

# Amos Tutuola and the Elusiveness of Completeness

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## Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the unfinished business of transformation of colonial and apartheid ideologies on being human and being African that continue to shape how research is conceptualized, taught and practiced in universities across Africa. Endogenous epistemologies such as depicted by Amos Tutuola in his writings, despite their popularity with ordinary Africans and with elite Africans especially in settings away from the scrutinising prescriptive gaze of their western and westernised counterparts, are mainly dormant or invisible in scholarly circles where they are often ignored, caricatured or misrepresented through problematic categories that are actively and uncritically internalised and reproduced by a Eurocentric modern intellectual elite. Africans immersed in popular traditions of meaning-making are denied the right to think and represent their realities in accordance with the civilisations and universes they know best. Often, the ways of life they cherish are labelled and dismissed too eagerly as traditional knowledge by some of the very African intellectual elite they look up to for protection. The paper makes a case for space to be created for such sidestepped traditions of knowledge. It draws attention to Africa's possibilities, prospects and emergent capacities for being and becoming in tune with its creativity and imagination. It speaks to the 'frontier African' at the crossroads and junctions of encounters, facilitating creative conversations and challenging regressive logics of exclusionary identities. The paper uses Tutuola's stories to question dualistic assumptions about reality and scholarship, and to call for conviviality, interconnections and interdependence between competing knowledge traditions in Africa.

## Introduction

This paper explores how the flexibility and fluidity of reality depicted in Amos Tutuola's universe challenges a social science founded narrowly on dichotomies, dualisms and bounded identities. It examines the extent to which Tutuola's books provide popular ontological insights that could contribute significantly to the reconstruction of a decolonised social science

in Africa. The paper argues that the universe depicted by Tutuola in his novels – *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* – is one of infinite possibilities where nothing is ever complete, and where to seek or claim completeness is to ignore, to one's peril, the reality of incompleteness as the normal order of things. Humans, ghosts, spirits, monsters, freak creatures, death and the dead, and gods are far from seeking completeness as a permanent state of being – an ultimate and extravagant illusion in a context where categories acquire meaning only through action and interaction. To achieve greater efficacy in their actions and interactions, Tutuola's creatures seek creative ways to activate themselves to commensurate levels of potency. This is achieved through relationships of interdependence with incomplete others, as well as through technologies of self-extension, jujus and magic, which can be acquired and lost with circumstances. Tutuola himself epitomises the universe he depicts, not only through his own elusive quest for completeness in a world of zero sum games of civilisations founded on exclusionary violence, but also by pointing a critical finger at the modern African intellectual elite who have unquestioningly yielded to a narrow Eurocentric index of civilisation and humanity.

This paper thus explores what Tutuola offers ongoing epistemological debates on the study of Africa more broadly, especially in social science disciplines such as anthropology and sociology. It highlights and discusses elements from the two novels that emphasize the logic of inclusion over the logic of exclusion and the violence of zero sum games often uncritically internalised and reproduced by practicing anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists in Africa fixated with micro categorisations, abstractions, appearances and permanence. The paper argues that Tutuola's novels offer comprehensive depictions of African endogenous universes wherein reality is more than meets the eye and the world an experience of life beyond sensory perceptions. These are universes where being and becoming materialise through the consciousness that gives it meaning. Consciousness matters more than the containers that house it. Consciousness can inhabit any container – human and non-human,

animate and inanimate, visible and invisible – regardless of the state of completeness or incompleteness of the container in question. These universes celebrate what it means to be a frontier being, at the crossroads and junctions of multiple influences and possibilities, mixing and blending to forge a vision where certainties are never too rigid and the prospect of innovation a constant source of hope.

Furthermore, the paper argues that Tutuola's novels are not just works of fiction. They are founded on the lived realities of Yoruba society – realities shared with many other communities across the continent – and depict endogenous epistemologies that are very popular in Africa, as the stories he recounts are commonplace across the continent. However, despite their popularity with ordinary Africans and with elite Africans especially in settings away from the scrutinising prescriptive gaze of their western and westernised counterparts, such epistemologies are mainly dormant or invisible in scholarly circles because they are often ignored, caricatured or misrepresented in the categories of 'magic', 'witchcraft', 'sorcery', 'superstition', 'primitivism', 'savagery' and 'animism' inspired by the origins and dominance of Eurocentric social sciences. Like the narrators in his novels, Tutuola is unapologetically part and parcel of the universe that fascinates him. His stories are contributions to his mission of keeping alive and relevant African ways of knowing and knowledge production, and fending off the one-dimensionalism of resilient colonialism and the ambitions of completeness which it claims and inspires.

### **Tutuola and the Extravagant Illusion of Completeness**

Amos Tutuola died on 7 June 1997 desperately seeking completeness in a world of binary oppositions and zero sum games. His contribution to understanding epistemologies endogenous to Africa is in his elusive quest to be a "complete gentleman" – through publication of his stories inspired by his native Yoruba universe –, and to be recognised by and relevant to Yoruba, Nigerian and African readers as well as to the rest of the world. He found some fulfilment through the international recognition accorded him

by his London based publisher Faber and Faber, only to be brushed aside for much of his life by fellow Nigerians seeking completeness of their own under a Eurocentric index of modernity.

Tutuola, especially since his death, has been described by some Nigerian writers, critics and scholars – many of whom initially regarded him as “a dangerous barbarian” (Lindfors 1999: 140), a disgrace to their modernist ambitions, and as someone who sought to undo their hard-earned achievements in the pursuit of western civilisation by perpetuating conceptions of Africa as a dark continent and Nigerians as primitive peoples<sup>1</sup> – as a spellbinding visionary raconteur and a storytelling genius who fruitfully combined magic with realism in his highly imaginative, poetic though, as perceived by some, grammatically limited, prose (Lindfors 1999: 136-144). Tutuola grew “much too large to ignore” in African literary circles, even by his detractors (Lindfors, 1999: 144), so let us take a look at what he has to offer ongoing epistemological debates on the study of Africa more broadly, especially in the social sciences.

It is not without significance that the publisher Faber and Faber turned to “Daryll Forde, a renowned Africanist teaching in the Department of Anthropology at University College, London,” as “an anthropologist familiar with the workings of the West African imagination,” (Lindfors 1999: 116) for an opinion on whether Tutuola’s manuscript – *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* – had “its roots in the common West African mind” (Lindfors 1999: 116). Two other anthropologists – Mary Danielli and Geoffrey Parrinder – also evaluated and recommended publication of the book (Lindfors 1999: 127). Whether or not Faber and Faber turned to anthropologists because the book was “the unsophisticated product of a West African mind”, or because “[i]ts interest is [was] possibly more anthropological than literary”, it was evident to them that the book had “a certain quality as a piece of unusual

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<sup>1</sup> In his introduction to the 2014 edition of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Wole Soyinka observes that in Nigeria, “Amos Tutuola’s first published novel was given short shrift”, and that although the “hostile reception was not quite as uniform as some of the expatriate community (mostly British, and mostly academic) tried to suggest”, the “general institutional attitude” to the novel and author “ranged between outright dismissal and condescension” (Soyinka 2014: v).

writing” (Lindfors 1999: 127). As far back as the early 1950s, Faber and Faber, a publisher, was perceptive enough to see anthropology in literature and literature in anthropology, an interconnection many an anthropologist in and of Africa is still, nearly a century later, rather reluctant to acknowledge (Nyamnjoh 2011, 2012a&b, 2013).

Faber and Faber were ready to take the risk of publishing an African novel unconcerned with the grammar and values of colonial education. In the words of Tutuola who had struggled in vain to find a publisher in Nigeria, “Faber and Faber took a risk with my work. They didn’t expect it would bag a lot of money or get across to the reading masses” (Larson 2001: 20). It was a risk no Nigerian publisher was willing to take, not even after Tutuola personally translated the book into Yoruba, his mother tongue (Larson 2001: 22). In a world steeped in colonial ambitions of dominance, where conversion was privileged over conversation and education reduced to producing “potted plants in greenhouses” (Nyamnjoh 2012c) and “complete gentlemen” and “super ladies” to borrow from Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Tutuola, 1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, (Tutuola 2014[1954]), the sort of authentic African novel sought by Faber and Faber was difficult to come by, especially among emerging elite Africans schooled to internalise, celebrate and reproduce Eurocentric modernity (p’Bitek 1984)<sup>2</sup>. A manuscript by a barely literate lowly paid messenger of humble rural beginnings – “written in English but not an English of this world” (Selden Rodman, quoted in Larson 2001: 4)<sup>3</sup> – about African forests, magic, gods, spirits and superstition (Larson 2001: 1-4) – was perfect and the closest reflection of an authentic African mind, if ever there was one. *Semper aliquid novi ex Africa* – from Africa always something new, the Romans used to say.

According to Harry Garuba, Tutuola’s novels and creative use of English have made him the central reference point “for the transition from the oral

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<sup>2</sup> See also the Ghanaian film *Heritage Africa* by Kwaw Ansah, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ7kRWHRsZM> (April 29, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> In his review of the published *Palm-Wine Drinkard* in the *Observer* newspaper on 6 July 1952, Dylan Thomas talks of a “bewitching story, or series of stories written in young English”, [www.theguardian.com/books/interactive/2013/oct/05/dylanthomas-wales](http://www.theguardian.com/books/interactive/2013/oct/05/dylanthomas-wales) (May 16, 2015).

tale to the written text and from the indigenous languages of Africa to writing in the languages of European colonialism” in “the story of the making of modern African literature”.<sup>4</sup> Nigerian novelist and short story writer Cyprian Ekwensi argues that Tutuola’s “writing was in a class of its own, because he wrote out of a poetic mind though with grammatical limitations,” adding that Tutuola would not have written the same novel in the Nigeria of the 1990s (Lindfors 1999: 137-138). Driven by his determination to keep the past alive and protect his culture (to resist being forced to choose between the ways of others and the ways of his own people, so to speak) – “I don’t want the past to die. I don’t want our culture to vanish” (Tutuola interviewed by Mike Awoyinfa, quoted in Lindfors 1999: 143) –, Tutuola did not allow his lack of higher formal education – his incompleteness in other words – to stand in the way of his mission: “So far as I don’t want our culture to fade away I don’t mind about English grammar” (Tutuola interviewed by Mike Awoyinfa, quoted in Lindfors 1999: 143). If this was a “longing for darkness” (Beard 1975), it was one informed and justified by a deep unease with the blazing lights of colonial civilisation – lights as dazzling and blinding as the flood of light from the Flash-Eyed Mother in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (Tutuola 1954: 88). Aware of the corrosive and infectious nature of colonial education and its zero sum games, Tutuola felt he might have become a worse writer or not written at all had he been better educated colonially. In other words, had he sought accomplishment in the sort of mimicry and self-denigration that colonial education implanted in those who embraced it unreservedly:

“Probably if I had more education, that might change my writing or improve it or change it to another thing people would not admire. [...] Perhaps with higher education, I might not be a popular writer. I might not write folktales. I might not take it as anything important. I would take it as superstition and not write in that line” (Tutuola interviewed by Mike Awoyinfa, quoted in Lindfors 1999: 143).

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<sup>4</sup> See Harry Garuba’s “And the Book Lived Happily Ever After,” in <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/and-the-books-lived-happily-ever-after/> (May 11, 2015).



This raises the question of who validates and authenticates the standard level of one's education in order for one to tell one's own personal story or write about one's own society and cultural conventions, a point I have developed elsewhere (Nyamnjoh 2012a, 2012c). Should a writer's skills be judged by the ability to communicate in a second language or in the language of his/her birth and upbringing? The idea of an exogenously dictated level of education somewhat denies the likes of Tutuola the ambition of telling their stories, as they are bound to fall short of the level of completeness or achievement expected for one to qualify as storyteller. It also denies a particular representation of their worlds and encounters with others that only they, with their background and experience, can make possible, however modest their level of formal education. However, instead of yielding to be converted by the language of his colonisers, Tutuola creatively appropriated English to serve as a vehicle for the popularisation of his Yoruba folktales – inspired by a Yoruba ontology that, to quote Wole Soyinka, “shies away from rigid compartmentalisation”, allowing for the world of the living to flow “into the ancestral domain and into the fragile world of the Unborn”, as well as for a non-linear concept of time (Soyinka 2014: vii). He decided to meet English halfway. “Tutuola took the English language and turned it upside-down, inventing new constructions and a new syntax, not so much out of ignorance (and the lack of a formal education) [but] as roughshod ownership” (Larson 2001: 11). Larson's study of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* leads him to conclude that “it is impossible not to regard Tutuola as a postmodern writer with few antecedents or authorities” (Larson 2001: 12). Postmodernism in Tutuola's case particularly entailed challenging dominant Eurocentric metanarratives of completeness and autonomy that could only result in a “complete gentleman” keeping up appearances with borrowed body parts and fineries – what late Burkinabe historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1992) aptly captures under the title of “*la natte des autres*”, in his call for the endogenisation of knowledge production in Africa. Our perennial fascination with Tutuola's universe, Harry Garuba argues, comes from the “sense of reversibility ... playfulness ... toying with our expectations, troubling our knowledge

systems and classificatory grids and upsetting our categories (even our tenses) for grasping the world,"<sup>5</sup> that it inspires in the reader.

Africa's infinite capacity to accommodate even when not accommodated and the persistence of popular epistemologies despite colonialism and its Eurocentric logic of conversion are evidence of the postmodern spirit of the continent as depicted in Tutuola's novels. It is indicative of a profound maturity with reference to relativism and acceptance of difference. Tutuola's quest was seeking to be published, to share his creative imagination in conversation with Yoruba folktales, to use and appropriate the English language to activate himself and his people through stories, and to employ Yoruba as well, navigating between languages and worldviews, sharing African modes of thought in a colonial language, and promoting conviviality between different traditions and generations of being and becoming African. His focus on giving incompleteness a chance rather than embracing the extravagant illusion of completeness fuelled by spurious affirmations of superiority and autonomy speaks more to the logic of inclusion and less to that of exclusion and the violence of zero sum games.

### **Keeping Alive Popular Ideas of Reality**

Tutuola's postmodernism did not limit itself to the deconstruction and creative appropriation of the English language. Nor was Tutuola essentialist in the form of "decolonising the mind" (Ngugi 1986) that he sought in craving for recognition and representation for worldviews and human conditions all too often endangered by the dominance of "a single story" (TED Conferences 2009). Tutuola's contestation of metanarratives and the essentialism of bounded identities, dualisms and dichotomies introduced a relativism that predated the postmodern turn in anthropology exemplified by texts such as *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus 1986). An ethnographic reading of Tutuola challenges anthropologists to renegotiate taken-for-granted ideas of Africa and its

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<sup>5</sup> See Harry Garuba's "And the Book Lived Happily Ever After", <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/and-the-books-lived-happily-ever-after/> (May 11, 2015).



social realities in favour of mobility, flexibility, fluidity and flux. The nimble-footed, boundary-crossing mobility of Tutuola's characters and their consciousness introduces a nuanced complexity in the interconnections between outsiders and insiders in anthropological knowledge production that endorses and legitimizes conversations and co-production informed by *etic* and *emic* perspectives. In his stories, the status of a stranger is no one's monopoly, just as being an insider is eternally a work in progress. In this regard, Tutuola's fiction would pass the test of ethnographic fiction by a "native" non-anthropologist, of the sort discussed by Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 30-31). The fact that anthropological practice in Africa is still steeped in problematic colonial assumptions, essentialisms, and confused and confusing commitments (Nyamnjoh 2012a, 2015a) makes Tutuola a very important interlocutor for vital conversations on the future of anthropology on the continent, especially at a time of renewed clamours for decolonisation and transformation of curricula and knowledge production across universities in Africa.

Tutuola's novels and short stories offer comprehensive depictions of African endogenous universes in a manner and with a profundity that only a native or an insider can. Both reality and the universe are imbued with endless possibilities of being and becoming, thanks to the multiplicity of consciousness available to inhabit them. Things, words, deeds and beings are always incomplete, not because of absences but because of their possibilities. Faced with inadequacies, we, every now and then, invest hope, interpretation and mediation in those claiming the status of seers and frontier beings, in those imbued with larger than life clairvoyance and capacity to straddle worlds, navigate, negotiate and reconcile chasms. With the potency they avail us, we are able to activate ourselves to mitigate the inadequacies of the five senses, so that we too might perceive what is ordinarily lost to us in terms of the fullness and complexity of reality. Mediators or interpreters are multidimensional in their perception, because of their capacity to see, feel, hear, smell and taste things that are ordinarily beyond sight, feeling, hearing, smelling and tasting. This is amply illustrated with relevant excerpts from the two

novels below, especially in the section titled “Activation, Potency and Efficacy in Tutuola’s Universe”.

Indeed, as variously illustrated below, Tutuola’s is a universe where life is larger than logic, and where the logic and reality of sensory perception are constantly challenged. Like a postmodern theorist, Tutuola invites us to perceive things as interlinked and to factor interconnections into how we relate to the world and the hierarchies we would like to claim or contest therein. No condition is permanent in this universe, not even the unity of being often insisted upon by certain philosophies and traditions of knowledge in scholarship. Only the permanence of change is unconditional. Natural, human and supernatural structures are just as subject to the whims and caprices of changing times and the shifting forms of the beings, things, words and deeds they seek to tame. Everyone and everything is malleable and flexible, from humans and their anatomies, to animals and plants, gods, ghosts and spirits. Anything can be anything. People and things adopt different forms and manifest themselves differently according to context and necessity. Something transformed can regain the state that preceded its transformation. A thing can double itself, and the double becomes the thing and the thing the double. Gods are humans and humans are gods. Spirits assume human forms, and humans can transform themselves into spirits, animals and plants. Sometimes a creature combines multiple forms of being – half-human and half-animal or half-plant, half-god, half-ghost, half-spirit, half-male or half-female, etc. – and assumes the consciousness akin to each form, even as it retains the consciousness of its form of origin to facilitate reverting. It is a universe of agency ad infinitum, one in which structures exist only to the extent they can be humbled by the agency of those who make structures possible. Agency is not a birthmark or permanence, but something to be discovered, cultivated, nurtured, activated and reactivated to different degrees of potency through relationships with others, things and humans alike. Context matters and even nature and the supernatural are sensitive to context, and, like chameleons, are expected to collaborate with the consciousness that possesses it. Power is fluid, and so is weakness. Both

change hands without warning. Woe betides those who invest too heavily on appearances in a nimble-footed world where signs are permanently scrambled and logic forever wrong-footed. Tutuola's universe of tales defies the currency of Cartesian rationalism and its dualistic ambitions of dominance (Nyamnjoh 2015b: 3-6).

This paper provides detailed substantiation for claims and arguments briefly touched upon in an earlier publication on incompleteness that draws on insights informed by Tutuola's writings (Nyamnjoh 2015b). Among the claims and arguments are the following: There is more and less to bodies than meets the eye, just as there is much more and much less to what strikes us in things or facets of things. When doubles mimic or parody in convincing ways, what reason is there to argue against a thing and its double being two sides of the same coin or cowry? While surfaces are obviously important and often suffice for many ends and purposes, delving beneath appearances and digging deep into the roots of things is critical for understanding eternally nuanced and ever-shifting complexities of being and becoming. Delving deep makes impossibilities possible, just as it makes the possible impossible. Being and becoming as works in progress require borrowings and enhancements to render them beautiful and acceptable. It is this capacity to enable and disable simultaneously that makes absence present and presence absent in certain places and spaces, private and public alike. Particular contexts challenge us in particular ways to heighten or lower the bar and threshold of acceptability and tolerability. This capacity, Mbembe (2003) argues, is most unsettling to a fundamentally dualistic assumption in western thought that 'every life is singular'; hence: "the impossibility for a single and same thing, or a single and same being, to have several different origins or to exist simultaneously in different places and under different signs" (Mbembe, 2003: 3). It is through a simultaneous recognition of one's capacity to act on others as well as to bear the actions of others in time and space that subjectivity is made possible (Nyamnjoh 2015b). This is in tune with the Foucauldian recognition that – technologies of self-cultivation notwithstanding (Martin et al. 1988) – no being is self-built, that every single being is the result of

billions of actions of other beings that have converged in producing a subject and shaping it while making it possible for the subject in question to take itself as the object of its own actions (Foucault 1975), and thus, the self-managing, self-made individual of neoliberal and neo-Kantian Western thought is a complete delusion (Warnier 2013: 101-105). Tutuola's bodies have meaning only to the extent that and in the manner in which they are harnessed, in full or as organs (Mbembe, 2003: 17). As vehicles, containers or envelopes (Salpeteur and Warnier, 2013; Warnier, 2006, 2007, 2009), bodies are malleable, amenable to being compressed, contorted and extended, dissected, dismembered and remembered, and branded. Auras and essences are as much attributes of the parts as they are of the whole, just as the part is in the whole and the whole in the part. What seems more important than the forms bodies take is the consciousness which inhabits bodies and body parts. Even when a body is seemingly palpably the same and contiguous, the consciousness that inhabits it may be fluid and flexible, pointing to a reality that impoverishes fixations with permanence and stability. The human body can assume the consciousness of an ordinary human just as it can that of a god, a spirit, death, a curious creature from the wild bushes or the endless forests, as well as it can project its own consciousness onto a plant, an animal, air or whatever other element of nature is available and handy. Tutuola's is a universe in which being a hero requires being a composite – amenable to shifting bodily shapes and with the capacity for presence in simultaneous multiplicities, in familiar and unfamiliar ways. Bodies and forms are never complete; they are open-ended malleable vessels to be appropriated by consciousness in its multiplicity. Bodies provide for hearts and minds to intermingle, accommodating the dreams and hopes of both, and mitigating the propensity of the one to outrace the other. Bodies are melting pots of possibilities and amenable to being melted by possibilities. Similarly, sameness is emphasised through border crossing and unbounding and fusing identities. The supernatural is quite simply natural. Gods, death, spirits and the curious and terrible creatures of the bushes and forests take on human nature, just as humans develop the supernatural attributes of

these ordinarily invisible forces in their lives.

### ***The Palm-Wine Drinkard and the Challenge of Dichotomies***

To substantiate the claims and arguments above, let us take a closer look at *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. The narrator who names himself “father of the gods who could do everything in this world” (p.10), is quite ordinarily extraordinary in his capacity to collapse the boundaries between nature and culture, village and town, home and bushes, human and supernatural, plausible and implausible, rational and superstitious, primitive and civilised, Africa and the West, etc. Not only is the palm-wine drinkard a composite of the natural and supernatural, he and the world he inhabits provide for infinite shifts between categories through flexibility and fluidity in bodies and a capacity to be anything and to take any form, even the form of air, while maintaining one’s consciousness. Speaking of the skulls in the endless forest, Tutuola writes of his narrator: “I had changed myself into air, they could not trace me out again, but I was looking at them” (p.27). The fact of having taken the form of air and its consciousness did not result in him losing consciousness as human. In another instance, confronted by a big river he ordinarily could not cross by foot or by swimming, he commands his juju acquired from “a kind spirit” to activate himself to acquire the form and consciousness of a canoe, while maintaining his consciousness of a human being, and is thus able to transport his wife and himself across the big river, before regaining his form of origin (p.39). Similarly, a mere skull from a hole in the heart of the endless forest can activate itself, however temporarily, into a “beautiful ‘complete’ gentleman,” “tall and stout,” “dressed with the finest and most costly clothes,” and with “all the parts of his body ... completed” (p.18), by borrowing or renting body parts from others to enhance himself and his efficacy for the market. In its borrowed body parts and costly clothes, the skull exudes such divine beauty that it instantly enchants women and men alike. Indeed, so beautiful was he that in a battlefield an “enemy would not kill him or capture him and if bombers saw him in a town which was to be bombed, they would not throw bombs on his presence, and if they did

throw it, the bomb itself would not explode" (p.25).

In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the passages that most illustrate the flexibility and fluidity of bodies as attachable and detachable containers and the proliferation of consciousness which inhabits them are those which describe how a mere skull came to be a complete gentleman. This is done by borrowing body parts and costly clothes to enable him to attend the famous market of a town where the beautiful daughter of the famous head of the town had turned down every suitor imaginable.

"This lady was very beautiful as an angel but no man could convince her for marriage. So, one day she went to the market on a market-day as she was doing before, or to sell her articles as usual; on that market-day, she saw a curious creature in the market, but she did not know where the man came from and never knew him before." (p.18)

She was instantly charmed by this "beautiful 'complete' gentleman ... dressed with the finest and most costly clothes" (p.18). Indeed, "all the parts of his body were completed"; he was both tall and stout, and had he "been an article or an animal for sale, he would be sold at least for £2000 (two thousand pounds)" (p.18). The more he ignored the lady, the more she felt attracted to him. She "left her articles unsold" and "began to watch the movements of the complete gentleman about in the market" (p.18). When the market day ended and people were returning to their various destinations, the lady followed the complete gentlemen, despite his repeatedly "telling her to go back, or not to follow him" (p.19). She "did not listen to what he was telling her, and when the complete gentleman had tired of telling her not to follow him or to go back to her town, he left her to follow him." (p.19). Roughly twelve miles away from the market, at a crossroads, "they left the road on which they were travelling and started to travel inside an endless forest in which only all the terrible creatures were living." (p.19). Crossroads and junctions are as much places and spaces of hope and reassurance as they are zones of diminishing prospects. Thus, as they branch off the main road at the crossroads, the lady's



fantasies turns into her worst nightmare, as she becomes the journey of discovery that there is much less to her prince charming than meets the eye. Her complete gentleman begins the process of self-deactivation by returning and paying the rental for “the hired parts of his body to the owners” (p.20) who had so generously lent them to him. “When he reached where he hired the left foot, he pulled it out, he gave it to the owner and paid him” (p.20), and continued his journey. And “when they reached the place where he hired the right foot, he pulled it out and gave it to the owner and paid for the rentage” (p.20). Both feet gone, the complete gentleman “began to crawl along on the ground” (p.20). Frightened at what was unfolding before her eyes, as her illusion of a complete gentleman evaporated, “that lady wanted to go back to her town or her father,” but the now not so complete gentleman would not let her. This is like a metaphor for what happens when one insists on completeness that is out of this world, and that requires diminishing and debasing others for one to claim fulfilment. It is what would happen if one absolutely had to pay all of one’s debts in order to free oneself from any form of sociality possible. Since a human being is a social being, one’s humanity is of necessity a composite of all the interconnections and relationships of entanglements or manglement that one has cultivated and internalised, it is impossible – indeed a contradiction – for one to claim absolute freedoms or autonomy without the prospect of self-deactivation. To make this point, Tutuola details in all its minuteness the deactivation of the complete gentleman that he has constructed. Thus, when “they reached where he hired the belly, ribs, chest, etc., ... he pulled them out and gave them to the owner and paid for the rentage” (p.20). Left with “only the head and both arms with neck,” the complete gentleman could not crawl any more, and resorted to “jumping on as a bull-frog” (p.20). Overwhelmed by fear and forbidden from returning home to her father, the lady fainted. When he had plucked off, returned and paid for both hired arms, as well as his hired neck, the “complete gentleman was reduced to head and when they reached where he hired the skin and flesh which covered the head, he returned them, and paid to the owner,” reducing himself to a “Skull”

(pp.20-21). As a skull, "he could jump a mile to the second before coming down," (p.22) so whenever the lady attempted to run away, "he hastily ran to her front and stopped her as a log of wood" (p.22). They got to his house, which was a hole under the ground; "there were only Skulls living in that whole" (p.22). Once home, the skull "tied a single Cowrie on the neck of this lady with a kind of rope," "gave her a large frog on which she sat as a stool," and then "he gave a whistle to a Skull of his kind to keep watch on this lady whenever she wanted to run away" (p.22). She would remain under their watch until eventually released by the narrator, "father of the gods who could do everything in this world" (pp.23-31). This is a tale of the horrors and futilities of an insensitive insistence on completeness, independence or autonomy that can only be achieved by sacrificing sociality and living in total solitude.

Spirits and gods in touch with humanity feel and behave the same as humans. Those humans with the gift of clairvoyance, like the narrator, can seek to outmanoeuvre others with their trickery. When the skull – that is watching the captured lady whom the narrator sets out to find and bring back to her father – falls asleep and thus is not in a position to blow the whistle and alert the other skulls, the narrator is able to change himself back from a lizard into a man to speak to the lady, who is seated "on a bull-frog with a single cowrie tied on her neck" (p.26). And even when the cowrie on the lady's neck "made a curious noise" that alerted the skulls, he had "changed" or "dissolved himself into air" before a cowrie could be tied around his neck as well (p.27). By tying the cowries round the neck of their victims the skulls were able "to reduce the power of any human being" and "also to make a person dumb" (p.27). When he finally snatched the lady away and started fleeing with the skulls chasing him through the forest, "rolling on the ground like large stones and also humming with terrible noise," he "changed the lady into a kitten and put her inside my pocket and changed myself to a very small bird" [a sparrow] (p.28).

The narrator of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* constantly employs the ruse of the magician and the trickster that his jujus make possible to activate his

potency to bring into fruitful conversation the visible and invisible dimensions of his world, thereby averting zero sum games of ambitions of dominance. Being a subject calls for the unrelenting quest to enhance one's potency depleted in previous interactions. Power is seldom permanent; like game it is to be stalked and harnessed in the context of particular relationships and interactions. If power were to be rigidly the prerogative of the gods, the spirits, ghosts, the invisible world, or human leaders, there would be no end to the vulnerability of ordinary humans and their world of appearances. The narrator is half spirit and half human, hence his frontier credentials as someone who belongs everywhere and nowhere in particular. He is a veritable cosmopolitan creature in constant conversation with dichotomies and boundaries in the interest of interdependence and conviviality.

To die in life and live in death is part of the flexibility characteristic of Tutuola's universe. Death is a form of circulation and not a matter of permanent severance of links with life and the living. One is dead to a particular context, as a way of becoming alive to prospective new contexts. Death is a form of adventure and exploration of the infinitudes of life. Death and dying are processes in gradations and by degree. There seems to be no end to dying, just as there is no end to living. People who die reappear elsewhere and are again available for death. There is no such thing as an ordinary mortal, just as there is no such thing as the fully dead. Death and dying are as much a reality for gods, spirits, ghosts and death itself, as they are for humans. Mbembe has likened Death to the currency of life, given its central role as the value and means of exchange in Tutuola's universe (Mbembe 2003: 16). Death might be extraordinarily frightening, but it also is very ordinary and often outmanoeuvred by its victims. Not only does Death assume human proportions, it exudes ordinary human propensities and frailties when it does. Death in human promotions has a house and a yam farm, and must cultivate, consume and ensure and assure a healthy lifestyle to stay alive and away from self-cannibalisation. Even the dead of the Deads' Town are extraordinarily ordinary in their humanness – eating and drinking and indulging in the

sociality and practices of the alives, even as they train and qualify to behave like the dead, which includes walking backwards. The gods are no different, not only do they look and act human, they are quite simply ordinary, just like any other human.

Similarly, the head of the town with the famous market asks the palm-wine drinkard to free his daughter from the terrible curious creature who borrowed body parts and fancy clothes to transform himself into a complete gentleman. In the Deads' Town – where the palm wine drinkard eventually locates his dead tapster, "BAITY," after a ten-year search – where it is "forbidden for alives to come," (p.96) alives are nonetheless tolerated. In terms of material culture and sociality, things are not that different between the world of the alives and Deads' Town. Whatever difference there is in Deads' Town is scarcely skin deep, as one can train and qualify as "a full dead man," as did the tapster following his death (p.100). Despite forbidding alives from living there, Deads' Town is very accommodating, as "both white and black deads" are living there (p.100). The culture of gifts and gifting is the same: "he [tapster] told me that he could not follow me back to my town again, because a dead man could not live with alives ... and said that he would give me anything that I liked in the Deads' Town." (p.100). As a parting present, the tapster gives him an egg, telling him "to keep it as safely as gold" upon his return home. The tapster told him "the use of the egg was to give me anything that I wanted in this world and if I wanted to use it, I must put it in a big bowl of water, then I would mention the name of anything that I wanted" (p.101). Indeed, the sameness between the alives and the dead of Deads' Town is so striking it begs the question: what business do the dead have living at all, and curiously, like the alives? Even more perplexing is the fact of Death itself, living as a human being, among the alives, until he, the narrator, "brought Death out from his house," upon the request of a god turned man, thereby rendering Death forever with "no permanent place to dwell or stay," and since then, "we are hearing his name about in the world" (p.16).

As half-spirit and half-human, the palm wine drinkard's needs and deeds

are no ordinary needs and deeds. The exceptional child of a wealthy father – “the richest man in our town” (p.7) – he had a supernatural appetite for palm-wine, an appetite which could only – or should I say, barely – be satisfied by a nine square mile farm of 560,000 palm trees. Being the richest man, his father could afford to pander to the unusual appetites of his bizarre son – the eldest of eight children, and the only one who substituted hard work with palm-wine drinking. The father recruits an equally exceptional palm-wine tapster to cater full-time for the appetite of his son. For fifteen years the narrator pleasures himself with a superabundance of palm-wine dutifully delivered by his devoted tapster. He drinks along with many a fair weather friend, but when his father and tapster die suddenly and the generous supply of palm-wine dries up, his drinking partners turn their backs on him. He becomes very lonely, sad and vulnerable, like a child doubly orphaned by losing both its biological and foster parents.

Encouraged by the legendary belief that the dead are alive in the world of the living even if “in the Deads’ Town” (p.96), the palm-wine drinkard sets out to track down his dead palm-wine tapster. Armed with and doubly activated by the potency of his “native juju” and his father’s (p.9), the narrator was able to neutralise his vulnerability and keep the company of gods, spirits and the wild animals of the thick bushes and forests he traversed. With his native jujus he could transform or project himself into a bird, fly about and overhear conversations, and seek answers to questions to prove that he could live up to his name of “father of the gods who could do everything in this world” (p.10). Chased by ghosts, he narrates how “I became a big bird like an aeroplane and flew away with my wife, I flew for 5 hours before I came down” (p.40). The swollen left thumb of his wife gives birth to a son who “began to talk to us as if he was ten years of age” (p.31), who named himself “ZURRJIR” (p.32), was “as strong as iron,” and could eat without satisfaction, and torture his parents the way only a spirit child could (pp.34-37).

One good turn deserves another in Tutuola’s universe. Those encountered

by the narrator of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* promise to help or reward him in exchange for services, often in the form of helping to resolve a challenge or predicament that defies. He must do something first, something that often threatens his very life. For ten years spent going from town to town through bushes and forests thick and thin looking for his tapster, the narrator encountered people who “would say unless I should help them to do something, they would not tell” (p.99). This is true of the old man who is a god who sends him to fetch a bell from the blacksmith, but which he refuses to name, as a way of making the task more challenging for the narrator. Beaten at his own game, the old man challenges the narrator to capture Death and bring it to him. But when Death is indeed captured and brought, the old man and his family flee, for they never thought anyone could capture Death. If the palm-wine tapster is still alive in Death’s Town, and if Death can itself be alive as a yam farmer busy struggling for subsistence and survival even as it kills others, this makes of Death a form of circulation and not a matter of permanent severance of links with life and the living.

### **Activation, Potency and Efficacy in Tutuola’s Universe**

In his *Techniques of the Body*, Marcel Mauss (1973) argues that the human body is trained or educated physiologically, psychologically and sociologically to act and achieve particular ends. Thanks to such training or education at bodily adaptability, everybody acquires particular techniques or instruments of efficiency/efficacy that are internal to their bodies and suited to particular forms and attitudes within the logic of practice characteristic of a given society or social context. It is in this way that Mauss sees the body as the “first and most natural instrument” or “first and most natural technical object” or “technical means” of a human being, who must perfect such internal techniques to achieve his or her ends before looking beyond themselves for “instrumental techniques” of self-extension. (Mauss 1973: 75-76). Techniques of the body acquired through training for efficacy are necessary for habitual individual action and for social



reproduction (Mauss 1973: 85). This approach to understanding the body in its complexity was very much in line with what Keith Hart has described as Mauss' "heroic aspiration" (Hart 2007: 479) to "a method for placing the whole person in society as a whole" by "pushing for a more concrete and complex approach to studying the human condition than the modern social sciences allow for" (Hart 2007: 475). The idea of a confluence in biological/physiological, psychological and sociological self-discipline through training or education implied in Mauss' *techniques of the body* are complemented by Foucault's *technologies of the self* (Foucault 1988; Martin et al. 1988) and Bourdieu's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990), which emphasise the same general idea of schooling (bodily, psychologically and socially) for disciplined, predictable, efficacious self-activation and self-actualisation that comes naturally without necessarily being natural.

In this section we explore the complexities of how human beings, ghosts, spirits and other creatures in Tutuola's universe of incompleteness employ techniques of the body and instrumental techniques to activate themselves to the level of potency that makes efficacious action possible. In some instances one's inadequacies in some regards are compensated for in others through a natural endowment that is more than what is usually perceived to be normal or the norm. In other words, one might have an incomplete nature in one regard (be lame, crippled or without legs, or reduced to a mere skull, etc.), while in other regards be overly endowed as far as other natural attributes are concerned (be exceedingly tall, long armed, sleek headed, etc.). Someone might be blind, yet extra gifted at hearing. In such instances the capacity to activate oneself beyond one's relative incompleteness vis-à-vis others is right there within oneself – nature compensating one for the inadequacies of one's nature. Whatever the situation or natural circumstance, all creatures explored train and educate themselves on ways of maximizing the potency of their condition in tune with the context in which they find themselves. In emergency situations where a creature does not have within their repertoire of past experiences or accepted and standardised modes of functioning – where they lack the training, education or capacity to act with efficacy, they might resort to

instrumental techniques external to themselves for enhancement. In Tutuola's universe, magic, jujus and other creatures come in handy in this regard. In addition to examples of activation, potency and efficacy discernible from the excerpts of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* discussed above, this section draws predominantly from *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*.

Immobilised in the centre of the town where "she sat permanently like a stump" (p.90) – deactivated by the lack of mobility, the Flash-Eyed Mother, as her name suggests, had

"... eyes which were bringing out splashes of fire all the time and were used to bring out fire on the firewood whenever she wanted to cook food and the flash of fire of these eyes was so strong that it would catch the firewood at the same moment like petrol or other inflammable spirit or gunpowder..." (p.88).

She could also use her flash eyes "at night as a flood of light in lighting the whole town" (p.88). When offended by any of her short ghost servants, "both eyes would be flashing out fire on to the body who offends her, and the fire would be burning the body at the same moment as fluffy things or rags" (p.89). Indeed, her flash eyes were capable of reaching out across long distances, so she could use them "as a whip to flog any other of her offenders" (p.89) regardless of how physically far away from her they were. Her capacity to use her flash eyes to activate herself to such formidable levels of potency made her "very fearful to other creatures coming to her town without special reason" (p.89). Even His Majesty "the King of the Bush of Ghosts" could not dare to ask "Who is she?" (p.89). She was further activated and fortified by "a large mouth which could swallow an elephant uncut" (p.88), and by "millions of heads ...on her body" (p.87), each of which

"... had two very short hands which were used to hold their food or anything that they want to take, ... two eyes which were shinning both day and night like fireflies, one small mouth with numerous sharp teeth, the head was full of long

dirty hair, two small ears like a rat's ears appeared on each side of the head." (p.87)

Thus armed or compensated for the fact of her immobility, the Flash-Eyed Mother could rely on the Short Ghosts to hunt game for her and her multiplicities of heads. She also sold some of her flash eyes to others who desired to enhance themselves in similar fashion. The Flash-Eyed Mother "was selling the flash fire of her eyes to other kinds of ghosts who were coming from the various towns to buy it, and a flash was worth a heavy amount of ghosts' money" (p.95). She was thus able to make ends meet and in certain cases thrive on her flash fires despite her being immobilised at the centre of the town like a stump. The fact of selling the power of her flash eye to others speaks to the circulation of jujus and magic as technologies of power in a manner similar to the economy of cults and ritual associations depicted by Ute Rosenthaler (2011) in the Cross River region of Cameroon and Nigeria, where cultural practices and worldviews have a lot in common with Tutuola's universe. It is comforting that the Flash-Eyed Mother does not pretend to claim completeness of any kind, despite her super endowments. She is very dependent and quite incapable of self-sustenance. Without the Short Ghosts to hunt obligingly for her, she would quite simply perish, in spite and perhaps because of her superabundance in body parts.

In other instances where one's nature taken together is the cause of one's incompleteness, one looks outside oneself for technologies – supernatural or otherwise – of self-activation to attend the potency one needs for efficacious action. In some such cases, it calls for reaching out and harnessing the potentialities of others through acts of dependence or interdependence. The grounded Flash-Eyed Mother relying exclusively on the Short Ghosts as her hunters for the food she needs to feed herself and all her extensions is an example in this regard. How she keeps them fettered to service in servitude is reminiscent of the classic master-slave relationship. Slaves are technology in human form as life reduced to non-living creatures or things. *In My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* where slavery is commonplace, "every slave buyer recognised slaves as non-living creatures" (p.164) to be used and abused

with impunity. No sooner does the narrator return to The Future-Sign Tree after 24 years lost in the Bush of Ghosts, than he is captured and taken into slavery by slave traders, who eventually sell him to his own brother who comes seeking a slave to kill as sacrifice for his god (pp.161-166)<sup>6</sup>. Still in other instances, the technology is beyond simple dependence or interdependence. It is a thing external to oneself, available to be activated to enable or render possible what one desires – something one can acquire, master, manage, own and share with others. Something as juju and magic, as such things are commonly known both in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Thus, already protected by the potency of his repellent smell, the King of Smelling Ghosts of the 7<sup>th</sup> Town of Ghosts, with the added potency of his juju, is able to transform his seven-year-old victim – the narrator in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* – into various kinds of creatures– monkey, lion, camel, horse, cow or bull – and back, as it pleases him or depending on what services he wants rendered (p.21). The flexibility and reversibility in these transformations or adoption of various forms are well suited for a world where permanence does not always serve one’s best interest. A technology that is adaptable – capable of taking the form of a monkey in one instance and that of a lion, camel, horse, cow or bull in another, is clearly much more amenable than a technology that is permanently the one or the other of these forms. With his juju, the King of Smelling Ghost was able to manipulate his victim – a case of using one technology to activate another technology – to assume the form and consciousness of whatever extension of himself – creature or otherwise – he wanted. Thus:

“In the presence of these guests, my boss was changing me to some kinds of creatures. First of all he changed me to a

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<sup>6</sup> In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the drinkard or “father of the gods who could do everything in this world” himself, although in the apparently powerful position of a master, is almost slavishly dependent on the tapster for his endless supply of palm wine. The skull, on the other hand, who seems to have disposed of the burdens of body parts he does not need all of the time, resorts to borrowing from others the body parts — detachable and re-attachable as various parts of the body are in Tutuola’s universe – it needs to activate self to the level of compositeness required to pass for a “complete gentleman” in the eyes of the girl with angelic beauty who has systematically turned down every suitor before him.

monkey, then I began to climb fruit trees and pluck fruits down for them. After that he changed me to a lion, then to a horse, to a camel, to a cow or bull with horns on its head and at last to my former form." (p.21)

To celebrate his good luck for bringing back a strange creature from earth, the King of Smelling Ghosts "performed a juju which changed me to a horse unexpectedly, then he put reins into my mouth and tied me on a stump with a thick rope" (p.22). Then, "he mounted me" (p.22), "mercilessly" (p.23), accompanied by two of his attendants, "with whips in their hands and flogging me along in the bush" (p.23), "I felt as if he was half a ton weight" (p.23). This was a repeated occurrence as he paraded his victim like a trophy:

"... he would mount me mercilessly and both his attendants would start to flog me in such a way that all the ghosts and ghostesses of that town would shout at me as a thief. But if they shouted at me like that my boss would jump and kick me mercilessly, with gladness in the presence of these bystanders until he would leave that town." (p.23).

As a horse, the earthly person was fed guinea corn (which he could eat) and leaves, which "I was unable to eat ... as I am not really a horse" (p.24), and offered urine mixed with limestone to drink, which is what the smelling ghost drank as "ordinary water" was "too clean for them" (p.24). As a horse, "I was all the while tied in the sun which was shining severely on me" (p.24), a burden compounded by the fact that "as I was tied in the sun all the young ghosts of this village were mounting me and getting down as if I am a tree as they were very surprised to see me as a horse" (p.24). If the King of the Smelling Ghosts needed another kind of beast of burden, he would transform his victim accordingly: "he changed me again to the form of a camel and then his sons were using me as transport to carry heavy loads to long distances of about twenty or forty miles" (p.25). He could also be hired out to other ghosts by his boss "to carry loads to long distances and returning again in the evening with heavier loads" (p.25).

Other Ghosts in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* with similar powers are the “Burglar-ghosts”. They burgle long-distance, navigating between the Bush of Ghosts and towns and villages inhabited by “earthly persons”, whom they resemble the most. The Burglar-ghosts describe themselves as both earthly and not earthly – “I am and I am not” (p.40) – “living as earthly persons and also as ghosts” (p.43). They fall through the cracks of fixed categories and binary oppositions between ghosts and humans. They are frontier beings, as they collapse the boundaries and borders between the world of ghosts and the world of humans, through their capacity to insinuate themselves into the world and anatomies of the earthly in order to burgle them. They traffic and transact between worlds, bringing ghostly beauty in contact with the earthly, and in turn taking earthly foods, animals and things back to the Bush of Ghosts for their consumption. Known as “born and die babies” among the earthly, the Burglar-ghosts go about their business of burgling the earthly by luring them with a deceptive attractiveness described as follows:

“If an earthly woman conceives we would choose one of us to go to her at night and after the woman has slept then he would use his invisible power to change himself to the good baby that the woman would be delivered of whenever it is time. But after he has driven out the good baby and entered into the woman’s womb, he would remain there and when it is time the woman would deliver him instead of the good baby which had been driven out; ... [...] As this inferior baby has invisible power or supernatural power, so all the money spent on him and also the sacrifices would be his own and all would be stored into a secret place with the help of his invisible power. (p.41)

The Burglar-ghosts are able to accumulate material goods from the earthly thanks to their capacity to manipulate them and to prey on their vulnerabilities and love of “superior babies”. No amount of resources spent to keep alive such unusually attractive babies is ever enough. Once the



“born and die babies” have thoroughly depleted their victims, it is time for them to return to the Bush of Ghosts with their booty. In the words of the same Burglar-ghost as above,

“... after the woman has spent all she has and become poor, then one night he would pretend as if he has died, so the woman who bore him as a superior baby, her family and other sympathisers would be saying thus: ‘Ah! That fine baby dies’, but they do not know that he is not a superior baby. They would bury him as a dead baby, but the earthly persons do not know that he does not die but simply stops breath. But after he is buried, then he would come out of the grave at night, then he would go direct to the secret place where all the moneys and sacrifices as sheep, goats, pigeons and fowls, all would be alive and are stored by his invisible power, and he would carry them to this town.” (pp.41-42)

The Burglar-ghost who narrated this account, went on to prove his story. He disappeared to an earthly town, and returned ten months later “with bales of sewn clothes, sheep, goats, pigeons, fowls, all were still alive and moneys with all other used expensive articles”(p.44). When the Burglar-ghost displayed the bales of clothes he had brought back,

“I saw plainly many clothes which belonged to my friends and my mother in my town that were among these clothes and was also surprised to see many clothes which my mother just bought for me and my brother before the war scattered all of us.” (p.44)

If ever the narrator needed evidence, there it was. In the manner of an ethnographer, not content with simply recounting past experiences, the Burglar-ghost had proceeded to do ten months of fieldwork and had returned to authenticate the ethnographic experience. This was enough to convince any doubting Thomas:

“And when I saw all that he brought and also my own and my brother’s properties, then I believed his story which he told me before he went away.” (p.44)

The “Super-lady” ghostess of the Nameless-town occupied exclusively by ghostesses is another ghost with the technology (power or Juju) to transform and revert to forms. The inhabitants of the Nameless-town are distinguished for having “been betrayed by their husbands after their marriage” (p.113). All wearing under their lower jaws “long brown moustaches which resemble that of he-goats”, the ladies and women of the Nameless-town all marry each other, as “none of them could marry any male again” (p.113). The narrator first encounters the Super-lady as an antelope, who then transforms itself into “a very beautiful lady” (p.101), who requests him to marry her, confessing: “I prefer to marry an earthly person more than the other creatures” (p.102). The Super-lady’s power to transform herself into anything of her choice and back was given her by her grandmother when her father and mother plotted to kill her through sacrificing her to be eaten by witches and wizards of the community of witchcraft whose meetings they presided (p.108). It was this power that saved her from being killed. She explains:

“So through this power I had the opportunity to change to an invisible bird early in the morning that my father and mother would kill me, then I packed all my belongings, after that I bade both of them invisible ‘good-bye’ and then I came to live permanently in this Nameless-town, which belongs only to women, and since that day I am not appearing to them personally but changing to a kind of a creature...” (p.108)

With his ethnographic instinct and insistence on proof, the narrator, now “earthly husband” of the Super-lady, upon hearing of her “wonderful power to change to any form of creature”, challenged her to prove herself by changing to some form at that very moment for him to see. She obliged:

“First, she became an antelope with two short horns on its head, secondly a lioness and roared at me several times so

that I nearly died for fear, thirdly, a big boa constrictor which made me fear most when she was coiling round my body, especially when it opened the mouth very wide as if it wanted to swallow me, and after this a tigress and jumped on me at the same time, after this she jumped away from my head and was jumping from room to room, having stopped jumping about in the rooms and house, then without hesitation she jumped outside the town, she was chasing fowls about in the town. After ... that she changed to a lady as usual, and to my surprise she was on the same chair as before ... and also held the two fowls which she killed outside with her hands." (p.109)

Interestingly, the technology for activating someone or something to assume different forms can be acquired and lost. It is not an intrinsic part of being a ghost, being human or being whatever and whoever. This is evident when the King of Smelling Ghosts transforms the narrator his victim from a camel back to his former form – an earthly person – with the intention of later transforming him into a horse to ride to the conference of ghosts, but when he forgets to hide away the technology, the victim appropriates it for his own ends:

"After he changed me to a person then he went away to take the reins which he would put into my mouth when he changed me to a horse, but as soon as he went away I saw where he hid the juju which he was using to change me to any animal or creature that he likes, so I took it and put it into my pocket so that he might not change me to anything again." (p.26)

Without his juju to activate him, the King of Smelling Ghosts "has no power to change me to a horse again" (p.27). The king is impotent, all of a sudden. The captive has effectively deactivated his captor by taking away his juju. The latter can no longer lay claim to being complete, superior, in charge and invincible as he imagined and insisted when his juju was still in his

possession. The captor deactivated, the captive regains some measure of potency, even if only temporarily, situational and ephemeral, as every potency in reality often is. The captive is able to unfetter himself from his confines and flee:

“I jumped right out from the bag to the ground and without hesitation I started to run away inside the bush for my life.”

(p.27)

As the King of Smelling Ghosts chases and threatens to catch up with him, he uses the juju he has stolen from the king and transforms himself into a cow. This makes him more powerful and able to run faster than the king who is overburdened with all his gear, amongst which the boa constrictor he uses as a belt and the heavy bag “full of mosquitoes, small snakes with centipedes” (p.15) he carries around on his left shoulder. No sooner is he free of the King of Smelling Ghosts than he, still as a cow, is threatened by a hungry lion. So he starts escaping from the lion, only once again, to run himself into cow-men who are only too happy to embrace and return to the fold one of their cows that they imagined had gone missing (p.28). Unable to change back into a person, the 7 year old starts his life as a cow (p.28). Subsequently, purely by chance, as he runs away from a crowd chasing him to kill as sacrifice to a god, he falls into a pond and upon seeing a reflection of himself as a cow in the water his form is changed back from cow to person (pp.34-35).

The universe depicted by Tutuola calls for patience, getting used to and deep conversations with those one encounters (people, things and creatures natural and supernatural alike, animate and inanimate) to discover the sameness or complementarity that lodges beneath a veneer of difference. Tutuola invites us to be cautious in our instinctive tendency – occasioned and protected by sensory perceptions – to define and confine as different or as similar just by looking at the surface of phenomena, realities, things and persons. He cautions against rushing to change or embrace what we barely understand and what has barely understood us. Tutuola’s universe schools his readers to see the stranger in the family and the family in the stranger.

Anything can be anything because of the impossibility of permanence beyond the capacity to change ad infinitum. Repeatedly, we are urged to provide for there being simultaneously much more and much less to things than meets our senses.

It is thus not surprising that 18 years into being lost in the Bush of Ghosts, the earthly person, our narrator, who would end up spending a total of 24 years with ghosts, goes native, anthropologically speaking. Having married twice to ghostesses, had a "half earthly and half ghost" son, kept the company of various ghosts across over 18 towns of the Bush of Ghosts, the earthly person is able to pass for "a real ghost" (p.150), speaking the language of the ghosts and behaving generally like one of them. He recounts how after the breakup of his second marriage to the Super-lady ghostess, he roams about in the bush day and night and nobody can identify him as earthly and therefore a stranger or an outsider to the community of ghosts. He had "become a full ghost and was doing everything that ghosts are doing and also speaking the language of ghosts fluently as if I was born in the Bush of Ghosts" (p.128). His ghostly abilities and fluencies meant that "I was always protected from uncountable merciless ghosts as it was hard for some of them to believe that I am an earthly person" (p.128). Indeed, his familiarity with the ways of ghosts and being a ghost had become so convincing that "a ghost friend of mine taught me the art of magic, because he did not know that I am an earthly person at that time" (p.150). Certain technologies and knowledge reserved for insiders and those at the heartland can be acquired through dedicated effort by those who start their journey as outsiders and eventually ease into their host communities.

Armed with his new magical powers, the earthly person and narrator now convincingly an insider was able to change himself into different types of animals and things, depending on what he needed to activate his potency in order to attain his ends in given situations. In one instance we see him in competition with a ghost magician trying to outsmart each other in a frenzy of transformations into myriad forms. This is when he refuses to share the

proceeds that came as reward following a competition in magic. He recounts that when he refused to share the gifts with his competitor, the ghost magician, the latter “changed to a poisonous snake” (p.151) and “wanted to bite me to death” (p.151). In reaction, he immediately used his own magical power and “changed to a long stick ... and started to beat him repeatedly” (p.151). Driven nearly to death by the pain of the beating, the ghost magician “changed from the snake to a great fire and burnt this stick to ashes, after that he started to burn me too” (p.151). In turn the narrator “changed to rain” (p.151) and “quenched him at once” (p.151). Refusing to give up, the ghost magician used his powers to transform “the place that I stood to become a deep well” (p.151) and to make “rain to be raining into the well while I was inside” (p.151). The well rapidly became full of water. Before the ghost magician could close the door of the well, the narrator changed himself into a big fish and attempted to swim out. But when the ghost magician saw the fish, he changed into a crocodile, jumped into the well and came to swallow him. Before the crocodile could swallow, “I changed to a bird and also changed the gifts to a single palm fruit, I held it with my beak and then flew out of the well straight to the 18<sup>th</sup> town” (p.151-152). Quickly, the ghost magician “changed himself again to a big hawk” and chased him about in the sky. Afraid that the hawk was catching up with him, the narrator changed himself to “air and blew within a second to a distance which a person could not travel on foot for thirty years” (p.152). This feat did not deter the ghost magician, as the latter mobilised his magic and appeared where the narrator was heading well before the narrator arrived. Now face to face, they struggled for many hours, at the end of which, “I shared the gifts into two parts, I gave him a part, but he insisted to take the whole” (p.152). Reluctantly, “I gave him all.” (p.152). This was just a temporary surrender, however, as the earthly person transformed himself into air again, anticipated the ghost magician to where he was headed, killed an animal and buried it neck down in a hole he had dug near the road. When the ghost magician saw the head of the animal, he concluded the animal had planted itself deliberately on the side of the road because it wanted his gifts. He started throwing the gifts at the animal one by one,

until he had no gift left on him. Later, the earthly competitor came and retrieved all the gifts from the animal's head (p.152-153).

As the earthly person desperately seeks his way out of the Bush of Ghosts, his family back in his home town are equally preoccupied with finding him, and have not given up despite his prolonged absence. They resort to another type of technology to assist them in this exercise. To keep alive in him memories of home, his family secures the services of a fortune teller and his "Invisible Missive Magnetic Juju" (p.148), renowned for its capacity to "bring a lost person back to home from an unknown place" (p.148), however faraway it may be, "with or without the will of the lost person" (p.148). The force of this magnetic juju makes him dream of home repeatedly (p.147). In the end, he is delivered back home under the very same "future sign tree" where his journey into the Bush of Ghosts began 24 years earlier (p.160). This delivery is made possible by the powers of a "Television-handed ghostess", in recognition for his having cured her of her sores. Pleased to have been cured, the Television-handed ghostess asks him to look at her open palm. And as soon as he does, he finds himself, all of a sudden, under the exact same tree where he disappeared 24 years ago, much to his utter surprise (p.160).

No blessing to or activation of our earthly person lost in the Bush of Ghosts comes without a curse. When recognised as a god who benefits and feeds from the sumptuous sacrifices brought him, the blood of the animals slaughtered in his honour and poured on him also attracts thousands of flies which literally cover him (p.61). No sooner is he married and has a "half ghostess and half earthly person" son (p.126) with the Super-lady ghostess is he driven away from the Nameless-town after four years of staying with her for daring to suggest, even as a joke, that "earthly people are superior to the ghosts and ghostesses or all other creatures" (p.127). Invested in completeness as both he as an earthly person and the Super-lady as ghostess are, they each celebrate their natures and communities of origin as the one best way of being and indulge themselves in zero sum games. Little wonder

that both the Super-lady and her earthly husband find their “half ghostess and half earthly person” son incomplete and irritating:

“Within six months that he was born he had grown up to the height of four feet and some inches. He could do everything in the house. But the worst part of it is that whenever I talked to him to do something, he would do it in the half method that ghosts are doing all their things and then in the half method that the earthly persons are doing everything. So I hated him for this habit, because I wanted him to do everything completely in the method that the earthly persons are doing everything and also his mother hated him for the half method that he was doing everything, because she wanted him to do everything in the full way that ghosts are doing their own things. She wanted him to be acting as a full ghost as herself and I myself wanted him to be acting as a full earthly person as I am.” (p.126-127)

Such zero sum expectations of exclusionary claims not only denied their “half and half” son the benefits of his hybridity and frontierness of being, it affected their love for one another, and within four years of their marriage, they could hardly stand each other anymore. Little wonder that the superiority the narrator attempted to claim for the earthly persons in a joke, was interpreted as no joking matter by the Super-lady. It was the last straw in their exclusionary logic of belonging and delusions of completeness. Within their logic of completeness, no half measures are tolerated, not even in the name of love. Hybridity is ferociously denied and violated, and those who claim it in earnest made to feel beleaguered and guilty of violating the code of normalcy.

The challenges of genuine hybridity or life as a frontier being collapsing dichotomies across various categories, social and otherwise, remain firmly with us even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In an April (10-16) 2015 article in the *Mail &*



*Guardian* titled “I am genderqueer – comfortable with my identity at last”<sup>7</sup>, Demelza Bush, a 28 year old South African does not identify herself with the conventional binary gender categories, despite having the obvious sexual attributes – “breasts” and “vagina” for example – that would lead to others categorising her as a woman. She defines herself as falling through these binaries: “I’m not a woman. But I’m not a man either”. She sees herself as “genderqueer”, just like the half and half of the union between an earthly father and a ghostess mother who is neither wholly earthly nor completely ghostly, but a mixture of both. She writes:

“As I have grown older, I have become less confused. When I was a child, I was a tomboy. When I was 14, I realised I was a lesbian. By my mid-20s, I knew I didn’t like the term lesbian, so I began using the all encompassing term ‘queer’.

It has taken me 28 years to get to ‘what’ I am now: I am genderqueer. I am queer. Genderqueer. Gender nonconformist. I don’t identify as male or female. Just me.

Genderqueer is a label for people who don’t fit into boxes.

One definition of genderqueer is: ‘Denoting or relating to a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions, but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.’

Society’s preoccupation with binary categories means that genderqueerness unsettles people. They get uncomfortable when they can’t figure you out. They don’t know how to read you. They don’t know how to treat you. And it leaves them with a sense of discomfort. And fear.

Even though I am completely comfortable with who I am, the rest of the world isn’t. Often when I shop in the men’s section

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<sup>7</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-04-10-00-i-am-genderqueer-comfortable-with-my-identity-at-last> (April 13, 2015).

or walk into the women's bathroom, I am looked at as if I am a freak."<sup>8</sup>

Far from using the realisation and recognition of herself as "genderqueer" to proclaim her completeness, Demelza details instead how she has relied on her mother – despite the "initial horror" of the latter "at finding her little girl trying to urinate like a boy" – who has been supportive, kind and unconditional in her love. She has also relied on the boy's and men's sections to shop for toys, clothes and other gender specific consumer items. Falling through rigid gender categories and having the courage to declare her being "gender queer" is more a statement of freedom to pursue interdependence and a frontier existence than a celebration of independence and the discovery of a purported true self. Frontier beings like Demelza are only too aware that human agency is neither an imaginary meal nor a meal served unaccompanied. Its existence is recognised in action and interactions in an ambiguous world of intricate entanglements and infinite possibilities.

Essentialisms are the curse of a world that overly emphasises regressive exclusionary logics of claiming and denying belonging. In his novel *Half a Life*, set in Britain, India and Portuguese Africa, V.S. Naipaul (2001) points to similar essentialist notions of culture, identity and belonging which imply that not even encounters and marriage shall bring together what cultural and social geographies in abstraction have put asunder. Persons who cultivate relationships across race, class and caste are treated with condescension and disdain; and so are their offspring, whose worlds are 'half-and-half' and who are not credited with more than 'half a life', regardless of their personal desires, experiences and frontier existence. They feel like pawns in someone else's game, as if they were forced to live the lives of others and to bear identities imposed by authorities with ambitions of dominance. As 'half-and-halves' they live with the idea of a great disaster about to happen. They are not sure what this disaster is going to be, whether it is going to be local or worldwide, but they feel it is going to do

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<sup>8</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-04-10-00-i-am-genderqueer-comfortable-with-my-identity-at-last> (April 13, 2015).

away with their security and sense of freedom. This makes them overly sensitive to the need to prove themselves, often with an arrogance that attracts envy from those who see themselves as 'full lives' bounded to a world of certainties and certitudes.

Like Demelza's and the stories narrated by Naipaul in *Half a Life*, Tutuola's stories constitute an ontological epistemological order where the sense of sight and physical evidence has not assumed the same centrality, dominance and dictatorship evident in the colonial epistemology and its hierarchies of perceptual faculties (Van Dijk/Pels 1996). In this epistemological order, one can be blinded by sight and sighted by blindness (Nyamnjoh 2012a), just as one does not need to be physically complete to act efficaciously. Similarly, body organs can outsource their responsibilities to others, in the manner of the womb of the palm-wine drinkard's wife outsourcing a pregnancy to her thumb. The stories invite us to question dualistic assumptions about reality and scholarship, inspired by: "the opposition between the affective and the cognitive, the subject and the object, appearance and essence, reason and passion, the corporeal and the ideal, the human and the animal, reality and representation, the one and the multiple", that tend to favour thinking which: "privileges above all the ability to reason (*argumentation* and *deliberation*) and the will to power, giving short shrift to the ability to feel, to remember, and to imagine" (Mbembe, 2003: 2, emphasis in original; see also Mbembe, 1997: 152).

The real is not only what is observable or what makes cognitive sense; it is also the invisible, the emotional, the sentimental, the intuitive and the inexplicable (Nyamnjoh, 2001). These popular ideas of knowing and knowledge challenge dualistic approaches to reality. They question the centrality accorded the mind and reason to the detriment of other modes of knowing. They suggest a world larger than its material realities, where matter is not as fixed as assumed in dualistic rationality. Instead, they focus on what is possible and not just on what exists made apparent by human sensory perception. Furthermore, they embrace the supernatural, and

emphasise the interconnection of everyone and everything. We are introduced to a world of flux, where structure is a temporary manifestation of what is otherwise a flow of constant change. It is a universe of self-consciously incomplete beings, constantly in need of activation, potency and enhancement through relationships with incomplete others. Put differently, Tutuola's is a universe where autonomy or independence, claimed absolutely, is an extravagant illusion which in the hands of those with ambitions of dominance provides spurious justification for coercive violence and control over humans, resources and nature.

### **Tutuola's Epistemologies in a World of Unequal Encounters**

Ordinary Africans immersed in popular traditions of meaning-making are denied the right to think and represent their realities in accordance with the civilisations and universes they know best. African elites schooled in western modernity are all too eager to label and dismiss (however hypocritically) as *traditional knowledge* the creative imagination of what their western counterparts love to term 'the African mind' – instead of creating space for the fruit of that mind as a *tradition of knowledge*.

The suppressed are like active volcanos; they eventually erupt. The story and universe of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* resonate with the daily lives of Tutuola's Yoruba community (Garuba 2003, 2013)<sup>9</sup>, and have variants in tune with social life and cultural contexts throughout Africa. These variants often sit uncomfortably with the resilience of colonial education and its dominant epistemologies (Nyamnjoh 2001, 2012a&c), epistemologies championed by dualisms and dichotomies in the Eurocentric modernity that inspired colonialism and that continue to inform how reality is defined and perceived (Mbembe 1997, 2003). If we believe that Tutuola's universe has something to offer epistemologically, that we should not continue to dismiss or will it away merely because it makes us look and feel primitive and superstitious (and

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<sup>9</sup> According to T.A. Oyesakin of Lagos State University, the stories are so common a daily reality that "By 15, a typical Yoruba child is conversant with the folktales" (cited in Lindfors 1999: 139).

thus incomplete) in the legitimating eyes of Western modernity, then we must invest time and scholarly energies to document (ethnographically, literarily, historically, archeologically, etc.) these universes for their epistemological significance. Such documentation should be conducted not in isolation but in conversation with researchers and writers throughout the continent, as comparison is critical for theory building. By way of a modest example, let me refer to what strikes me as parallels to Tutuola's universe from the Grassfields region of Cameroon (see Nyamnjoh 2001, for details of what follows).

In many parts of Cameroon, palm-wine is a prominent lubricant of myriad forms of sociality, libation, ritual and communication with ancestors and the dead (Warnier 2007; Butake 1990), just as bushes and forests are symbolic meeting points between humans and spirits (Abega 2000). Indeed, it is striking the extent to which the universe (of the alives and the deads) Tutuola depicts in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* resonates with notions of conviviality, interconnections and interdependence between the visible and the invisible prevalent in Cameroon, and that has preponderantly been studied under the unfortunate and unsettling theme of "witchcraft and sorcery" (Rowlands/Warnier 1988; Ardener 1996; Geschiere 1997; Nyamnjoh 2001).

This brief discussion of *Msa* is intended to emphasize the importance of comparative studies of African worlds heavily altered and ultimately disadvantaged by the persistence of colonial education and blind adherence to the dualisms of Western modernity in African scholarship and scholarship on Africa. While the stories are familiar, of particular resonance are the flexible and fluid representations of reality and personhood that parallels *Msa* and related notions prevalent in the Grassfields of Cameroon (Nyamnjoh 2001). Like the world of Tutuola's narrator, *Msa* is perceived as a mysterious world of abundance and infinite possibilities. It is present everywhere – at home, in rivers, the bushes and the forests – and can be made visible by cunning, clever or trickster individuals such as the narrator of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Only tricksters and clairvoyants can visit *Msa*

anytime, anywhere, and can frequent the bushes and the endless forests occupied by spirits, ghosts and terrible curious creatures like the skulls. *Msa* is an ambiguous and ambivalent world of beauty, abundance and marvels, where everything can be found and anything is possible. It is inhabited by its own people who look no different from ordinary people, but who are actually spirits. The people of *Msa* live in even better houses, but speak local languages, just as the people of *Msa* of other communities speak the respective languages of these areas. *Msa* can be found everywhere in the world. Inhabitants of *Msa* are understood to be generally wicked, hostile and vicious; they are terrible curious creatures and spirits of the sort depicted by Tutuola in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.

Villains or tricksters, when they want something valuable, take their victims to *Msa* to be tethered like goats. *Msa* is like a market, complete with traders and buyers, a bazaar where many come but few are rewarded. To get what one wants, one must bargain and pay for it. But the only currency in *Msa* is human beings, variously referred to as 'goat' or 'fowl'. At *Msa*, villains or tricksters, like the narrator in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, can only get what they want after complete payment. Nothing sacrificed, nothing gained. Villains who fail to honour their debts must pay with their own lives. The number of 'fowls' or 'goats' to be paid, once agreed upon, cannot be revoked. This is why, while at *Msa*, the more sensible 'Sly', or trickster, is hesitant to enter into a contract or debt.

People also believe that anything that comes from *Msa* multiplies or proliferates. *Msa* is, above all, an ambivalent place – full of good and bad, pleasure and pain. *Msa* also suggests a place that is highly unpredictable, and where death and dying are never permanent. In *Msa*, there is more good than one can imagine, and more evil than the imagination can grasp. Good and evil are entangled at *Msa*, and no one can have one without the other. Evil is enveloped in goodness and goodness in evil, and one often gets more than one sees. At *Msa* it is everyone for themselves and the Devil for us all. Interdependence, interconnectedness and intersubjectivity seem to threaten the very existence of *Msa*; hence its violent opposition to all

attempts at conviviality between those it charms and their community of origin.

In this regard, *Msa* is strikingly like the Deads' Town, which refuses to have anything to do with the alives and the places they inhabit, unless as Death gone wild, to turn the backs of its victims among the alives to their kin and communities by "killing"<sup>10</sup> them in the thousands. The narrator of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* recounts: "As we were going on this road, we met over a thousand deads who were just going to the Deads' Town" (p.101). Not only were the deads "very annoyed to see alives" whom they hated, "These deads were not talking to one another at all" (p.101). When they appeared to talk, it was not in plain words but murmurs. "They always seemed as if they were mourning, their eyes would be very wild and brown and everyone of them wore white clothes without a single stain" (p.102). The ubiquity of Death and its devastations are well captured by "about 400 dead babies" marching to Deads' Town with "sticks in their hands," beating up with the sticks and frightening the narrator and his wife into the bushes (p.102). Tutuola's deads are analogous to the zombies of *Msa*, who are only dead enough to slave away in the interest of those who have implanted them at *Msa* (Nyamnjoh 2001, 2005). The surest and safest way to benefit from *Msa* without becoming trapped by its evils is to be a wise person that is, choosing not to belong fully to *Msa* but to act as a bridge and mediator of the two worlds. Domesticating one's connections with *Msa* is the surest way of survival for *Msa*, those it enchants and their kith and kin. Just like the narrator of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* who benefits from the gift of a precious egg that can answer his every wish, so too is *Msa* known to reward those who engage it with wisdom.

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<sup>10</sup> As already discussed, there is no permanence in death and dying in Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard*, so this is more like dying in the eyes or the world with which one is familiar, as life continues in strikingly similar ways in the Deads' Town.

### **Conclusion: Tutuola's Legacy**

Like his narrator, Tutuola is part and parcel of the universe that fascinates him. In June 1997, at the age of 77, Tutuola started his own journey to the Deads' Town. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) are not his only books. Others include: *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955); *The Brave African Huntress* (1958); *Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962); *Ayaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967); *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town* (1981); *Pauper, Brawler and Slanderer* (1987); and *The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories* (1990) – all published by Faber and Faber – and *Yoruba Folktales* (1986), published by Ibadan University Press. All are contributions to his mission of keeping alive and relevant African ways of knowing and knowledge production, and fending off the one-dimensionalism of resilient colonialism.

In Nigeria, Tutuola was just an ordinary messenger, and messengers were expected by the modern colonial elite to deliver messages and not author those messages. When Tutuola's imagination ran away with him, and he started thinking of himself as a writer in his own right, the Nigerian literati castigated him (Lindfors 1999; Larson 2001). They were even more incensed when Faber and Faber offered him the visibility and recognition he was seeking, and what is more, largely on his own terms – they did not edit what they saw as his defective grammar, thus recognising his right to think in Yoruba and write in English. Through this rare generosity or accident of publication, relevance came closest to being bedfellows with recognition in a story of Africa. Tutuola could afford to live with the snobbery of the Nigerian intellectual elite, and he felt gratified to have had the opportunity to publish his stories the way he had written and wanted them published. His message was more important than the language in which it was conveyed. He escaped the fate of many an African writer who are edited out of their own story to conform to what others expect storytelling to be. He is an early example of what an African storyteller, drawing on African universes, looks like in print. It is also an example of what privileging conversations over conversion could yield in African encounters with the



wider world. It speaks to the 'frontier African' at the crossroads and junctions of African encounters, facilitating creative conversations and challenging the regressive logic of exclusionary identities.

Tutuola's stories constitute an epistemological order where the sense of sight and physical evidence has not assumed the same centrality, dominance and dictatorship evident in the colonial epistemology and its hierarchies of perceptual faculties (van Dijk/ Pels 1996). The stories invite us to question dualistic assumptions about reality and the scholarship inspired by such dualism.

That Tutuola has inspired younger generations of storytellers in "magical realism"<sup>11</sup> or the reality of a multifaceted world of presence in simultaneous multiplicities is evidenced in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) and *Astonishing the Gods* (1996)<sup>12</sup>, and also in the proliferation of Nollywood films about the place and power of the occult in everyday life.<sup>13</sup> Introducing the 2014 edition of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Wole Soyinka remarks that "Amos Tutuola has been enjoying a quiet but steady revival" both "within his immediate cultural environment, and across America and Europe," adding that, "[a]s long as there is a drop of wine left to tap from the West African palm tree, Amos Tutuola lives on." (2014: viii). Indeed, as Harry Garuba argues, the very fact that Faber and Faber managed to secure an introduction from Wole Soyinka, the Yoruba Nigerian Nobel Prize-winning author, is significant because Tutuola's countrymen scoffed at the accolades this novel received from reviewers in Europe and the USA when it was first published. By getting Soyinka to write this introduction, the publishers are, as it were, providing the final seal of authority that binds the initial

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<sup>11</sup> "Magical realism" might not be an appropriate term for what the Amos Tutuola tradition of fiction offers, but it is the current term in circulation (Bowers 2004). For an idea of competing or complementary realisms and the crisis of consciousness in African literature, see Onoge (1974). See also Garuba (2003, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> According to Wole Soyinka (2014: viii), Amos Tutuola "was forerunner of Gabriel García Márquez, Ben Okri, Shahrnush Parsipur and others in the narrative style conveniently known as magical realism".

<sup>13</sup> See Location One. (2010). Panel on Nollywood with filmmaker Zina Saro-Wiwa, film scholar Awam Amkpa, and AfricaLab founder Mahen Bonnetti and moderated by Claudia Calirman. <http://derica.tumblr.com/post/2746338774/sharon-stone-in-abuja-exhibition> (August 2, 2014).

international recognition to the belated embrace of the writer by his local constituency.<sup>14</sup>

Tutuola's gripping description of the supernatural world of his Yoruba culture and indeed other Nigerian and African cultures and subcultures can be likened to the themes of magic, spirits, superstition, death, power, authority, impermanence of life, blackmail, human betrayal, constant struggles against the forces of nature, uncertainties of life, and so on that dominated the films of a well-known Yoruba filmmaker, the late Hubert Ogunde. Appearances, of course, can be deceitful.

Everyone has a story to tell, educated in school or not, and even if it requires palm-wine induced fantasies and creative imagination, the cultural dinosaurs of Africa, prematurely extinct or made to hibernate in the limbo of the Deads' Town, must be given the opportunity to share stories others might consider "a throwback to an earlier era" (Lindsfors 1999: 136). Many a less fortunate author have had their stories buried in the endless forest of bad books, stories stoned to death by publishers and critics determined to annihilate the African mind with exogenously induced yardsticks of art and literary appreciation. The power of fantasy and creative imagination is an open shop, there for all who frequent the market of life, with or without Death and Debt as currency. Apparently, we the sophisticated, frequent flyer intellectual elite of Africa enchanted by the complete gentlemen of Eurocentric modernity do not have the monopoly of lived experiences.

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<sup>14</sup> See Harry Garuba's "And the Book Lived Happily Ever After", <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/and-the-books-lived-happily-ever-after> (May 11, 2015).

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