, and, therefore, why wives are buried in their natal villages. Okonkwo cannot reply. Uchendu explains, "A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is here to protect you" (116–17). Uchendu insists that just as the community offers "refuge" and "protection," so Okonkwo owes his family the same: "Your duty is to comfort your wives and children …. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will all die in exile" (117). By challenging Okonkwo, "If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world ask my daughter, Akueni, how many twins she has borne and thrown away. Have you not heard the song they sing when a woman dies? 'For whom it is well, for whom is it well? / There is no one for whom it is well'" (117), Uchendu asks him to empathize with the experience of women for whom inevitable, unrelenting sorrow is woven into the texture of daily life.

The maternal sensibility that Uchendu celebrates is, as Okonkwo's inability to answer his questions indicates, undermined by hegemonic masculinist discursive and material practices. When Obierika comes to visit Okonkwo, Uchendu laments that in the past "a man had friends in distant clans," whereas now "You stay at home, afraid of your next-door neighbor. Even a man's motherland is strange to him nowadays" (118–19). Moses observes that this speech "obliquely acknowledges the increasingly violent relationships among the clans that had come to define Igbo life by the turn of the century, a state of affairs that resulted in part from the oppressive power wielded by the Aro."[66] Moreover, militant local ethnocentrism, dehumanizing the stranger, plays a tragic role in the first encounter between the Igbo and the British: Obierika narrates how Abame was wiped out in retaliation for killing, after consulting their Oracle, a British bicyclist. Based on a true incident,[67] the story as Achebe fictionalizes it reiterates the role of oracles in legitimating violence even as it reveals how the relative isolation of Igbo village life makes even the most reflective of people unprepared to imagine alternative patterns of life and value. Hogan notes that the actual incident occurred at the time of Royal Niger Company's brutally violent Arochukwu expedition of 1901–1902,

65 Nwoga, *The Supreme God as Stranger*, p. 65; Nwoga cites F.A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), p. 116.

66 Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, p. 127.

67 See Wren, *Achebe's World*, pp. 26–7. On the "Aro Expedition" and British military punitive actions directed at the Igbo, see S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860–1960* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978), pp. 97–139; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, pp. 126–33.

so that the killing occurred "not out of blind devotion to an equivocating oracle, but out of rage against the British, who had slaughtered many people, razed many villages, and imposed over wide areas … corrupt and incomprehensible courts and prisons."[68] Hogan argues that Achebe's version is "unfortunate" to the extent that it reinforces impressions that Africans are "superstitious" and makes "them the initial aggressors," which is a point well-taken, but Achebe's fictionalization underscores the construal of outsiders that oracles, especially those associated with Arochukwu, promoted. While Achebe's version stresses the brutality of British retaliation (wiping out an entire village), it also emphasizes Igboland's cultural isolation. Obierika remarks, "We have heard stories about white men who made powerful guns and the strong drinks and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true" (122).

Because of the inability of even such open-minded and reflective individuals as Obierika to imagine themselves as the Other within their own culture, dominant members of Igbo society do not anticipate Christianity's appeal to the outcast, the unlucky, the weak, and even to some titled men. When Obierika returns to visit Okonkwo two years later, he describes an Umuofia with a church and "a handful of converts," who were "mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless, empty men" (124). Alan Levine, like Michael Moses, argues that Achebe portrays a Nietzschean transvaluation of values, where the "slave morality" of Christianity allows those despised by heroic "master morality" to take revenge, to empower themselves through a system that valorizes the lowly and the wretched.[69] This certainly helps account for the appeal of Christianity to the *osu*, the class of outcastes who, "dedicated to a god," were "a thing set apart—a taboo for ever, and [their] children after [them]" (137). That the recklessly fanatic convert Enoch, "who was believed to have killed and eaten the sacred python," was "the son of the snake-priest" (159) implies that Christianity provided an ideological vehicle for Oedipal revenge, for dominated or despised sons to kill and devour symbolically the fathers who lorded over them.[70] As Moses notes, "The tribal wars evoked at the beginning of the novel suggest a remote but important source of the ill-treatment meted out to Okonkwo and the other leaders of Umuofia by the 'foreign' *kotma* who serve the British imperial government."[71] The vulnerability of Igbo society to those who have good reasons for resentment discloses the wisdom of Ezeudu's critique of customs that institutionalize injustice and so breed in its midst grievances and a thirst for revenge.

While a Nietzschean and Oedipal logic does indeed consolidate the political power that Christianity and British colonial rule come to acquire, Achebe depicts the initial appeal of Christianity as separable from both the practical modes of empowerment it later is able to offer and its own conceptual, determinate (and highly ethnocentric) claims. Through an interpreter, the white missionary declares

68 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 128.

69 Levine, "Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*;" Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, pp. 122–9.

70 See Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, pp. 123–4.

71 Ibid., p. 127.

that all are brothers because "they were all sons of God" and that the Igbo worshipped "false gods, gods of wood and stone" (125). Such arguments provoke only laughter, but when the missionaries sing "one of those gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism which had the power of plucking at silent and dusty chords in the heart of an Ibo man," several "stood enthralled" by the music and its story of "brothers who lived in darkness and in fear," far "from the tender shepherd's care" (127). The first appeal of Christianity rests upon its ability to speak to the "silent and dusty chords in the heart," to offer more than tragic endurance by anchoring identity and signification in a paternal (tender shepherd's) care. By putting forth an image of fatherhood evocative of maternal empathy and yet distinctly masculine (the shepherd tends his flock much as a patriarch tends his lineage and a farmer his land and crops), Christianity articulates the need for, and promises to deliver, the kind of predication of fraternal, civic life upon ethical sensibility that Uchendu implicitly advocates through his commentary upon the dictum "Mother is Supreme." As Kristeva notes, the Pauline notion of divine love ascribes to a father attributes with striking maternal resonances:

> [T]he stress is … placed on [love's] source, God, and not man, who loves his creator. … God is the first to love; as center, source, and gift, his love comes to us without our having to deserve it—it falls, strictly speaking, from heaven …. The essential moment of this theocentrism is the inversion of Eros' dynamics, which rose toward the desired object or supreme Wisdom. *Agape*, to the contrary, inasmuch as it is identified with God, comes down; it is gift, welcome, and favor …. [I]t is originally set in motion by an Other who turns his suffering into an offer and a welcome.[72]

Kristeva's description contains elements of Levinas's description of the ethical (it is asymmetrical, not predicated upon "initial reciprocity"), the maternal-feminine (it is gift and welcome), and subjectivity (motion by the Other constitutes the self).[73]

Nwoye, not attracted by "the mad logic of the Trinity," is "captivated" by "the poetry of the new religion," which in speaking of "brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul—the persistent question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed" (128). The poetry of the religion seems to validate Nwoye's experience of being "haunted," somatically, physiologically, by the Other and to speak to his needs by giving him a loving father while entwining maternal comfort with paternal authority and power. In the implicit call for justice to the Other, one's own ethical sensibility receives "welcome." Nwoye's heart, like that of the Igbo men "enthralled" by the music, is "dusty:" "[T]he hymn poured into his parched soul;" its words were "like drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth" (128). Achebe's metaphors of rebirth and fecundity,

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72 Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 140–41.

73 See esp. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 215–16, 154–8; *Otherwise Than Being*, pp. 68–81, 99–129.

especially when juxtaposed with those of "giving away" and "hanging limp" after Ikemefuna's murder, suggest that through first the "poetry" and later the conceptual resources of Christianity, Nwoye will at least be spared Unoka's fate. Rather than pursuing a sad, self-indulgent purely negative resistance, rather than being locked in despair, Nwoye will be able to invest psychically in an alternative symbolic order that grants him, at the price of internalizing colonialist ways of seeing, to be sure, agency and identity.[74]

The poetry of universal brotherhood is combined with militant cultural self-confidence. When the missionaries do not die after building their church in the Evil Forest, they acquire new converts, including Nneka ("Mother is Supreme"), the wife of a wealthy farmer who had thrown away four sets of twins: "Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance" (131). Achebe's indirect discourse underscores the totalizing violence to which Nneka would be exposed without the refuge of the Christian community. At the same time, her name and her condition—"She was very heavy with child" (131)—indicates that the Christian community could function as a refuge for people like Nneka for reasons beyond ideological mystification or colonialist power relations. Here Achebe suggests that the Christians at least seemed to accommodate basic human needs and moral intuitions that Igbo society had come in practice to neglect.

While Okonkwo drives Nwoye from his home and disowns him, he feels "a cold shudder" when he imagines being an ancestor abandoned by the living (133), and he can account for producing such a son only by a chilling analogy: "Living fire begets cold, impotent ash. He sighed again, deeply" (134). He might well sigh, for if this is true, all his efforts to say yes will produce in the next generation chis that say no. If this is the case, then neither one's own descendants nor the community can be relied upon to accord ancestors the respect and political efficacy that one had assumed to be the due of those who led admirable lives. As Hogan notes, Okonkwo faces a despair that "would drain the meaning from every property and relation that formed his sense of self."[75] Similarly, the political question of what to do with the Christians cannot be answered within the conceptual framework Igbo traditionalists would defend. "As for the converts, no one could kill them

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74 Innes notes that Nwoye and the women who have lost twins "are searching for a new language which will close the gap between their inner feeling of what should be and the language the culture has developed to justify what is" (*Achebe*, p. 39). In *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1987), Cyril C. Okorocha argues that "salvation" in Igbo piety is understood in terms of Ezi-Ndu, the viable or full life. To those excluded from Ezi-Ndu through social marginalization, personal calamity, or temperament, Christianity appeared to offer at once an alternative means of achieving a viable or full life, and a transvaluation of how such a life was conceived. However, the lack of women in Achebe's passage, its stress upon male community, and the marginalization of the maternal-feminine in Christian theology, suggests that this offer of a "viable or full life" may have been less unequivocal, less inclusive, than it seemed.

75 Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, p. 133.

without having to flee from the clan, for in spite of their worthlessness they still belonged to the clan" (136). At an assembly, one elder notes, "It is not our custom to fight for our gods …. If we put ourselves between the god and his victim we may receive blows intended for the offender" (139).

Anticolonial Ethics and Historical Fiction

Upon his return to Umuofia, Okonkwo hopes to reclaim his social position by initiating his sons into the *ozo* title-society and overseeing an advantageous marriage for Ezinma, but he finds to his dismay that such matters no longer dominate public discourse. Now not only "the low-born and the outcast," but men like Ogbuefi Ugonna, "who had taken two titles," have begun to convert to the new religion (149), which suggests that a Nietzschean reading, while illuminating for interpreting characters such as Nwoye, is insufficient to explain why a "big man" would be drawn to the new religion. As European control increases, joining the colonial forces becomes a matter of self-interest. But Achebe makes clear that European control increases *as a result* of the conversion of men like Ogbuefi Ugonna.

Many "did not feel as strongly as Okonkwo did about the new dispensation," for the white man "built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia" (153). An alternative and promising system of accumulation, one that might potentially relieve the pressures of overpopulation and competition for land, as well as provide people not temperamentally suited for the old ways access to material well-being and social prestige, contributes to a "growing feeling" that "even in the matter of religion" there "might be something in it after all" (153). Because Umuofia is integrated into global commodity markets, wealth-creation can be separated from both direct exercises of violence (as in interclan warfare) and access to resources controlled by senior males in the clan (a young Okonkwo would no longer have to plead with a Nwakibie for a share of yam seeds, given that alternative means of accumulation and social advancement have become available). Nonetheless, concern with private economic advancement weakens identification of the self with the community, eroding the habits and customs that sustained an ethos of public service and wealth-distribution (through the cost of purchasing titles).[76] The association of status with individual accumulation, already evident in the *kotmas*' extortions, opens the way for what Achebe portrays in later fiction as the bane of colonial and postcolonial Africa: endemic, antisocial appropriations of the mechanisms and authority of the modern state for intimidation, corruption, and self-aggrandizement.

Still, the transformation of material life ("money flowed into Umuofia") generated a communal disposition to give the new religion a more respectful

76 The challenge that British-introduced systems of meaning and self-advancement pose to the ability of senior males to regulate interpretation, and thus control access to social authority and material well-being, is a central theme of Achebe's later novel, *Arrow of God* (New York: Anchor, 1964).

hearing. If material value could be created where there was none before, if a plurality of goods (in the economic sense) could sustain a broadening of means to well-being, then it would not be unreasonable to suspect that new goods, and a radically increased plurality of goods, could be introduced in intellectual and spiritual spheres as well. The missionary Mr Brown reinforces the community's willingness to consider the new religion as a potential source of renewed pluralistic communal strength through his respect for people of rank and his willingness to discuss religious differences in ways that suggest possible ecumenical common ground (154). This is largely illusory, however. The degree of ecumenicalism in religious thought and social practice Mr Brown tolerates does not reflect any conviction that Igbo piety has something to offer Anglican Christianity, as opposed to perhaps anticipating it in some respects. Rather, his apparent liberality serves as a stratagem to bring about the ultimate effacement of Igbo culture in favor of ways of thinking and valuing that are purely European.

A crisis ensues when Mr Brown, broken in health, is replaced by a man, Mr Smith, who epitomizes undiluted, impolitic cognitive imperialism: "He saw things as black and white. And black was evil. … He spoke in his sermons about sheep and goats and about wheat and tares. He believed in slaying the prophets of Baal" (158). Mr Smith's discursive, conceptual violence provokes Enoch to unmask an *egwugwu*. Because the "annual worship of the earth goddess" falls on a Sunday, the Christian women cannot go home from church: women are expected to stay inside, out of fear and reverence, as long as the spirits roam the village (160). After the Christian men beg the *egwugwu* to retire temporarily to allow their women to go home and the *egwugwu* agree, Enoch mocks the spirits, which leads an *egwugwu* to cane him. In response, he unmasks the spirit, symbolically killing him. Enoch would show that there is nothing behind the signs constitutive of Igbo culture, that they construct an arbitrary, fraudulent symbolic order.

Enoch's unmasking of the *egwugwu* precipitates an unmasking of the naked violence upon which colonial authority rests. The District Commissioner invites leaders of the clan, including Okonkwo, to the courthouse with promises of respect and dialogue: "I have been told a few things but I cannot believe them until I have heard your own side" (166). Quickly taking advantage of their courteous gesture of disarming themselves, he has them overpowered and arrested, and then delivers a speech that admits of no response: "We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others" (167). Denying Umuofia men both their right to discourse and their traditional understanding of male self-assertion (they must now go to a foreigner to be "rescued"), he delivers them to the beatings and humiliations of the *kotma* until the clan pays a fine. In their imprisonment, the men "just sat and moped" (167): "Even when the men were left alone they found no words to speak to one another" (167). When they are released, after the fine is paid, including an additional fifty bags of cowries that the kotma extort, they "neither spoke to anyone nor among themselves" (170).

Silence prevails because the unimaginable has transpired. Men of title have been treated like *efulefu* by *efulefu*. Seemingly out of nowhere, a new political

order has unmanned the great men of the clan, making their words as superfluous as those of the *osu*. Okonkwo can only imagine recourse to violence, the futility of which is indicated, poignantly, by his thinking of a great war as one in which twelve of the enemy are slain (171–2). Okonkwo anticipates that Egonwanne, exercising his "womanish wisdom," may well convince the assembly not to fight "a 'war of blame'": he reflects, "If they listen to him I shall leave them and plan my own revenge" (172). Okonkwo thinks of himself as separable from the clan in a way that would have been previously impossible; he has already come to resemble the converts he despises.

The final act of colonialist aggression, inscribing the Igbo generally in the space once reserved for *efulefu*, occurs when an assembly, called to deliberate a response to the District Commissioner's action, is broken up on the District Commissioner's orders. But even before the *kotma* order the meeting disbanded, the deployment of deliberative rhetoric at the assembly has become an exercise in nostalgia. Okika, "a great man and orator" (174), notes that their fathers never killed their brothers, "But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done. Eneke the bird was asked why he was always on the wing and he replied: 'Men have learned to shoot without missing their mark and I have learned to fly without perching on a twig'" (175). Okika deploys the same proverb that Nwakibie used to explain why he generally did not lend yams to young men (18). The proverb's point, survival demands adaptation, is at odds with the application Okika would make of it: the flying without perching that needs to be learned cannot involve killing clansmen, not only because that repudiates the very notion of a clan but also because the British have raised the art of "shooting without missing" to an entirely new level. Umuofia would be wiped out, like Abame. If the proverb is to remain a cultural guide, its application must render impossible the kind of subject position that Okika's rhetoric construes. Traditional masculine self-assertion and politically relevant practical rationality have parted company. Recalling Uchendu's commentary upon "Mother is Supreme," the imperative of caring for others here entails renouncing a war-like, masculinist symbolic imagination that, under the new material, political conditions, can only be self-aestheticizing and narcissistic—can only work against all that the maternal goddess Ani represents. But while war is an impossible alternative, it is hard to see any other. Adaptability has limits. Birds cannot really fly without perching for very long.

The community seems to recognize the nostalgia of Okika's discourse. When Okonkwo impulsively beheads a *kotma* for ordering the assembly to disband, instead of instinctively killing the other messengers, they let them go (176). If the community is paralyzed by its inability to find a promising form of adaptation, Okonkwo hangs himself because he cannot imagine more than one response to being treated as an *efulefu*. He remains untutored by the wisdom of his mother's story about Mosquito and Ear,[77] in which the resiliency of the seemingly weak constantly exposes the folly of imperialistic pretensions. Were Igbo society to be

77 See Jeyifo, "Okonkwo and His Mother."

equally bound to precedent, it would follow Okonkwo into tragic grandeur, but also into cultural suicide.[78]

Obierika's refusal of suicide may point towards possible alternatives. He tells the District Commissioner, "Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him," for clansmen are forbidden to bury a suicide among them (178). He grasps that the new mechanisms of power may be used in creative ways to conserve goods internal to pre-colonial culture, or at least to prevent Igbo culture from being entirely effaced. But a tactical use of colonial institutions does not imply conferring upon them any moral legitimacy. He turns "ferociously" to the District Commissioner and declares, "That man was one the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog" (178–9). It does mean, however, that he is prepared to allow the Igbo valorization of cultural survival, of obedience to the dictates of Ani, to shape what adaptive practices he can devise. If there is to be "modernization-from-indigenous-roots," the roots themselves, much more than Hayford acknowledges, will have to be transformed. In being willing to improvise creative adaptations, Obierika brings himself to accept a transformation of communal morality or custom that is also a diminishment. With Okonkwo's passing, with the institutionalization of a world that can no longer accommodate him, a grandeur disappears from daily life. The nobility implicit in providing for and defending one's family with one's own strength and determination, and a strong, unified community sustaining, celebrating, rewarding that nobility, is gone and will never come back. The diminishments of character to which Nwoye's "agency" and "identity" are subject, and the propensity of new, "adaptive" ways of living to issue in narrow materialism, self-indulgent egotism, and systemic corruption, are all too painfully illustrated in Achebe's later fiction. Nonetheless, Obierika chooses to live with the diminishment of his world and the distortion of his identity, apparently to keep faith with transcendent, ethical imperatives in a way that, as Ezeudu's comparative analysis of social practices suggests, is already implicit within Igbo understandings of practical wisdom.[79]

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78 Gikandi argues, "The Achilles heel in the Igbo epistemology … is its blindness, or refusal to contemplate, its own ethnocentricism" (*Reading Chinua Achebe*, p. 38; also see Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, p. 125). Reading Achebe in terms of Hegel's theories of tragedy and history, Moses notes that the Christian missionaries unwittingly, through a "ruse of reason," introduced ideas that, potentially at least, overcome ethnocentric blindness, providing "the ideological basis for the future development of modern forms of egalitarianism and democratic individualism" (*The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, p. 131). Achebe's own novelistic discourse discloses how Igbo culture can remain a living tradition only if it is transformed by ethical universalism sufficiently to correct the ethnocentric bias implicit in European forms of ethical universalism. See Irele's discussion of the thematic significance of Achebe's novelistic discourse (*The African Imagination*, pp. 146–53).

79 The implication of this is that, even though Igbo military resistance to British colonialism continued until the 1920s, Obierika's actions are the wiser, and ultimately more effectively anticolonial, course. On Igbo military resistance, see Don C. Ohadike, *The Ekumeku Movement: Western Igbo Resistance to the British Conquest of Nigeria,*

By concluding with the District Commissioner's reflections on how Okonkwo's story might make "a reasonable paragraph" (179) in his projected book, Achebe not only underscores the cognitive imperialism inherent within colonialist political practice, but also links the injustice of colonial thought to its effacement of all that his own novelistic discourse has delineated and valued—the complexity of Okonkwo and Igbo society, the non-totalizing currents in Igbo social practices and moral discourse, the circulation of an ethical rationality critical of unjust customs within traditional modes of deliberation and evaluation.[80] Achebe's integration of the goods internal to non-totalizing Igbo acculturation with the goods internal to novelistic ethical signification suggests that pre-colonial moral discourse can, within fiction and perhaps outside it, transcend its own deformation by political economies tied to predation. Because colonialism forces the great men of the clan to experience what it is like to be regarded as *efulefu*, it unwittingly brings home the injustice of the category, and of cognitive imperialism generally.

However, even as Achebe suggests self-undermining aspects of colonial violence, he shows its brutal efficacy (most explicitly in destroying Okonkwo and the world that could hold him). Some promising aspects of the culture are disrupted—the weddings and their social contexts, respect for ancestors, the town meetings, the valorization of self-restraint itself. Unalterable change is reflected in the novel's linearity after the British come, and in the narrative voice's increasingly indirect free style, in contrast to its previous generalized and representative account of village experience and clan views. Finally, the proverbs become less well understood. English "tales"—sermons, the ideology of the Queen, the District Commissioner's book—are introduced that have little connection with the reality of colonial religion and justice. Signifiers begin to lose clear reference, to float. The irresponsible play with language characteristic of Unoka begins to dominate material and cultural life.

Although Achebe preserves Igbo pre-colonial discourse in his novel, the living contexts of that discourse are destroyed. As in historical fiction from the time of Sir Walter Scott on, the society brought to life by novelistic techniques has already become politically extinct. Indeed, the aspiration to memorialize a way of life that is no longer possible is central to the genre. At the same time, however, Achebe does not follow Scott in making the lost culture an aesthetic object for antiquarian contemplation, as in the painting of the Highlander Jacobite Fergus Mac Ivor

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1883–1914 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991); Nwabara, *Iboland*, pp. 140–61; Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, pp. 133–9.

80 So powerful is Achebe's achievement that, as Olakunle George notes, "We may use 1958, the year of the publication of *Things Fall Apart*, as the moment of the inauguration of African Literature as it has come to be known in the world of formal education" (*Relocating Agency: Modernity and African Letters* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003], p. 196). Irele argues that "what cultural memory delivers in Achebe's first novel is not so much a revalued past, recollected in a spirit of untroubled celebration, as, ultimately, the opening of the African consciousness to the possibility of its transcendence, to the historical chance of a new collective being and existential project" (*The African Imagination*, p. 152).

that adorns the moderate, modern, loyalist Waverley's estate. The conquered are not assimilated, in however a bittersweet fashion, into a narrative affirming that history is a story of progress.[81] Instead, Achebe makes Igbo disruptive and constructive discursive traditions part of a global culture of genuine, not ethnocentric, ethical universalism. In doing so, he establishes a paradigm for vindicating the ethical rationality of pre-colonial moral discourse and for weaving together oral storytelling and novelistic modes of eliciting "felt experience." Many later African novels, written after the independences of 1960, would draw upon Achebe's model of assessing possibilities for modernization-through-indigenous-roots. That later fiction would have to confront the complicating and frequently disillusioning experiences of decolonization. But the story of how a novelistic discourse shaped by indigenous non-totalizing ethics confronts the struggle for political independence and its frequent betrayal belongs to another study.

81 See Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 489, for a description of the painting, which is "beheld with admiration, and deeper feelings" by Waverley, his wife, and other beneficiaries of the Hanover-Whig ascendancy.

Conclusion

Things Fall Apart represents a golden moment in which the projects of cultural retrieval and assessment that had marked African colonial writing from the 1930s on intersected with the emergent nationalist discourses of the 1950s. The appeal of Achebe's novel is linked to its ability to trace how problematic power relations woven into symbolic and material pre-colonial practices inclined Igbo polities to "fall apart" before the British colonial adventure, while nonetheless suggesting that pre-colonial culture provides the terms for an anticolonial resistance that is neither a mere imitation of European nationalism nor a nostalgic, uncritical hankering, especially on the part of the African elite, to return to an irrecoverable pre-colonial world. Indeed, Achebe suggests that colonizing self-certitude and ethnocentrism is self-undermining, and that it sets in motion a dynamic productive, in the fullness of time, of a more just society. By positioning the Igbo in general as the marginal, the disempowered, the "feminized," by forcing "big men" to experience within their own communities the injustice accorded a deprecated Other, colonial power has the perverse effect, Achebe intimates, of granting non-totalizing, anti-hierarchical, pluralistic currents within Igbo discourse and life a new cultural centrality, making them integral to a nascent anticolonial politics. Achebe thus connects the kind of specific representation of pre-colonial history found in Balewa, Hazoumé, Fagunwa, and Tutuola with Hayford's project of demonstrating that a progressive politics may be rooted in indigenous African cultural values. The capacity of non-totalizing Igbo discourse to motivate anticolonial ethics enables Achebe to make novelistic craft a decolonizing practice, to demonstrate how Igbo moral resources, far from being the "savage" customs and beliefs of a "primitive" people, find their consummation in a politics born of ethical sociability and dedicated to justice against which colonialist practices and ideologies are measured and found wanting.

The aesthetic power and ideological appeal of Achebe's achievement perhaps contributed to the marginalization of the tradition of historical fiction traced in this study. On the one hand, viewing pre-colonial culture as a resource for anticolonial politics and thinking of colonialism in terms of abrogating or permanently undoing pre-colonial power relations could easily intermingle with nationalist projects of creating a "usable past" with which the colonized could identify and through whose image appeals to unity could be constructed. Within such contexts, the insistence of Balewa, Hazoumé, Fagunwa, and Tutuola upon the shaping force of predatory political economies upon daily life, and their ambivalence toward the prospects of internal cultural reform, could hardly seem inviting or relevant. On the other hand, Achebe's brilliant evocation of the relative isolation of Igbo village polities in the southeast Nigeria forests from external African states and European contact could all too easily be taken as representative of pre-colonial African experience in general in ways that, in effect, pushed

to the shadows much of the historical experience, and experience of history, characteristic of West Africa. This too had perhaps unconscious ideological appeal. It allowed colonialism to appear as a calamity that, to Africans, seemed to come from nowhere, rather than to be the culmination of centuries of interaction between European and African political and economic entities. It also allowed colonialism to appear as a radical disturbance of a self-regulating, internally balanced cultural order, rather than, as it is presented in Balewa, Fagunwa, and Tutuola, as a suspension of incessant, dehumanizing warfare predicated upon the centrality of enslavement to both personal enrichment and state power. For European and American readers, taking Achebe's portrait of Igbo village life to describes pre-colonial Africa in general permitted a self-conscious, and perhaps sometimes self-congratulatory, correction of racist, colonialist assumptions without necessarily challenging notions about "ahistorical," isolated non-Western peoples that nineteenth-century and functionalist anthropology, as well as iconic mass media evocations of "primitive" societies, had long circulated.

In the wake, however, of disillusionment with nationalist discourses that conflated independence with liberation and ideological solidarity with social justice, a disillusionment registered first in the unsettling first-person discourse of Achebe's own *A Man of the People* (1966), and then proclaimed with seismic force in the watershed texts of 1968—Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*, Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*—the interrogations of pre-colonial history pursued by Balewa, Hazoumé, Fagunwa, and Tutuola assume a new importance, or rather their abiding importance begins once again to come in view. Just as the advent of African women's writing in the late-1970s and 1980s called attention to the continuance of pre-colonial patterns of gender inequities and oppression in postcolonial circumstances, so the radical writing inaugurated in 1968 made plain how easily the postcolonial state may become a mechanism for re-inscribing and totalizing power relations that were normative in pre-colonial political and socio-economic life. The phenomena of intertwined structural impoverishment and state dissolution, the resurgence of warlordism and political economies organized around elite predation, that has characterized much, though certainly not all, of Africa since 1990, and enveloped nations as varied as Nigeria and Liberia, Somalia and Zaïre/the Congo, the Ivory Coast and the Sudan, stands as a sobering reminder that the structural instabilities explored by colonial historical fictions continue to effect daily life in the twenty-first century. Without discounting the trauma and pernicious legacy of colonialism, one may affirm that now, as in pre-colonial times, African history is made primarily by Africans, and its consequences, for good or ill, are experienced primarily by Africans. Thus a return to considerations of colonial African writers' meditations upon pre-colonial history and its legacy is far from an antiquarian endeavor; it is a radically political and urgently contemporary gesture.

The political and historical importance of these narratives, while real, hardly exhausts their value. By exploring the interplay of constructive and disruptive ethics in the constitution of subjectivity, by tracing the relation of material life to conceptuality, ideology, and imaginative life, and by articulating the entwinement

of the public and the personal, these texts delineate within African contexts experiences that are universal in the sense of reflecting the conditions of human embodiment, in which affective investments in others and non-indifference to the Other constitute both the basis of meaning and the possibility of tension between the political and the ethical. Time and again, these narratives suggest that not only does ethical sensibility break in upon and unsettle an appropriative, imperialistic intentional consciousness, but that such consciousness may be deliberately cultivated, may seem a tragically necessary consequence of affective investments in others. Each narrative depicts a margin of sociability, from Makau's solicitude for Shaihu Umar's mother and Adulkarim's friendship to Shaihu, through Doguicimi's adoration of Toffa, to Agara-ogun's devotion to his fellow hunters and the Drinkard's to his wife, culminating in Okonkwo's affection toward Ifemefuna and Obierika, that is in some sense subsidized by exploitive power relations. Who would argue that such subsidizing is not an attribute of postindustrial, late capitalist societies as well? One might claim for the pre-colonial worlds depicted by colonial-era Africans the virtue of less mystification, and therefore more acute anguish of conscience. But the very intensity of the tensions the narratives highlight between the characters' affective investments in the others they love, and so their commitment to the flourishing of their own people and their ways, and an ethical non-indifference to any Other articulated somatically, viscerally, at the origins of signification, is such as to demand in the name of ethics *and human felicity* the possibility of a reformative politics capable of making meaningful distinctions between degrees of material and cognitive violence, and so capable of authorizing practical rationality to grope toward ever less violent, ever less unjust modes of acquiring material well-being and exercising power. By sketching forth possibilities for disentangling sociability from exploitation, these narratives challenge not only their own cultures, but any culture, to find better ways of making material and institutional life answerable to ethical imperatives whose authority undoes the mystifications of all ethnocentrisms and imperialisms by making treatment of the stranger, the marginal, the Other, those akin to Shaihu Umar and Ikemefuna, the measure of political strength, properly understood.

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Index

Aborginal Rights Protection Society 16–17, 35
Achebe, Chinua ix, xii, 5, 8, 10, 23, 73, 74, 102, 103, 108, 110, 113–14, 133–64, 165–6
Adebayo, Akanmu 80, 84, 86
Agiri, Babatunde 14–15, 17
Ajantala (character in *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*) 97, 107
Ajayi, J.F. Ade 78
Akan 1, 20, 29–31, 35–6, 83
Akara-Ogun (character in *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*) 75–100, 105, 109, 110, 117, 123, 167
- Christianity and 76–7, 84–5, 123
- ethnocentrism and 84
- first journey of 82–5
- last words of 99
- misogyny and 80–81
- second journey and 85–90
- third journey of 92–100

Anderson, Benedict 130
Appiah, Kwame Anthony 2
Aristotle 1–2, 44, 151
Aro 140–41, 145–6, 152, 155
Arochukwu (Aro Chukwu) 140, 145, 146, 152, 155–6
Asante [Ashanti] 4, 7–8, 13, 20, 29–31, 40–41, 61, 70, 83
- *odwira* festival 61

Asiwaju, A.I. 90–91, 95
Azarya, Victor 18

Bakhtin, Mikhail 23–4
Balewa, Sir Abubakar Tafawa ix, xi–xii, 8, 22, 41–52, 53, 75, 134, 135, 165–6
Barber, Karin 89–90, 92
Basden, G.T. 145
Belasco, Bernard I. 80, 104
Benin (pre-colonial kingdom of) 70
Bjornson, Richard 54, 57, 59
Blyden, E.W. 16, 35, 40, 53, 74, 95
Borno 13
Bosworth, Clifford Edmund 49–50
Boyer, Pascal 24
Brothers Karamazov, The 47
Bunyan, John x, 37, 76, 85, 96
Burton, Sir Richard 67
bush xi, 3, 20, 80, 89–90, 108, 115–16, 117–31

capitalism xi, 3, 13–15, 113–14, 159–60, 167
- African wealth-creation and 113, 159–60
- forced labor and xi, 13–15
- resistance to 3
- slave trade and xi

Cary, Joyce ix, 134
Christianity xi, 110–11, 127–8, 156–9, 160
cognitive imperialism x–xi, 6–7, 17–23, 53–5, 58–9, 62–3, 68, 71–3, 74, 84–5, 125–6, 133–4, 163–4
- Dahomey official state discourse and 53–5, 62–3, 68
- egoism and x, 71, 74, 84–5
- ethnocentrism and x, 17–21, 53–5, 58–9, 62–3, 71–3, 163–4
- hunters and 83–5
- Igbo culture and xii, 145–9
- naturalization of xi, 17, 21–3, 53–5, 62–3, 125
- slavery and x, 17–21, 71–3, 125–6

cognitive science 33–4, 68, 146, 154, 167
- somatic marking 33, 68, 146, 154, 167

colonialism xii, 21–3, 34–42, 69–70, 86, 90–91, 94–5, 103, 107, 133, 153, 155–6, 160–61
- British xii, 35, 38–39, 41–2, 69, 90–91, 94–5, 103, 107, 153, 155–6, 160–61
  - indigenous languages and 41–2
  - indirect rule and 86, 90–91
- cognitive imperialism and 22, 38–9, 133, 155, 160
- contradictions of 35–41, 133
- French 61, 69–70, 90–91
- gender and 36

colonialist discourse ix, 2, 7–8, 35, 69–70, 90, 103, 133, 147, 155, 160, 163, 166
 Eurocentrism and 103, 160, 163, 166
 European ix, 7–8
 racism and 35, 90, 166
colonization x, 84, 86, 102, 125, 133, 165
Comaroff, Jean and John 3–4, 10
Conrad, Joseph ix, 35
Consentino, Donald J. 42
Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine 19–20
Crowther, Samuel Ajayi 77–8, 88, 112, 127
culture ix, 4–7, 17–18, 19–23, 40, 53–74, 102, 116–17, 122, 133–4, 136–8, 147, 150–52, 157–8, 161–4, 167
 conceptual vocabulary and xii, 17–18, 53–5, 147, 150–52, 157–8
 ethical embodiment and 5–7, 133–4, 167
 fertility and 102, 116–17, 122
 indigenous languages and 40, 41–2, 53–4
 pre-colonial xi, 2–3, 19–23, 53–74, 133–4
  pluralism of 2–3, 19–20, 23–4, 29–31, 55–6, 60, 133–4, 163
  resistance and 5–6, 161–4
  structural contradictions and xi, 136–8, 157–8
 relativism and 134, 138, 150–51

Dahomey (Benin) ix, 37, 53–74, 78, 90, 135
 imperial discourse and 53–5, 56–7, 60–63
  human sacrifice as rhetoric within 56–7, 62–3, 68–9, 72–3
 misogyny and 58, 59–60
Damasio, Anthony R. 33–4, 154
Darnton, Richard 76
Derrida, Jacques 2, 137
Desai, Gaurav 7–9
Dike, Azuka 143
"Disobedient Sisters, The" 28–9, 129
Doguicimi ix, 53–74
Doguicimi (character in *Doguicimi*) 59–61, 63–5, 69–70, 72, 74, 75, 167
 Ethnocentrism of 71, 74
 Guézo's idealization of 64
 prophetic discourse of 61, 69–70
 rationalism of 59–60
 suicide of 72, 74
 Vidaho's desire for 64–5
Drinkard, the (character in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*) 103–17, 123, 167
 Faithful-Mother and 109–12
 greed of 105, 108
 money and 108, 113
 moral growth of 116–17
 parallels with Agara-ogun 105, 107, 109, 110
 son and 107–8
 slave economy and 103–4
 wife and 105–7, 112–13, 167

Ekwefi (wife of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*) 144, 146, 150, 152, 154
Emecheta, Buchi 37
Equiano, Olaudah 36, 40, 137
Erickson, John 57
Esu (Yoruba trickster deity) 76, 80, 85, 122
ethics x, 1–7, 23–4, 33–6, 38, 45–6, 51–2, 68, 73–4, 117, 125–7, 129–30, 133–4, 137–8, 143–4, 146–9, 153–4, 163–4, 166–7
 Akan culture and 1–2, 35–6
 consciousness and x, 4, 6–7, 147
 constructive 1–7, 23–4, 52, 130, 133, 143, 144, 154, 164, 166–7
 disruptive x, 1–7, 23–4, 33–4, 51–2, 68, 133, 143, 144, 154, 164, 166–67
 embodiment and 1–7, 33–4, 38, 133, 138, 147, 149, 166–7
 maternal love and 4, 47, 52, 125, 137, 147–8
 novelistic discourse and xi, 38, 47–9, 52, 68, 138, 146–8, 163–4
 Other and xi, xii, 6, 45–6, 74, 125–6, 133–4, 147, 154, 167
 pagan and 45–6
 pluralism and xii, 2, 138, 163–4
 politics and xi, 1–2, 68–9, 73–4, 143, 153–4, 167
 significance and xii, 68, 127, 147, 167
 subjectivity and x, 4–5, 26–8, 45–6, 117, 125–6, 138, 146–8, 166–7
 universalism and 33–4, 36, 52, 68, 129–30, 133–4, 138, 148–9, 151, 154, 164, 167
 writing and 151, 154, 164, 167

Ethiopia Unbound ix, xi–xii, 17, 34–41, 53, 58, 73, 131
Ezeani (character in *Things Fall Apart*) 142–3, 146
Ezeudu (character in *Things Fall Apart*) 138, 143, 146, 150, 151, 152, 153, 162
Ezinma (daughter of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*) 144, 146, 149, 150, 152, 154, 159

Fadipe, N.A. 76
Fagunwa, D.O. ix, xi–xii, 8, 10, 23, 75–100, 101–3, 112, 117, 119, 122, 128, 130–31, 134, 135, 165–6
  Christianity and 75, 79, 93
  Tutuola and 101–3, 112, 130–31
  view of Yoruba history 99–100, 117, 122, 130–31
Falola, Toyin 80, 84, 86
Flash-Eyed Mother (character in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*) 123–7
  Appearance of 123
  Faithful-Mother and 125
  Iyalode (women-chiefs) and 124
  predatory characters of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and 125
  witch-like attributes and 125
folklore ix, xi, 3, 28–9, 29–30, 42, 52, 97, 101, 102, 109, 129–30, 152, 161
Fon 53–6, 60, 66
  language 54
  pluralism and 55–6, 60
  religion 55–6, 66
Forest of a Thousand Daemons (*Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irumale*) ix, 75–100, 110, 114, 119
  divine intervention in 84–5, 88–90, 110
  gender and 79–81, 85, 88–9, 92, 93, 98–9, 110
  lack of European presence in 95, 99
  predatory acquisition and 82–90, 119
Foucault, Michel 62
Fulani [Fulbe] 4, 18, 77, 120

"Gassire's Lute" 26–2, 151
George, Olakunle 7, 102
George, Rosemary Marangoly 90
Giddens, Anthony 5, 21
Girard, René 137
Gold Coast 34–41
  Fanti 35–6, 40–41
Guézo (Dahomey king, character in *Doguicimi*) 54–6, 58–9, 61, 64, 68–9
Gyekye, Kwame 1, 4, 25

Haggard, H. Rider ix, 35
Hausa ix, 40–52, 120, 135
  ethical discourse of x, 42–5, 52
  genres of xi, 42–4, 52
    dialogic xi, 43–4, 52
    homiletic xi, 43–4, 52
    women's speech and 44–5
Hayford, J.E. Casely ix, xi–xii, 17, 22, 34–41, 49, 50, 53, 57, 71, 73, 74, 95, 99, 122, 133, 134, 162, 165
Hazoumé, Paul ix, xi–xii, 8, 10, 23, 37, 53–74, 75, 93, 99, 122, 134, 135, 165
  Catholicism of 53, 57, 61
  Dahomey history and 70–71, 73–4, 75, 99
Hegel, G.W.F. 139
Hensbroek, Pieter Boele van 16, 17
Hiskett, Mervyn 45
historiography x, 2–3, 7–23, 30–31, 70–71, 119–20
  African x, 2–3, 7–23, 30–31, 70–71
    "conquest states" 19, 20, 119–20
    small-scale polities 19
  Hebrew 61
Hogan, Patrick Colm 81–2, 87, 88, 97, 102, 103, 104, 106, 107, 112, 116, 133, 134, 138, 139, 143, 148–4, 151, 155–6, 158
Horton, Africanus 16, 73
Hountondji, Paulin 2
hunters 24, 79, 82–5, 89, 92–3, 123, 128, 167
  pathfinders and 83, 89
  war and 82, 123

Igbo ix, 5–6, 28–9, 36, 68–9, 80, 133–64, 165–7
  Ani (Earth Goddess) 136–7, 138, 150, 151, 153, 160, 162
  Aro 140–41, 145–6, 152, 155
  anticolonial resistance and 134, 155–6, 163–54
  chi and 154–5
  cognitive imperialism and xii, 5–6, 134

conceptual vocabulary and xii, 144, 146, 157–9
Cross River and 140, 145
culture of xii, 6, 134, 136–7, 139, 140, 144, 147, 155–6
gender and 136–7, 139, 155
headhunting and 140
pluralism xii, 6, 134, 135, 144, 147, 151, 159, 165
efulefu ("worthless, empty men") and xii, 156, 160–61, 163
egwugwu (ancestral spirits) 152, 159
ethical discourse of x, 5–6, 134, 143, 147, 151, 162, 164
militarizing culture and xii, 134, 138–41, 145–7, 152–3
non-totalizing thought and xii, 5–6, 134, 151–2, 163, 165
oracles and 140–41, 145–7, 155
oral discourse of ix, 5–6, 28–9, 80, 147, 150–51, 153, 154, 164
osu (hereditary outcasts) and xii, 156, 161
ozo title 143–4, 159
pre-colonial history of ix, 36, 68–9, 134, 135–6
expansion and 135–6
relative isolation and 135–6
sacrifice and 136–7, 138, 140, 146
slave trade and 14, 140–41, 146–7
twins and xii, 149, 153, 157–8
Igboland 135–6, 140–41, 145, 156
Ikemefuna (character in *Things Fall Apart*) xii, 8, 134–5, 136, 138, 142, 144, 145–9, 150, 151, 153, 154, 158, 167
condemnation of 145–6
death of 146–9
discernment of 144
name signifies 147
Iliffe, John 17
intentionality x, 6–7, 108–9, 118–19, 154, 167
egocentric x, 6–7
Irele, F. Abiola 101–2
Isichei, Elizabeth 68–9, 135–6, 140
Islam xi, 14, 18, 20, 28, 42–5, 47–52, 77
dar al-Islam/*dar al-harb* 20
Fulani expansion and 77
ilm 44
jahiliyya 28
jihad 14, 18, 50
pederasty and 49–50
piety xi
sacred hermeneutics and 42–4, 51–2
women and 45, 50–51

Jackson, Michael 24, 25
Johnson, Rev. Samuel 73, 74, 93, 127

Kierkegaard, Søren 139
Kirk-Greene, A.H.M. 42
Konrad, Zinta 26, 28, 151
Krios 16, 36
Kristeva, Julia 157
Kuranko 24, 25, 97, 107

Lacan, Jacques 64
Laiten, David D. 49, 78, 127–8
Levinas, Emmanuel x, 1–2, 6–7, 23, 24, 34, 57, 127, 138, 139, 147–8, 154, 157
ethical subjectivity and x, 6–7, 23, 57, 127, 138, 148, 157
"hatred of" 34, 53–74
"other man, the" 24, 34, 53–74
"said" 2, 23, 148
"saying" 23, 57, 147–8, 154
Levine, Alan 156
liberal individualism 138
modernity and 138
Lovejoy, Paul E. 12, 13, 16, 46, 70, 83, 93, 119, 140, 145, 146, 152

McCaskie, T.C. 8, 29, 30–31, 61
Mande 23, 24, 25
Manning, Patrick 13, 14, 15, 17
masculine aggressivity xi, 136
maternal feminine xi, 29–30, 47–8, 50–51, 110–12, 123–7, 136–7, 142–3, 147–8
Matory, J. Lorand 82–3, 86, 88
"modernization-from-indigenous-roots" 17, 35, 38, 134, 162, 164
Moses, Michael Valdez 143, 155, 156
Mubimbe, V.Y. 6, 10, 12, 17
My Life in the Bush of Ghosts ix, xii, 101, 117–31

neo-Aristotelian x, 1
Nietzsche, Friedrich 138, 156, 159
novel ix, x, 53, 159–64
historical ix, 53, 159–64, 163–4, 165–6

novelistic discourse xi, 33–41, 42–50, 52, 57, 133–4, 146–8, 151, 152, 163–4
anticolonialism and xii, 34–41, 52, 133–4, 163–4
ethics and xi, 38, 47–9, 52, 57, 133–4, 146–8, 163–4
novelistic representation ix, 1, 33–4, 45–6, 147, 163–4
slave raiding and 45–6, 48
Nwoga, Donatus 154–5
Nwoye (son of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*) 144, 149, 157–9, 162

Obatala (Yoruba deity) 82, 86, 96, 98, 110
Obierika (character in *Things Fall Apart*) xii, 138, 149–54, 156, 162, 167
ethical rationality of 149–52, 153–4
flexibility of 150, 162
orality and 151–2
parenting style of 149–50
Ohadike, Don C. 136
O'Hear, Ann 14, 16, 17
Ogun (Yoruba god of war) 82, 83, 85, 89, 112, 121, 122, 125
Okonkwo (character in *Things Fall Apart*) xii, 8, 134–64, 167
aggressive masculinity and 139–40, 154
chi and 154
conceptual vocabulary of 144
exile of 154–9
fear of abandonment by descendants 158
headhunting and 139
Ikemefuna and 142, 146–9
misogyny of 144, 161
suicide of 161–2
Unoka and 138–9
work ethic and 141–2
Okpewho, Isidore 79–80, 92–3
omo-ogun ("war-boys") 84, 107
oral literature ix, xi, 3–6, 23–31, 33–4, 38, 42, 52, 75–100, 101–3, 109, 115, 129–30, 133–4, 141–2, 147, 150, 152, 154, 161, 163, 164
chronicles xi, 3
cognitive science and 33–4, 154
dialogism and 25–6, 42, 133–4, 152, 154
dilemma tales 115
epic xi, 26–8
ethics and xi, 5, 23–31, 33–4, 38, 52, 129–30, 133–4, 147, 164
folktales xi, 3, 28–9, 29–30, 42, 52, 97, 101, 102, 109, 129–30, 152, 161
Igbo, 28–9, 129–30, 152, 163
Yoruba 75, 87, 101, 102
praise songs xi
proverbs xi, 3, 141–2, 150, 161, 163
Owomoyela, Oyekan 102–3, 106, 110, 112, 114, 122, 130
Oyo Empire 70, 77, 80, 82–3, 84, 86, 87, 93, 104, 119–20, 121, 124

Palm-Wine Drinkard, The ix, xii, 101–3, 103–17, 118, 127
Parrinder, Geoffrey 88
Peel, J.D.Y. 78, 79
Pelton, Robert D. 56
political economy x, 10–23, 45–7, 63, 113–14, 118–23, 125–6, 165
capitalism and 113–14
cognitive imperialism and x, 63, 121, 125–6
ethnocentrism and x, 120, 125–6
post-colonial state and 21–3, 113–14
violent accumulation and x, 11–12, 45–7, 63, 118–23, 126–7, 165
politics x, 70–71, 90–91, 130–31, 143–4, 159–64, 165–6
colonial-era x, 70–71, 90–91, 130–31, 165–6
colonialist x, 159–64
ethics and xi, 143–4, 165
polygamy 39, 117–18, 130
Porto Novo 53
pre-colonial history ix, 7–9, 10–23, 28–31, 34–41, 45–51, 56–7, 61–3, 71–3, 76–9, 83, 86–7, 88, 90–91, 99–100, 103–5, 118–23, 124–5, 129, 134–8, 140–41
African states and x, 11, 40–41, 46, 61–3, 76–9, 83
Muslim 14, 18–19
cognitive imperialism and x, 45–51, 71–3, 118–20
elite predation and 8, 11–23, 28–31, 46, 63–4, 104–5, 118–19, 124–5, 140–41, 145–6
human sacrifice and 7–9, 11, 37, 56–7, 61–3, 88, 122, 138
idealization of xi, 34–41, 90–91, 99
religion and 35, 37–8, 55–6, 76–9, 137, 145–6

slave economy and 12, 17, 45–7, 50–51, 61–3, 83, 86–7
women and 10–11, 39, 50–51, 124–5, 130

Quayson, Ato 102
Quran 42–3, 51–2

raiding xi, 9, 18, 45–6, 72, 83, 118–19, 120, 121, 123
Fulani expansion and 18, 120
novelistic representation of 45–6, 48, 72, 121
slavery and xi, 9, 11, 83, 118–19
Reisman, Paul 120
Richardson, Samuel 34, 60, 65, 74
Ricoeur, Paul 1

Said, Edward W. 34
Sango (Oyo Empire king and deity) 82, 85, 86, 88
Saros 16, 36, 77, 88, 111–12
Scheub, Harold 23, 33
Scott, Sir Walter 163–4
Sekoni, Ropo 87
Shaihu Umar ix, 41–52, 72, 75, 79, 118, 167
Sierra Leone 16, 34, 77, 78, 111–12
Freetown 16, 77, 111–12
slave trade x, 9, 10–23, 36, 67–8, 69–71, 83, 86–7, 94–5, 103–4, 107, 118, 129–30, 137, 140–41, 152
abolition of xi, 14–16, 94–5
Abolitionist discourse and 36, 67, 137
Atlantic x, 70–71, 86–7, 104, 137
Aro traders 140–41, 145–6, 152
cowries and 103–4
internal to Africa xi, 10–23, 94–5, 104–5, 118, 129–30, 140–41
slavery xi, 10–23, 28–9, 47–51, 103–4, 118, 124, 140–41
child kidnapping and 28–9, 47, 118–19, 141
commodity production and xi, 13–15, 103–4, 124, 129, 141
cloves 13
gold mines 13
kola nuts 13
palm oil 13, 103–4
slaves xi, 10–23, 28–9, 45–51, 94–5, 104–5, 106–7, 112, 118–20, 124–5, 129–30, 146
female 11, 13–14, 50–51, 106–7, 124
concubines 13–14
ghulam (slave boy) 49–50
human sacrifice and 10–11, 112, 118, 120, 129, 146
post-Atlantic trade prices of xi, 13–15, 94–5, 104–5
warriors 13, 107, 118, 119, 124–5
Sokoto Caliphate 14, 94
Soyinka, Wole 73, 74, 75, 83
spirits xi, 4, 6, 24, 83–4, 114–16, 117–31
bush and 4, 24, 115, 117–31
predatory xi, 115–16, 118–19

Taylor, Charles 43
Things Fall Apart ix, xii, 8, 41, 73, 74, 133–64, 165–7
elders and 136, 145–6
gender and 136–8, 139, 147–8, 150, 153, 161, 165
Greek tragedy and 142
Igbo cultural cognitive imperialism and 137–8, 139, 145–9
Oracle of the Hill and Caves in 145–7
Thornton, John 9, 12, 15, 17, 70
Tobias, Stephen M. 106, 122
totalization ix, 2, 6–7, 23, 139, 154
Tutuola, Amos ix, x–xiii, 8, 10, 75, 81, 88, 101–31, 134, 135, 165–6
Christianity and 75, 122–3, 127–8
critical reputation of 101–3, 130–31
English of ix, 101–2
view of British colonialism 108
view of Yoruba history 122, 130–31

Uchendu (character in *Things Fall Apart*) 138, 155, 157, 161
universalism 33–5, 68, 128, 129–30, 133–4, 138, 147–8, 151, 164, 167
literacy and 151, 164
West African piety and 35
Unoka (character in *Things Fall Apart*) 138–9, 142, 145, 149, 158, 163

Wiredu, Kwasi 1, 30
witchcraft 24–5, 79, 115–16
witches x, 4, 6–7, 46–7, 80–81, 125–6
rapaciousness of x, 4, 6–7, 46–7, 80, 125–6
sorcerers 46–7, 83, 115

Wren, Robert M. 141, 145

Yemoja (Yoruba deity) 86, 122, 125
Yoruba ix–x, 13–16, 40–41, 75–100, 101–31, 135
  Christianity and 15, 92, 110–12
  enslavement of 83, 106–7, 119–20, 124–5
    Fulani and 120
  ethical discourse of x, 75–6, 80–81, 92, 103, 105, 126–7
  human sacrifice and 88, 112
  hunters' poetry (*ijala*) 79–80
  Iyalode (women-chiefs) and 123–4
  language 75, 91, 100–102
    gender and 81 n. 20
    moral conceptual vocabulary 76
  money and 80, 86, 103–4, 106
    cowries and 103–4, 106
  music of 76, 107–8
  mythic origins of 78
  omo-ogun ("war-boys") 84, 86
  oriki ('praise poems") 92, 104
  pre-colonial history of ix, 77–9
    civil wars and 76–9, 88, 111, 118–20, 124–5
    Oyo Empire and 70, 77, 104, 119–20, 121, 124
    pre-colonial contact with Christianity 77–9, 110–12
    "recaptives" and 77–9, 111
  religion of 76–8, 80, 82, 86, 112, 116–17, 122–3
    city states and 78
  Saros and 16, 36, 77
  social practices of ix, 102, 121
  victims of Dahomey state power 62
  warlords 13, 84, 86, 105, 107, 119, 123–4
Yorubaland xi, 77–9, 94–5, 106, 111, 112, 119–20
  Abeokuta 77, 78, 95, 111, 124
  Ibadan 78, 86, 124