

**REPRESENTATIONS OF CHRONOTOPIC CYCLES AND  
CONSCIOUSNESS IN SELECTED NOVELS OF AMOS TUTUOLA, BEN  
OKRI, ALAIN MABANCKOU AND MIA COUTO**

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**SEPTEMBER, 2021**

**DECLARATION**

This Ph.D. thesis is my original work and it has not been submitted for a degree in any other university or for any other award.

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**DEDICATION**

To those  
Time has  
So enchantingly  
Made to flower,  
That they know  
Others should  
Flower too  
For the garden.

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## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Literary chronotope:** As per Mikhail Bakhtin, a novelistic universe in which temporal and spatial indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole which describes the existence of the subject.

**Time:** In chronotopic sense, the axis (bar) separating the dichotomy of the problem/solution, beneath which the signifier slides into the space(s) where meaning is presumed to be.

**Chronotopic cycles:** circlets of being that are formed as the subject tries to make sense of what it is like to be the subject in the representations of time and space.

**Consciousness:** the subject's awareness of that which is nominated by intersections of time and space as the problem dialogues for the solution.

**Symbolic cycle:** a loop of life stretching from birth to death.

**Anisotropy:** return of the subject to its conception which initiates a cyclic existence of birth, death and rebirth.

**Challenge-resolution model:** Used almost as a linguistic sign, the intersections of the challenge and the resolution when plotted against time and space.

**Double:** an image that claims to represent a presence, and it has the ability to annex and mime what it represents while masking the power of its own arbitrariness.

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigates how the artistic relationships of time and space in the selected African novels are used to create the awareness of an African chronotope. The scope of the study is an examination on the selected novels of Ben Okri, Alain Mabanckou, Amos Tutuola and Mia Couto. The findings of the study reveal that the resemblance in the selected African novels is their dialogic problem-solution and question-answer structure. The authors innovatively use the riddle-narrative to address themselves to the representations of time and space in the African chronotope. In Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the eponymous narrator poses the dialogic problem as an alcoholic foible which propels him to make an almost-impossible journey to the Deads' Town where his dead palm-wine tapster now resides. The dead tapster offers him a magic egg as the resolution to the problem but soon the egg breaks creating a cyclic journey as the narrator often returns to the Deads' Town for another magic egg. In Okri's *The Famished Road*, Azaro, an abiku, who is a spirit-child, poses the dialogic problem as a cycle journey of birth and death that revolves around an imagined postcolonial African world and a mysterious world of pure dreams. In Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the narrator(s) poses the dialogic problem as a commissioned manuscript(s) in which an African narrator is appointed to act as a double in the imagined African world. Finally, in Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the narrator(s) poses the dialogic problem as a journey to the idea of home. Due to their riddle-like structures, the novels have been easily fitted out into the imagined riddling session(s) through which the study analyzes the representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness. The study employs a conceptual framework built on Akíntúndé Akínyemí's idea of the dialogic problem-solution or question-answer that characterizes the riddle-narrative in the Yorùbá oral tradition and Kimani Njogu's idea of dialogic problem-solution in the Gicaandi, an African poetic riddle-like dialogue. The study engages qualitative research methodology since the phenomenon being investigated is textual efficacy rather than quantifying of materiality. The study proposes the riddle's dialogic problem-solution model as an efficacious protocol for reading the representations of time and space in the selected novels of Okri, Mabanckou, Tutuola and Couto, in particular, and the African literary imagination, in general.

**Key words:** African chronotope, chronotopic cycles, consciousness, Couto, double, Mabanckou, Okri, riddle, Tutuola.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 CONTEXTUALIZING THE WRITING OF AMOS TUTUOLA, BEN OKRI, ALAIN MABANCKOU AND MIA COUTO WITHIN THE AFRICAN CHRONOTOPE

“[S]ince its inception Africanism has been producing its own motives as well as objects, and fundamentally commenting upon its being, while promoting a gnosis,” (Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, xi).

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

The study examines how Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Alain Mabanckou and Mia Couto use representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness in the novels selected for the study to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of the African chronotope. The study focuses on Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Okri’s *The Famished Road* and *The Age of Magic*, Mabanckou’s *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* and Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*. Tutuola and Okri could be categorized as Anglophone writers since they write in English and their literary works fall under literature from former British colonies. On his part, Mabanckou is a Francophone writer since he writes in French and his literary works fall under literature from former French colonies. Then, Couto could be categorized as a Lusophone writer as he writes in Portuguese and his literary works fall under literature from former Portuguese colonies. The comparative paradigm for the selection of the writers of literary traditions as diverse as Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone, the triumvirate

out of which comes the novels of the study, is an acknowledgement that the selected African writers demonstrate an awareness of African protocols for literary production in a way that promotes an African gnosis.

Mudimbe's argument for an African gnosis, as indicated in the above epigraph, informs the sampling technique that has been used in choosing the novels for the study. The reason for such a protocol of sampling for the study is that the twinned issues of time and space in the African fiction have so far been largely understood from Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the literary chronotope. However, in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," Bakhtin defines the literary chronotope as a procedure for understanding the working of time and space in the European novel. Consequently, using the Bakhtinian chronotopic imagination for interpreting African novels without adopting it to African literary methods imply that African novels are a kind of double to the European novel. However, African novels do not necessarily imitate the European novel in the structures of time and space that they exhibit.

Such a pressupitive attitude could mean, for instance, that the working of time and space in the adventure chronotope in Tutuola, Okri, Mabanckou and Couto's literary works operates in a similar way as that in the ancient Greek Romance. In *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, Michael Holquist observes that for Bakhtin the adventure chronotope "is the formal feature that best defines the peculiarity of

the ancient Greek Romance” (110). The intervention of the current study is not to offer a comparative study between the peculiarity of the African and the European literary imagination but to analyze how the selected African writers use African methods for demonstrating the working of time and space in the African literary imagination. In this light, Mudimbe’s idea of an African gnosis carries the spirit of the study. Subsequently, it is tenable to talk about an African chronotope that foregrounds African ways of knowing and knowledge production in order to demonstrate the working of time and space in the African literary imagination.

The issue of language is quite important in understanding the working of a chronotope. For Bakhtin, as Holquist observes, “Dialogism ... assumes that thought is fundamentally a language activity” (140). Holquist’s observation implies that writing in different languages, say French, Portuguese and English, as the writers who have been selected for the study do, might exhibit different circuits of aesthetic value. Though two of the writers, Mabanckou and Couto, use French and Portuguese respectively as their original medium of writing, it is their work in English translation that is being studied here. The question may arise about how different the conclusions of the study might have been had the original texts been accessible since translations and originals operate on different circuits of aesthetic value hence the serious implication of choosing either as the reference point for commenting on the nature of the literary work. However, since the sampling technique is based on the motives and objects in the novels for creating

an awareness of and promoting an African way of knowing and knowledge production, the slight difference in aesthetic value that might exist between the originals and the translations is assumed to have little impact on the conclusions of the study.

Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is the first full-length novel in English that is written by a Nigerian author. In the scholarly circles, its aesthetic value has been appreciated as having been drawn from the Yorùbá oral tradition. The aesthetic value in Tutuola's novel has raised a lot of critical discussion, especially due to its literary nature that is sharply different from that of the traditional novel, with some critics defining it as a folk-novel, a point that will become more evident in the literature review. Okri's *The Famished Road* uses the Yorùbá aesthetic value of the abiku myth to make the fusion of time and space visible for the interpretive reader. Its aesthetic circuit of abiku allows it to be paired with Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* such that the analysis of the two novels is presented in Chapter Two as cogs of the same African riddle. The comparative paradigm that allows this pairing is that in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the narrator is locked in a cyclic journey of going to the Deads' Town for a resolution to his alcoholic foible and returning home to a worsening reality while in *The Famished Road* the narrator is tied to a cycle of coming to birth and going to death such that his African parents are intermittently bereaved.

Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* addresses itself to the problem of the commissioned writing that opens the bar of aesthetics into nodes with the different potential of the aesthetics of the written word and the spoken word. In the novel, the narrator, a regular patron at a local bar by the name Credit Gone West, is appointed by the proprietor to write about the patrons, in a certain custom-built manner that deifies the written sign while desecrating the oral. The aesthetic value in *Broken Glass* of writing the African self from the point of view of another who is trying to turn the African into a harmful double is followed through in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. The choice of *Memoirs of a Porcupine* is therefore informed on the aesthetic value of being a sequel to *Broken Glass*.

Okri's *The Age of Magic* is paired with Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* because they operate at the same circuit of aesthetic value in which the mind is the focus of consciousness and knowledge production. In the novel a seven-member crew is making a television documentary to Arcadia, in Greece, but along the way they realize that though "They were making a journey to a place ... in truth they were making a journey to an idea," (13), about the meaning of home in time and space for the racially fragmented humanity. Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* addresses itself to the African problem of time not just as a historical event but as occupation of the mind. The witchdoctor Andorinho, one of the characters in the novel, argues that the African problem of colonialism is largely perceived wrongly as a historical event that came to a closure. However, for him colonialism never existed because "What those whites did was to occupy

us. It wasn't just the land: they occupied [our] very [African] selves, they put up camp right inside our heads" (124). The way Andorinho recreates aesthetics to address himself to the vestiges of colonialism enables him to recast the mind as the real problem in the African chronotope.

The notion of an African gnosis calls for the study to employ African methods of knowing and knowledge production in the interpretation of data. Subsequently, Akíntúndé Akínyemí's idea of the dialogic problem-solution/ question-answer that characterize the riddle-narrative in the Yorùbá oral tradition and Kimani Njogu's idea of dialogic problem-solution in **gicaandi**, an African poetic riddle-like dialogue are used to systematically interpret and analyze the primary data. Akínyemí arrives at the idea of dialogic problem-solution from his analysis of Yorùbá Riddles and oral narratives while Njogu arrives at the same protocols from his analysis of the Gikuyu poetic riddle-like dialogue. The study adopts the dialogic problem-solution as the protocol for interpreting the data that has been collected from the six African novels under examination because, while acknowledging Mikhail Bakhtin's great contribution on chronotopic imagination, it foregrounds African methods of knowing and knowledge production.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

While the representations of the African experience by different African authors might not be homogenous across the Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone literary traditions, the African fictional world that they create in their literary texts

promotes the idea of an African chronotope. The problem of the study is to examine how Okri, Mabanckou, Tutuola and Couto use representations of time and space to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope as revealed in the novels selected for inquiry. Consequently, the study investigates how Tutuola and Okri fuse time and space in *The Famished Road* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to represent the awareness of anisotropy in the African chronotope. The study investigates how Mabanckou fuses time and space in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* and *Broken Glass* to represent the consciousness of being a harmful double in the African chronotope. The ultimate goal of the study is to show how time and space are fused to create a unique signifier upon which the literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope become visible as portrayed in Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study hopes to fulfill the following three objectives:

- i. To examine how Tutuola and Okri fuse time and space in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road* respectively into a unique African chronotope in which the African subject attains anisotropic character.
- ii. To investigate how Mabanckou uses representations of time and space in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to portray the consciousness of being a harmful double in the African chronotope.

- iii. To interrogate how Okri and Couto use representations of time and space in *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* respectively to create a sliding signifier upon which the awareness of the African chronotope becomes visible.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The study employs the following research questions:

- i. How do Tutuola and Okri fuse time and space in *The Famished Road* and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* respectively into a unique African chronotope in which the African subject attains anisotropic character?
- ii. How does Mabanckou use representations of time and space in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to portray the consciousness of being a harmful double in the African chronotope?
- iii. How do Okri and Couto use representations of time and space in *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* respectively to create a sliding signifier upon which the awareness of the African chronotope becomes visible?

#### **1.5 Research Assumptions**

- i. That in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road*, Tutuola and Okri fuse time and space into a unique chronotope in which the African subject attains anisotropic character.

- ii. That in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Mabanckou uses representations of time and space to portray the consciousness of being a harmful double in the African chronotope.
- iii. That Okri and Couto use representations of time and space in *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* respectively to create a sliding signifier upon which the awareness of the African chronotope becomes visible.

### **1.6 Justification of the Study**

Though a lot of scholarly work on Okri, Mabanckou, Tutuola and Couto's novels reasonably extol the authors' metaphorical use of African mythology, the abiku for Okri, Yorùbá mythic order of spirits and ghosts for Tutuola, and the human-animal double for Mabanckou and Couto, there is a literary gap on how the artistic intersections of time and space in the novels constitute an African literary chronotope. The study hopes to fill this lacuna through the critical examination of Representations of Chronotopic Cycles and Consciousness in the selected African novels. The notion of chronotopic cycles offers concise explication for the African subject's repetitive loops of birth, death, and rebirth. Existing corpus of literature majorly associates the narrator's cyclic character in Okri's *The Famished Road* and Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to the African mythological aspect. However, in the current study the focus is on how the African subject's cyclic character portrayed in the novels could be perceived as

conscious attempts, by the authors, to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope. *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* are used to offer an intervention on how Mabanckou uses representations of time and space to produce literary motives and objects that allow the African subject to become aware of being a harmful double. Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* help the study to fill the identified gap through an interrogation on how representations of time and space form a sliding signifier upon which the literary motives and objects that promote an African chronotope become visible.

### **1.7 Scope and Delimitation**

The scope of the study is a literary examination on how Okri, Mabanckou, Tutuola and Couto use representations of time and space in the selected African novels to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope. Okri is an illustrious Nigerian novelist who has authored eight novels, numerous volumes of short stories and poetry. The study is delimited to *The Famished Road* and *The Age of Magic* since they offer a fictionalized African world in which time and space are fused in a way that produces literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope. In addition to these novels, the study is further delimited to Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* since they uniquely exhibit the author's attempt to use the harmful double trope to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an

African chronotope. Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* has been chosen for the study because, like Okri's *The Famished Road*, it reveals the author's conscious effort to use the narrator's anisotropic character to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope. Finally, Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* has been chosen for the study because it addresses itself to representations of time and space in a way that creates a sliding signifier whose focus is the African subject's mind. The study employs qualitative research methodology which is delimited to textual and content analysis. The study employs a conceptual framework built on the idea of the dialogic imagination to interpret and analyze data. It is delimited to Akíntúndé Akínyemí's idea of the dialogic problem-solution or question-answer that characterizes the riddle-narrative in the Yorùbá oral tradition and Kimani Njogu's idea of the dialogic problem-solution in the **gicaandi**, an African poetic riddle-like dialogue.

### **1.8 Literature Review**

This section contextualizes the study in terms of related chronotopic tropes which have been used to characterize the writing of Tutuola, Okri, Mabanckou and Couto. Through a keen examination of the theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches used in the existing corpus of literature, an apt conceptual framework has been designed for the study. The ultimate aim that the literature review achieves is establishing the lacuna from which the study takes on its scholarly wings.

### 1.8.1 Chronotopic Imagination

Chronotopic imagination could be traced to Bakhtin's idea of the literary chronotope. In *Flesh and Spirit Onstage: Chronotopes of Performance in Medieval English Theatre*, Gregory Lee Cavanaugh avers that "Bakhtin characterizes the chronotope not as a description of objective space and time ... but rather as a phenomenological frame for making sense of lived experience," (12). Cavanaugh's assertion aptly infers that the chronotope is a literary protocol for doing qualitative analysis for literary texts. In *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson concur with Cavanaugh: "In a primary sense, a chronotope is a way of understanding experience; it is a specific form-shaping ideology for understanding the nature of events and actions," (367) in literature. The inference that could be made here is that artistic fusion of time and space forms an important literary means for understanding representations of lived experiences in literature.

In "Notes on a Poetics of Time," Lawrence Kimmel observes that for T. S. Eliot, "The poetic journey of imagination within time into eternity is symbolized in a line that becomes a circle [and the] linear of ordinary time becomes transformed through creative metaphor of imagination, so that what appeared a straight line proves to be a segment of the arch of a circle whose radius is infinity (14-15). The inference that could be made here is that by disambiguating the linear and circular notions of time, Eliot makes a significant contribution that shows that time could

be perceived as representations of lived experience. The linear and circular notions of time are thus not separate entities but intersections on the representations of the lived experiences.

In “The Philosophy of Wole Soyinka’s Art,” Dele Loyiwola observes that interrogating the author’s philosophy as revealed in *Idanre and Other Poems* invites a relevant question, “Why does Soyinka ... represent the act of rejuvenation [in his poetry] as a Mobius strip, a loop, a ring, or a cyclic medal?” (24). While Loyiwola avers that the artistic conception of a loop confirms Soyinka’s philosophy of a turning world, the study infers the notion of chronotopic cycles through which the subject is anchored into consciousness. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin notes that “Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships” (252). While appreciating Bakhtin’s observation, the study infers the mutually co-existing chronotopes as chronotopic cycles of a distinct literary world.

### **1.8.2 Okri and Tutuola’s Chronotope**

Both Okri and Tutuola’s writing have received a lot of literary acclaim due to their unique progression of plot. In *Chronotope of a Continent: Ben Okri and Spatial Dynamics of The Famished Road*, Cleo O’ Brien-Udry avers that “The

narrative of [the novel] makes use of Bakhtin's Chronotope [, by] reinvent[ing] space through integration of spirits and a world of physical reality," (2). Brien-Udry's argument is apt but it leaves a gap on how the representations of time and space in the novel are used to portray the African subject's consciousness of being a double. In *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*, Brenda Cooper argues that the strange eye that opens on the abiku-narrator in Okri's *The Famished Road* enables him to see reality in a new light (67). In *Re-inventing Oral Tradition in Ben Okri's Trilogy: The Famished Road, Songs of Enchantment and Infinite Riches and The Seeds' Tales*, Michael Oshoke Irene concurs with Cooper that "In *The Famished Road* (1991), Azaro, the main protagonist discovers that '... out of the centre' of his 'forehead, an eye opened' with which he sees 'beautiful thing[s] in the world' [and that] [t]his strange eye on the protagonist's head is Okri's attempt to see reality," (6), from a new perspective. In *The Famished Road: Ben Okri's Imaginary Homelands*, Vanessa Guignery terms Azaro's unique sight as "the sense of sight [that] simultaneously redefines the contours of vision as a phenomenological and spiritual experience" (2). The above studies critically discuss Okri's attempt to represent the African reality in an entirely new literary light but they do not examine how the representations of time in the novel are used to produce literary motives and objects that promote an African chronotope.

In “Higher Realities: New Age Spirituality in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*,” Douglas Maccabe defines abiku as a child “born to die” (46), while, in *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, Ato Quayson describes it as “a child in an unending cycle of births, deaths and re-births” (122). Here, the definition of abiku begs the question: how is the abiku able to attain anisotropy so that he/she transcends death to be born again in an endless cycle? In *The Famished Road : Ben Okri’s Imaginary Homelands*, Vanessa Guignery appears to partly answer the question: “[T]he metaphor of the spiral,” overrides the text with, “an ebbing and flowing narrative that moves in loops, twirls and arabesques,” (8), which characterize “Okri’s writing as well as the winding [textual] structure ... which denies any linear and teleological progression” (9). While assenting to this kind of spiral metaphor, the inference made is that there is need to establish how Okri’s spiral image in the novel could be interpreted as the author’s conscious effort to produce literary motives and objects that promote an African gnosis.

In “Spiritual Realism,” Kwame Anthony Appiah observes that *The Famished Road* spins, “500 pages with only the barest semblance of a plot” (147), while, Cooper submits that, “not much happens. What does transpire seems familiar and repetitive, as though one is living through many versions of the same dream or nightmare” (68). Similarly, Guignery maintains that for Okri, Azaro’s time is vertical rather than cyclical or linear as “certain scenes are placed outside of time [and they are] contracted or expanded” (9). Based on the arguments from Appiah,

Cooper and Guignery, the study infers that the fusion of time and space in *The Famished Road* creates a familiar and repetitive aesthetic value for the African subject. The gap the study hopes to fill is how the author uses the familiar and repetitive aesthetic value for explicating the narrator's anisotropic character.

In *Fiction and the Incompleteness of History: Toni Morrison, V. S. Naipul and Ben Okri*, Zhu Ying avers that "In particular, abiku becomes a trope for the nature of being [and that its] cycle symbolizes the dialectic of birth, death, and rebirth and of the past, present and future, as well as the interaction among the world of the ancestor, the living and the unborn, and 'the fourth spaces that houses the mythopoeic foundations of African literature'" (117-118). It is inferred from Ying's observation that the abiku cycle demonstrates the importance of myth in the African literary imagination. The gap that the study attempts to fill is an examination on how Okri uses the abiku cycle in the novel to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope.

In *Infinite Longing for Home: Desire and the Nation in Selected Writing of Ben Okri and K. S. Mariam*, David C. L. Lim asserts that Okri's writing reveals different cycles which, while appearing to be similar, contain some differences. The cycle of toil, arrival, destruction, and recommencement of toil that describe the existence of the road-builders is in a sense different from, "the abiku cycle [which] is a condition of bad infinity [, where, those] fated ... to loop ad infinitum

... achieve no progress” (70). Inferentially, it seems viable to assume that these cycles are functions in the same chronotope. In explicating the subject’s endless looping, Lim turns to Jacques Lacan: “[T]he Lacanian subject is by definition an empty nothing with an infinite craving for something” (68). While not dismissing Lim’s avowal, the study proposes that the subject in Okri’s writing, abides to Lacan’s theorization, but is a function of time rather than an empty nothing. It follows, then, that to gain a fuller understanding of the subject in Okri’s writing, Lacan’s theorization needs to be extrapolated on intersections of time and space.

In a review of Okri’s *The Age of Magic*, Magdalena Ball observes that the characters in the novel are searching for “Arcadia [which] is primarily treated as an idea – a kind of personal paradise akin to an inner calm or sense of peace regardless of what happens or where you go” (Book Review). In “The Age of Magic Review: Giving Substance to the Abstract,” Anne Haverty notes that the lyrical form of the novel “is a welcome visiting breadth on the European literary [imaginary, but it] could be said to be a quintessentially African novel” (Giving Substance). Ball and Haverty’s observations reveal a gap on how Okri uses representations of time in *The Age of Magic* to portray the mind as the focus for understanding how intersections of time and space shape consciousness.

In “Amos Tutuola and the Elusiveness of Completeness,” Francis B. Nyamnjoh argues that in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of*

*Ghosts*, “Consciousness matters more than the containers that house it [and, that] it can inhabit any container – human, non-human, animate and inanimate, visible and invisible – regardless of the state of completeness or incompleteness” (3). Nyamnjoh’s avowal fittingly implies that consciousness is at the centre of Tutuola’s literary imagination. Nyamnjoh also notes that consciousness is imbued with multiplicity: “Things, worlds, deeds and beings are always incomplete, not because of absences but because of their possibilities,” (9) through the representations of consciousness in the novel. The gap the study attempts to fill is an interrogation on how the incompleteness of objects and motives in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* creates anisotropic character upon which the literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope become visible in the novel.

In “Folklore and Society in Transition: A study of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road*,” Saradashree Choudhury argues that “By incorporating the oral traditions of ... Africa in their writing, [Tutuola and Okri] have created a body of literature that distinctly expresses [the] African consciousness and sensibility” (3). While assenting to Choudhury’s argument, the study perceives Tutuola and Okri’s novels not merely as representations of African consciousness but also as constituting an African literary chronotope in which literary objects and motives promote an African gnosis.

### 1.8.3 Mabanckou and Couto's Chronotope

Mabanckou writes in French but some of his works have been translated into English. There appears to be not much related literature written in English which could be used for review. However, In “User-Friendliness and Virtual Reality: A Hypertextual Reading of Alain Mabanckou’s *Verre Cassé*,” Jason Herbeck observes that in *Broken Glass* (French, *Verre Cassé*), “[T]he narrative’s linearity is ... one run-on sentence ... an unmistakably singular, uninterrupted narrative” (51). Nonetheless, the novel spins disparate worlds of literature. The gap the study infers from Herbeck’s observation is an interrogation on how the run-on-sentence could be interpreted as the author’s attempt to produce literary objects and motives in the novel for promoting the idea of an African chronotope.

In “Broken Glass or Broken Text?: The Translatability of Alain Mabanckou’s *Verre Cassé* (2005) into English,” Vivian Steemers avers that “Mabanckou has incorporated approximately three hundred references to African, French, and world literature” (110), in the narrative. The inference that could be made from Steemers’ observation is that the numerous references that Mabanckou incorporates in the plot are important literary objects and motives that influence the methods of interpretation in praxis. For Herbeck, “the intertexts are incorporated virtually glitch-free into the nonstop sentence” (51). Herbeck’s assertion implies the references to African, French and world literature in the run-on sentence is Mabanckou’s attempt to turn the literary titles into literary objects

and motives for promoting the aesthetic value of mutually inclusive chronotopes. The intervention the study makes is to interrogate how Mabanckou uses the literary motives and objects in the run-on sentence to promote the idea of an African chronotope.

In “Retelling Human and Non-Human Affiliations in Alain Mabanckou’s *Mémoires de porc-épic: A Zoocritical Exploration*,” Eunice E. Omonzejie concludes that *Memoirs of a Porcupine* “attempts to redefine in a holistic way, the relationship of humans and non-human life-forms within their environment [and that the] narration portrays both human and nonhuman life forms as equal and interdependent” (80). Omonzejie uses a Zoocritical approach to investigate the “human-animal categorisation,” (73). This cataloguing is quite unique as “it pertains to the spiritual double” (71), literary trope that makes it possible for human and animal forms of life to fuse into a single body of consciousness. Subsequently, the study hopes to investigate how Mabanckou uses the animal-human double trope in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to represent the fusion of time and space as a literary motive and object for promoting the idea of an African chronotope.

In “Globalization, Mondialisation and the Immonde in Contemporary Francophone African Literature,” Michael Syrotinski observes that “Like its sequel, [*Memoirs of a Porcupine*], (2006), [*Broken Glass*] is set in the local

community bar,” (257), and it has an eponymous narrator. Syrontiski notes that the narrator announces himself, thus, “Let’s say the boss of bar Credit Gone West gave me this notebook to fill, he’s convinced that I – Broken Glass – can turn out a book” (257). Syrotinski’s observations imply that Mabanckou uses the narrator, the boss of bar and the notebook as the central objects and motives for creating the aesthetic value of the commissioned writer in the novel. The gap that the current study attempts to fill is an examination on how Mabanckou uses the commissioned writer trope to represent fusion of time and space as literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope.

In “Who is to say ... that the Hen did not Speak? Bird Subjectivities in some Southern African Narratives,” Wendy Woodward posits that in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, birds are characterized as “Putative subjects who may be capable of relationship with humans” (244). She explains that “In [his] attempt to escape the explosions in Tizangara, [the narrator] is visited by his deceased mother’s spirit, who tells him the story of a place where time hadn’t invented night [, and that] in her fable, the birds plead, to no avail, with the flamingo not to make his last flight, which will bring about night” (249). The inference made, here, is that the flight of the flamingo indicates fusion of time-space indicators in the fictional world portrayed in the novel. The gap the study attempts to fill is an interrogation on how Couto uses representations of time and space in *The Last*

*Flight of the Flamingo* to create a sliding signifier upon which the literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope become visible.

In *Inclusivity and Construction of Memory in Mia Couto's Under the Frangipani*, Lawrence Ngoveni maintains that Couto's novels "Not only pioneer the emergence of a relatively 'new genre' in Mozambique, but also a unique mode of representation" (7). Ngoveni's assertion implies that Couto's novels form a unique African literary imagination. The gap the study hopes to interrogate is on how Couto uses the unique mode of representation in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope.

#### **1.8.4 Conclusion**

From the review, it is evident that the gap in the literature is an interrogation on how Okri, Mabanckou, Tutuola and Couto use representations of time and space in the selected novels to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope. The physical focal point for *The Famished Road* and *The Age of Magic* as well as *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* is a bar or restaurant, while for *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* the action oscillates in disparate worlds. Nonetheless, as chronotopic spaces, each of the novels' focal point in promoting an African gnosis becomes visible through the representations of time and space.

## 1.9 Conceptual Framework

### 1.9.1 The Idea of Chronotopic Cycles

The idea of the literary chronotope can be traced to the Russian writer and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Though he originally proposed it as a literary protocol for interpreting the working of time and space in the European novel, the idea of the literary chronotope has buttressed the critical interpretation of African novels. The current study does not use Bakhtin's protocols per se as it incorporates African motives and objects to the idea of the literary chronotope to justify its claim to an African gnosis. In *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives*, Nele Bermong and Pieter Borghart aver that initially Bakhtin configured the Chronotope to serve as “[A]nalytical instrument for establishing generic divisions in the history of the western novel, [but] chronotopic analysis has recently been proposed as a conceptual tool for enriching such diverse fields as narratology ... reception theory [and] cognitive approaches to literature” (3), among other nodes of the contemporary body of theory. Bermong and Borghart's avowal succinctly expresses the efficacy of fusion of ideas that is made possible by the Bakhtin's idea of the Literary Chronotope.

In “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics,” Bakhtin, influenced by Kant's philosophy and Albert Einstein's relativity theory, configured a space-time conceptual tool, which he calls the literary chronotope. He asserts that in the literary chronotope, time and space

indicators “are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole. Time ... thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible ... space becomes charged and responsive to ... time, plot and history.” (84). Bakhtin’s description implies that in a literary text space-time indicators fuse into a literary imagination which could be used to interpret fictionalized human experience in literary texts.

The study appreciates how efficacious Bakhtin’s idea of the literary chronotope has been systematically used for interpreting and analysing data in the European as well as African literary circles. However, since the current study lays claim to an African gnosis, conscious attempt has been made for specifying African methods for interpreting and analyzing the data on representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness drawn from the African novels under examination. To achieve this aim, the study adopts the idea of the dialogic problem-solution from the efficacious studies by Akíntúndé Akínyemí and Kimani Njogu. In the studies, *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles* and “On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Akínyemí and Njogu respectively revise Bakhtin’s idea of the chronotope in a way that succinctly promotes an African gnosis. The interpolation of the idea of the riddle on Bakhtin’s chronotopic imagination produces two basic chronotopic cycles involving the challenge and the resolution. Since the tale-riddle and **gicaandi** genre are characterized by a chain of riddles, the challenge-resolution cycles are repeated creating a chain of dialogic problem-solution pairs upon which meaning is produced in the text.

### 1.9.2 The Conceptual Idea of Dialogic Problem-Solution Pairs

The conceptual framework for the study is built on Akíntúndé Akínyemí's idea of the dialogic problem-solution or question-answer that characterize the riddle-narrative in the Yorùbá oral tradition and Kimani Njogu's similar idea of the dialogic problem-solution in the **gicaandi**, an African poetic riddle-like dialogue. Akínyemí and Njogu's notion of the dialogic problem-solution helps the study to interpret and analyze the data on the representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness that has been collected from the novels under inquiry.

In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyemí rightly observes that “the dialogic problem-solution and question-answer structure that constitutes the core of the riddle is inherently sequential and thus leads itself naturally to narrative” (129). Akínyemí's observation means that though the riddle and the narrative are two distinct genre categories, in the Yorùbá oral tradition the problem-solution protocols that characterize the riddle are often found in narratives. The idea of the dialogic problem-solution structure helps the study to interpret how the selected African authors organize the representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness in the novels to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope.

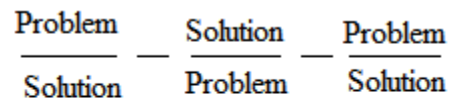
In “On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu asserts that the **gicaandi** genre in the Gikuyu oral tradition is polyphonic in nature but he

cautions readers against falling into the trap of thinking that polyphony means a multiplicity of voices. He explains that polyphony does not refer to the number of voices but to the plurality of an individual utterance, “that is the ability of an utterance to encapsulate someone else’s utterance, thus creating a dialogic relation between the voice of the self and the other” (47). Njogu’s idea of the dialogic relation helps the study to interpret data on how the selected african authors use an individual utterance to create intersections of time and space producing motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope.

In addition, Njogu notes that the **gicaandi** genre is characterized by coded messages involving all aspects of the societal life. The messages are “decoded by contesting poets, and failure to decode a message may lead to a poet forfeiting his rattle, the **gicaandi** musical instrument” (48). Using Njogu’s idea of a dialogic contest among the poets, the study fits out the selected African authors into a kind of literary contest aimed at interrogating how each of them use representations of time and space to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope.

The applicability of Akínyemí and Njogu’s idea of the dialogic problem-solution/question-answer as a protocol for interpreting the primary data is evinced in the way the six novels under examination replicate the riddle-narrative with a multiplication of problem-posing and problem-solving in agreement with the

dialogic nature of the Yorùbá riddle-narrative and **gicaandi** in the Gikuyu oral tradition. The dialogic problem-solution operates as a conceptual chain of signifiers upon which the meanings of the representations of time and consciousness in the novels under examination could be drawn. As a conceptual chain of signifiers the dialogic problem-solution can be mapped out as shown in diagram 1.9.2 below.



**Diagram 1.9.2 Problem-Solution dialogic pairs**

The chain of signification shown above helps the study to interpret how problem-posing creates the awareness of the dialogic journey to the solution as portrayed in the novels under inquiry. Noteworthy, the conceptual dialogic chain of signifiers helps the study to engage in protocols of interpretation in praxis aimed, not at anti-colonial and decolonization politics but, at critically analyzing how the selected African authors use representations of time and space to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope.

### **1.9.3 Research Design**

The study employs the qualitative research methodology to investigate, organize, analyze and interpret textual data on representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness in the selected African novels of Tutuola, Okri, Mabanckou, and Couto. The purpose of the study is not to quantify the data collected from the

primary texts but rather to establish how the quality of the data on representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness enables the authors to produce literary motives and objects that promote the idea of an African chronotope. Subsequently, the study design engages both the qualitative textual and content analyses because the literary phenomenon being interrogated is textual and it requires coding into strands of representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness.

The qualitative textual analysis enables the researcher to systematically collect, organize and interpret data on the representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness as portrayed in the novels under examination. The research design has been engaged right from the selection of the texts for the study to the collection, organization, analysis and interpretation of the data on representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness. In “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis”, Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon define qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of content of the text data through the systemic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (1278). Subsequently, the researcher has used the qualitative content analysis to single out representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness as the classification process of coding and identifying themes and patterns of the data collected from the novels under study.

In “Qualitative Content Analysis Research: A Review Article,” Hossein Hashemnezhad observes that for Hsieh and Shannon, the first approach of qualitative content analysis, is “conventional qualitative content analysis, in which coding categories are derived directly and inductively from the raw data” (60). Cued by Hashemnezhad’s observation, the coding categories upon which the analytic chapters operate in the study are derived directly and inductively from the primary data. Chapter Two, is therefore based on the anisotropic character portrayed by the eponymous narrator in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Azaro, the abiku-narrator, in Okri’s *The Famished Road*. Then, Chapter Three is derived from the character of the eponymous narrator in Mabanckou’s *Broken Glass* and the porcupine-narrator in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* of disembarking from the bar of aesthetics commissioned by the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* and Kibandi, the human master, respectively. Chapter Four is derived from the episodic events of the alternating dream and waking that characterize Okri’s *The Age of Magic* and Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* forming a sliding signifier.

Hashemnezhad maintains that Hsieh expounds the second approach as directed content analysis in which “initial coding starts with a theory or relevant findings. Then, during data analysis, the researcher immerses themselves in the data and allows themes to emerge from the data. This approach usually validates or extends a conceptual framework or theory” (60). Accordingly, the initial coding

starts with the relevant findings in the existing corpus of the literature examined in the literature review and it helps in identify the gap for the study. In addition, the initial theoretical coding emanates from Akíntúndé Akínyemí and Kimani Njogu's theoretical findings on the idea of the dialogic problem-solution in their examination on Orature and Yorùbá Riddles and the **gicaandi** genre respectively.

The third approach, Hashemnezhad observes, “is summative content analysis, which starts with identifying manifest content, then extends the analysis to include latent meanings and themes [, and] its goal is to explore the usage of the words/ indicators in an inductive manner” (60). The approach helps the study to identify the material representations on chronotopic cycles and consciousness as portrayed in the novels under examination and to analyze the latent meanings behind the material representations.

#### **1.9.4 Sampling Technique**

The study uses the purposive sampling technique in choosing the African authors and novels for examination as well as the pairing of the strands of material representations in the analytic chapters. In “Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling,” Alker Etikan, Musa and Alkassim observe that the purposive sampling technique is “the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (2). Accordingly, the selection of the African authors Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Alain Mabanckou and Mia Couto is

based on the objects and motives they exhibit in their novels for promoting the idea of the African chronotope. All the four African authors simulate the African tale-riddle and **gicaandi**, a riddle-like poetic dialogue, in the narrative spaces of the selected novels and therefore, promote an African gnosis by foregrounding the African ways of knowing and knowledge production.

In addition, the study is guided by the maximum variation sampling method (MVS) since the representations of the African experience is not homogenous across the diverse writing traditions of Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone. The idea behind MVS, Etikan writes, “is to look at a subject from all available angles, thereby achieving a greater understanding” (3). In this light, the researcher has chosen Tutuola and Okri to represent the authors from the Anglophone writing tradition, Mabanckou to represent the authors from the Francophone tradition, and Couto to represent the authors from Lusophone writing tradition. What protocols of sampling justify the choice of the novels for the study with one novel per Couto and Tutuola and two for Okri and Mabanckou? There are two aesthetic values that justify the choice. The first one is that each novel has been selected on its own merit of exhibiting circuits of aesthetic value that promote the African ways of knowing and knowledge production. The second consideration is on the nature of the aesthetic value portrayed by the motives and objects cutting across the six novels allowing pairing for analytic purposes. The pairing of the

novels allows the African gnosis being promoted by the authors to be systematic analyzed in the study.

### **1.9.5 Data Collection**

The primary data has been collected through the close reading of the selected novels guided by the three objectives of the study. Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Okri's *The Famished Road* have been closely read with the first objective of the study in mind. The strands of data collected from the two novels is based on the anisotropic character of the narrators. Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* have been closely read and strands of data on the portrayal of a harmful double collected following the demands of the second objective. Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* have been read keenly and data on representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness that support the idea of a sliding signifier collected in line with the third objective. Relevant secondary data has been collected from books, internet websites and journals in order to contextualize the analysis of the strands of data collected from the six novels under examination within the paradigm of representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness.

### **1.9.6 Data Interpretation and Analysis**

Data interpretation and analysis has been done using the qualitative interpretive tools built on the conceptual idea of the dialogic problem-solution pairs. In *The*

*Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the dialogic problem-solution pairs revolve around the eponymous narrator and his dead palm-wine tapster. In Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the dialogic pairs of boss-customer, human-animal, and the written word-spoken word have been identified and used in the interpretation and analysis of data on the harmful double. In Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* the dialogic pairs of dream-waking have been used in the interpretation and analysis of the primary data. The analysis of the primary data has been organized into three chapters each based on one of the objectives of the study. In conclusion, the discussion on the conceptual framework and the research methodology lays the interpretative protocols for the analytic chapters. The upcoming analysis in Chapter Two critically discusses how Tutuola and Okri use representations of chronotopic cycles in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road* respectively to portray the consciousness of anisotropy in the African chronotope.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 THE ROAD TO AFRICAN LITERARY CHRONOTOPE: READING THE ANISOTROPIC IMAGINARIES OF AMOS TUTUOLA AND BEN

#### OKRI

In the African tale-riddle there “are enigmatic dialogic routines consisting of problem-solution pairs that are most often called ‘riddles’ ... the narrators give us at least preliminary authorization to examine the texts in terms of the interactive combination of folktale and riddle” (Akínyemí, *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, 116).

#### 2.1 Introduction

The chapter interrogates how Tutuola and Okri use representations of chronotopic cycles and consciousness to characterize and promote the idea of the African chronotope. The fictional world in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Okri’s *The Famished Road* portrays an anisotropic vision that defines the narrator’s search for solution to the problem that is posed by the representations of chronotopic cycles. As Akíntúndé Akínyemí rightly asserts in the epigraph above, the preliminary authorization for the interpretive readers to examine given texts as an interactive combination of tale and riddle is normally given by the the narrator(s). In *The Famished Road*, the narrator initiates the story through the riddle involving a river that astoundingly becomes a road. By posing the riddle, the narrator gives the authorization to examine the fictional world in the novel as interactive combination of riddle and tale: “IN THE BEGINNING there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And

because the road was once a river it was always hungry” (3). The narrator’s observation implies that the road that was once a river is a problem for travellers and that they need to look for a solution to avoid becoming victims of its hunger.

The narrator complicates the problem by pointing out that, “In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. [They] could assume numerous forms. Many were birds [who] knew no boundaries” (3). The narrator’s explication of the ‘land of beginnings’ resonates with the anisotropic vision that characterizes the African metaphysical world. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka asserts that rigid compartmentalization of objects and motives does not define the aesthetic value for the African metaphysical world because, “The world of the living flows into the ancestral domain and into the fragile world of the Unborn” (151-152). Soyinka’s assertion is in agreement with the aesthetic value that is used by the narrator in *The Famished Road* of a world where spirits interact with the unborn. With no boundaries among the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn, existence sprouts with riddles running deep into each of the different worlds.

Accordingly, the narrator in *The Famished Road* observes that “the world is full of riddles that only the dead can answer” (89). In their search for resolutions to the riddles, therefore, the living are obliged to cross borders to the ancestral domain the dead inhabit. Similarly, in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the narrator sets

out to “find out where [his] palm-wine tapster who had died was,” with the view to solving the paradox of “there [being] no palm-wine for him again, and nobody [to] tap it for [him]” (5). Subsequently, for him to find a solution to the problem, the narrator has to cross borders into the town of the dead. To this end, the chapter examines how the fusion of time and space in the interflowing worlds in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Okri’s *The Famished Road* enables the subject to cross borders, of the otherwise compartmentalized categories, such as life and death, in an attempt to resolve paradoxes in human existence. As stated in the justification of the study, a lot of scholarly works extol Tutuola and Okri’s allegorical use of Yorùbá mythic order of spirits and ghosts. However, as Akínyemí observes, the Yorùbá riddle-narrative exhibits “enigmatic dialogic routines consisting of problem-solution pairs that are most often called riddles” (116). The aesthetic value in both Tutuola and Okri’s novels is in agreement with Akínyemí’s observation. For this reason, the dialogic routines comprising of problem-solution pairs that characterize the riddle will be used to instantiate the working of time and consciousness in the fictional African worlds that are exhibited in the novels.

Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* works through the aesthetic value of the dialogic problem-solution pairs that characterizes the protocols in the African riddle. The challenge in the novel is that the palm-wine drinkard has lost his social clout and, subsequently his friends do not call on him any more for he does

not have palm-wine by which he could entertain. Metaphorically, his house no longer contains a door for ushering in his friends. The resolution of the riddle is offered as a magic egg from the dead palm-wine tapster. As a literary trope, therefore, the story in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* seems to unfold through the riddling process for the African riddle **my-house-without-a-door-an-egg**. However, the riddle becomes quite complex when the resolution keeps crumbling and, the dead tapster is called upon to supply more suitable answers: “my palm-wine tapster who gave me the first wonderful egg had sent another egg to me from the Deads’ Town, and this one was even more powerful than the first one which broke” (127). Here, the array of resolutions from the dead palm-wine tapster momentarily works magic for the palm-wine drinkard, but soon crumbles down.

How does Okri’s *The Famished Road* fit into the aesthetic value of the African riddle **my-house-without-a-door-an-egg** that is manifest in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*? The story in *The Famished Road* revolves around an abiku narrator who describes his existence that he shares with other spirit-children thus: “We were the ones who kept coming and going, unwilling to come to terms with life. We had the ability to will our deaths” (4). The abiku’s nature of coming to life and going to death at will resonates with the nature of the magic egg of frequently breaking as portrayed in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. In “On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Kimani Njogu observes that the

protocols in the Gikuyu riddle-like poetic dialogue, **gicaandi**, are “characterized by predominance of coded messages involving all aspects of Gikuyu life. These messages are decoded by competing poets” (48). Cued by Njogu’s observation, Tutuola and Okri are considered as posers of dialogic problem-solution routines in the riddling session involving the Yorùbá aesthetic value. Subsequently, the coded messages in Okri’s *The Famished Road* work as the puzzle for the crumbling nature of the magic egg, the resolution, which is depicted in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.

Generally, the riddle works by transcending the otherwise rigid boundaries which ordinarily separate objects and motives paradigmatically as well as syntactically. In the riddle **my-house-without-a-door-an-egg** that is manifest in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road*, the house and the egg are two distinct objects. However, the riddle invites us to perceive the different objects with new eyes in order to establish their figurative connectivity. Hence, the working of the riddle could be illustrated as shown in diagram 2.1 below:

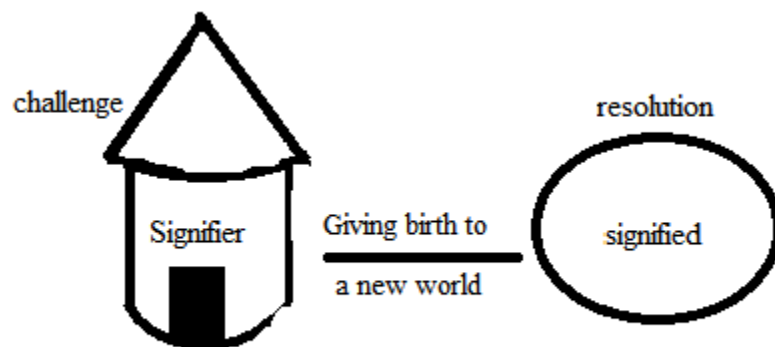


Diagram 2.1 The working of the Riddle

As shown in diagram 2.1 above, the riddle's distinct objects or motives (house and egg) are put together in a syntactic construction as though they were the same thing. Consequently, the riddle operates as a metaphor. In "Chronotope and Metaphor as ways of Time-Space Contextual Blending: The Principle of Relativity in Literature," Ljuba Tarvi observes that there is agreement between chronotope and metaphor: "[T]he very notion of chronotope as interrelated *chronoi* and *topoi* can be expressed via a total reversible conceptual metaphor – Time is Space/ Space is Time" (211). Cued by Tarvi, the world of the riddle that is expressed in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road* operates through the conceptual metaphor of time and space. The challenge is the signifier that is contained in the 'house without a door.' Then, the resolution is the signified that is expressed as 'a magic egg.' Finally, there is the movement of the challenge towards the resolution, through which a new world of metaphorical realities becomes visible.

Interpreted within Soyinka's explication of the African metaphysical world, the riddle spins out through interflowing stages characterized by birthing that brings forth the challenge and its branding (naming), the labour to resolve the challenge or paying of prizes and, finally, the resolution. Of great interest to the study is to establish how the working of time and space in Tutuola and Okri's novels, as the different stages of the riddle unfold, characterize the road to the African literary imagination. The chapter is divided into two main sections which critically

examine how the riddles in the two novels reasonably instantiate the working of time and consciousness in the African literary imagination. The first part discusses the riddle in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* while the second one examines the conundrum in *The Famished Road*. In “Social Roles of Riddles, with reference to Kasena Society,” A. K. Awedoba observes that “Two parties are required in a typical riddling session. It takes a minimum of two individuals but usually a bigger group makes for an interesting session” (38-39). Following Awedoba’s cue, Tutuola and Okri are perceived as parties in the riddling session in which they address themselves to the coded messages in the Yorùbá aesthetic value as portrayed in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road* respectively.

## **2.2 The Challenge of Time: “The Palm-Wine Drinkard and his Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads’ Town”**

In Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the eponymous narrator poses the problem as his own idiosyncratic character of doing nothing else but drinking palm-wine. He explains that though he is the eldest in a family of eight children he earned himself the title of an expert palm-wine drinkard, but all his siblings stand apart because they are hard workers. He drinks palm-wine “from morning till night and from night till morning,” (3). Subsequently, to solve the problem of the alcoholic foible, the narrator’s father engages an expert palm-wine tapster and provides an expansive farm containing five hundred and sixty thousand palm-trees. He seems

to be aware that the narrator brands time and space in terms of drinking palm-wine. The narrator uses the prepositions of time, “from” and “till” to brand his basic preoccupation of drinking palm-wine. For the narrator, therefore, time is a problem that he experiences as drinking of palm-wine.

However, the narrator’s father dies fifteen years later and, strangely, in the sixth month after his death, the palm-wine tapster follows. Henceforth, the riddle, which appears to have been solved by the engagement of the expert tapster, gains complexity. Time appears to lose meaning for the narrator because his entire world had hitherto rested on drinking of palm-wine. He recounts that following the death of his tapster he has no palm-wine causing him a lot of misery: “all my friends did not come to my house” (4-5), anymore. Here, the narrator’s social life is defined by the presence or absence of palm-wine. Subsequently, after staying for a week without palm-wine, the narrator desperately seeks for another palm-wine tapster. However, none could match the expertise displayed by his dead tapster and they were unable to meet his drinking requirement. Therefore, he decides to look for his dead palm-wine tapster in the Deads’ Town with a view to bringing him back home to resume his irreplaceable role.

Nonetheless, there is complication since the palm-wine drinkard and his dead tapster are on different points along the radius of the universe. The narrator has nothing to guide him to his dead tapster apart from the unsubstantiated claim by

some old people that the dead “were living in one place some-where in this world” (5). Subsequently, the palm-wine drinkard must travel along the radius of the universe if he is to find his dead tapster. The narrator recounts that one morning he sets off to look for his dead tapster, empowered by his native juju and his father’s. The narrator travels from one town or village to the other but they were far apart and, therefore, it took him “many days and months ... before reaching a town or a village” (6). Here, it is evident that the narrator’s travel along the radius of the universe is a function of time because the sense of the journey is felt as the many days and months he spends between towns or villages.

Then, the narrator’s challenge seems to lie on the axis of time rather than on the radius of the universe. The narrator recounts that whenever he reached a town or a village, he would spend almost four months there asking around for his palm-wine tapster. If the tapster had not reached there, then the narrator would leave “there and continue to another town or village” (6). The narrator’s observation implies that what separates one town or village from another is not really the spatial imagination that is ordinarily thought to mark different places on the radius of the universe but time. It is no wonder, then, that though the narrator’s words, there, to, and another, in the above quote, seem to describe points on the radius of the universe, the word ‘to’ forms an intersection that goes beyond the spatial plane. It is, arguably, not an adverb of direction but a preposition of time. In essence, the word to, appears to communicate the arrow of time, and therefore, it

marks the adverbs, there and another, as worlds apart. In fact, the narrator seems to be conscious of the words there and another, as spatial categories; only in terms of the almost four months' time he spends in each.

Noteworthy, for the palm-wine drinkard, events are contracted or expanded on the axis of time in a way that separates the literary motives or objects that characterize the fictional world in the novel. In *The Famished Road: Ben Okri's Imaginary Homelands*, Vanessa Guignery observes that Okri's *The Famished Road* is characterized by the Yorùbá aesthetic value of time that is “vertical rather than cyclical or linear” (9). Guignery assertion is based on Okri's novel but it holds true for Tutuola as evidenced in the palm-wine drinkard's awareness of the intersections of time and space initiated by the dialogic problem-solution for the alcoholic foible. The relationship of time and space in the Yorùbá aesthetic value that characterizes the fictional world in Tutuola, as well as Okri's, novel could thus be illustrated as indicated in diagrams 2.2 a) and b) below:



2.2 a) Time-Space Axis    2.2 b) Challenge-Resolution on Time-Space Axis

The interpolation of the Challenge (C) and Resolution (R) on the Time-Space Axis as shown in diagram 2.2 b) above clearly indicates that the literary motives and objects that characterize the riddle in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* are functions of time. In other words, time is the real challenge that the narrator must resolve.

In the Physical world, the arrow of time always points forward, and, hence, as the palm-wine drinkard moves from one town to another, he seems to be propelled by this promise of time. He states that in the seventh month after leaving his home town, he reached a town where he found an old man who was “a god” (6), could therefore tell him the whereabouts of his dead tapster. Here, the promise of time is marked by the deity-like knowledge of the old man for telling where on the radius of the universe the dead tapster could be found. However, following the Space-Time model, as shown in diagram 2.2 b) above, the narrator’s resolution reads as a semi-circle whose diameter is the axis of time. Subsequently, for the narrator to gain the reward of time, the semi-circle must complete itself to a circle, but the other half overlaps the challenge. It follows, then, that the narrator does not get a quick resolution. For the narrator, the old man is a potential respondent for the challenge of the dead tapster due to the wisdom attributed to age in the Yorùbá oral tradition. However, he does not give the narrator a direct but demands to know the narrator’s “name” (6). At this point, the old man implies that the solution lies in the narrator’s branding thus the resolution replicates the challenge.

Interpreted within Soyinka's explication of the African metaphysical world, the resolution is not a world of rigid compartmentalization, and, therefore, it expands into the world of the challenge. Henceforth, a fresh journey starts towards the promise of time. But only after a firm self-branding by the narrator who declares that his name is "Father of gods who could do everything in this world" (6). Here, the narrator considers himself quite knowledgeable in solving any puzzle in the society. In the Yorùbá oral tradition Ifá is considered to be the father of gods. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyemí describes the father of gods as "the Yorùbá god of wisdom, knowledge, and divination who occupies a premier position among Yorùbá divinities" (125). Accordingly, by branding himself as father of gods the narrator is in essence boasting of his wisdom in cracking riddles on the social realities of his society. To test the narrator's self-acclaimed wisdom, the old man asks him to go to an undisclosed place in another town and bring him a specified thing from his black-smith. Subsequently, the narrator must travel once more along the radius of the universe towards the new promise of time.

Mathematically speaking, the right object ( $x$ ) is on a certain point ( $x_1$ ) on the radius of the universe. However, for the narrator, both  $x$  and  $x_1$  are unknown and they could, therefore, be anything or anywhere on the radius of the universe, say  $x_2$ . The narrator must, then, travel on the radius of the universe to the point where  $x_2$  coincides with  $x_1$ . In the Space-Time model, space is a function of time, and hence the functions of  $x_2$  and  $x_1$  must be the same. It follows, then, that the real

challenge on consciousness/ knowing is time rather than the radius of the universe. The palm-wine drinkard recounts how he uses his Ifá-like knowledge to change his consciousness to that of a big bird and “flew back to the roof of the old man’s house” (7). By turning full cycle to the old man’s house, the narrator implies that the knowledge about  $x_1$  coincides with the point occupied by the old man. Hence, the narrator travel’s back to the old man’s house in order to locate  $x_2$ .

The narrator explains that when he perches on the roof of the old man’s house, many people come to gaze at him because of his, otherwise, strange-bird consciousness. Attracted by the commotion outside his house, the old man and his wife come out and discover the bird on the roof. He tells his wife that if he had not sent the narrator to his native black-smith to bring the bell the black-smith was making for him he would have asked him to “mention the name of the bird” (7). Here, the narrator’s way of knowing that he uses to unravel the unknown object  $x$  on the unknown place  $x_1$  implies a temporal way of knowing. His change from human to bird consciousness remains unknown to the old man and his lot because they are not on the same point of lived time as the narrator. The narrator has first travelled a mile away from the old man’s town before changing himself into a bird, after which he flies back.

Then, the narrator sets out on the black-smith’s radius eventually returning to the old man with his bell. He expects the old man to reward his knowledge by

revealing the whereabouts of his dead tapster. Nonetheless, even after delivering the bell to the old man, the narrator does not receive the anticipated reward of time. He recounts that the old man and his wife fail to keep their promise claiming that there was still another wonderful task for him. The reward/ return of time, therefore, reproduces the challenge such that the narrator must travel again along the radius of the universe to find another object or motive before the old man could make him aware of the knowledge that he seeks.

In short, the worlds of the challenge and that of resolution interflow into each other such that the working of the riddle in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* does Soyinka's bidding by creating interflowing circlets of time and consciousness for the narrator. Subsequently, the narrator's search for his dead palm-wine tapster takes on anisotropic vision with circlets of branding and promise, labour, and return/ reward of time. The interflowing circlets of time and consciousness that characterize the riddle enable the novel's plot to progress through a chain of problem-posing and problem-solving.

### **2.2.1 “Father of gods”: Branding and Promise of Time**

In his introduction to *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, a collection of two of Tutuola's novels, Michael Thelwell highlights the special place for naming in the Yorùbá world. While commenting on the birth of Tutuola himself, Thelwell notes that the author was born in the Yorùbá town of

Abeokuta at the eve of the second Ogun festival as “the firstborn son of the Odafin” (177). Here, the birth of Tutuola, a Yorùbá child, seems to gain description from the festivities of the gods. It follows, then, that in the African world, birthing is a unique riddle that poses a temporal challenge that must be named or branded for the African child to become aware of their being in the society.

The name selected for the Yorùbá child is a culmination of ritualistic relation between the human beings and the divinities that govern social life. Accordingly, Thelwell observes that the child’s name is established through divination and consultation with the elders and the grandmother who “whisper the name and irike or birth-poem into the ear of the newborn, thus setting the new spirit in its appropriate place in the world of mankind, society, and history,” (178). Thelwell’s observation implies that it is naming that gives the child awareness of being human, social and historical. Consequently, the name given to the African child initiates the footing for their place in the society, that is, their pursuit for the promise of time.

Among the Yorùbá, and indeed in the African oral tradition, drinking of local brews, such as palm-wine, is a common social activity. Since the narrator admits that he does no other work apart from dinking palm-wine while his siblings are “hard workers,” (3), the name, the palm-wine drinkard could be superficially

interpreted as an idler or sloth. However, the name is re-interpreted in the course of the storytelling in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to mean “Father of gods who could do everything in this world” (20). The narrator’s branding resembles that of the poets in **gicaandi** performances. In “On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Kimani Njogu observes that “**gicaandi** performers consider themselves ... as professionals because they have unique skills utilized in a distinct art form” (52). In agreement with Njogu’s observation, the narrator in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* considers himself – and he is considered by his compatriots – as an expert in the art of palm-wine drinking.

The palm-wine drinkard’s unique branding means that he should be able to do the inexplicable. He is, for instance, able to find the way to death’s house, spend a few days there, escape death’s snares, and finally trap death himself with a net and carry him to the old man’s house (7-13). In another instance, he rescues a lady who has been trapped by a curious creature. The lady’s father, the head of the town, believes that the narrator’s unique branding offers great promise for resolving riddles on social realities declaring that the father of gods should find out where his daughter was (20). Here, the use of the modal auxiliary ‘should’ implies an obligatory tone that leaves the narrator with no option but to look for the abducted. Accordingly, the narrator rises to the challenge and sets off to look for the head of the town’s daughter. He goes to the market as it was the market

day and uses his juju to know all the people in the market. Before long, he identifies curious creature who had duped the head of the town's daughter.

On seeing it, he realizes that the lady had been powerless in the hands of such a curious and terrible creature. He explicates that in spite of herself the lady could not have rested the Skull posing as a complete gentleman. He himself might have fallen in the same trap: "if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go" (21). The narrator's admission implies that the challenge operates on the blind category of consciousness that creates the motives and objects upon which the victim is beguiled. Consequently, the lady could not be conscious that the "gentleman" whom she had fallen in love with was just a Skull dressed up in gentility.

Indeed, the narrator himself is for some time nudged about by the blind category. He narrates that when he saw that gentleman in the market he followed him about in spite of himself, mesmerized by his beauty. He so admires the beauty of the gentleman that it pitches him into low self-image. He feels incomplete in the presence of such untold beauty. However, he soon remembers that in reality the gentleman "was only a Skull" (21). Here, the narrator gains the sight category that things are not always what they appear to be. He realizes that the head of the town's daughter should have been constantly aware of her society's cultural beauty in order to escape the Skull's trap. The Skull represents the lure of foreign

cultural beauty opening a conflict of aesthetics in the head of the town's daughter's consciousness.

The sight category offers the narrator knowledge that enables him to carry out investigation at the Skull's family with the view to rescuing the entrapped lady. The Skull's family's house is the challenge that the narrator must probe in order to find a resolution for the lady. Subsequently, the narrator follows the gentleman who leaves the road about twelve miles from the market and branches into a thick forest. Proudly rising to the new challenge, the narrator uses one of his jujus changing himself into "a lizard" (23). In his 'lizard' consciousness, he is able to clandestinely probe the gentleman. Deep into the forest he observes the gentleman pulling out all his body parts and returning them to their owners. Here, the narrator becomes aware that the foreign cultural lure is built on 'borrowed' cultural and economic bits.

Thereafter, the Skull enters a hole but since the narrator was now a lizard he is able to follow him in. Inside the hole the narrator notices the entrapped lady sitting "on a bullfrog with a single cowrie tied on her neck" (23), a Skull watching over her. He is able to rescue the lady after performing a lot antics associated with his unique branding. At one point the Skulls almost entrap him but he quickly changes himself to air making it impossible for them to trace him. Later, he changes himself from air to his human form. However, when he touches the lady

the cowrie sounds the alarm. However, grabbing the lady he bolts into the forest. The Skulls chase after him. On realizing that they were going to catch up with him, he changes the lady into a kitten and puts her inside his pocket. Then, he transforms himself into a very small bird and flies to the head of the town's home safely. The way the narrator blurs his consciousness fitting it into different containers is characteristic of the poets in **gicaandi** performances.

In "On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre," Njogu observes that in the **gicaandi** performances, "the performer is able to blur the distinction between the fictive world and the real world, between his own experiences and those of the narrator, and, in the process, is engaged in the inversion of the notion of a wholly objective and detached aesthetic that does not respond to social-cultural demands" (54). In agreement with Njogu's observation, the eponymous narrator in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* blurs his consciousness and that of the head of the town's daughter encapsulating the demands of the Yorùbá cultural aesthetics.

The narrator's wonderful work of rescuing the entrapped lady clearly indicates that branding expresses the promise of time. Consequently, the head of the town is quite pleased with the narrator because his claim to the father of gods had turned out true. Here, the lady's father confirms that indeed the narrator is able to deliver the promise of time suggested in his unique branding. In recognition of the narrator's unique knowledge and wisdom in cracking the riddle of the Skull, the

head of the town offers him his daughter as a wife. Nonetheless, the narrator is yet to solve the riddle of his dead tapster.

### 2.2.2 “On the Way to an Unknown Place”: Labour of Time

In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the eponymous narrator searches for the solution to the riddle on his alcoholic foible in the symbolic worlds of Yorùbá which conceal and, at the same time, promise to reveal the whereabouts of the dead palm-wine tapster. However, the narrator realizes that the resolution is not in the symbolic world. He experiences the blind/ sight category making him to remember his dead tapster after living with his wife for six months. He prompts his father-in-law to tell him “where [his] tapster was” (28). The narrator’s forgetfulness and/ or remembrance imply that the labour of time is realized as a gain/ loss of knowledge. By admitting loss of memory, the narrator offers a disclaimer to the great knowledge and wisdom that he possesses in problem-posing and problem-solving. In “On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu notes that in **gicaandi** performances the artists display the tendency to disclaim competence as a way of conceding that “other performers who are better may exist ... or that a certain ... canon exists” (60). Accordingly, in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the narrator’s tendency to disclaim memory is an acknowledgement that the labour of time as the artist engages in problem-solving is not always straightforward in the narrative spaces of the novel.

The labour of time thickens and becomes noticeable from the way the narrator struggles to remain focused on his initial mission of looking for his dead tapster. The narrator recounts that he spent three years with his father tapping palm-wine for himself but he could not tap it to “the quantity that [he] required” (28-29). The narrator’s account suggests that he is still locked in the blind/ sight category. He is aware that there is a functional gap that could only be resolved by locating the dead tapster. He also seems to be aware of the labour of time through the duration of time that he has spent in the town. He also becomes conscious of time through the strange swelling of his wife’s left hand thumb. Touched by a palm-tree thorn, the thumb bursts out giving off a “male child” (29). Here, the conception of the baby in the thumb instead of in the right organ makes the narrator to become conscious that the duration of time he has spent in the town is not yielding the desired labour of time for locating the whereabouts of his dead palm-wine tapster.

The baby who comes out from the thumb is strange since he could immediately talk like a ten-year-old and within an hour after being born he grows to a height of slightly more than three feet. Then, he asks his mother whether she knew his name but on getting a negative answer, he turns to his father, who is as perplexed as the mother. When the baby volunteers his name, the narrator is greatly terrified. He said that his name was “ZURRJIR which means a son who would change himself into another thing very soon” (29). As he talks to his parents, he drinks all the palm-wine that they have tapped. Then, without any prompting, he goes

directly to the town, enters the right house, greets everyone as though he already knew them and asked for food. In this case, it is interesting that the baby seems to instantly acquire knowledge which is ordinarily realized through the labour of time.

Symbolically, the strange baby stands for the negative labour of time whose narrative body poses the new challenge for the narrator and his prize wife. Subsequently, Zurrjir, the unreasonable child, almost depletes his parents' labour through his tantrums of greed. The narrator needs to solve the fresh problem of the unreasonable child before he could move back to the initial problem of his dead tapster. The narrator experiences Zurrjir's challenge as unreasonable demands for food. The baby, then, eats the food greedily leaving nothing for the rest of the society. In addition, he mercilessly flogs a man who tries to stop him from eating the food meant for supper. The narrator recounts that when all the people in the house notice Zurrjir's cruelty, they try to drive him away. However, the baby is quite destructive smashing everything on the ground to pieces including killing the domestic animals: "still all the people could not conquer him" (30). Here, the crushingly cruel nature of the child represents the challenge of time brought on to the narrator and the African society by greed for materiality.

The ungainly child seems to be born out of the narrative imagination in the African oral tradition where the hero is always fighting to overcome oppressive

social forces. In *Oral Literature in Africa*, Ruth Finegan observes that in the African oral imagination, “The hero struggles against ogres and monsters who are trying to devour him” (345). In agreement with Finegan’s observation, the eponymous narrator in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* struggles against the ogre-like child who is trying to devour him. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyemí notes that the Ifá-based stories “put didactic pressure, subtle or otherwise, on the audience to conform to certain religious, social, or moral values. Such tales, in pragmatic terms, aspire to socialize the audience – guiding them to what is ... considered to be the correct mode of action, thought, and behaviour in the social world” (124). The story in *The Palm-wine Drinkard* could be categorized as an Ifá-based story because the eponymous narrator brands himself as the father of gods. The riddle of Zurrjir, therefore, socializes the audience on embracing moderate and fair use of materiality.

In the African symbolic world, a stranger who comes to the society is metaphorically considered to be a child who must, of necessity, be nurtured into the African social expectations and realities. Nonetheless, the tone for his/ her enculturation is far from patronizing since the child is allowed to mutually gain symbolic value as important ‘wealth’ in the society. Inversely, a bad child, like Zurrjir, who tries to patronize his parents, brings untold suffering for the whole society. For the narrator, Zurrjir traumatizes his parents due to his greed. Subsequently, the narrator’s labour of time is transformed into wits for

eliminating the oppressive the bad child, and retrieving of the dead tapster. In the African context, the 'absence' of the dead palm-wine tapster represents the lure of foreign cultural bodies that oppose enculturation in the African cultural world.

Zurrjir embodies the oppressive forces that beguile the African world represented by the narrator. Though, this terrible child also seems to be quite wonderful in his own right, especially due to his mysterious command of time, he must be banished from the society. The narrator recounts that Zurrjir was a wonderful child because he could defeat a hundred men flogging them until they run away: "He was as strong as iron, if he stood on a place nobody could push him off" (31). The narrator is tempted by the lure of such a terrible child with unmatched strength. Consequently, the strange child seems to concretize the challenge of time in the African world portrayed in the novel in a number of ways. First, the strange infant is on the axis of time. Second, due to greed Zurrjir's labour of time is unproductive for the society. Third, the conception and birthing of the unproductive labour of time does not happen according to the laws of nature but as a lure of materiality. The narrator explicates that Zurrjir's mother "did not conceive [him] in the right part of her body as other women do" (30). Here, the narrator's observation implies that the newly born labour of time is strange to the African subject. It operates in an ogre-like manner devouring the aesthetic values that govern the narrator's cultural world.

Given that the narrator and his wife could not tell the name of the newly born time, they had no control over it. Subsequently, the narrator engages in problem-posing and problem-solving in a bid to name the consciousness of the bad child. The riddle on Zurrjir, like the riddle on the big strange bird discussed earlier, is a challenge of time whose function is language. The narrator and his wife's ignorance about their newly born calls for linguistic production in order to enculturate the new consciousness within the Yorùbá world depicted in the novel. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the naming of the newly born is of great importance in the African world. Subsequently, the African literary imagination appears to flower at the linguistic creativity in naming and describing the challenge of time. The labour of time serves as a road to an unknown place that eventually gives the traveller the chance to learn their ability for naming and describing the promise of the newly born.

The unproductive labour of time in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* thickens and becomes visible to the reader through Zurrjir's draconian, destructive and arrogant gait unsettling the people. The narrator observes that because the bad child was stronger than all the people in that town he could not be restrained. He went around the town burning the houses to ashes. When the townspeople realized that the child could not be socialized into their cultural expectations, "they called [the narrator] to discuss how to exile [the child] from the town" (31). Here, the bad child is not welcome. As a symbol, Zurrjir represent the

unproductive labour of time comparable to the labour of the ogre characters in the African oral tradition. It is not surprising, therefore, that the father puts oil around the house after noticing that the child is asleep, and sets it on fire. Having gotten the colonizing child off his homestead: "I pressed my wife's father to tell me where my tapster was and he told me" (32). The narrator's acquisition of the knowledge on the whereabouts of his dead tapster appears to suggest that he would soon resolve the challenge.

Consequently, the linear path of time pointing to the Deads' Town, which the narrator seems to follow, imply that the African riddle has been overlain by a colonizing temporal consciousness. The narrator recounts that after learning the whereabouts of his tapster they woke before dawn and travelled to the "unknown place" (32). The observation confirms that the narrator is blind to the strange consciousness represented by the unknown place. After being told where his tapster is, the narrator should, as a matter of logic, talk of a specific destination. Even if it were to be taken literally that the phrase 'unknown place' means that the narrator has not gone to that place before, it would not be convincing enough. However, it is more tenable for the ensuing discussion for us to remember that the place where the dead tapster is lies on the radius of the universe but the real challenge for the narrator is time. Indeed, the Phrase 'unknown place' seems to communicate the narrator's awareness that he is blind about his destination. He,

therefore, relies on groping or fumbling about with the hope of happening on the road to the Deads' Town.

The narrator appears to be moving in circles with little progress. After travelling for miles, he returns to the town to retrieve his wife's gold trinket: "my wife said that she forgot her gold trinket inside the house which I had burnt into ashes ... She said she would go back and take it" (32). The arrow of time changes direction from the unknown place to the town that the narrator has just left. However, the narrator is not willing to go back for the gold trinket because the labour of time nudges him on to find the road to his dead tapster. The gold trinket represents the lure of materiality.

Going back to the burnt house proves to be unproductive labour. As the narrator's wife probes the ashes with a stick, "the ashes rose up suddenly and at the same time there appeared a half-bodied baby, [who] was talking with a lower voice like a telephone" (33). The baby pleads with the narrator and his wife to take him along but when they start walking away he strikes them with blindness and chokes them. To save themselves, they reluctantly take the ugly baby with them. The ogre-like baby demands to be carried on his mother's head and refuses to disembark. On realizing that his wife would die of exhaustion, the narrator recounts taking over carrying him along: "I was sweating as if I bath in water for overloading, yet this half-bodied baby did not allow us to put him down and rest"

(35). The narrator's explication suggests that the reborn half-bodied child has become their insurmountable ruler. The mysterious rebirth of the terrible child represents the continuities of oppressive social forces.

The narrator is greatly perturbed for he does not know how to escape from the half-bodied baby. However, he soon gets the answer in "Three good creatures ... Drum, Song and Dance" (36). The three are quite important in the African rituals and chants meant to invoke time into offering required knowledge for solving riddles of life. They have been used in Tutuola's novel as symbols of the African temporal aesthetics of knowing and knowledge production. The narrator and his wife are drained from carrying the half-bodied baby but they soon get relieve as "the half-bodied baby came down [and] joined the three creatures at once" (36), in dancing. Interestingly, Drum is said to be beating himself as nobody else could, Song singing himself incredulously, while Dance is dancing as no one else could. It is worthwhile to note that for the African, language is not restricted to words but it extends to performativity of oral tradition in its entirety, such as enthused drums, dance and song. Subsequently, the creative potency of Africa's oral tradition is used to do away with penetrative forces, like slavery, colonialism and neoliberalism.

In the African world, a child is expected to remember his branding and promise of time throughout the journeys that they make in their lives. In *The Palm-Wine*

*Drinkard*, the labour of time appears to translate to whatever significant knowledge that is acquired by the narrator while he transverses the radius of the universe. Remembering what he has learnt seems to be at the heart of realizing productive labour of time. The narrator tells us that after they leave the three creatures and the half-bodied baby, they start a fresh journey but they have no provisions. Luckily, after a short while he remembers that his name is “Father of gods who could do anything in this world” (37). Becoming conscious of what it is like to be ‘Father of gods,’ the narrator is able to employ temporal means of creativity to solve the challenges that he faces as he sets on his new journey to the Deads’ Town. Symbolically speaking, the African is able to reinvent themselves from whatever that subjugates them by invoking the creative potentialities contained in Africa’s oral tradition.

On the journey to the unknown place, the narrator uses his juju to get provisions like food. Here, it is evident that being conscious of his branding is what enables him to become creative. Undoubtedly, branding is a category of language since it is a function of time. Creativity, hence, works at the level of language allowing time to thicken and become visible to the reader. Accordingly, the narrator is able to use temporal ways of knowing to overcome numerous barriers on his way. The eponymous narrator’s exploits in problem-posing and problem-solving in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* represent Africa’s resilient body of creative productivities for solving her cultural challenges.

### **2.2.3 “I and my Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads’ Town”: Return/ Reward of Time**

The narrator finally arrives at his destination very early in the morning. He recounts that they entered the Deads’ Town and asked for his dead palm-wine tapster: “but the deads asked for his name and I told him he was called ‘BAITY’ before he died” (97). The narrator’s observation suggests that the tapster’s branding in the symbolic cycle, while he was living in the world of the narrator, does not necessarily follow him to the world of the deads. Curiously, the name ‘Baity’ means “an extremely caring person who would do anything for their family and friends, but he will take sexual advantage of the drunk college girls” (“Urban Dictionary”). This meaning seems to describe the tapster quite well because while he lived he dedicated all his time to tapping palm-wine for the narrator. However, the genealogy of the name is traced to a family in Roxburghshire, Scotland with fifty-six percent of her members’ most common occupation in 1880 being farmer (“Baity Name Meaning”). The name Baity, therefore, seems to express the tapster promise of time for tending the expansive farm containing five hundred and sixty thousand palm trees bequeathed to the narrator by his father. Baity represents the idea of the African as a drunk who cannot care for the vast resources of Africa which calls for a sober caretaker.

The palm-wine drinkard could not live without palm-wine, he becomes conscious of his existence after the tapster begins tapping palm-wine for him. Consequently,

his search for the tapster is initiated by the need to be enclosed in the motherly space of care and tenderness that the tapster's dedication to tapping palm-wine for him demonstrates. Nonetheless, the tapster is dead. The narrator admits that at this point he could not definitely know the tapster's "present name as he had died" (97). Therefore, the narrator is following the endless pulsations to the tomb for rebirth.

The aesthetics circuit governing the deads in the Deads' Town is different from the one in the narrator's world. Therefore, the deads are baffled to hear that the narrator and the people in his town are alive and that they have not yet died: "[H]e told us to go back to my town where there were only alives living, he said that it was forbidden for alives to come to the Deads' Town" (98). Here, the alives and the deads appear to be irreconcilable aesthetics categories. Their manner of locomotion, for example, is quite distinct. The alives walk forward but the deads walk backward. The narrator does not know how it is like to walk as a dead man. The deads, on their part, seem to have lost the awareness of what it is like to walk as they used to when they were alive.

The narrator begs the deads to allow them to see his tapster. Eventually, they showed him his house. However, since the narrator could not walk backward, he stumbles and hurts his finger which begins to bleed attracting the wrath of the deads for they could not stand the sight of blood. The narrator is therefore drive

outside the Deads' Town. It is worthwhile to note that the narrator sees the tapster's house but he could not enter it. The concretization of the working of the riddle, in the introduction to this chapter, shows that the challenge is an object, a house-without-a-door. Since the object of the challenge appears to subtly describe the object of the resolution, it must also, thinking in pure analytic sense, be sighted as the object of the resolution. It is, then, reasonable to conclude that the narrator could not enter his tapster's house because it does not have a door. In other words, it is an enclosed space.

Accordingly, it is the palm-wine tapster who must come to the narrator outside the Deads' Town. Subsequently, the deads who drags the narrator out of the town goes back and informs the tapster that two alives are waiting for him: "After a few minutes, my palm-wine tapster came, but immediately he saw us, he thought that I had died before coming there, so he gave the sign of the deads to us, but we were unable to reply to him, because we never died" (99). Here, 'the sign of the deads' imply that the language of the deads operates from a distinct aesthetics circuit inaccessible to the alives. Due to this linguistic difference between the narrator and his tapster, conversing outside the Deads' Town becomes an important vehicle for discovering the resolution.

However, in the African world the host must portray utmost hospitality for his guests. Accordingly, the tapster builds a small house for the narrator outside

Deads' Town. Then, he brought "food and ten kegs of palm-wine for us" (100). The narrator's elucidation suggests that since the resolution is described in terms of the object of the challenge, a house-without-a-door, the host must of necessity build a small house outside the town for any narration to take place. Therefore, the resolution seems to be a construction of the object of the challenge outside the town of the resolution in which the palm-wine tapster and the palm-wine drinkard recount their stories, in turns. Nonetheless, within the African colonial experience, the dead tapster seems to construct the small house outside the Deads' Town for his guests in order to distract them from discovering the truth of there being no possibility in the West for getting viable resolutions for the African challenge.

The palm-wine drinkard tells his story first recounting the misery he experienced after the death of the tapster. He wished to die and follow the tapster to the Deads' Town. He missed the palm-wine that he had been tapping for him because "nobody could tap it ... like him" (100). Here, the narrator experiences the lure of materiality as thirst for palm-wine. He tells of his exploits from one town or village to another, asking about for the tapster, and how he got a wife after rescuing her from the hold of a Skull. He ends his narration by intimating that he is quite glad to meet the tapster and that he would like him to go back to the town of the alives so that he could tap palm-wine for him as he used to do before he died.

The tapster, then, goes inside the Deads' Town without saying a word and brings about twenty kegs of palm-wine for the narrator. He only begins his narration after the narrator has drunk to his fill explicating how he had died and travelled to a certain place where the newly dead went first, "because a person who just died could not come [to] Deads' Town directly" (101). The newly dead would have to learn the language of the deads first. He explains that he spent two years there being trained to be conscious of what it is like to be a "full dead man" (102), and that he could not remember what had happened to him before he died. Finally, he points out to him the impracticability of staying with him because in the town the deads could not live among the alives. In the African societies, drinking of palm wine during the interlude of narration is meant to smoothen the throat as well as loosen the tongue a bit for a freer narration. However, the huge amount of palm wine brought for the narrator by his dead tapster singles out some ulterior motive. The dead tapster is, undoubtedly, trying to get the narrator to be drunk so that he could neither make out nor remember the deads' alternate narrative. Consequently, the narrator would never be able to assemble the pieces of the broken story of his cultural death.

Nonetheless, the palm-wine drinkard and his tapster's narration outside the Deads' Town appears to augment the discussion, in the introduction, about the working of the riddle in the African literary imaginary. Structurally, the riddle could be described as 'challenge-myth-resolution.' Here, myth is constituted by

the mysterious objects of both the challenge and the resolution. The object of the challenge, a house-without-a-door, is an enclosed space. It is, therefore, a mystery that requires narration for its nature/ meaning to become apparent. For the resolution to be recognized, in the descriptive terms of the challenge, the object of the challenge must be sighted there. Then, since the object is an enclosed space that does not allow entry, a resemblance of it must be built outside the resolution's town for narration to take place. More importantly, the alternate narration is supposed to dissolve the mythic objects of the challenge and the resolution such that the narrators are able to retrieve the concealed door. Then, they are able to gain entry into the mythic object. However, in Tutuola's riddle, the dead palm wine tapster wears pretensions of irreconcilability in order to prevent the narrator from entering the resolution's house.

Subsequently, the reward/ return of time that is ordinarily achieved through the alternate narration of the objects of the challenge and the resolution is not understood by one of the parties. In the African riddle, the narration normally creates some kind of understanding, especially about the apparently irreconcilable traits between the objects of the challenge and the resolution. As the narrator expounds there seems to be something strange in Tutuola's riddle: "Even I myself knew already that the deads could not live with the alives, because I had watched their doings and they did not correspond with ours at all" (102-103). Having come to the painful awareness about the irreconcilability of the aesthetics between the

deads and the alives he is ready to go back home empty handed. However, the dead tapster throws a fetish at him by promising to give him anything that pleases him in the Deads' Town. Interestingly, he gives the narrator an egg whose magic involved was to giving him "anything that [he] wanted in this world" (103). Subsequently, the African challenge of whipping realities of poverty and underdevelopment seems to be resolved through the wonderful object gained at the resolution. Interestingly, the resolution of the riddle is a magic egg, a gift out of Baity's unending generosity. Here, there is a question that lingers in the mind: Does the magic egg solve the narrator's thirst for palm-wine?

There are a number of miracles that the narrator is able to perform using the egg. First, he sets off from the Deads' Town on a shorter road instead of travelling through the bushes as he has done when looking for his dead tapster. He has taken ten years to find his tapster but now he would take a relatively shorter time to travel back home. Secondly, having reached home, he uses the magic egg to feed the whole world. He relates how he commanded the egg to produce food and drinks to the satisfaction of his people: "I sent for all of my old friends and gave them the rest of the food and the drinks" (123). His symbolic existence regains meaning. All the people in his town become his friends once more. However, one day he commands the egg to produce food, as usual, but as the people scramble for it they break the egg to his annoyance. He pieces it together the best he could. Nonetheless, the next time he commands it to produce food; it produces whips,

instead, and beats the people senseless. The narrator loses his friends once more. Subsequently, his challenge of cultural alienation deepens.

Symbolically perceived, the image, symbol and metaphor of the narrator's broken magic egg portend the penetration of the African riddle by oppressive social forces. The African riddle has a grotesque body of consciousness that turns everything in the entirety of the African environment into searching containers for the challenge-initiated objects of 'absence,' be it cultural alienation or economic underdevelopment. However, the oppressive social realities that overlay the narrator's labour of time are at the heart of the narrator's problem-posing and problem-solving in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Duped through the fetish of materiality, the narrator follows modernistic cravings to the grave, 'the Deads' Town,' where there are only 'dead' objects for the resolution of the challenge of time.

The modernistic motives and objects for the resolution of the African riddle appear quite attractive and, hence, they are dished out as the panacea for eliminating Africa's history of poverty and underdevelopment. However, after a short time they normally become scrambled by their very impracticability to produce desirable outcomes for the African. The scrambled/ broken egg, therefore, is a metaphor of the dismembering the African body by oppressive social realities. Tutuola's riddle starts with the birth of the narrator who happens

to possess an idiosyncrasy of drinking palm-wine and doing nothing else. Symbolically, the branding of the narrator as ‘the palm-wine drinkard’ implies that the labour of time is felt as palm-wine drinking. Now that the magic in the Deads’ Town is irreconcilable with the world of the narrator’s. The perpetual going to the Deads’ Town and returning home with a scrambled egg forms a vicious cycle that appears to be picked up in the abiku myth in Okri’s *The Famished Road*.

The riddle in Okri’s *The Famished Road* that is coming up shortly appears to take up the uncompleted narrative in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. In the riddle, the author appears to turn to Africa’s oral tradition and its unique creative productivities that enthuse the living, the dead and even the unborn into becoming alternate narrators. The African riddle, therefore, would never be complete without the narrative voices of the various containers of consciousness, such as the human, the tree, the air, the road, the river or even the idea itself, like going to the west for solutions and coming home to the same hopeless state of down-and-out. In conclusion, the ‘broken-magic-egg’ idea of the eponymous’ world in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is roused in Okri’s riddle in *The Famished Road*, as an abiku-narrator, who henceforth, allegorizes a speaking body of modernity.

### 2.3 Turn for Okri: “The Famished Road that was once a River”

Like Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the trope that makes Okri’s *The Famished Road* a classic of all times is the unique deployment of the riddle which creates pristine mythic imagination as the challenge slides beneath the bar of signification in search of the resolution. In “Folklore and Society in Transition: A Study of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road*,” Saradashree Choudhury posits that “Both Okri and Tutuola share a common resource which takes into account elements from the traditional metaphysical belief system blending them with aspects of the real, the esoteric and the supernatural” (4). Like most of the critical works done on Okri and Tutuola’s novels, Choudhury’s praises the authors’ ingenious artistic blending of objects of realism with the African mythic imagination. However, how the authors’ mythic imagination operates could only be more clearly understood by examining the working of time and consciousness through the riddles in the novels.

From the previous discussion on Tutuola’s riddle, it is evident that for the narrator, the real challenge is time rather than travelling along the radius of the universe. How, then, does Okri’s riddle operate? Does it follow the same cycles as those portrayed in Tutuola’s riddle? Of great importance, how does it instantiate the working of time and consciousness in the African literary imaginary? In a bid to get answers to these pertinent questions, Okri’s riddle of “The Famished Road that was once a river” will be examined under the subheadings: “Cycle of

rebirth,” “Cycle of Symbolic” and “Time’s womb.” The cycle of rebirth is hinted at by what happens at the Deads’ Town in Tutuola’s riddle. The dead palm-wine tapster cannot go back to the world of the living despite the usefulness he would have there of tapping palm-wine for the narrator. However, for the palm-wine drinkard to have gone to the Deads’ Town and then returned home to the world of the living with a magic egg could be thought of as a kind of rebirth.

Before the tapster dies he has a unique branding, ‘Baity,’ that indicates the meaning of his existence. He tends the palm-wine drinkard’s palm trees as well as tap palm-wine for him. This cycle of life is what forms the Symbolic. Nonetheless, now that he is dead he seems to occupy an enclosed space that the living cannot enter. This enclosed space for the dead implies the idea of ‘Time’s womb’ because the dead are living there in their own way that is unique from what it is like to be alive before they die. Additionally, the palm-wine drinkard seems to gain understanding after the alternate narration with his tapster outside the Deads’ Town. However, when he reaches home he soon faces almost the very kind of challenge that he has been struggling to solve for ten years. This apparent loss of the reward of time implies the notion of ‘Time’s tomb’ that seems to direct the possibilities of rebirth for Africa to a linearity of poverty and underdevelopment. It is, then, from these insights that the discussion on Okri’s riddle of ‘The Famished Road that was once a river’ is engaged.

### 2.3.1 Cycle of Rebirth: “Giving Birth to a God or to a New World”

In Tutuola’s riddle of “The palm-wine drinkard and his dead tapster in the Deads’ Town,” the narrator follows his dead tapster to the Deads town with the hope of impressing on him to return to the world of the living. However, the conversing between the two outside the Deads’ Town creates the understanding that the dead cannot return to the world of the living. Consequently, the narrator’s quest does not seem to be finitely resolved. In the African world, the riddling session involves a series of riddles. While the various riddles may appear to be distinct from one another, there is always a thread that ties them together. It is no wonder, then that the problematic of rebirth expressed in Tutuola’s riddle seems to be implicitly picked up in Okri’s. The dead palm-wine tapster in Tutuola’s riddle does not enjoy a ‘presence’ of rebirth because the aesthetics of death, which he represents, conflicts with the aesthetics of life in the narrator’s world. Nonetheless, he becomes an executor of rebirth by periodically sending the palm-wine drinkard a magic egg for alleviating the worsening social realities in the narrator’s village. In Okri’s *The Famished Road*, Azaro, the abiku narrator, like the magic egg in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, is indefinitely reborn, almost at will.

In *The Famished Road*, Azaro is a spirit-child and hence, he is conscious of the cyclic order of existence involving birth, living, death and rebirth. He explains the nature of a spirit child, thus: “As we approached another incarnation we made

pacts that we would return to the spirit world at the first opportunity ... Those of us who made such vows were known among the Living as abiku, spirit-children” (4). Here, the embodiment of the child implies a new, presumably short existence for they must keep their promise to expeditiously return to their place of origin. The abiku seems to be doomed to oscillate in the cycle of rebirth: “We were the ones who kept coming and going, unwilling to come to terms with life. We had the ability to will our deaths” (4). The spirit child appears to be conscious of the challenge of time that initiates their cycle of rebirth. Interestingly, the spirit-child’s consciousness appears to conciliate with Tutuola’s riddle in which the palm-wine drinkard is unwilling to accept a life devoid of fulfillment.

However, after discovering the supposedly irreconcilable objects of the deads and the alives, he leaves the tapster alone. In Okri’s riddle, the abiku narrator explains the consciousness of rebirth, thus: “To be born is to come into the world weighed down with strange gifts of the soul, with enigmas and an inextinguishable sense of exile” (5). The narrator’s explication suggests that being born is a riddle, an enigma. The newly born, therefore, experiences a sharp sense of separation, perhaps because they are conscious that their birth will not resolve the challenge of existence. In any case, the spirit-child is supposed to return to the world of origin at the first opportunity they get for willing their death. The narrator explains why the infant experiences the awareness of exile at birth: “There are many reasons why babies cry when they are born, and one of them is the sudden

separation from the world of pure dreams, where all things are made of enchantment, and there is no suffering” (4). Here, the narrator implies that infants would rather stay in their sheltered spaces of origin than be born into the symbolic where suffering seems to prevail.

Conjecturally, the palm-wine tapster in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* could have been unwilling to be reborn. Azaro, the abiku narrator, in *The Famished Road* points out his own unwillingness to be born: “One of the reasons I didn’t want to be born became apparent to me after I had come into the world. I was still very young when in a daze I saw Dad swallowed up by a hole in the road. Another time I saw Mum dangling from the branches of a blue tree” (8). Azaro’s observation implies that he fears being born because he is conscious of what it is like to face the challenge in Okri’s riddle of “The famished road that was once a river.” He visualises Dad, his father, suffering from the rapacity of the road. He also gets confused at the idea of his mother suffering to the extent of taking her own life.

The cycle of rebirth appears to be galvanized by two major factors. The first one is happiness or a feeling of fulfilment. The abiku narrator explicates: “The happier we were, the closer was our birth” (4). The narrator’s observation suggests that the feeling of contentment is one of the categories that breed birthing. It seems that the moment the unborn is floating in feelings of fulfilment and glee, they are

suddenly pushed into birth. The second factor is sustained anguish. The abiku narrator relates: “In not wanting to stay [alive], we caused much pain to mothers. The pain grew heavier with each return. Their anguish became for us an added spiritual weight which quickens the cycle of rebirth” (5). Here, the mothers’ anguish is heightened by their being conscious of an acute feeling of loss that results from each bewildering return of the short-lived infant. Here, the objects of the resolution for the African riddle of poverty and underdevelopment seem to swing on the axis of anguish/ contentment.

The cycle of rebirth appears to operate from the alternate consciousness of happiness and anguish. When the infant is born, mothers are beside themselves with joy. They normally perceive the newly born as the onset of a new cycle of life: “In the early years Mum was quite proud of me. ‘You are a child of miracles,’ she would say” (10). Indeed, the child seems to have special powers for he is able to read people’s minds and to foretell their futures. He tugs his mother to safety just before a seemingly fatal accident takes place. The child appears to be resolutely bent on making his mother happy. The abiku narrator reveals: “One of the many promises I made before birth was that I would make her happy. I had chosen to stay” (266). Mum appears to be gladdened by the child’s promise of time, especially when it becomes clear that he seems to be determined to stay. The abiku-child seems to allegorize how the colonial fetish is used to lure the African into embracing Eurocentric solutions for Africa’s challenge of poverty,

underdevelopment and cultural alienation. The solutions are plastered on Africa on the justification that they have already worked magic in Europe. They are also recommended whenever the continent appears to be wallowing in misery.

Like the magic egg in Tutuola's riddle, the child is soon broken. He is erratically ill or unhealthy and troublesome, pitching the mother into anguish. The abiku narrator explains one such incident, thus: "When I woke up I found myself in a coffin. My parents had given me up for the dead ... I learnt afterwards that I had lingered between not dying and not living for two weeks" (9). The child's limbo of death and life causes his parents untold suffering. They consult diviners and healers to no avail. Later, the abiku narrator learns that during his limbo he had sapped his parents' energies and finances. The realization seems to galvanize his feeling of traumatic separation from the world pure dreams: "As a child I felt that I weighed my mother down. In turn I felt weighed down by the inscrutability of life. Being born was a shock from which I never recovered" (8). The narrator's observation implies that when parents experience anguish on account of the child's limbo of death and life, it heightens the child's sense of exile and quickens the cycle of rebirth.

Mum seems to be always nurturing the narrator to be a good child for them, especially for Dad. After discovering that the narrator is an abiku, she cautions him against responding to voices of spirits in case they call him: "Think of us.

Think of your father who suffers every day to feed us. And think of me who carried you in my womb for more than nine months and who walks all the streets because of you” (352). Mum appears to be imploring the spirit-child to be considerate for Dad and her since their lives are functionally dedicated to him. If he leaves them, their existence will completely lose meaning. Here, the category ‘Dad,’ appears to represent the idea of the African as labour of time. Therefore, Dad slaves away as a loader for Eurocentric companies but he has hardly enough money for feeding his family.

Nonetheless, Dad seems to be continually governing Azaro to behave in desired social patterns. He, for example, permits him to seat in Madame Koto’s bar after school for the proprietor thinks that he will bring her good fortune. Later, he falls out with Madame Koto for apparently keeping quiet on an incident in which he is stoned by her friends. Consequently, he declares her an enemy, and sternly warns Azaro: “From now on Madame Koto is our enemy. Azaro, if I see you there again, I will flog you and put pepper in your eyes” (352). Here, Dad seems to govern the spirit-child’s association with other people.

For birth to take place, ‘Mum’ must become pregnant for the infant. Then, she must find an infant who is willing to be born. If no child is found, the woman might endlessly remain pregnant without ever giving birth. The abiku narrator relates such a case involving the goddess of a strange island to which he has been

abducted by women in white smocks: “Her mighty and wondrous pregnancy faced the sea ... Her magnificent pregnancy was so startling against the immense sea that she could have been giving birth to a god or to a new world.” (15-16). Later, a voice from a strange cat asks the narrator whether he knows why the goddess has not yet given birth. He admits ignorance, upon which the cat educates him: “Because she hasn’t found a child to give birth to. If you’re not careful you will be born a second time tonight” (16). However, the goddess is not lucky for Azaro already has a mother and he is not willing to be galvanized into the cycle of rebirth by the strange-looking women have taken him by force. He therefore, escapes from the island.

Madame Koto’s bar appears to be a kind of fulcrum as far as sighting of the birth of the new world is concerned. At first, it is a humble abode for a few people who drink some palm-wine after work or whatever their engagements. There are days that are quite low. During such time she would remain in her room after instructing Azaro to “Call [her] only when customers arrive” (92). However, later the bar is frequented by all kinds, spirits and humans alike. Madame Koto renovates it and erects a new signboard to express its promise for a new world. The abiku narrator observes that “MADAME KOTO’S BAR had changed [, with a new] signboard had a painting of a large-breasted mermaid serving drinks and steaming peppersoup” (240). Nonetheless, the time of bliss for the bar appears to be short-lived. Some patrons arguing over politics get heated up and one of them

attacks the carpenter who had renovated the bar. This sparks a fight that ends up setting the bar on fire. By the time, the fire is extinguished, the bar is in disarray.

Madame Koto is enraged and she chases the patrons away beating them indiscriminately with a broom. Azaro explains Madame Koto's consciousness at that point, thus: "She must have known that a new cycle had begun" (262). The beginning of a new cycle portends the birth of a new world. The abiku narrator relates his own consciousness: "I sat up and looked around [and] I knew we were in the divide between past and future. A new cycle had begun, an old one was being brought to pitch, prosperity and tragedy rang out from what I saw, and I knew that the bar would never be the same again" (256). The narrator's observation implies that a new cycle may bring forth a new world of prosperity or tragedy.

In the discussion on Tutuola's riddle of "The palm-wine drinkard and his dead tapster in the Deads' Town," the significance of the bar is associated with disembarking of the narrator to prepare them for the beginning or end of narration. The bar, therefore, depicts the divide at which the old cycle is pitched while a new one is sprung into being. Madame Koto's bar, hence, represents the point at which the old time is pitched and a new time is born. The discourse of the rebirth cycle appears to operate through the intersections of the axes of anguish and happiness or tragedy and prosperity. When the new world brings forth perennial suffering,

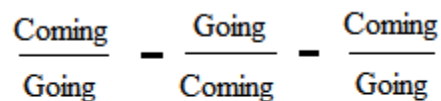
the new cycle seems to be bent on anguish. Dad and Mum together with Azaro, for instance, experience a lot suffering, especially after they seem to rub politicians the wrong way. Azaro explicates: “It seemed our lives kept turning on the same axis of anguish” (322). Azaro’s explication shows that almost every new cycle in their lives pitches them into a world of suffering.

It is worthwhile to note that the cycle of rebirth, like all other cycles in the African literary imaginary, is a significant section of language for understanding the African metaphysical world. Previously in the chapter, it has been noted that the African literary imagination makes signification of meaning through the riddle’s succession of alternate signifiers of Myth and Narrator. Nonetheless, in the cycle of rebirth, the signs of signification are the gerunds ‘Coming’ and ‘Going’. They appear different from the nouns ‘Myth’ and ‘Narrator’ because they are verbs in the progressive aspect acting as nouns.

However, ‘Coming’ and ‘Going’ of the spirit-child are categories of myth. The fateful birth and thereafter sudden death of the spirit-child is perplexing to their parents. They cannot understand why the child keeps coming and going. On one occasion when Azaro seems to float between life and death for a long time, Dad implores him: “Our life appears to be a sad music. So how can you come and then leave us? Do you know our misery” (387). Dad appears to consider coming and going of the child as enigmas. Therefore, coming and going could be

conceptualized as categories of myth. In the earlier debate in the chapter, it has been pointed out that the African literary imagination elicits meaning through the riddle's succession of alternate signifiers of Narrator and Myth. In the cycle of rebirth, however, the category of Narrator seems to be blurred such that it does not gain prominence over Myth at any given time. It operates only as myth. Consequently, the alternate signifiers are comprised of Myth and Myth. Remember, the narrator bears unique branding, and hence, he is an enigma.

In short, the cycle of rebirth gains signification through the riddle's succession of alternate signifiers of Coming and Going. Here, both Coming and Going operate at the level of Myth. The mode of signification is indicated in diagram 2.3.1 below:



**Diagram 2.3.1 Coming-Going dialogic pairs**

If the signifiers Coming and Going are replaced with Myth, then the signification chain would comprise a succession of alternate signifiers of Myth. Without a visible signifier of Narrator, the cycle of rebirth endlessly remains a perplexing entity. The thick bar between alternate signifiers represent the intermittent world of Dad and Mum to which the short-lived spirit-child comes and then leaves.

### **2.3.2 Cycle of Symbolic: “Life is Full of Riddles that only the Dead can Answer”**

Being born implies leaving the world of the unborn, and subsequently occupying some space on the radius of the universe. The Symbolic, hence, marks the place of the infant in the human world, history and time. An early insight on the consciousness of the symbolic cycle seems to be expressed by the abiku narrator’s spirit companions when they probe the narrator on his awareness of being in the world of the living. The conversation goes, thus:

“What are you doing there?” One of them would ask.

“Living,” I would reply.

“Living for what?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why don’t you know? Haven’t you seen what lies ahead of you?”

“No.” (8)

The questions the abiku narrator is subjected to appear to be quite pertinent for the understanding of the working of consciousness in the symbolic cycle.

The temporal/ spatial categories that appear to define the symbolic are implied in the conversation between Azaro and his spirit companions’ voices. First, the spirit-child must have a sense of being on the radius of the universe. The sense of being is suggested by the adverb “there” at the beginning of the probe. In

Tutuola's riddle of "The palm-wine drinkard and his dead tapster in the Deads' Town," discussed earlier, the spatial category "there" seems to be quite significant for the narrator. He describes his travel between towns or villages as "being there" and "leaving there." He would be "there" in one town for about three months asking about for the whereabouts of his dead tapster, and if the tapster has not reached "there", he would leave "there" to the next town. Interestingly, in the current riddle of "The famished road that was once a river," the category "there" seems to become an important subject of inquiry involving the spirit-children's voices and the abiku narrator.

Nonetheless, being there in the world must have a definite purpose for the spirit-child. For the abiku, the purpose seems to be simply living, but his spirit companions' voices problematize it by probing its meaning. The second category, therefore, is having a clear purpose for being in the world. Finally, the spirit-child should have vision about what lies ahead of them in their lives. The category of vision implies that the spirit-child is able to dream of a future that defines the purpose for their being in the world. Dreaming of a future, for the spirit-child, suggests a resolve for staying on with the hope of turning being into better worlds. As a result, the spirit-child would find a permanent footing on the radius of the universe instead of oscillating between living and dying.

The dynamism in the world of Dad and Mum in *The Famished Road* is expressed through the coming and going of the spirit-child. The abiku narrator observes: “We [, the spirit-children,] kept coming and going ... Our cyclic rebellion made us resented by other spirits and ancestors. Disliked in the spirit world and branded amongst the Living, our unwillingness to stay affected all kinds of balances” (4-5). The narrator’s observation suggests that the oscillation of the spirit-children between coming and going causes untold tilts in the symbolic cycle. Being at the top of the axis of time, the spirit-child’s coming and going implies oscillations in that axis. Since the radius of the universe is a function of time, oscillations in the axis of time translate to shifts in the spaces occupied by Dad and Mum. Enigmatically, the spirit-child does not merely relate with Mum and Dad in the ordinary mathematical interpolation on XYZ planes. Accordingly, since the spirit-child is on top of the axis of time, coming means sliding down the axis to the radius of the universe while going is sliding up from the radius of the universe to the top of the axis. Coming positions the spirit-child at the centre of Mum and Dad’s world while going creates a gap at the centre.

Like the cycle of rebirth, the symbolic operates on the riddle’s succession of alternate signifiers of Myth and Narrator. However, in the symbolic the overriding category is Narrator. The category of Myth appears to be discounted by both Mum and Dad. The abiku narrator explains that neither Mum nor Dad could afford another ceremony to get rid of his connections to the spirit world: “And

anyway they did not really want to believe that I was a spirit-child” (10). Mum and Dad’s disbelief appears to suspend the category of Myth. There appears to be sporadic conversation between Dad and the spirit-child. At one point, Dad sadly asks the child: “Why do you keep running away from me, eh” (41). Curiously, the child says nothing but stares at the faces of the compound men which he perceives as being big and stamped with hardship and humour.

However, there is always a lot of conversing between the spirit-child and Mum. The abiku narrator relates: “When Mum came from hawking that evening I told her about the white man” (321). Then, he observes that there is a little flicker of interest after which she tells him about the political thugs who have materialized indicating that election time is near. Later, she promises to tell him about the white man: “I will tell you a story another time,” (325). After a little moment of silence, she seems to change her mind: “When white people first came to our land” (325). During different moments, Mum also tells the spirit-child about Dad, about his efforts and struggles to feed and offer shelter for them. The categories ‘Mum’ and ‘Spirit-child,’ therefore, seem to be the overriding signifiers for the symbolic cycle. The chain of signification is, thus, as shown in diagram 2.3.2:

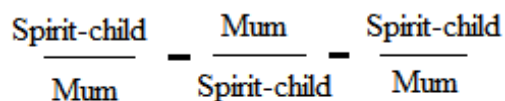


Diagram 2.3.2 Mum-Spirit-Child dialogic pairs

The Spirit-child slides beneath the bar of signification to Mum for meaning. Then, Mum moves up to the top of the signification bar in order to describe the spirit-child. Nonetheless, Mum can only describe the Spirit-child after getting a narration from them. She, hence, slides beneath the bar to the Spirit-child. To tell their story, the Spirit-child gains prominence and ascends to the upper side of the bar.

The thick bar between alternate signifiers represents the role of Dad of linking the old set to the new one. Unlike Mum and Spirit-child, Dad does not have a visible body but his presence is felt through the connecting role of feeding the two. While apparently mourning his lack of a visible body, Dad hums: “When I die, no one will see my body” (54). For the spirit-child Dad’s pronouncement is like magic. He relates that “[Dad], then, for no apparent reason, almost as if snatching riddles out of the air,” (54), uttered the pronouncement. However, Mum is shocked. She bursts into tears and rushes out of the room. Dad does not have a visible body because he is preoccupied with the welfare of Mum and the spirit-child.

The spirit-child occasionally gets lost and he tries to locate Mum. The abiku narrator explains such an incident, thus: “Stumbling along, looking for Mum, I found myself in a dark street” (13). Wherever the spirit child gets lost Mum goes looking for him. When the spirit-child is found, Dad organizes a party to celebrate him. In such a case, Madame Koto comes to the party and asks the gathering, “Is

this the boy we are celebrating?” (56). Then, the crowd answers in the affirmative. She proceeds: “Is this the boy who was lost and found?”(56). Again, the answer is affirmative. Afterwards, she says a prayer for him: “The road will never swallow you. The river of your destiny will always overcome evil. May you understand your fate” (56-57). Everyone is so amazed by her prayer that they all remain silent for a moment. Recovering from his shock, Dad says ‘Amen,’ and the crowd follows suit.

Since Mum and the spirit-child form a dyad, when Mum seems to be unwell the spirit-child becomes restless. At one point, the abiku narrator relates his fears at the possibility of his mother’s death. He rushes to Madame Koto and cries: “My mother is dying” (67). He is told to boil some water, and he rushes home and lights a fire. When Mum seems to be recovering, she speaks in a feeble voice as though from a great distance: “I saw my son in the land of death. Azaro? ... What were you doing there?” (68). Azaro responds that he is here with her. Mum’s inquiry suggests that she has almost died. She oscillates between life and death. Subsequently, she is able to see the spirit-child who follows her into the world of the spirits.

Dreaming futures for the mother-child dyad appears to be Dad’s most significant role. He soars with happiness as he tells Mum and the spirit-child: “I see us dancing on lovely beaches. The water sings for us. I see the days of our misery

turn over and become bright. My son, my only son, your mother has never ceased being a young woman with hopes, and me a young man” (387). By dreaming futures for the alternate signifiers of Mum and Spirit-child, Dad enables the signifiers to establish Mum and the child’s histories of existence as well as a sustained vision for a better world.

The spirit-child occasionally follows Dad in his dreaming nebula: “I followed Dad sometimes in his cyclical dreams. I followed him in his escape into the great realms and spaces, the landscapes of genius, the worlds before birth, the worlds of pure dreams and signs” (565). The spirit-child’s account implies that Dad is a kind of pointer that guides the signifier into possible futures for the symbolic cycle. Then, why does the spirit-child only follow Dad from time to time? For the signifier to follow the sign of Dad, represented by the thick bar in the signification model, it must first gain prominence by ascending to the upper side of the signification bar. The Spirit-child is not always at the top of the signification bar, and therefore the child can only follow Dad from time to time depending on whether his signifier gains prominence or not.

Nonetheless, the sign of Dad does not simply point in one direction. It could lead the signifier forward into possible futures or backward into worlds of origin. It is, therefore, anisotropic in nature. During a case in point, the abiku narrator is perplexed by oddities he notes in the forest, especially about a snake that emerges

from some roots and bites a mysterious woman. When he relates the oddities to Dad, he responds without explicating: “That’s good. Life is full of riddles that only the dead can answer” (48). Dad’s response implies that a possible resolution for the oddities would require travelling back to the world of origin. If one of the alternate signifiers wears a body that is unfamiliar to the preceding or following one, the sign of Dad tries to resolve the mystery. Being unable to read into or make back reference, implies that the signifiers would become disconnected. In such a case, “The air [is] full of riddles ... books and mouths and forgotten histories” (353). The role of Dad, hence, is to point the signifier to the text where it can gain signification.

Generic shifts of alternate signifiers, for example, may create ambiguity for the preceding or following signifiers. The body of, say, verse may look quite distinct when it is transformed into prose. A case in hand involves Okri’s poem “An African Elegy. The poem is not easily recognisable when its poetic structure is collapsed into prose: “We are the miracles that God made to taste the bitter fruits of time ... Destiny is our friend” (388-389). Dad whispers the poem to the spirit-child as though he were a flower. He seems to be encouraging him to be resilient until the signification of a better world is achieved.

### **2.3.3 Time's Womb: "Mystery of Riddles that not even the Dead can Answer"**

The cycles of rebirth and symbolic have been discussed separately though they form the interflowing African metaphysical worlds of the unborn, the living and the dead. The cycle of rebirth is a world of the spirit-child's myths of coming and going while the symbolic is the world of Mum and Dad which operates on the discourse of finding a footing on the radius of the universe for the spirit-child. Nonetheless, what actually describes the operation of the interflowing categories of the unborn, the living and the dead in the African literary imaginary is the notion of time's womb. The infant, here, considered as the spirit-child, is at the apex of the axis of time while the symbolic categories of Mum and Dad are on the farthest ends along the radius of the universe. Mum and Dad are considered as representations of the Lacanian categories 'other' and 'Other.' It has been noted in the review of literature that Lim (2005) describes the endless looping of the spirit-child as a Lacanian subject who is "an empty nothing with infinite craving for something" (68). However, the spirit-child's oscillations between the worlds of the living and the dead is governed by the time's womb.

In symbolic terms, the coming of the spirit-child is defined as being born. In essence, it means that the spirit-child has come to the radius of the universe along which Mum and Dad exist. However, as already explained earlier, the spirit-child is on top of the axis of time. To come to the radius of the universe, the spirit-child

must slide down the axis of time to the intersection. Arriving there, he occupies a point that is at the centre of Mum and Dad. Going means that the spirit-child slides from the radius of the universe to the apex of the axis of time. Symbolically, going means to die. Since the spirit-child slides down the axis of time in order to be born, time must of necessity contain womb. The spirit-child does not come from Mum's womb for the category of Mum is on the radius of the universe and not on the axis of time. When the spirit-child dies, he slides from the radius of the universe to the top of the axis of time. This implies that time also contains tomb. Nonetheless, the spirit-child is able to slide down the axis of time again and again to be reborn on the radius of the universe. It is, therefore, more logical to talk of time's womb rather than time's tomb.

Coming and going of the spirit-child implies shifts in the axis of time. The abiku narrator relates: "How many times had I come and gone through the dreaded gate? How many times had I been born and died young? And how many times to the same parents? I had no idea" (5). The narrator's observation implies that a spirit-child could be born to the same or different parents. Since the categories Mum and Dad are not fixed but can move along the radius of the universe, it means that every time the spirit-child is reborn ideally there must be a shift in the axis of time that approximates the centre between the points occupied by Mum and Dad. The shifting axis of time means that there seems to be no relationship between alternate comings and goings of the spirit-child.

Consequently, whenever the spirit-child comes or returns to the time's womb, it appears to be the pitching of an old world, and the onset of a new one. Time's ability to somehow conceal the spirit-child makes it almost impossible for those on the radius of the universe to see it. The spirit-child, therefore, appears to be enraged by the inability of humans to make out the shifts in time. The abiku narrator observes: "There was not one amongst us who looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigours of existence ... We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few ever learn to see" (3). The narrator's observation suggests that the heartlessness of human beings is caused by blindness. Unable to see what their world of yesterday implies for tomorrow, they end up impoverishing what would otherwise flower into a world beauty and sweet dreams.

At first, the abiku narrator seems to be fumbling about for understanding of human existence. However, there is a spirit who later on tries to explain to him why life seems to contain endless paradoxes: "From a certain of view the universe seems to be composed of paradoxes. But everything resolves. That is the function of contradiction ... when you can see everything from every imaginable point of view you might begin to understand" (376). Here, the spirit seems to teach the narrator to scrutinize a given aspect of life from every possible shifts of time so that he is able to resolve any kind of paradox that the aspect initiates. The spirit further explains why human beings realise little development even after appearing

to exert themselves to projects for years: “[They] have the great curse of forgetfulness. They are deaf to the things they need to know the most” (379). Forgetfulness appears to be a great curse for humanity because it is caused by the ever shifting axis of time.

Forgetfulness is human blindness that is galvanized by time. It implies failure on the part of humans to establish the link between the spirit-child’s alternate coming and going. However, since the spirit-child comes and returns to the time’s womb, it is possible for human to gain sight. All what is required is for them to scrutinize time’s womb to establish the connection between the signifiers of Coming and Going. Understanding what it is like to die or for others to die, defines human love and tenderness. The abiku narrator is inconsolable after his mother seems to give up in life blurting out: “I am tired of this life anyway ... I want to die” (266). The narrator is shocked at his mother’s defeatist attitude. He observes: “I had a vision of her death ... I remembered her face when she nearly died just after my homecoming ... she didn’t know that the only thing that could make me stop [crying] was a promise from her that she would never die” (266). The abiku narrator understands what it means to die and therefore he wishes that his mother would live forever.

Dad, too, eventually, establishes the connection between the spirit-child’s coming and going. The abiku narrator follows Dad’s new discoveries: [He] found that all

nations are children; it shocked him that ours too was an abiku nation, a spirit-child nation, one that keeps being reborn and after each birth come blood and betrayals” (567). Dad’s new sight enables him to understand that all nations are worlds which have not attained significant development. He is shocked to discover that his own country’s keeps alternating between different political regimes creating a blood bath every time there is coming and going. Understanding seems to be a crucial step in coming up with a new vision for the children of this world.

In short, understanding creates prominence for the signifier of time’s womb but blurs the one of time’s tomb. In the African literary imagination, the sign of time’s womb takes prominence. It enables the existence of an interflowing world in which the subject is constantly redefined through the category of rebirth. Subsequently, despite the challenges the literary imagined Africans face, they always find a way of triumphing.

#### **2.4 Conclusion**

Both Tutuola and Okri’s riddles initiate pristine African literary imagination as portrayed in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road*. Nonetheless, Soyinka (1976) appears to extol myth as the artistic object that makes the African literary imaginary unique. He ably explains how myth expounds the working of time in the African metaphysical world with its cyclic order of existence

involving interflowing categories of the unborn, the living and the dead. While assenting to Soyinka's extolling of the African mythic imagination, the critical examination of Tutuola and Okri's novels, in the chapter, succinctly indicates that the cyclic order of existence in the African world is indeed galvanized by the riddle.

The working of the riddle in both Tutuola and Okri's literary imaginaries assumes the structure: challenge — myth — resolution. The challenge is an enclosed space since it could be described through the trope, "My-house-without-a-door." It is, therefore, an enigma that requires to be explained through myth. The resolution is also an enclosed space. Logically speaking, hence, the object of the trope must be sighted there for the narrator to recognize the resolution. It follows, then, that both the challenge and resolution are enigmas that call for a narrator to explain them away. Myth becomes the vehicle for the pertinent explication. The narrator must of necessity be a person of unique branding to be able to unravel what lays in the enclosed spaces.

In Tutuola's riddle, the narrator bears the name, "Father of gods who could do everything in this world." He is, therefore, an enigma himself and requires to be explained away through myth. Likewise, Okri's narrator is branded abiku or spirit child. Subsequently, he is also an enigma that needs to be explicated through myth. Perceived from the conceptual idea of the dialogic problem-solution pairs

both Tutuola and Okri's riddles elicit meaning through the succession of the alternate signs of myth and narrator as shown diagram 2.4 below:

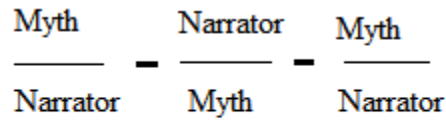


Diagram 2.4 Myth-Narrator dialogic pairs

Simply put, the challenge is a myth that slides beneath the bar of signification to the narrator for meaning to become visible. The thin line separating the sign of myth from that of narrator is the bar of signification.

In Okri's *The Famished Road* and Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the narrator needs to prepare for narration. He is, therefore, served with palm-wine or other alcoholic drink to loosen his tongue for a good narration. This act of hospitality for the narrator is termed, here, as dis-embarking at the bar. It is indicated in the chain of signification by the thick bar between alternate signs. Being an enigma, the sign of narrator interestingly takes prominence over the sign of myth. Thus, it moves to the upper side of the signification bar. However, it needs to be explicated through myth, and therefore, it slides beneath the bar of signification to the myth in search of meaning.

Then, at the end of the first part of narration there is normally an interlude of hospitality for the audience to prepare to take up the alternate role of narrator. In

Tutuola's riddle, the palm-wine drinkard is offered twenty kegs of palm-wine after completing his part of narration outside Deads' Town. This marks another point of dis-embarking at the bar. Afterwards, the sign of myth takes prominence over that of narrator and it moves to the upper side of the signification bar. Nonetheless, it must slide beneath the bar of signification to the sign of narrator for meaning.

In Tutuola and Okri's riddles, myth could be thought of as the language for explicating the narrator's enclosed spaces of the challenge and the resolution. It has already been noted in the discussion in the chapter that language is a function of time. Therefore, since the real challenge for the narrator is time, the challenge could be thought of as the infant, the newly born time, that requires to be explained by a narrator who bears unique branding. Subsequently, the succession of the alternate signs of myth and narrator in both Tutuola and Okri's riddles is a temporal indicator. Review of literature indicates that almost all the scholars who have examined *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road* concur that both Tutuola and Okri's imaginaries typically represent the African Metaphysical world.

The extraordinary insight gained from the critical examination of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Okri's *The Famished Road* in the chapter is that the riddle happens to be the trope that galvanizes the working of temporal/ spatial

categories in the African literary imagination. It initiates unique intersections between the axes of time and the radius of the universe. Therefore, African literature could be more clearly understood by examining how the temporal/spatial connections are expressed through the riddle's alternate succession of the signs of myth and narrator. The major concern for African literature, then, is to name the newly born with the view to understanding the promise it portends. For African literature, the infant is the newly born time. Undoubtedly, the interflowing world of the unborn, the living and the dead in the African metaphysical world is made possible by the riddle's alternating signs of myth and narrator. Its productive literary capabilities are drawn from the idea of time's womb. In conclusion, the African literary imagination acquires its true dimension when viewed from the trope of the riddle with its succession of pristine alternate signs of myth and narrator.

In short, Tutuola and Okri's riddles, discussed in the chapter, revolve around problem-posing and problem-solving on the social forces splitting the narrator's cultural aesthetics into nodes of different potential represented in the twinned relationship between the palm-wine drinkard and his dead tapster, and the abiku's world of pure dreams and the world of social reality surrounding Dad and Mum, respectively. The lives of the palm-wine drinkard and the abiku-narrator are therefore given their cultural tastes by the aesthetics of the Deads' Town and the world of pure dreams, respectively, and hence operate like a commissioned

manuscript. The next chapter critically discusses how the narrators in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* try to disembark from the bar of the aesthetics of the commissioned manuscript.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 MEMOIRS OF DIS-EMBARKING AT THE BAR IN ALAIN

#### MABANCKOU'S CHARACTERIZATION OF THE AFRICAN

#### CHRONOTOPE

“Polyphony makes reference ... to the plurality of an utterance, that is the ability of an utterance to encapsulate someone else's utterance, thus creating a dialogic relation between the voice of the self and the voice of the other” (Njogu, “On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” 47).

#### 3.1 Introduction: Opening the Bar of Aesthetics

The chapter interrogates how Alain Mabanckou uses representations of time and space in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to portray the consciousness of being a harmful double in the African chronotope. In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator introduces the story through a puzzling statement, inviting the reader to react: “let's say the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* gave me this notebook to fill, he's convinced that I – Broken Glass – can turn out a book, because one day, for a laugh, I told him about this famous writer who drank like a fish” (1). Here, the puzzling motive or object in the narrator's statement is the comic presumption upon which the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* establishes a circuit of the aesthetics of writing between Broken Glass and the caricature of the famous writer who drank like a fish. In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the narrator, too, uses a puzzling statement to draw the attention of the reader to the story: “so I'm just an animal, just a dumb, wild animal, men would say, though if you ask me

most of them are dumber and wilder than any animal, but to them I'm just a porcupine" (3). The puzzling motive or object in the porcupine-narrator's statement is the presumption upon which the aesthetics circuit is opened varying the potential on the animal and the human nodes.

In "On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre," as noted in the above epigraph, Kimani Njogu aptly observes that an individual utterance has the ability "to encapsulate someone else's utterance, thus creating a dialogic relation between the voice of the self and the voice of the other" (47). In agreement with Njogu's assertion, the narrator's individual utterance in both *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* exhibits plurality creating a dialogic relation between the voice of the self (the eponymous narrator) and the voice of the other (the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*, and the men who make a claim to a more refined status, respectively). Therefore, the plurality of the individual utterance in the novels produce dialogic relations that characterize the riddle-narrative in the African literary aesthetics. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akíntúndé Akínyemí observes that in the riddle-narrative, the texts "consists of a puzzling question or a statement concerning the status of an object to which the audience is invited to react" (116). The narrator in *Broken Glass* uses the puzzling statement to invite the reader to react on the nature of the comic presumption on writing that is attributed to the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*. Likewise, the narrator in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* uses the puzzling statement to invite the reader to react

on the nature of the comic presumption on the human-animal divide that is attributed to human beings.

Presumption is the condition upon which something is assumed to be true, often without proof or proper authority. In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator attributes the presumption on writing to the nature of the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* of taking things literally: “which shows you should never joke with the boss, he takes everything literally” (1). Here, the eponymous narrator suggests that the boss’s presumption is built on the character of taking things plainly. That is, the boss’s failure to interrogate how an individual utterance may encapsulate figurative meanings. In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the porcupine-narrator attaches the presumption about the human-animal divide to the human character of only believing in what they can see: “they’d see nothing special in me, just one of those mammals with long sharp quills, slower than a hound dog, too lazy to stray from the patch where he feeds” (3). Here, the porcupine-narrator invites the reader to not only interrogate what is special about him, despite his animal state, but also why human beings might be dumber than the animal, in spite of their claim to intelligence. The porcupine-narrator hints at the possibility of short circuits occurring in the aesthetics system through the presumption of human beings that he could not stray from his patch. A short circuit occurs when the current strays from the established pathway of the aesthetics circuit.

Interpreted within the dialogic problem-solution pairs that characterize the riddle-narrative, the presumption contained in the narrator's puzzling statement in both *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* can be illustrated as shown in diagrams 3.1 a) and 3.1 b) below:

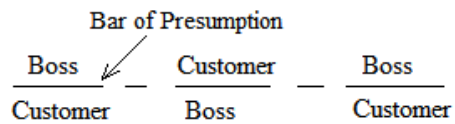


Diagram 3.1 a) Boss-Customer dialogic pairs

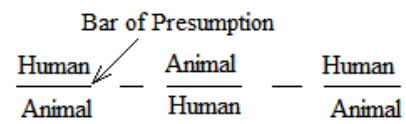


Diagram 3.1 b) Human-Animal dialogic pairs

As indicated in diagram 3.1 a) above, the presumption in *Broken Glass* functions as the bar of signification for the dialogic relation between the narrator and the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*. In the first dialogic pair, the category Boss that represents the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* is at the top of the bar since the presumption is attributed to him. In the second dialogic pair, the category Boss slides down but the category Customer that defines the narrator moves above the bar of presumption, as the narrator declares: “I’m not his ghost, I’m writing this for myself as well, that’s why I wouldn’t want to be in his shoes when he reads these pages” (2). The dialogic pairs in *Broken Glass* keep alternating in this manner forming a chain of signification through which the representations of time and space in the novel become visible to the reader.

As shown in diagram 3.1 b) above, the presumption in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* functions as the bar of signification in the dialogic relation between the porcupine-narrator, animal, and the human. In the first dialogic pair, the human

category is at the top of the bar since the human is the one associated with the presumption. The animal category that represents the porcupine-narrator is below the bar since the porcupine-narrator has been, for years, “the double of a man they called Kibandi” (3). However, in the second dialogic pair, the animal category moves to the top of the bar while the human category slides below. The movement is attributed to the porcupine-narrator’s dismissal of the object that has traditionally been given as proof for the division: “I wouldn’t want to be a man, to be honest, they can keep their so-called intelligence” (3). Like in *Broken Glass*, the dialogic pairs in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* keep alternating, creating a chain of signification through which the representations of time and space in the novel become visible to the reader.

Here is a short synopsis of the two novels. In *Broken Glass*, the story revolves around the local bar that has been recently opened by an African named Stubborn Snail who has a fancy of the written word. The name of the bar, *Credit Gone West* is rather curious. The proprietor seems to be inclined to the ethos of the age of writing but he caricatures the African cultural values, especially the oral tradition. To immortalize his bar, he strangely commissions one of the patrons by the name Broken Glass, who is drunk most of the time, to churn out a book concerning the greatness of the bar. He gives him a notebook in which to document the lives of the patrons and the daily happenings in and around the bar. Soon, Broken Glass becomes the fancy of the bar as the patrons’ demand for the inclusion of their

stories in his notebook. As they go about their business in the bar, Broken Glass, artistically listens to their narratives – at times feigning lack of interest – mostly about their broken lives in Europe or in Africa. Then, he occasionally jots down in what they say in the notebook. He also secretly muses at the boss's comic character of caricaturing the oral aesthetics while wholly putting his trust in the aesthetics of writing.

*Memoirs of a Porcupine*, on its part, revolves around a malevolent African character by the name Kibandi. Through some strange ritual, he initiates a porcupine to become his double. Then, he commissions the porcupine, who has now become his true servant, to engage in spiteful activities of eliminating anyone who might be his enemy. The porcupine readily accepts his role as a harmful double. Kibandi, himself, is a harmful double, having been initiated by his father, Papa Kibandi, when he was a small boy. Therefore, apart from the porcupine, he has a human double who is said to have no mouth but who appears to eat through Kibandi's. Whenever the porcupine 'eats,' meaning kills, a victim, the human double lies down in Kibandi's hut satiated by the kill. In total, they 'eat' ninety-nine victims. However, the hundredth target happens to be a double of a baby that the porcupine has killed. The baby's double is able to kill Kibandi together with his human double but he lets the porcupine to walk free. The porcupine tells the story of his life as a harmful double to the Baobab tree. He admits that he could not have told the story while his human master lived.

There is an appendix at the end of *Memoirs of a Porcupine* containing the Stubborn Snail's letter about certain details on the origin of the manuscript. Acting in his capacity as the literary executor to his lifelong friend, Broken Glass, and as the bar owner of *Credit Gone West*, the Stubborn Snail explains certain details about what he thought to be Broken Glass's singular manuscript. In a feigned tantrum, he points out his displeasure at the French publishing house for having changed the name of the manuscript from *Credit Gone West* to *Broken Glass* during the process of publication. He then explains the strange circumstances under which a new manuscript had been discovered. Presumably, after writing the manuscript, *Credit Gone West*, Broken Glass threw himself into river Tchinouka, which had consumed his mother. A team trying to recover his body discovered the second manuscript in a thicket by the river. The proprietor of the bar pleads with the publisher not to change the name of the second manuscript, to let it remain *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. He claims that the late Broken Glass must have thought that the story could be best told as an allegory because to him life is an approximate version of a fable. That is the gist of *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* upon which the chapter discusses how Mabanckou uses representations of time and space to portray the consciousness of being a double in the African chronotope.

The idea of a double presupposes that the self represents the presence of the other. In "The Thing and its Doubles," Achille Mbembe proposes that a double is an

image that claims to represent presence, immediacy, and facticity, and that “what is special about the image is ... its ability to annex and mime what it represents, while in the very act of representation, masking the power of its own arbitrariness, its own potential for opacity, simulacrum, and distortion” (142). Mbembe’s proposition suggests that the double operates as a dialogic relation in which the image unpredictably produces other multiple images forming the processes of experiencing the different systems of aesthetics in the text.

### **3.2 *Credit Gone West*: “Writing Plurality in the Singular Manuscript”**

Mabanckou’s representations of time and space in *Broken Glass* become visible through the commissioned writing of the manuscript *Credit Gone West*. The movement in the plot and the thickening of time and space become observable in the dialogic structure that the eponymous narrator, Broken Glass, adopts in writing the manuscript. He writes it in two parts, labeled “First Part,” and “Last Part.” The two parts form the dialogic superstructure through which the intersections of time and space become visible to the interpretive reader. The “First Part” and the “Last Part” labels are separated from the parts that they name by some blank spaces creating dramatic pauses in the writing of the story.

Between the “First Part” label and the page number ‘1’ there is some blank space, whose artistic relevance is to raise anticipation in the reader for the puzzling statement the eponymous narrator is about to make: “let’s say the boss of the bar

*Credit Gone West* gave me this notebook to fill, he's convinced that I – Broken Glass – can turn out a book, because one day, for a laugh, I told him about this famous writer who drank like a fish,” (1). Here, in a riddling-like session, the narrator invites the reader to react to the status of the object presented in the puzzling statement. By the words “for a laugh,” the narrator cues the reader to the comic nature of the object. He attributes the problem in the puzzling statement to the boss's comic flaw: “which shows you should not joke with the boss, he takes everything literally” (1). The narrator further reveals other things attributable to the boss's comic flaw as: his selfish nature of wanting the notebook only for himself, barring others from reading it, and boasting that the notebook would, through its enduring aesthetics of the written word, forever catch the fancy of the people in his country. Contrastingly, he caricatures the aesthetics of the oral word as “just black smoke, wild cat's piss ... worn-out cliché ... old ... crap” (1). The Stubborn Snail creates an open circuit of aesthetics freezing the flow of the current such that the written word and the spoken word stand as two separated nodes in the circuit. What the Stubborn Snail fails to realize at the moment is that opening the bar would lower the voltage not only at the node of the oral word but also at the node of the written word.

Progression of plot in the “First Part” is achieved through the narrator's creativity in producing a chain of caricatures to showcase the Stubborn Snail's claim to the rising fancy of the aesthetics of the written word, on one hand, and the apparently

dwindling fancy of the spoken word, on the other hand. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyemí notes that “semiotic innovation and updating of images in enigmatic forms” (179), enables the artist to show how an aesthetic system catches the fancy of people for a period of time but eventually becomes worn out. In *Broken Glass*, the Stubborn Snail’s claim to the age of writing opens a conflict between the aesthetics of the written word and the spoken word. The eponymous narrator creatively caricatures the conflict as a row between the owner of the bar *Credit Gone West* and the Church people: “who, noticing their Sunday congregations had dwindled, launched a holy war, flinching their Jerusalem bibles at the door of *Credit Gone West*, saying if things went on like this it would be the end of Sunday mass in [the] district” (3). By pitying *Credit Gone West* against the Church people, the narrator artistically cracks the Stubborn Snail’s fancy of the written word into voices of morality.

Then he allows the cracked voices of morality to engage in a dialogue revealing how the Stubborn Snail’s claim catches the fancy of the people in his country. Accordingly, he describes the comic event in the Cabinet where the Stubborn Snail gets the divided support of the political class. The narrator describes how certain leading politicians called for the immediate and permanent closure of the bar *Credit Gone West* while others opposed such a move, though without offering convincing grounds: “the country suddenly found itself divided over this petty spat” (5). However, the Stubborn Snail’s bar sees the light of day through the

support of the Minister of Agriculture, Albert Zou Loukia. He raises his voice saying several times “I accuse, I accuse” (6). Overnight the bar owner becomes famous as every TV channel speaks about his fate: “people felt sorry for him, they wanted to help him, and even sent letters of support and petitions on behalf of the good guy they started to call ‘the Stubborn Snail’, but the ones who really supported him were the drunks, who always stay loyal till the last bottle runs dry” (5). By describing the Stubborn Snail’s true supporters as the drunks, the narrator closes the circuit between the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* and the patrons. The representations of time and space in Broken Glass’s mission of writing the manuscript becomes visible to the reader from the way the load in the aesthetics current – be it gain or loss of vitality, wild cat’s piss or black smoke – now freely flows between the nodes of the boss and the customers.

The narrator signals the end of the “First Part” by expressing the need for a good rest since as he reckons he has been writing flat out for several weeks now and some people make fun of what they call his new occupation (66). The significance of the dramatic rest is to give the reader time to digest and consider the depth of the load and its direction in the aesthetics current based on what Broken Glass has so far written in the manuscript. As the writer, Broken Glass becomes aware of the thickening of time into several weeks through the much that he has jotted down in his notebook. He has merged his voice, the voice of the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* and the voices of the other customers in the bar into a single

run-on sentence, separated only by commas and speech marks creating a polyphony of voices in the manuscript. He writes that there is a rumour that he is working for an examination to get him back into teaching: “they say that’s why I want to stop drinking and stop coming here, but that’s nonsense, I’m hardly going back into teaching aged sixty-four, am I, in any case, I need rest, I need to put down my pen, not read back what I’ve written” (66-67). Here, the narrator uses the dramatic rest to create a short circuit freezing the flow of the aesthetics current in order to encapsulate the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*’s intention of establishing an open circuit of reading the manuscript: “when he gave me this notebook he said from the start it was only for him, no one else would read it” (1). The reader is thus given time to digest the boss’s claim to an open circuit of reading against the writing and the reading of the manuscript that have so far occurred.

The ‘First Part’ ends on page sixty-seven, which, arithmetically, almost corresponds to sixty-four, the advanced age of the narrator. Page sixty-eight is a blank space, and then the label “Last Part” appears on page sixty-nine. Page seventy is a blank space, and it serves to raise anticipation in the reader for the puzzling statement that the narrator is about to make in the introduction to the “Last Part” of the manuscript: “today is another day, a grey day, I try not to be sad, and my poor mother, whose spirit still drifts somewhere over the dirty water of the Tchinouka, always used to say you shouldn’t let the grey days get you

down, perhaps life's waiting for me somewhere" (71). The narrator expresses the distinction between the "First Part" and the "Last Part" of the manuscript as different days with the same tone such that he appears to be reposing the riddle contained in the "First Part." Therefore, the load of the worn-out cliché – "in Africa when an old person dies a library burns" (1) – is carried over to the "Last Part" of the manuscript. The current is artistically presented in the image of the dirty water of river Tchinouka. By establishing an equivalent of the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*'s caricatured body of the spoken word, the worn-out cliché, in his own late mother whose spirit floats over the murky water of river Tchinouka, the narrator introduces a short circuit upon which the bursts of laughter in the boss can be heard in the current part of the manuscript.

The reposing of the riddle offers the narrator a useful technique for creating short circuits from which bursts of laughter periodically occur in the manuscript. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyemí observes that while posing the challenge, "Bits of information are often embedded in contemporary riddles, offering clues as to when the riddles were first introduced" (181). Accordingly, by making reference to the scatological scene in the river Tchinouka over which his mother's spirit drifts, the narrator cues the reader to the reference of scatology made in the "First Part." Subsequently, the narrator expects the reader to remember how the Stubborn Snail has not only ascribed the scatological value of wild cat's piss to the aesthetics of the spoken word, but also how he has made the spoken word's

vitality to encapsulate the cliché of an African library being set ablaze whenever an old person dies. In terms of mood, the cue enables the narrator to fit in the “grey day” of the “Last Part” within the sobriety of the main riddle posed at the beginning of the novel. The narrator’s remembrance of his mother’s advice, not to let the grey days put him down, implies a possibility of the spoken word regaining vitality in the aesthetics circuit.

The narrator expresses the dramatic rest that he takes between the “First Part” and the “Last Part” as an awareness of space: “I’ve been sitting in my corner here since 5 o’clock this morning, I’ve got a bit more distance on things now, so I should be able to write about them better” (71). The dramatic rest enables the narrator to have a better perspective of what has been happening in the bar Credit Gone West. He claims that having got a bit more distance, he can now write more objectively. By raising the issue of subjectivity, the narrator separates the self (the voice telling the tale) from the things reported in the story such that the voice of the narrator is in a dialogic relation with the story. Subsequently, the story acquires a taste – a certain tone – that affects not only the events being recounted but also the consciousness of the narrator. The narrator writes, “it’s four or five days now since I finished the first part of this book, it makes me smile when I read through some of the pages, they go back quite a way now, I wonder whether deep down I should be proud of it” (71). Here, the representations of time and

space in the manuscript become visible to the reader through the way the narrator gauges the manuscript against his own feelings.

The smile that the narrator wears after reading through some of the pages, raises the familiar humorous tone used in the “First Part” for describing the boss of the bar Credit Gone West’s presumption on writing: “because one day, for a laugh” (1). The narrator uses comic strips as the basis for writing such that the commissioned manuscript promotes the consciousness of a bubbling stream of laughter. The narrator rereads a few lines to get the comic tone of the manuscript, and he concludes: “mostly it frustrates me, nothing really fires me up, in fact everything irritates me, it’s nobody’s fault, I feel weak, my tongue feels mushy, as though I’d eaten a meal of pork and green bananas the previous day, and yet I haven’t eaten anything since yesterday” (71). Here, the narrator becomes aware of the time he has been writing the first part of the manuscript as the sense of eating that leaves the mouth with an awful taste. The narrator’s frustration, irritation and awful taste are attributable to the dialogic nature of the laughter – as the narrator reads the caricatured accounts of the boss of the bar Credit Gone West and the patrons, he realizes that the caricatures apply to him, too, making him a laughing stalk.

Reading back a few pages into the “First Part,” the reader comes across the caricature on the Stubborn Snail’s proposition to match Broken Glass with

Robinette. Broken Glass has written that he would not have minded taking up the proposition since he had not had a sexual affair lately. However, he turned down the offer because presumably he does not want to offend his boss or make him jealous, for the boss has a fancy with Robinette. He has written that it would not have felt right for him “perched on top of her, imagining the Stubborn Snail himself jigging around her like an epileptic rabbit” (66). Through this caricature of an epileptic rabbit, the narrator gets a good laugh out of the Stubborn Snail. Due to its arbitrariness, however, the caricature acts as the Stubborn Snail’s comic double turning the stream of laughter back onto Broken Glass. The narrator has written that Robinette might not have accepted him because he is a wet dishcloth, and there would have been a big technical problem, since he thought he could not match her vitality (66). Through his doubt, he stratifies the caricature of the epileptic rabbit into two comic parts. The first part allows him to get a good measure of laughter out of the Stubborn Snail. The second part allows the stream of laughter to flow backward to the narrator turning him into a laughing stalk. The disturbing comic awareness makes it necessary for the narrator, at this point in the story, to beg for a good rest, “just to drink, do nothing but drink, take huge big gulps of drink” (66). The dramatic pause gives the narrator an opportunity to digest and consider how the comic double strays from the pathway he had established of getting a good measure of laughter out of the boss.

Noticeably, the dialogic relation between the “First Part” and the “Last Part” does not only operate as the superstructure for the manuscript *Credit Gone West*, but it also permeates the narrator’s presentation of the accounts in the story. In the superstructure, the “First Part” operates as a chronotopic cycle whose intersections of time and space begin with the puzzling statement, “let’s say the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* gave me this notebook to fill...because one day, for a laugh,” and ends with, “not read back what I’ve written, and carry on when I’m ready, whenever that might be” (1-67). While the narrator makes a clear distinction for the “First Part,” he reveals his intention of pressing on to the “Last Part,” which forms another chronotopic cycle. The “Last Part” begins with the puzzling statement, “today is another day, a grey day,” and ends with, “I must go now, there’s nothing left for me to do round here, I must get rid of this book, but then where can I throw it, I don’t know, I turn back towards *Credit Gone West*, though I don’t know why” (71-165). By turning back towards *Credit Gone West*, the narrator suggests that the “Last Part” intersects with the “First Part,” creating a circular motion.

Subsequently, the intersections of time and space in the “First Part” and the “last Part” of *Broken Glass*’s manuscript operate as a semi-circle that presses on for completion into a circle. The diameter of the circle falls on the axis of time while the arc expands on to the axis of space as illustrated in diagram 3.2 below:

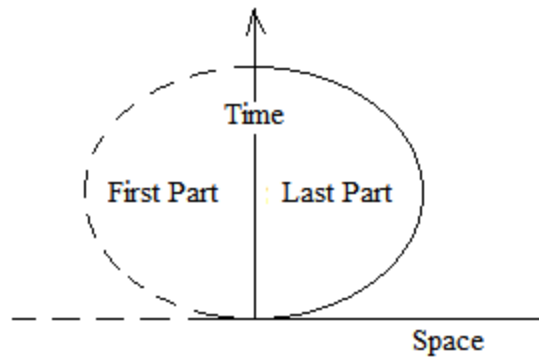


Diagram 3.2 Manuscript on Time-Space Axis

As indicated in diagram 3.2 above, what separates the “First Part” of the manuscript from the “Last Part” is the axis of time. Therefore, the two parts are spaces that operate as functions of time.

Broken Glass’s manuscript comprises of multiple stories about the patrons of the bar Credit Gone West. The narrator jots down bits of the patrons’ verbal versions creating a plurality of voices in the manuscript. Broken Glass writes that he meets the characters at the bar Credit Gone West almost in the same manner: “they just pop up out of nowhere, suddenly there they are, with tears in their eyes and a tremor in their voice” (35). The encounter with the patrons forms the first part in which Broken Glass laughs at their miserable condition. He introduces the Pampers guy, one of the characters, through the puzzling statement: “how could I ever forget the man who’d been turned out of the family home like a mad dog, I got a good laugh out of him a couple of months back, a pathetic guy who now goes round wearing Pampers nappies, like a newborn babe” (22). The narrator

uses the comic strip about the Pampers guy to create a bubbling streamlet of laughter in the manuscript. After giving the humorous assessment, the narrator allows the characters to tell their story. That day, he writes, the Pampers guy seemed to be struggling for words, but all at once he got into his stride and went out with his story: “so you see, Broken Glass, my wife has the nerve to say I’m not allowed out, when I’m telling you, she has no right to tell me what to do, I paid all the bills, but she made all the rules, whoever heard of a thing like that, in this crumbling world” (25-26). By allowing Pampers guy to tell his tearful story, the narrator creates a dialogic relation in which he becomes the listener.

The Printer, like the Pampers guy, relates to Broken Glass how his life as a decent man in France has been wrecked by Céline, his French wife: “I don’t know if you understand what’s meant by a decent man in France, but I was a man who earned his living, a man who paid his income tax on time, a man with a post office savings account, a man who even had shares on the stock exchange in Paris, a man who was saving for his pension in France” (38). The Printer’s account implies that he attains vitality in France through his career as a printer. However, his French wife cheats on him with the workers, and quite appalling with his own son from another marriage. Unfortunately, when the Printer catches his wife with his son in bed, there is a backlash from the two family members turning him into the assailant. He recounts his unlucky fate to Broken Glass, thus: “I’m quite sure that shit of a no-good lawyer got down dirty in bed with Céline, because the

minute she has a black man in front of her she has to get her teeth into him ... she got her divorce ... most importantly she got me repatriated” (52). The Printer, like the Pampers guy, is turned out of his family home and treated as though he were a criminal. In France, the written word has been the rhythm of life for the Printer but now he roams the streets of Trois-Cents, “spilling out his story to someone or the other” (53), and the spoken word has become the rhythm of his life.

By leveling and stratifying the singular manuscript into a multiplicity of narrative voices, *Broken Glass* manages to create equivalents of the Stubborn Snail’s action of opening the bar of aesthetics into two nodes with the different potentials of the written word and the spoken word. Subsequently, he uses the human tales about the fortunes and misfortunes of the Pampers guy and the Printer, in the hands of their families, to demonstrate how the dialogic nature of the different circuits of aesthetics, the written and the spoken words, is severed by opening the main circuit into two nodes with different potential. The Stubborn Snail’s desecration of the spoken word into the scatological value of ‘wild-cat’s piss,’ ‘crap’ and ‘worn-out cliché,’ on one hand, and deification of the written word into the value of an enduring memory, on the other hand, is felt, in the narrative spaces of the manuscript, as an unfair turn of events in the family driving one of the members away from the family home like a mad dog. In short, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* constantly promotes the Stubborn Snail’s tone about the differential nodes of the spoken word and the written word through the equivalents he creates

in the stories of the Pampers guy and the Printer. However, how the eponymous narrator builds an incremental sense to the Stubborn Snail's tone is ultimately felt in the game of pissing between Robinette and Casimir.

### 3.2.1 “Playing Gicaandi of Pissing”: The Dialogic Power of Words

At the literal level, the pissing contest between Robinette and Casimir is difficult to make sense of within the flow of the material representations in *Broken Glass*. In “Alain Mabanckou’s Masterfully Unstructured Novel of Addiction,” Uzodinma Iwealo, while reviewing the material representations in *Broken Glass*, poses the question: “How do we interpret the literal pissing contest between the only roundly developed female character – the voluptuous and boisterous Robinette – and the annoying interloper called Casimir High-life that occurs in full view of the mostly male patrons, who watch in erotic awe” (“Paris Review”). Iwealo’s question puts into focus the difficulty of interpreting the literal pissing contest between Robinette and Casimir. However, in his letter in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the Stubborn Snail cautions the reader against the trap of taking account only of the material representations of things.

Subsequently, the pissing competition in *Broken Glass* between Robinette and Casimir should be read within the Stubborn Snail’s caricature of the spoken word – the worn-out cliché with the scatological value of a wild cat’s piss. In a clear riposting of the Stubborn Snail’s value of the aesthetics of the spoken word, the

eponymous narrator makes the movement of time and space in the pissing competition to become visible through the withdrawal of the two contestants to “a grubby corner stinking of cat’s piss and mad-cow dung” (60). It is evident, then, that the scatological load has been carried over from the Stubborn Snail’s utterance. Subsequently, Broken Glass levels and stratifies the Stubborn Snail’s caricature of the aesthetics of the spoken word into the boastful and competitive voices of Robinette and Casimir in the game of pissing. He recounts, thus: “the last time Robinette dropped by, she came on to a guy we’d never seen before at *Credit Gone West*, it began with a direct attack from Robinette, the kind of invisible blow dealt by Mohammed Ali to Sonny Liston in the sixties, when he was defending his world champion title” (57). Here, the mood of competition that the narrator assigns to Robinette, of defending an important title, characterizes the competitiveness between poets in the **gicaandi** genre who compose verses to defend the musical instrument that accompanies the performance.

In “On the Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu observes that in **gicaandi** performance, “one performer would propose an enigma and the other would explain it and propose the next in turn; competition would continue until one of them failed to give the interpretation and so lost the game. The losing party would surrender his instrument over to the winner” (57). In agreement with Njogu’s observation, Robinette throws a challenge to Casimir and she expects him to take it up. If he beats her in the game of pissing, she would surrender her

boastful stance and allow him to have an unconditional sexual engagement with her. The narrator's reference to the challenge between the boxing champions of the sixties indicates that Robinette's challenge is serious in nature yet it encapsulates the game of wits that goes with the riddling performance.

Robinette entices Casimir to take up the game by challenging his pissing vitality: "hey you there, strutting like a barnyard cock, if you can piss longer than me I'll let you shag me, any time, any place, free of charge, I give you my word" (57). Robinette's challenge is spiced up with the prize of a free sexual engagement. The prize may look ludicrous, but it makes sense when it is perceived as a promise to solve the Stubborn Snail's problem of the open circuit of aesthetics. The Stubborn Snail's claim that the spoken word is 'crap' enveloped in the worn-out cliché, "in Africa, when an old person dies, a library burns" (1), upsets the tonal balance between the aesthetics of the spoken word and the written word. Robinette's prize is like the right key that completes the flow of the open circuit. In *Oral Literature in Africa*, Ruth Finnegan observes that in Africa tonal riddles "share the characteristic that the analogy between the statement and the reply is primarily one of form – tone and perhaps rhythm – rather than meaning" (416). In agreement with Finnegan's observation, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* reposes the Stubborn Snail's riddle of the open circuit of aesthetics as tonal patterns in the broken sexual affair between familiar partners.

Casimir readily accepts Robinette's challenge throwing in his own erotic tone to balance her taunt: "show off, you don't know what you're taking on, I accept your challenge, Robinette, but I'm going to give you a proper going over when we're done" (57). Here, the tonal balance between Robinette's challenge and Casimir's acceptance portrays the motives and objects that characterize the African riddling process. However, what Robinette, the challenger, and Casimir, the respondent, propose is not a mere exchange of challenge and answer but a performance to demonstrate the vitality of pissing. The patrons at the bar *Credit Gone West* serve as the audience in the pissing contest. They get a good laugh out of Casimir, the newcomer in the bar: "we all laughed, because the guy was truly a first class braggart, he had no idea what he was up against, if he'd known the first thing about her, he would have thought twice about what he was saying" (57). The audience identifies with Robinette whom they consider as the unbeatable queen of pissing in the entire neighbourhood of *Credit Gone West*.

Noteworthy, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* uses Robinette and Casimir as an erotic equivalent of the Stubborn Snail's material representations of the two aesthetics nodes with different potential of the spoken word and the written word. The patrons of the bar *Credit Gone West* have caught the fancy of Robinette: "we were all on Robinette's side, cheering her on, applauding her efforts" (60). Their fancy is felt as sexual excitement, which heightens as they watch Robinette artistically shedding off her items of clothing in readiness for the pissing

competition. They applaud at the elaborate exposure of her well-endowed sensual body. Contrastingly, the audience gets a good laugh out of Casimir who exposes little skinny legs like those of a wader's bird: "and there was his sex, his original indivisible element, at which we burst out laughing wondering where his puny piss would come from" (61). For the patrons of the bar *Credit Gone West*, Casimir's tiny sexual organ is the proof of his dwindling vitality.

Right from the beginning of the pissing competition, the narrator establishes a dialogic relation between the two contestants and the audience. Subsequently, as Robinette and Casimir try to outdo each other with boasts, the audience's laughter is encapsulated in the performance: "there we all were, killing ourselves laughing, imagining the fellow's corpse already flat out on the ground" (57). For the narrator, the audience visualizes Casimir's impending defeat by Robinette as the comic death that leads to laughter. The audience itself encapsulates Casimir's comic death in their bursts of laughter. Robinette involves the audience in the search for the truth when she raises her voice and declares: "God willing, the truth will be revealed at the first light of dawn, to have and have not, that is what we are about to discover, my friends" (60). Robinette's utterance about the purpose of the pissing competition portrays the motives and objects of questioning the truth about social stratification that characterize **gicaandi** performances. In "The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre," Njogu observes that in the **gicaandi** performance, "the performer and the audience are involved in the dynamic

reactivation of socio-cultural experiences shared by the performer and the audience. As a result, the audience becomes involved in the construction of the performance” (57). Robinette and Casimir’s pissing competition, in agreement to Njogu’s observation, reactivates the Stubborn Snail’s cultural problem of the open aesthetics circuit. The short circuits created by the competitors’ boasts create bursts of laughter in the audience.

In the pissing competition, the dialogic nature of words becomes visible in the way Robinette’s boasts encapsulate Casimir’s. Broken Glass observes that Robinette is certainly irritated by the newcomer’s comment on her voluminous body, and “so she answered ‘are you mad, or what, my boy, before you start calling me fat, you win your contest, you’re talking rubbish, no way you’re gonna beat me, not the way I see you standing here, Mr all Mouth and No Trousers’, ‘oh yes, I gonna beat you, my fat lady’ he says” (57). By encapsulating each other’s words, Robinette and Casimir create a familiar tone in their exchanges. In “The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu notes that in the **gicaandi** performance the artists “use each other’s words, albeit with slight modifications” (55), to re-produce the motives and the objects of problem-posing and problem-solving forming a dialogic chain.

Therefore, in the pissing competition in *Broken Glass* the audience gets the feeling that they are being treated to some hilarious farce or to a comic strip. The

eponymous narrator explicates, thus: “I thought it must be a joke, that they knew each other already and we were being treated to a brief scene from *Three Suitors, One Husband*, some hilarious farce, at any rate” (58). Here, the narrator’s experience suggests that the sense of familiarity portrayed by the two contestants brings into memory the aesthetics of familiarity in Oyono-Mbia’s *Three Suitors, One Husband*. In “Considering Moliere in Oyono-Mbia’s *Three Suitors, One Husband*,” H el ene Sanko observes that Oyono-Mbia’s comedy “raises issues through the contrast and interaction between the play’s African subject matter, echoes of French classical dramaturgy, and ultimately its ability to enhance and disturb classical comedy’s reassuring and predictable format” (249). Sanko’s observation implies that the comic effect in Oyono-Mbia’s comedy becomes visible through the contrast, interaction and disruption made to the voices that characterize the African subject matter and the remnants of French classical dramaturgy. Consequently, by making reference to Oyono-Mbia’s comedy, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* implies that the representations of time and space in the pissing competition create the mood of familiarity between the contestants from the way the circuits of aesthetics embodied in Robinette and Casimir’s voices are contrasted, made to interact or to disrupt presumptions about aesthetics.

The flow of the currents of aesthetics from the two nodes embodied by Robinette and Casimir are observable from the output of piss from the two contestants.

Broken Glass observes: “Casimir high-life was liberating the contents of his bladder, but Robinette’s stream was heavier, hotter, more majestic, and above all had a longer range, while her cocky opponent’s came out in little fits and starts, like a baby kangaroo, a frog hoping to turn into a bull cow” (62). From the strength of her stream of piss, Robinette represents the circuit of aesthetics that has caught the fancy of the audience at the bar *Credit Gone West*. Contrastingly, due to his constrained flow of piss, Casimir is considered by the audience as representation of the dwindling circuit of aesthetics. Read within the Stubborn Snail’s open bar of aesthetics, therefore, Robinette’s pissing vitality is an equivalent of the vitality of the written word while Casimir’s dwindling pissing vitality finds equivalence in the dwindling fancy of the spoken word.

Nonetheless, in the simulation of the pissing **gicaandi** in *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator demonstrates how the dialogic power of words disrupts the Stubborn Snail’s open bar of aesthetics such that the aesthetics of the spoken word encapsulates that of the written word. The Stubborn Snail’s reassuring and predictable format of treating the aesthetics of the spoken word as a worn-out cliché is echoed in Robinette’s reassuring and predictable taunts that depict Casimir as a worn-out man: “gradually she began to step up her urinal output, and suddenly flung at him ‘come on, crack, crack, you piss-pot, crack, you know you will, you don’t even know how to piss, crack now, I got litres left in my reservoir, man” (62-63). Casimir does not yield to Robinette’s taunts. He steadily, albeit in

little fits, presses on pissing. Soon the audience notices that Casimir is not merely pissing but sketching with his urine an outline of the map of France. Now, Casimir was gaining fancy while Robinette was losing: “we were all quite captivated by the mysterious boastful contestant and began to applaud him and call him Casimir the Geographer, and he began to rise to the challenge ‘I’m a marathon man, I’m not a sprinter’” (64). The aesthetics circuit embodied by Robinette had caught the fancy of the patrons of the bar *Credit Gone West* but now the newcomer Casimir was slowly breaking the fancy.

After pissing for about ten minutes, Robinette concedes, and she had the grace and sportsmanship to go over to Casimir to congratulate him: “you did well my boy, you win today, you are a true pisser, now let’s see” (65), whether you will demonstrate the same strength in claiming the prize. Robinette suggests that though she has conceded she might still have a chance to retrieve her fancy because the competition is not really over but promoted to the problem-posing and problem-solving on the subject of sexual vitality embodied in the prize. Subsequently, the victorious Casimir high-life and Robinette dived into a taxi to settle it out in some private place. The patrons of the bar *Credit Gone West* feel a little measure of disappointment for they would have liked the two contestants to square it out right there in front of them. When Robinette returns from the adventure, she says nothing about what happened between her and Casimir. The narrator assumes that she must have lost to Casimir once more. Her silence

encapsulates the audience's desire to know, through storytelling, how the circuit of aesthetics she embodies compares with the fancy of the aesthetics embodied in Casimir high-life.

### **3.2.2 The Dialogic Aesthetics of the Self: "I'm Writing this for Myself too"**

From the beginning of the manuscript *Credit Gone West*, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* declares that although the Stubborn Snail commissions him to write the notebook as a private project he would turn it around to incorporate his own motives and objects: "I'm not his ghost, I'm writing this for myself as well" (2). Here, *Broken Glass* encapsulates the aesthetics of the self to that of the other creating a flow of current between the nodes of the other and the self upon which the load in the circuits of aesthetics is carried over from one to the other. The social awareness that the eponymous narrator proposes in his utterance is that the self finds the meaning of existence in the utterance of the other. The Stubborn Snail expects *Broken Glass* to write the manuscript *Credit Gone West* in a certain cultural taste treating, on one hand, the aesthetics of the written word as the fancy of the people, and on the other hand, the aesthetics of the spoken word as the worn-out cliché that does not invoke artist value but anger in the people.

Consequently, the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* is in essence trying to turn the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* into his human-double such that in the proposed manuscript the narrator's voice would find equivalence in the boss's

vicious tone about the aesthetics of the spoken word. In the writing of the manuscript, therefore, the relationship between the Stubborn Snail and Broken Glass mirrors that of the boss-customer in the bar *Credit Gone West*. Being the boss, the Stubborn Snail orders the narrator in a military style, thus: “Broken Glass, I want your inner anger out from inside you, go on explode, vomit, spit, cough or ejaculate, I don’t care how you do it, just turn out something about this bar for me, about some of the guys who hang out here, and especially about yourself” (128). By ordering Broken Glass to ‘explode, vomit, spit, cough or ejaculate,’ the Stubborn Snail proposes a mode of writing that encapsulates a scatological vision. The Stubborn Snail’s words, ‘especially about yourself,’ initiates Broken Glass into the dialogic aesthetics of the self so that as he writes the stories of the bar *Credit Gone West*’s patrons he incorporates his own story.

Indeed, the eponymous narrator’s voice becomes the narrative thread upon which the myriad stories of the patrons of the bar *Credit Gone West* are put together in the narratives spaces of the novel. Subsequently, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* has a name that mirrors the Stubborn Snail’s open bar of aesthetics with nodes of different potential. Given that the narrator levels and stratifies the Stubborn Snail’s claim to the ‘age of the written word’ into titles of books, quotes and political slogans, the origin of the name Broken Glass could be traced to certain books about the 1492 to 1797 colonial relationship between imperialistic Europe and the Caribbeans. In *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Caribbean*,

1492-1797, Peter Hulme uses Edward Braithwaite's 1969 poem, 'Islands' as an epigraph: "Looking through a map of the Islands, you see/ that history teaches/ that when hope/ splinters, when the pieces/ of broken glass lie/ in the sunlight/ ... iron's travelling flame that teaches/ us pain will never be/ extinguished" (viii). Through Braithwaite's poem, Hulme seems to aptly communicate the idea of the scrambled narrator in the Caribbean Islands. For him, the narrator is broken through a culture of pain that is initiated in the Caribbeans by European imperialistic tendencies. In *Broken Glass*, Mabanckou promotes Braithwaite's idea of the 'broken glass' to the title of the novel and the scrambled eponymous narrator in order to address himself to the problem of the Stubborn Snail's open bar of aesthetics.

Mabanckou explodes the image of the scrambled narrator into the very processes of experiencing the representations of time and space in *Broken Glass*. The eponymous narrator is levelled and stratified into the narrative and commentary voices upon which the artistic sounds and the aesthetic taste of the Stubborn Snail's commissioned manuscript are felt. He functions as the seeds in the **gicaandi** instrument which, when shaken, produce the rhythm that holds the voices of the various poets as well as the reactions of the audience together during performances. In "The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre," Njogu explains that **gicaandi** is "onomatopoeic pointing to the sound made by seeds in the instrument as the poem is being performed" (49). In the same measure, the

eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* jumbles the myriad stories of the patrons at the bar *Credit Gone West* inside the run-on sentence constituting the one-hundred-and-sixty-five page novel holding together the artistic sounds and the aesthetic value resulting from the dialogic relation of the written word and the spoken word.

The eponymous narrator perceives the progression of the plot in *Broken Glass* as a kind of unrestricted journey across the fictional world depicted in the titles of books that he incorporates in the narrative spaces of the novel as the proof of the Stubborn Snail's claim to 'the age of the written word.' He experiences the aesthetics of the written word, in the dialogic cycles of writing and reading the Stubborn Snail's proposed manuscript *Credit Gone West*, as the noise made by the oar rowing a boat in the stream. Therefore, he boasts of being widely travelled across the world through literature: "without ever leaving my own native soil, I've travelled one might say, through literature, each time I've opened a book the pages echoed with noise like the dip of a paddle in midstream, and throughout my odyssey I never crossed a single border, and so never had to produce a passport" (137). Subsequently, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* makes sense of the aesthetics of the written word by encapsulating it to the aesthetics of the spoken word so that the narrative voices in the book come to him as though from a dialogue in real life.

However, in the commissioning of the manuscript *Credit Gone West*, the Stubborn Snail intended Broken Glass to use modes of writing and reading that would open a chasm between the aesthetics of the written word and the spoken word. Therefore, there is a split between the Stubborn Snail and Broken Glass's perception on the working of the aesthetics of the written word and the spoken word in the book. The eponymous narrator's utterance, "I'm not his ghost, I'm writing this for myself as well" (2) succinctly expresses the split in the perception. Nonetheless, what brings the split sharply into focus is the eponymous narrator's intention of not sparing the Stubborn Snail: "that's why I wouldn't want to be in his shoes when he reads these pages, I don't intend to spare him or anyone else, by the time he reads this , though, I'll no longer be one of his customers" (2). Here, the eponymous narrator proposes dialogic aesthetics that opens a row between the self and the other. Later, he simulates the aesthetic taste of the row between the self and the other in the story about the political maneuvers between the President and the Minister for Agriculture caused by the latter's historic phrase 'I Accuse.' To assert himself, the President "was longing for civil war to break out between north and south so he could write his war memoirs and give them the modest title *Memoirs of Hadrian*" (8). The President's aesthetics of civil war creates a short circuit that carries over the load of civil war to the Stubborn Snail's open bar of aesthetics turning the nodes of the different potential of the written word and the spoken word into family members at war with each other.

The eponymous narrator adopts different narrative postures in *Broken Glass* in order to simulate the idea of the civil war of aesthetics between the nodes of the written and the spoken word. In one of the narrative postures, the eponymous narrator presents the evidence of the civil war by pointing to the dirty water of river Tchinouka where, “he counted several animal carcasses, thrown in the water by the bank dwellers” (85). For the eponymous narrator, the animal carcasses represent nodes of aesthetics that have been pushed off the main circuit of aesthetics by the bank dwellers who represent human narrators in modern tale-riddles. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyemí notes that “A major iconographic shift in ... modern tale-riddles is the absence of animal characters” (185). In this light, the carcasses thrown in river Tchinouka by the town dwellers in *Broken Glass* represent the animal characters who have been pushed off from the narrative spaces of the modern tale-riddles.

In the narrative posture, the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* proposes that the animal characters are denied their narrative turn in the modern tale-riddles severing the human-animal double that characterizes the working of aesthetics in the African chronotope. He recounts that the animal and the human characters have their day when each catch the fancy of the reader in the narrative spaces of tale-riddles: “these were dog days, it was their season, I saw some dogs mating” (85). The eponymous narrator represents the rising fancy of the animal characters as ‘dog days’ and the evidence as the boisterous mating of dogs. However,

irritated at their mating, he picks a stone and throws it at them, and they protest barking loudly and angrily and then take flight. He visualizes a dialogue in which the dogs pour out their anger on him: “scum, rogue, pathetic, hiped, and I said ‘I don’t understand your canine patois, you go ahead and bark if you’re angry, it doesn’t bother me’, and” (85-86). Patois is a regional dialect of a language usually considered substandard. By assigning the dogs’ language the status of patois, therefore the eponymous narrator splits the human-animal double that characterizes the dialogic aesthetics in the african chronotope into two nodes with the different potential of the the aesthetics of human characters and the animal characters.

In *Broken Glass*’s open human-animal double, the load of the scatological value, represented by the rotting animal carcasses in the river Tchinouka, is lodged at the node of the aesthetics of the animal characters. The eponymous narrator experiences the split in the aesthetics of the human-animal double as some kind of severe hunger: “I pursued my famished road, I thought I must sit down for a moment, then I folded my legs beneath me like a gazelle who kneels down to weep, in fact I was dizzy with hunger, I could feel a hard knot moving about in my stomach, I started to spew up clots of wine, but ‘I don’t care’ I said” (86). The eponymous narrator experiences hunger because he refuses to feed on the aesthetics of the animal characters to tell his story in the modern tale-riddle in *Broken Glass*. He proposes that by excluding the circuit of the animal-double

from the aesthetics of the modern tale-riddle, the narrator introduces a scatological scene, represented by the spewing of clots of wine, creating nutritional deficiency of aesthetics in the narrative spaces of the novel.

The scatological scene evokes repulsion in the bank dweller who, having thrown the animals into the river Tchinouka, expected clean narrative spaces in the novel. Therefore, a row opens between the eponymous narrator and the bank dweller after finding him relieving himself at the foot of a mango tree: “poor bugger ... polluter of public spaces, shitting at the foot of a tree at your age, have you no shame?” and I said out loud ‘I don’t care ... and the bank dweller was furious ... pick up your shit or I’ll throw you in the river” (86). For the bank dweller, the eponymous narrator is behaving like an animal and therefore he should be excluded from the narrative spaces of the modern tale-riddle. Fearing to die, the eponymous narrator starts picking his shit: “what are you doing, old man, you can’t go picking up your own poop with your bare hands, you should do it with the end of a stick” (86). Experiencing repulsion, the bank dweller throws up scarpering away. The encounter between the eponymous narrator and the bank dweller creates a short circuit carrying over the load of scatology from the self to the other.

In short, the eponymous narrator adopts the philosophy that there is nothing sickening about picking one’s scatology but other people’s is revolting.

Ultimately, the eponymous narrator's dialogic aesthetics of the self in *Broken Glass* feeds on the aesthetics of the other by establishing short circuits carrying over the load of scatology from one node of aesthetics to the other.

### **3.2.3 “Feeding on the Historic Phrase”: The Political Reading of the Stubborn Snail’s Bar**

The riddle of the Stubborn Snail's open bar of aesthetics in *Broken Glass* feeds on the aesthetics of the ministerial phrase. The Stubborn Snail has commissioned Broken Glass, one of his regular patrons at his bar *Credit Gone West*, to turn out a book that would immortalize the name of the bar so that it sticks in the memory of all ages. The ministerial phrase that informs the Stubborn Snail's mission is that “this is the age of the written word” (1). The Stubborn Snail's ministerial phrase initiates the politics of aesthetics between the written word and the spoken word. Accordingly, the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* dismisses the aesthetics of the spoken word as deathly while praising the aesthetics of the written word as the time of life for humanity: “people in this country have no sense of the importance of memory, that the days when grandmothers reminisced from their deathbeds was gone now, this is the age of the written word, that's all that's left, the spoken word's just black smoke” (1). Here, the Stubborn Snail excludes the aesthetics of the spoken word from the body politic of vibrant aesthetics and thus assigns it a dwindling importance in his compatriots' memory.

The Stubborn Snail encapsulates the aesthetics of the written word to the ministerial phrase by crediting it with unalienable importance in the representations of time and space. Consequently, the aesthetics of the written word stands over that of the spoken word. Any fancy of the aesthetics of the spoken word that had earlier caught the people are assigned the value of a smoky-fire with little to feed on. The Stubborn Snail no longer accommodates what he now considers as ready-made phrases about the aesthetics of the spoken word: ‘in Africa, when an old person dies, a library burns’, every time he hears that worn-out cliché he gets mad, he’ll say ‘depends which old person, don’t talk crap, I only trust what’s written down’ ...” (1). The politics of aesthetics between the written word and the spoken word is evident in the Stubborn Snail’s fiery dismissal of the spoken word, on one hand, and the trust he ascribes to the written word, on the other hand.

Phrases are dialogic in nature because they attain syntactical meaning through interacting with other phrases in the utterance they encapsulate. However, the Stubborn Snail assigns the phrase ‘this is the age of the written word’ an infallible sense. Subsequently, the ministerial phrase accuses the aesthetics of the spoken word of lacking vitality so that it can now, alone, stand above the world. The ministerial phrase creates the problem of the politics of aesthetics because phrases ordinarily function like the cooperating and competing voices of the poets in the **gicaandi** performance to produce meaning. In “The Polyphonic Nature of the

Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu observes that in **gicaandi** performances, “performers are engaged in dialogue with each other ... addressing the other directly” (50), to produce meaning through problem-posing and problem-solving. In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator writes the manuscript *Credit Gone West* by feeding on the ministerial phrase such that the aesthetics of the written word is leveled to a syntactic interaction with the aesthetics of the spoken word.

When the Stubborn Snail finally gets the almost complete manuscript from Broken Glass, he becomes mad because it has been written like a dialogue contained in a single run-on sentence: “it’s a real mess, this book, there are no full stops, only commas, sometimes speech marks when someone’s talking, that’s not right, I think you should tidy it up a bit, don’t you, how am I supposed to read all that, if it’s all run together like that” (158). For the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*, the manuscript is messy because the motives and objects that promote the aesthetics of the spoken word have been run together with those of the aesthetics of the written word. He portrays a modernistic view of the novel. In “The Postcolonial Wizard: A Review of Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*,” Simon Gikandi argues that in the modernistic view “What differentiated the novel from other forms of prose fiction was that it neither came from oral tradition nor went into it” (156). In agreement with Gikandi’s argument, the Stubborn Snail opens the bar of aesthetics such that the aesthetics of the written word in the novel is not supposed to incorporate oral tradition.

However, as the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* exemplifies in his writing of the manuscript *Credit Gone West*, the writer can allow the aesthetics of the written word to run together with the aesthetics of the spoken word in the spaces of the novel. Gikandi observes that for the postcolonial writer, exemplified in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's authorship of *Wizard of the Crow*, the novel is "the culmination of a long process by the novelist to simulate the art of the oral storyteller in writing, and thus to overcome the ostensible gap between orality and writing" (156). Accordingly, in *Broken Glass* Mabanckou creates a postcolonial wizard in the eponymous narrator who simulates the art of the oral storyteller in the written spaces of the novel despite having been commissioned to use the aesthetics of the written word by the Stubborn Snail.

The eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* recounts that the Stubborn Snail told him himself that he first got the idea of starting the bar *Credit Gone West* when he was in New-Bell where he saw "*The Cathedral*, the Cameroonian bar which had never closed its doors since the day it first opened" (17). Here, the Stubborn Snail's bar *Credit Gone West*, which the boss is trying to assign a permanent memory through his commissioned notebook, encapsulates the Cameroonian bar *The Cathedral* forming a dialogic relation. The boss of the Cameroonian bar depends on his presence as the official system of managing the business: "he was there at *The Cathedral* in person, every morning and evening, and his employees, seeing him turn up regular as clockwork, decided *The Cathedral* was truly a place

of worship” (17-18). The Cameroonian bar catches the fancy of the people because of the boss’s regular presence in the management of the business.

However, the problem of the singular system of aesthetics that characterize the Cameroonian bar encapsulates the fate of the old tree in Kofi Awoonor’s poem *The Cathedral*. In the poem, the persona poses the problem of depending on a single system of aesthetics: “On this dirty patch/ a tree once stood/ shedding incense on the infant corn/ its boughs stretched across a heaven/ brightened by the last fires of a tribe/ They sent surveyors and builders/ who cut that tree/ planting in its place/ A huge cathedral of doom” (“The Cathedral”). In the poem, the huge cathedral gains its towering presence by permanently replacing the old tree. In *Broken Glass*, the aesthetics of the written word catches the fancy of the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* such that he only trusts what is written down. Subsequently, he tries to permanently replace the aesthetics of the spoken word with the written word, in the spaces of his commissioned notebook *Credit Gone West*.

However, as the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* suggests that in his reading of *The Cathedral*, the Cameroonian bar, the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* may have misinterpreted the dialogic link between the bar and the boss referred by the name Steppenwolf. The name of the boss of the Cameroonian bar invokes a dialogic relation with the eponymous character in Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*.

In the preface, Hesse explains that the book contains the records which were left by the man they called the Steppenwolf whose life was defined by the fancy of the written word. He explains that since Steppenwolf's bedroom was next door to his, he saw him arriving: "with two trunks and a big case of books" ("Preface"). For the nine or ten months he stayed at the hotel, he hardly stepped out of his room. Presumably, Steppenwolf spent his time in the hotel room reading and writing books. However, he could not entirely avoid speaking to his neighbour whom he met a few times in the stairs that their bedrooms shared. Steppenwolf's image of spending a life of reading and writing books represents the 'age of writing' that catches the fancy of the Stubborn Snail in *Broken Glass*. Then, Steppenwolf's occasional encounter with his neighbour in the stairs indicates that the aesthetics of the written word cannot avoid an occasional encounter with the aesthetics of the spoken word since they share the same stairs in the spaces of the fictional world.

The eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* explains that "throughout his stay in New-Bell, the boss sat around, in this bar, closely observing the behaviour of the clients and the staff, chatting with Steppenwolf, who had quickly become a friend" (18). Here, 'chatting' implies talking or having a dialogue, and therefore it invokes the aesthetics of the spoken word. Back in Trois-Cents, the Stubborn Snail put everything he had to his plan of replicating the New-Bell model: "everyone laughed at him when he talked about his plan, said it was like trying to

find out how to slip through customs with a salmon in your luggage” (19). Everyone got a good laugh out of the Stubborn Snail’s plan because he proposed to use the aesthetics of the written word only while locking out the aesthetics of the spoken word. The mention of trying to slip through customs with a salmon in your luggage infers to Umberto Eco’s problematizing of a single system of aesthetics in *How to Travel with a Salmon and Other Essays*.

In Eco’s short story “How to Travel with a Salmon,” the narrator encounters the problem of a single system of aesthetics when he books a room in a deluxe hotel whose management had recently installed a computerized system for all business operations. Wishing to refrigerate the smoked salmon he had bought earlier, he empties the bar and puts the enormous bottles in some drawers. The following day he finds the salmon on the table and discovers that the bar has been replenished. He again empties the bar and refrigerates the salmon. However, when he went down to sign the bill it was astronomical. It indicated that in two and a half days he had consumed several hectoliters of alcoholic drinks. He tried to explain what had transpired but the clerk assured him that that was what the computer read. His publisher was furious and thought that he had become a chronic freeloader (5-7). The Stubborn Snail’s plan in *Broken Glass* of immortalizing the bar *Credit Gone West* through the single aesthetics system of the written word finds equivalence in the deluxe hotel’s computerized system that produces preposterous results due to lack of a backup system.

The political reading of the Stubborn Snail's bar is evident in the search of a historic phrase to counter the popularity of the Agricultural Minister that he gets due to the catchy phrase he uses in defending the proprietary of bar *Credit Gone West* in parliament: "Ladies and Gentlemen of Cabinet, I accuse, I wish to distance myself from our current moribund social climate, I refuse to cordon this witch hunt by my presence in the government, I accuse the shabby treatment meted out to a man who has done no more than draw up a route map for his own existence" (6). Despite the contradiction in the Minister's speech in which he accuses his presence in the Cabinet, people are enthralled by his catchy phrase. The Minister's phrase, "I accuse," catches the fancy of the Trois-Cents' people such that they use it in their daily lives and they began to refer to the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* as the Stubborn Snail.

In addition, President Adrien Lokouta Eleki Mingi is jealous of the Minister for Agriculture because of the fame he gets due to the historic phrase. Fearing to lose political ground, he mobilizes the government machinery to find a succinct phrase that would counter the memory in the Minister's phrase. Broken Glass recounts how the President and General of Armies called on his government officials to find him a phrase that would be remembered by posterity as Minister Zou Loukia's 'I accuse': "the negroes in the presidential cabinet worked all night long, behind closed doors, opening up and looking through – for the first time – encyclopedias which stood gathering dust on the presidential bookshelves" (8).

The search for the infallible phrase that the President commissions becomes visible to the reader through scanning of historical book which the government officials had hitherto not read despite their availability. The president's search for the apt historic phrase indicates that the aesthetics of the singular phrase turns reading and writing into a political project.

The political reading of the Stubborn Snail's bar initiated by the aesthetics of the historic phrase culminates in the government officials' idea of leveling all the ideas and everything they had found out into a brainstorming session involving writing the historic phrases on slips of paper and then putting them into a hat. They pick the slips at random reading each out as though they were counting votes in a democratic election. The chief of the government officials makes comments on each of the slips. Drawing the slip with Louis XIV phrase 'I am the State,' the chief comments, "no, that quote is no good, we're not having that one, it's too self-regarding , it makes us sound like dictators, next!" (11). It is evident that the government officials are interested in finding the phrase with the political tone that would suit their purposes. The next slip contains Lenin's phrase 'Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country' to which the chief said "no, that's no good, it's disrespectful to the people, especially in a country where they can't even pay their electricity bill, next!" (12). Here, the chief's comments are used to make a vote on each of the historic phrase as well as

to give the reason why it might not catch the fancy of the people or the political class.

The paper-slip with Blaise Pascal's phrase, 'if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter it would have changed the face of the world' is knocked out for being irrelevant to the political project at hand: "no, no good, we're talking politics here, not plastic surgery, move on, next!" (14). The chief takes Pascal's phrase literally assigning it the aesthetics of plastic surgery away from the tactical context of war it entails. In "The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre," Njogu notes that "When we quote someone else's word we engage in dialogue with his or her perception" (47). Consequently, by putting the quotes into the hat and reading each out while making comments on them establishes a dialogic relation between them. Writing the phrases on slips of paper and then reading each out creates a dialogic relation between the aesthetics of the written word and that of the spoken word. In short, the brainstorming session adopted by the government officials levels and stratifies the historic phrases into a chain of voices encapsulating the perception of the author to that of the critic in the current political situation.

### **3.3 The Dialogic Aesthetics in the First Part: "Reading Back What I've Written"**

In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator reveals that the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* makes a claim to the reading cycle in which the aesthetics circuit is

open such that apart from the boss, “no one else would read” (1) the notebook. However, the representations of time and space in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* portray the reading cycle with a closed aesthetics circuit in which the reading current encapsulates the voices in *Broken Glass*. The chronotopic cycle in the “Appendix,” containing the letter that the Stubborn Snail writes to Editions du Seuil, a French publishing house, explaining the origin of the second manuscript, clearly encapsulates *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to the dialogic aesthetics of “First Part” and “Last Part.” The Stubborn Snail writes in the letter, “I am writing to you in my capacity as literary executor to my lifelong friend, the late Broken Glass. I should like this letter to be published at the end of his book *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, to inform the readers of certain details regarding the origin of the text” (“Appendix”). Stubborn Snail’s letter has the dialogic importance of inviting the readers to re-examine the manuscript, now with the details that it supplies in mind.

In the letter, Stubborn Snail explains that the previous year, just after the death of Broken Glass, he had sent, by registered mail, what he believed to be his one and only manuscript, since it was he who had commissioned it, with a view to immortalizing his bar, Credit Gone West. He complains that despite having formally expressed the wish that the manuscript be called *Credit Gone West*, the editorial office had gone ahead to publish it under the title *Broken Glass*, presumably to take in the interests of the book. Nonetheless, he writes on that the

purpose of the letter was to enclose the second manuscript, which one of his employees, the bartender Mompéro, had found in a thicket down by river Tchinouka, where the body of the lamented Broken Glass had been fished out. He explains that the original document, an old school folder filled with papers, was in such a deplorable state that great care had to be taken to put the pages in order and number them. He and his two bartenders deciphered the passages which were smudged with dust, rain and dew, and in the process, they argued to avoid ascribing to the deceased words which he had not written.

He confesses that their discussions, often bitter and heated, exasperated a number of his clients. Several of them, including the Pampers guy and Robinette, continued to deny certain scenes attributed to them in the novel *Broken Glass*. Therefore, they were displeased to hear of the existence of a second notebook since they wrongly thought that *Memoirs of a Porcupine* was simply a sequel to *Broken Glass*. They were worried that once again they would find themselves caricatured by Broken Glass whom they now considered to be a traitor for making representations of whole sections of their lives in a humorous light. However, Stubborn Snail writes that Broken Glass has used the aesthetics of the animal fable in the second manuscript. Consequently, Broken Glass, as a human-narrator-character, together with the other human characters in the first manuscript, are absent from the second book.

Explaining the aesthetics of the fable used in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Stubborn Snail writes that deep down Broken Glass was convinced that the books we really remember are those which reinvent the world, revisit our childhood, pose questions about the origin of all things, examine our obsessions and question our beliefs. He believes that the world is just an approximate version of a fable which we will never understand as long as we continue to take account of only the material representations of things. Stubborn Snail confesses of having enjoyed reading the tale of the fortunes and misfortunes of this singular porcupine. The reading of the manuscript changes his view of animals, leading him to the huge question, “which is really the beast, man or animal?” (“Appendix”). Stubborn Snail’s question invites the reader to re-examine both *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, now looking beyond the mere representations of material things.

As a whole, Stubborn Snail’s letter creates the dialogic link for reading *Memoirs of a Porcupine* as a sequel to *Broken Glass*. It allows us to see how the trope of the human-animal double in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* encapsulates the aesthetics of the comic strips in *Broken Glass* creating a dialogic relation. In the first novel, the narrator uses the aesthetics of human tales to account for representations of things. In the second novel, the narrator uses the aesthetics of animal tales to represent things. Subsequently, *Broken Glass* operates as the “First Part,” in the Human-Animal dialogic pair in which the human is presumed to be the boss while *Memoirs of the Porcupine* operates as the “Last Part,” in which the animal is

presumed to be the customer creating the puzzle: who is the beast, man or the animal? The dialogic aesthetics between the two novels can be illustrated as indicated in diagram 3.3 below:

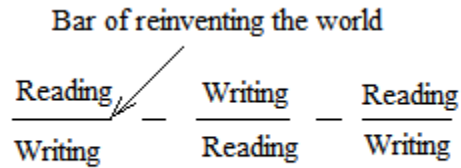


Diagram 3.3 Reading-Writing dialogic pairs

As shown in diagram 3.3 above, it is upon the bar of reinventing the world that the dialogic relation between the reading of the “First Part” and the writing of the “Last Part” of *Broken Glass*’s manuscript becomes visible. Like in the **gicaandi** genre, the bar of reinventing the world gives the narrator a voice for making meta-commentary on the nature of things, obsessions and beliefs that stratify and level the subject at hand into competing and cooperating voices. In “The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu asserts that the meta-commentary in the riddle-like dialogue “depends on another preceding utterance and by making reference to it projects a possible way of understanding it” (51). The meta-commentary in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* is a leveling of the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*’s initial utterance about the cycles of reading and writing and a projection by the narrator into the possible comic way of understanding it.

The reading of *Broken Glass* through the dialogic aesthetics clearly reveals how the eponymous narrator reinvents the world in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. First, the superstructure – defined by a label for a particular chronotopic cycle, a blank page to mark dramatic rest, followed by a puzzling statement, rendition of that particular part of the story, then another rest – that characterizes the first manuscript is also evident in the second one. In *Broken Glass*, the representations of time and space are presented in two main chronotopic cycles, labelled “First Part,” and “Last Part.” In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the representations of time and space are presented in seven labelled chronotopic cycles. The first one is labelled “how disaster brought me to your feet” (1). The label is followed by a blank page representing the dramatic rest, to anticipate the porcupine-narrator’s puzzling statement: “so I’m just an animal, just a dumb, wild animal, men would say ... since they only believe in what they can see” (3). The statement opens the bar of presumption upon which men say that the porcupine is just an animal. The men, like the Stubborn Snail in *Broken Glass*, take things literally. The chronotopic cycle runs on to page twenty-five, with the porcupine giving a rendition to the Baobab tree on how he had been initiated into the harmful double of a man called Kibandi. Presently, he begs leave of the Baobab, under whom he shelters: “just let me take a few breaths before I carry on, I’m panting a little, ideas rush and crowd my mind, I think since this morning I’ve been talking too fast” (24). Page twenty-five, which follows, is almost blank indicating that the rest has been granted while page twenty-six is blank marking the rest.

The next chronotopic cycle is labeled, “how I left the animal world” (27). The naming is followed by a blank page, marking the dramatic rest in anticipation for the porcupine-narrator’s puzzling statement: “how long ago it seems, that time when I left my own habitat, and drew close to the boy child I knew affectionately as ‘little Kibandi’, it’s been many years since then” (29). Here, representations of time and space become visible through the porcupine’s movement from the animal world to the human world. In the chronotopic cycle, the porcupine-narrator explains the aesthetics of being a double: “once it becomes the harmful double of a human being, an animal has to leave its natural milieu, its family, so my separation from the members of our group occurred in Mossaka” (34). For the porcupine-narrator, when an animal becomes a double of a human being, it must leave the animal world losing contact with its family members. The chronotopic cycle ends with the porcupine-narrator artistically pausing: “I’ll turn my back to you, out of decency, and rest for a moment, before I carry on” (48). Half of page forty-eight is blank, marking the porcupine-narrator’s rest.

The third chronotopic cycle is labeled, “how Papa Kibandi sold us his destiny” (49). Page fifty is blank, marking the rest the porcupine-narrator takes in anticipation to the puzzling statement in the introduction to the section: “not a day of his life went by without my master thinking of the night his father sold on his destiny to us, visions of the initiation haunted him, he was back in Mossaka, aged ten, it was night, a night full of terrors, when Papa Kibandi woke him ... and

dragged him off into the forest” (51). Here, the porcupine-narrator reveals that his master, Kibandi, had been a double of his father, Papa Kibandi. The representations of time and space in the chronotopic cycle become visible through the young Kibandi’s involuntary movement from the world of the human to the world of the animal in the dark terrifying forest. The chronotopic cycle ends on page sixty-nine with the porcupine-narrator explaining how he and his human master came to live in their current village called Sèkèmbè: “so that is how, through no choice of our own, we came to live in this village, a foster village where we ought even so to have been able to lead a normal life” (69). By describing the current dwelling place as a foster village, the porcupine-narrator assigns it an adoptive sense encapsulating the charge against the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* of taking everything literally that is made in the first manuscript, *Broken Glass*.

The fourth chronotopic cycle is labeled “How Mama Kibandi joined Papa Kibandi in the other world” (171). Page seventy-two is blank indicating the dramatic rest in anticipation to the rendition of the story: “it was strange to see my young master grinding roots with his incisors, sharper than those of an ordinary human, I even wondered if he was going to spend his entire adolescence eating nothing but bulbs, but in the end he accepted the death of his father, living here in Sèkèmbè broadened their horizons” (73). Here, the porcupine-narrator uses the impact of Papa Kibandi’s death to level the young master Kibandi into a beast in

the form of a human being. Subsequently, the image of beast-human foregrounds the Stubborn Snail's change of view about animals that is coalesced into the huge question in his letter, "After all, which is really the beast, man or animal?" (Appendix). The movement of Mama Kibandi, the young master and his porcupine double from their former village to Sèkèmbè affords them the distance that they need to forget their past lives and "the memory of how the people of Mossaka, aided by the sorcerer, Tembè-Essouka, had wiped out Papa Kibandi" (73). Considering that the village they come to is adoptive in nature, the distance is also adoptive and should not be taken literally. The chronotopic cycle ends on page eighty-six with the porcupine-narrator saying "I knew now that we were very close to the start of our activities" (86). The narrator's revelation cues the reader to expect the crux of the story.

The fifth chronotopic cycle is labeled "how last Friday became black Friday" (87). Page eighty-eight comprises of a blank space which allows the reader to digest the movement across the human world and the world of the animals that characterizes the unfolding relationship between Kibandi and the porcupine. The blank space also gives the reader time to anticipate the activities that Kibandi and his animal double are about to undertake. The representations of time and space in the chronotopic cycle becomes visible to the reader in the ritualistic process by which the mood of everything narrated in the story changes through the switch of the modifier 'last' to 'black' ushering in another day. The porcupine-narrator

recounts that the last Friday when Kibandi comes from his mother's grave alters his destiny and that of his doubles: "let me tell you about the day Kibandi came from his mother's grave, the day when towards the stroke of ten in the evening, I decided to go and sniff around his hut, all afternoon my master's other double had been hanging about" (89). Here, the porcupine narrator implies that the doubles were being summoned to do the bidding of Kibandi. In this chronotopic cycle, Kibandi charges the porcupine with the mission of 'eating,' which means killing, anyone deemed to possess greater vitality. He uses the doubles to 'eat' ninety-nine victims before he is eventually trapped and killed by the villagers with the help of the sorcerer.

By the end of the chronotopic cycle, Kibandi and his human-double have been eliminated. However, the porcupine is still alive but quite exhausted: "It's getting late, dear Baobab, the moon has just disappeared, I feel my eyelids growing heavy, my limbs giving way, my sight misting over, could this be death, folding its arms about me, I can't hold out any longer" (141). The vitality of the porcupine-narrator has dwindled signaling the end of his fancy as an animal-human double in the world of the storytelling. However, the sixth chronotopic cycle is labeled "how this porcupine isn't finished yet" (143), which implies that the porcupine-narrator's dwindling vitality is going to be renewed in the subsequent storytelling. The porcupine-narrator recounts: "day has just broken, I'm surprised to find life still going on around me, the birds have come to perch

on the branches of the trees, the river tumbles along, it's reassuring, all this movement, another small victory" (145). Here, the porcupine-narrator's small victory resonates with Broken Glass's in *Broken Glass* concerning a broken glass being repaired by the good God.

The seventh chronotopic cycle is the "Appendix" containing the letter from the Stubborn Snail concerning the origin of the manuscript *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. The representations of time and space in the letter are geared towards offering the solution to the Stubborn Snail's problem of opening the aesthetics circuit into nodes of the written word and the spoken word. Through the reading cycle, the Stubborn Snail realizes that by literally reading the material representations of the world he had created short circuits resulting in representations of time and space bubbling with bursts of laughter. He recognizes Broken Glass's wisdom of considering life to be an approximate version of a fable. The resolution turns the reader full circle into a new cycle of reading in which the material representations in both *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* are reinterpreted through the eyes of the fable. How Broken Glass reinvents the human fable in *Broken Glass* to create a human-animal fictional world in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* now becomes evident. Accordingly, the adverb 'how' which introduces the chronotopic cycles in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* become visible to the reader as the etiological tone upon which the narrator reinvents the world of the fable into a framework for problem-posing and problem-solving, in the printed pages of the novel, about the

opening of the bar of aesthetics into nodes of the spoken word and the written word or the animal and the human categories.

### **3.3.1 “So I’m just an Animal, a Damn, Wild Animal”: The Dialogic Aesthetics of Intelligence**

The labels that describe the seven chronotopic cycles in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* function as semantic fits upon which the existing material representations find new meaning giving the porcupine a special spun of life in the narrative spaces of the novel. The artist summons the porcupine from the world of animals and assigns it, in the turn of the storytelling, the narrative role of the animal-human double. The porcupine-narrator in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* explains his special existence in the narrative spaces, thus: “I’m forty-two years old now, I still feel very young, and if I was a porcupine like the ones that hang about in the fields near the village I would never have lived this long” (4). The porcupine-narrator functions as an animal character in the novel and therefore his existence is freed from the strict rhythms of life that govern porcupines in the physical world. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyẹmí observes that the animal characters are the “other folk of the country-side who walk along the same paths, share similar vicssitudes with humans upon equal terms and in the crystalline of life’s tale, are ... credited with some of the equivalent idealized traits of popular characters” (120-121). Akínyẹmí’s observation implies that in the fictional world of the novel the distinction between the traits normally ascribed to human beings and animals

is blurred such that there is a dialogic relation between human and animal characters.

In the narrative spaces of the novel, the porcupine-narrator exacts great demands on his senses becoming his master's "third eye, his third nostril, his third ear" (4), so that what his master could not see or smell or hear he transmitted to him in dreams or made a physical appearance. Here, the porcupine-narrator is assigned senses with heightened potential enabling him to easily fill the slips in his human master's unreliable senses. Therefore, he is not just a porcupine but the simulacrum in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* upon which the processes of sensing in the fictional world are established. In *Simulacra and simulation*, Jean Baudrillard argues that in the simulacrum the real is produced from "miniturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control – and can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational" (2). Baudrillard's argument holds true for the working of the human-porcupine double in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. The porcupine-narrator is not a mere animal character just as Kibandi is not a mere human character but the models of control upon which the circuits of aesthetics attain meaning in the narrative spaces of the novel.

The porcupine-narrator is not a pawn in the hands of his human master neither is Kibandi a pawn in the hands of the animal-narrator but the two combine in a dialogic turn of aesthetics defining everything in the novel – representations of time and space, semantic fits on themes, characterization and style. The porcupine-narrator has not crossed over from the animal world to become a human character. In the same measure, Kibandi has not crossed over from the human world to become an animal. Subsequently, the porcupine-narrator explains his stance on the human intelligence: “I wouldn’t want to be a man, to be honest, they can keep their so-called intelligence” (3). Here, the porcupine-narrator is not interested in being transformed into a man or acquiring human intelligence. The porcupine-narrator, however, is interested in the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence. He recounts that for years he had been the double of a man they called Kibandi: “he may not have shown it, but all his life he felt I owed him, I was just a lowly bit player, a pawn in his hands, well, I don’t want to boast, but I could say the same about him, without me he’d have been a bit of rotten pulp, his life as a man worth less than a few drops of piss” (3). For the porcupine-narrator, the human-animal double operates through the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence making survival possible for both the human and the animal categories.

The porcupine-narrator recounts that there are two kinds of doubles: the peaceful double and the harmful double. He explains that the peaceful doubles are “soft and slow, the slightest noise sends them running, a foolish way to behave, starting

at your own shadow” (7). Since the peaceful doubles are timid they can hardly have a narrative turn in the spaces of the novel. The harmful double, he expounds, are “the liveliest, scariest kind of double, as you can imagine, is more complicated ... transmission of a harmful double takes place against the child’s wishes” (7). It follows that the initiation of the human being or the animal into a harmful double is not a consensual undertaking. The human or the animal is initiated into being the artist’s harmful double without any consensual arrangement. The artist, like some supernatural being, assigns the human and the animal character with the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence upon which the story becomes visible to the reader in the narrative spaces of the novel.

While revising Mikhail Bakhtin’s view on the artist, Njogu observes that Bakhtin makes too strong a claim in his assertion that a story teller is a literary person and he or she belongs to the lower strata associated with the common people from whom he or she brings the oral speech. For Njogu the story teller is both “common ... and literary ... an organic intellectual ... to the extent that he emerges from the people and he performs for them” (52). Evidently, the porcupine-narrator and his human master, Kibandi, in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, support Njogu’s idea of the literary story teller. The porcupine and the young human master are common categories among the society of the story. However, the artist initiates Kibandi and the porcupine into a special character with fused

literary and organic nature upon which the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence in the turn of the storytelling in the novel becomes visible to the reader.

In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator is assigned the role of a harmful double of the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*. Like Kibandi, the human master in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* assumes that the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* is dependent on his intelligence for survival. The eponymous narrator recounts that he turned into one of *Credit Gone West*'s most loyal customers the year he got thrown out of teaching. He consolidated his friendship with the Stubborn Snail, and became so much part of the fittings and furnishings that the boss proposed to him, thus: "you know, Broken Glass, if you'd been a bit together, I'd have taken you on as a barman here' and I replied I was together and if he doubted the clarity of my mind he could test me on my times tables and he said 'no, Broken Glass, business isn't about times tables, it's about clarity of mind'" (124-125). Here, the Stubborn Snail thinks that he possesses better brainpower than Broken Glass whom he considers as a hopeless drunk.

However, like the porcupine-narrator, Broken Glass makes claim to the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence. He points out that despite being thought of by the Stubborn Snail as a hopeless drunkard, he is able to judge the flow of traffic on the Independence Avenue in order to go to the bald soprano to return the plate

after managing to have his bicycle chicken. The eponymous narrator triumphantly recounts: “I’ll manage all right, there’s no two-way traffic, unless I’ve gone blind, and there are no motorcycles either, and no dustcarts that I can see, ah, there we are, It’s done, I’ve made it, I can claim victory now, it wasn’t a foregone conclusion, so I’m across the Independence Avenue” (133). The eponymous narrator celebrates his own sense of intelligence, especially how it encapsulates the world of his adopted home at *Credit Gone West*. The dialogic aesthetics of intelligence that he stands for is demonstrated in his ability to multiply: “I’m a sensible man, otherwise how come those people who say they’re not drunks can’t do their times tables, huh, I mean, anyone can multiply by 2, but once you start multiplying by 9, say, it does get tricky” (136). It follows that the eponymous narrator’s dialogic aesthetics is evident on his ability to reproduce models of control with heightened potential for understanding the Stubborn Snail’s model of the open bar of aesthetics with the two nodes of the different potential of the written word and the spoken word.

In the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence, quotients are not fixed in certain circuits of aesthetics but they are allowed to be carried over, through short circuits, to any of the nodes in the open circuit. The porcupine-narrator, for example, demonstrates the ability to read the aesthetics of the written word from all kinds of books that his human master has caught a fancy of. The porcupine-narrator points out that human beings spend most of their time reading books in schools

creating two nodes with the different potential of the educated and the ignorant. The porcupine-narrator recounts his bitter taste for people who become boasts on account of having read many books: “there’s a certain kind of person I really don’t like, like the educated young man called Amédée, whom we ate ... he was a show off, a braggart of the first order, he thought he was the most intelligent person in the village” (102). The porcupine-narrator disapproves of Amédée’s open circuit of education with two nodes of the different potential of the boastful, educated lot and the unassertive ignorant villagers.

The porcupine-narrator explains to the Baobab tree that Amédée criticized the old folk openly calling them ignorant old fools sparing only his parents on account that had they gone to school they would have been as intelligent as he. Presuming that the tree has never seen a novel, he spells out what it is: “I’ll tell you this, novels are books written by men to recount things which are untrue, they’ll say it all comes from their imagination ... they need novels so they can invent other lives for themselves” (104). Here, the intelligence quotients in the novel are visible through the way the artist invents a new life for the society. Therefore, the nature of intelligence in the novel is based on the dialogic aesthetics of writing and reading upon which the artist and the reader are initiated into a new model with heightened sensual and critical processes for experiencing the possibilities of life portrayed in the fictional world.

Indeed, the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* is established in the way the porcupine leaves its patch in order to serve as the artist's double in the narrative spaces of the novel. Consequently, the porcupine-narrator makes claim to quotients of intelligence not merely on account of his biological nature but on how he is able to leave his patch and move to the fictional world of the novel where he assumes a new life with dialogic aesthetics of intelligence enabling him to not only fit in but also to maintain Kibandi's rhythms of life in the adopted village of Séképembé. His animal instinct dialogues with the social quotients of intelligence that define the human society in Séképembé creating a simulacrum upon which infinite models of control for making sense of the material representations in the fictional world of the novel are produced. Accordingly, the porcupine-narrator recounts how by leaving one's patch dialogic aesthetics of intelligence is initiated: "by diving into one of these books, dear Baobab, you can take off round the world, leave the bush in the blink of an eye, turn up in a distant country, meet foreign people, strange animals" (104). By enticing Baobab to dive into books, the porcupine-narrator assigns the tree quotients of the dialogic aesthetics of intelligence in readiness for further storytelling.

### 3.3.2 “You’re a bad Man because you eat Children”: The Dialogic Aesthetics of Eating

Couto beautifully uses the aesthetics of the harmful double to organize the representations of time in the narrative spaces of *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. The harmful double’s aesthetic value is evident in the dialogic aesthetics of eating existing corpses of aesthetics in order to feed the narrative spaces of the novel with promotional patterns in problem-posing and problem-solving. In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Papa Kibandi, the father of the porcupine-narrator’s human master, is accused of eating his niece, “and when I say eating, my dear Baobab, you must understand that I am talking about terminating someone’s life by means which are imperceptible to those who deny the existence of a parallel world” (60). Here, ‘eating his niece’ implies that Papa Kibandi practices cannibalism. However, the porcupine-narrator explains that by eating, he means terminating someone’s life, and thus the idea of flesh-eating of members of one’s family is updated to an approximate version. Subsequently, cannibalism gains the operational meaning of using imperceptible means to send a member of the family to a parallel world.

Mabanckou’s aesthetics of eating becomes visible in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* through the cannibalistic activities of Papa Kibandi’s human-rat doubles and Kibandi’s human-porcupine doubles. Papa Kibandi causes the people of Mossaka untold miseries through the vicious eating habits of the human-rat doubles.

However, the people soon realized that Papa Kibandi was the bad man causing all their troubles. Therefore, with the help of Temb -Essouka, the famous sorcerer, they hunt down Papa Kibandi the bad man posing “a threat to the entire village ... to date he had eaten more than ninety-nine people ... let him not eat his hundredth victim” (67). Within the sample size of one hundred, ninety-nine victims have been eaten and only one remains. For the famous sorcerer, Papa Kibandi should not be allowed to eat the hundredth victim because if he does he will complete the cycle of eating upsetting the balance of things in the Mossaka society.

After burying Papa Kibandi, whose body had been bullet-riddled by the Mossaka hunters, Mama Kibandi and the young Kibandi relocate to the village of S k pemb . Against his will, the porcupine follows Kibandi because an animal double could not live far from his human master. Like his late father in Mossaka, Kibandi soon causes the people of S k pemb  untold miseries. The porcupine-narrator recounts: “we just began eating people at the drop of the hat, because my master’s other self had to be fed and when the creature with no mouth, no ears and nose had had its fill, it would settle on the last mat Mama Kibandi ever wove, scratching and farting away” (128). The porcupine-narrator’s account reveals four important things about the aesthetics of eating in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. First, the aesthetics of eating is a triad involving the human master, his other self and the animal double. Second, the aesthetics of eating is controlled by the insatiable

hunger of the human master's other self who does not have a mouth, ear or nose. Thirdly, Kibandi and his porcupine double carry out their cannibalistic activities as a way of feeding the creature without a mouth that lies on Mama Kibandi's mat satiated with every kill. Fourth, it is upon Mama Kibandi's mat that the creature's metabolic processes, such as farting away, become visible.

Consequently, Kibandi and the porcupine double serve as the two mouths upon which the creature without a mouth feeds while Mama Kibandi's mat serves as the narrative spaces upon which the creature's metabolism takes place. In an imperceptible manner, therefore, Kibandi's human-porcupine double, as well as Papa Kibandi's human-rat double, echo the two-mouthed cannibalistic ogres of African tales. In *Oral Literature in Africa*, Finegan observes that ogres are stock characters in many stories in "Bantu Africa ... the one-legged, two-mouthed cannibalistic ogres of East African tales ... the half-animal monsters of some tales in Malawi and the Congo" (345). Cued by Finegan's observation, there is great possibility that Mabanckou coalesces the ideas of the two-mouthed ogres and the half-animal characters of the Bantu African tales to establish the harmful human-animal double as the bedrock of the dialogic aesthetics of eating in *Memoirs of a porcupine*. Mabanckou beautifully updates the image of the two-mouthed ogre to characterize the novel as the creature with no mouth, ear or nose who is otherwise able to feed from the two 'mouths' of the porcupine-narrator and the human

character of Kibandi. Mama Kibandi's mat on which the creature lies farting away represents the comic aesthetics of the novel.

The porcupine-narrator specifies that the aesthetics of the harmful human-animal double is regulated by strict rules. However, Kibandi, his human master, does not abide by the rules and he turns out into a bad man: "my master was obsessed with thirst for mayamvumbi, and by his other self's inexhaustible appetite, and as a result he had ignored certain basic prohibitions usually observed by those in possession of a harmful double, for example never attack twins" (129). Here, Kibandi fatally strays from the rules governing the aesthetics of harmful doubles on account of his addiction and the inexhaustible hunger of his other self who demanded more and more kills. Therefore, though he had already eaten ninety-nine victims, like his late father Papa Kibandi, he planned to eat the twins Koty and Koté who used to take up position outside his house regularly. They seemed to know that Kibandi was involved in some mysterious activities posing a threat to the people of Séképembé. When he confronted them, they told him to his face that he was a bad man because he hated children: "you're a bad man because you eat children, we know you ate a baby, he told us when we were playing in the cemetery, and he'll tell us the same thing again tonight" (134). The twins are able to trap and kill Kibandi and his human double creating a dialogic turn in the aesthetics of eating. In real world, the writing of books is guided by strict rules that protect copyright and other ethical issues. When an author breaks the rules,

his or her book may be removed from circulation. However, books are dialogic in nature and they feed on each other, constantly updating their images. However, there is always the quotient of remainder, the hundredth victim, which ensures that each book retains its identity.

Mabanckou's literary brilliance is evident in the way he allows the aesthetics of eating epitomized in Papa Kibandi's human-rat doubles and Kibandi's human-porcupine doubles in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to encapsulate the aesthetics of the boss-customer in *Broken Glass*. The Stubborn Snail points out in his letter in the appendix to *Memoirs of a Porcupine* that he had charged Broken Glass, one of his patrons to turn out a book *Credit Gone West*, which was against his will published under the title *Broken Glass*. However, the discovery of the second manuscript with the title *Memoirs of a Porcupine* caused a stir with some of the patrons of the bar *Credit Gone West* because they thought "wrongly, as it happens, that *Memoirs of a Porcupine* was simply a sequel to *Broken Glass*" (Appendix). The critical reading of the two novels reveals that they are a strange sequel in that they form two dialogic fictional worlds, in a simulation of the Earth and the Heaven, where the characters may inhabit at different cycles of their existence.

Consequently, the dialogue between the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* and Holden, one of the customers of *Credit Gone West*, towards the end of the novel is a clear hint at the aesthetics of the dialogic novel. Holden charges Broken Glass

to tell him what they do with the ducks in cold countries during winter-time. However, Broken Glass only offers a promise: “we’ll meet again in the other world, Holden, we’ll have a drink together ... I’ll answer your question, I’ll tell you what they do with the poor ducks in cold countries during winter ... I must go now, my place is in paradise” (165). In the other world, that is the fictional world in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Broken Glass is however not physically present. The Stubborn Snail writes in his letter, “Broken Glass is absent from the text, featuring neither as omnipresent narrator nor as a character in the story. Deep down, he was convinced that the books we really remember are those that reinvent the world” (Appendix). The Stubborn Snail’s explanation indicates that Broken Glass exists in the other fictional world, *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, as the spirit of the text.

In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator operationalizes eating as giving transfer orders to an employee from the place of convenience to one of inconvenience. He recounts how the Education Office executes a transfer on him from the town school where he was teaching to a school in the bush with no electricity. In an entertaining manner, he moves Lenin’s historic phrase, “Communism means Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country” (115), from its historical context of the Russian revolution to the current inconvenience of relocation. He protests against the injustice: “so I refused to go off into exile up-country, because I didn’t want to be a drunk in the bush, and once I had categorically turned down

my second chance, the administration seized the opportunity to bar me from public office” (116). The eponymous narrator’s refusal to obey the transfer orders earns him a dismissal barring him from public office. Here, like a conceding poet in the **gicaandi** performance, the eponymous narrator loses his instrument of trade making it practically impossible for him to hold public office. In “The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu observes that in the **gicaandi** performance, a poet who fails to decode a message, is required to forfeit “his rattle, the gicaandi musical instrument ... without the instrument of his trade he cannot perform in public” (48). Accordingly, the eponymous narrator has lost the fancy of the government and he must find a way of retrieving it away from the profession of teaching. Subsequently, his presence shifts to the bar *Credit Gone West* where he becomes the double of the man called the Stubborn Snail.

No longer eating from the government salary, the eponymous narrator goes, mostly at the end of a narrative cycle, to the eatery along the Avenue of Independence where Mama Mfoa is “selling meat kebabs opposite *Credit Gone West*” (96). He orders a bicycle chicken, which is cooked on a barbecue, eats and then proceeds to the next narrative cycle of the manuscript *Credit Gone West*. His utterance at the beginning of the manuscript “you should never joke with the boss, he takes everything literally” (1), stands in a dialogic relation with the interpretation of everything in the book. Therefore, Mama Mfoa’s eatery should not be taken literally. Accordingly, the researcher’s examination of existing

corpuses of data reveals that the name Mama Mfoa can be traced to MFOA (Municipal Finance Officers' Association of Ontario) whose document title is *Better Capital Planning (Tackling your Infrastructure Deficit)*. In economic terms, infrastructure deficiency means a steady decline in government infrastructure spending and a steady increase in the cost of building additional infrastructure creating the sense of a failing economy. To tackle the infrastructure deficiency, better capital planning is called for on the part of the government.

In *Broken Glass*, Mabanckou updates the idea of infrastructure deficiency to the idea of Mama Mfoa's eatery where the eponymous narrator is furnished with a better capital plan for retrieving his lost fancy. Like the aesthetics of eating in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the dialogic aesthetics of eating in *Broken Glass* operates as a triad, comprising of the Stubborn Snail who is the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*, Broken Glass, a regular customer at the bar, and the manuscript *Credit Gone West*. The bar compares to Mama Kibandi's mat because it becomes the space upon which the tales of the patrons are told. Ultimately, the movement of the characters from one fictional world to the other becomes a promotional model in problem-posing and problem-solving so that what a character fails to understand while living in one place becomes visible when he or she goes over to the other world. In short, Mabanckou is able to produce aesthetics of the dialogic novel in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*

assigning the cycles of writing and reading a promotional duty of creating balance between different aesthetics circuits.

### **3.3.3 The Proof of Dialogic Aesthetics: “I’m Clearly Far from Finished Yet”**

Mabanckou organizes the aesthetics of the harmful double in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* in seven chronotopic cycles which read as the porcupine-narrator’s proof of the dialogic aesthetics in the storytelling. In the first six chronotopic cycles, for instance, he employs labels beginning with the explanatory adverb ‘how,’ as in, “how disaster brought me to your feet” (1), to show the burden of proof in the dialogic aesthetics of the storytelling. The porcupine-narrator has just escaped death: “by rights I should have left the world by now, I should have died the day before yesterday, along with Kibandi” (15). The porcupine-narrator is surprised at being alive because ordinarily when the human master dies his doubles also cease to exist. Kibandi and his human double had just been killed by the twins Koty and Koté, but against the common belief, the porcupine-double had been spared. The porcupine-narrator reasons that a higher power must have spared him so that he could tell the story of his exploits as a harmful double to the Baobab tree.

The first proof of dialogic aesthetics in the storytelling in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* appears in the way the porcupine-narrator makes reference to Kibandi, his departed human master. In his narration to the Baobab tree, the porcupine-narrator

reveals the discomfiture of working, for years, as the animal-human double of the man called Kibandi who had died two days before. The porcupine-narrator recounts, thus: “most of the time I stayed hidden just outside the village, and went to him late at night for specific missions, I know if he’d heard me making this confession while he was still alive he’d have punished me severely, free speech, he’d have said, ingratitude more like” (3). Here, the porcupine-narrator makes reference to Kibandi in the way an apprentice does to his master in the **gicaandi** performances. In “The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu observes that in **gicaandi**, apprentices who had been trained by a **njoorua**, a master poet, “would show their indebtedness and acknowledgement of their tutor’s knowledge by making reference to them in performances” (53). Accordingly, the porcupine-narrator’s reference to his human master during the narration is a proof of the dialogic aesthetics that characterize the storytelling in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*.

The movement of the porcupine-narrator from the world of the animals to the world of the human beings in order to work as the double of the human master Kibandi also serves as another proof of the dialogic aesthetics in the storytelling in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. The porcupine-narrator gives an account on how he would carry out a mission for his human master and then return to the forest, the world of the animals: “back in the forest after a mission, I’d go and think things over for a while in a burrow ... I’d review what we’d been doing, me and my

master, while he slept long and deep recovering his strength after an exhausting night” (13). The proof of the dialogic aesthetics, here, is given in terms of intelligence. Ordinarily, the distinction between animals and human beings is made through the latter’s claim to intelligence. However, in the storytelling a short circuit of intelligence is created enabling the load/ quotients to flow to the node of the animal. Accordingly, the porcupine-narrator boasts: “I enjoyed grappling with the abstract world, and I learned early on to discriminate, to look for the best solution to a problem, I don’t know why men think themselves so superior” (13). The porcupine-narrator brings to the narrative world of the human beings the quotients of intelligence he has gained living in the harsh world of the animals. Human beings claim to intelligence is therefore levelled into a dialogic voice that must of necessity encapsulate the voice of the animal distributing intelligence quotients across the human and the animal worlds.

The porcupine-narrator also offers proof of the dialogic aesthetics in his accounts of the initiatory process upon which the master artist commissions a person, a thing or even a place to assume the role of the narrator. Towards the end of the narrative cycle in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, for example, the porcupine-narrator prods the Baobab tree to give its opinion about his exploits as a harmful double: “Since yesterday, I was happy to talk to you till my eyelids began to droop, in the end you didn’t interrupt me, I still don’t know what you think, well, whatever, I feel better now I’ve got it off my chest” (145). Through the storytelling the

porcupine-narrator creates a narrative link with the Baobab tree. Therefore, the narrative load about his exploits as a harmful double flows to the node of the Baobab tree enticing it to talk. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyẹmí notes that in tale-riddles, “Animal characters as well as inanimate objects are described in material and human terms/ form” (120). Akínyẹmí’s observation implies that in the world of storytelling whatever the artist wants to commission is given a voice for expressing the desired consciousness in the story.

The artist cannot write about everything in a single book. There is always the quotient of remainder in the book encapsulating other books: “there may be a few things I haven’t told you, my name, for instance, which was given to me by my master, he called me Ngoumba, in our language it means porcupine” (145). The porcupine-narrator gives the Baobab tree one example of some of the things that still remain untold. The porcupine-narrator’s phrase, ‘he called me Ngoumba, in our language it means porcupine’ opens language into the dialects with the different potential of the human master, the porcupine and the Baobab tree. Consequently, though the porcupine narrator admirably addresses himself to the row of the aesthetics between the human and the animal categories in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, there is more that needs to be said about the subject.

In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator recounts how he would always go to a certain favorite tree and piss under it, and tell it his wanderer’s tale and the tree

would weep at his misery: “only the tree understood me, and moved its branches, to show that it cared and whispered low to me that I was a loser, but a nice one, and that the society just didn’t understand me” (125). Here, the tree talks to the eponymous narrator in its own ‘leafy’ language yet there is mutual understanding as though the two share a special language. The eponymous narrator hints at the credibility of a mutual language through his reference to incarnation: “the tree and I would have these long conversations ... I promised my leafy friend that when God called me back next time I would choose to be a tree” (125). The porcupine-narrator’s promise stands as proof of the dialogic aesthetics in the spun of storytelling in *Broken Glass*. In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the porcupine-narrator encapsulates the idea of incarnation in what the old governor porcupine used to teach them about matter, “of three most usual states and how they change, the liquid state, the gaseous state and the solid state ... the meaning of fusion, sublimation, becoming solid, becoming liquid, or vaporization” (148). The old governor porcupine’s lesson implies that a character can change his or her state as they transit from one fictional world to the other. Their presence in the other world is imperceptible and should therefore be examined beyond the material representation.

In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator presents multiple circuits to demonstrate the row of aesthetics that results when the Stubborn Snail opens the bar of aesthetics into two nodes with the different potential of the written word and the

spoken word. The circuits cut across many aspects of life including sour marital relationships, colonial binaries of the Whites and the Negros, political fancy with the people, conflict between religious groups at Trois-Cents and the bar owner, pissing competition, competition between books, and teaching of the French language. By using the different circuits of aesthetics to address himself to the row of the aesthetics between the written word and the spoken word, the eponymous narrator gives the reader the proof of dialogic aesthetics that characterize the novel. In addition, there is still a lot that needs to be said about each of the circuits of aesthetics that may be encapsulated in other books.

The eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* uses his imagined experience of teaching to reveal the row of aesthetics in the pronunciation of the French singular and plural nouns. Introducing the subject to his favorite student he observes: "I'm going to tell you about plural nouns, which are important in life ... because life is a banal business of singulars and plurals, locked in daily combat, loving, hating, condemned to live together" (113). Here, the eponymous narrator describes the disharmonies in the pronunciation rules of the French singular and plural nouns as a civil war of aesthetics. He explains that "the plural of common nouns is formed by adding an s to the end of the word, but watch out because the plural and the singular are the same whenever a word ends in s, x or z ... the plural of foreign common nouns ... I heard a great uproar outside, a large crowd of people burst in" (114). The crowd of people who bursts in the eponymous narrator's class

represent the row of aesthetics in the pronunciation of the various categories of nouns. He visualizes some militia accompanied by parents and students beating him up: “that was how I got put in quarantine, with an order not to set foot in the school premises” (114). The eponymous narrator’s visualization of the pronunciation problem in the French nouns as a row of aesthetics encapsulates the problem of translation in Mia Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* accounts that he was accused of misconduct by the Education Office: “when I was still teaching I apparently even used to turn up late for classes whenever I’d been drinking ... draw giant sex organs on the board, and apparently I even used to piss in a corner of the classroom” (111). The accusations leveled against *Broken Glass* point to the row of aesthetics in the open circuit with the two nodes of the different potential of formal education and cultural expectations. The giant sex organs are illustrations used by the eponymous narrator in the teaching of the human anatomy in a class of Biology but they stand in conflict with the cultural sensibilities about exposing one’s sexual parts in public. The drawings of the giant sex organs in *Broken Glass* encapsulate the severed large male sexual organ in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*. The eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* also recounts that he was accused of not being able to draw a straight line: “they wouldn’t give me a map of our country because I still called it by the name it had under colonial rule” (113).

Here, the eponymous narrator uses the idea of the map to demonstrate the conflict of the aesthetics of History in the teaching the subject and the aesthetics of change at the heart of the independent country.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is evident that Mabanckou beautifully uses representations of time and space in both *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to characterize the consciousness of being a harmful double in the African chronotope. In *Broken Glass*, he produces the dialogic aesthetics of eating through the triad of the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West*, Broken Glass, a regular customer at the bar, and the manuscript *Credit Gone West* which the Stubborn Snail commissions Broken Glass to write in a certain cultural taste that makes claim to the age of the written word. Mabanckou uses the patrons' drinking habits at the bar *Credit Gone West* to address himself to the addiction of writing whose unhealthy competition is demonstrated in clamor of the patrons of the bar credit Gone West to have their stories put down in the manuscript *Credit Gone West*. To demonstrate the row of aesthetics among competing authors Mabanckou allows the Stubborn Snail to open the bar of aesthetics into two nodes with the different potential of the written word and the spoken word. However, the eponymous narrator levels and stratifies the Stubborn Snail's claim to 'the age of the written word' into a multiplicity of voices drawn from titles of books, quotes and political slogans, engaging in dialogue within the single run-on sentence that constitutes

the one-hundred-and-sixty-five-page novel, in a way that simulates the voices of the poets in the **gicaandi** performance. The scatological vision resulting from the row of aesthetics culminates in the pissing competition between Robinette and Casimir. Mabanckou allows short circuits to be formed in *Broken Glass* as characters take things literally enabling the load of scatology to be carried over to the nodes of the open circuit equalizing the potential.

In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Mabanckou beautifully updates the image of the two-mouthed ogres of the Bantu African tales and the half-animal doubles of the tales of Malawi and the Congo to characterize the novel as the creature without a mouth, ears or nose who is able to feed from the two mouths of the narrator and the character(s). He uses the dialogic aesthetics of eating to demonstrate how books feed on each other creating promotional models upon which an aesthetic balance between the competing circuits of aesthetics may be achieved. He beautifully establishes the dialogic aesthetics of eating as the bedrock of the aesthetics of the dialogic novel. He makes *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to operate as the dialogic sequel simulating the dialogic movement between the Earth and the Heaven. Characters who might be killed in the course of the storytelling go to other world and have the chance of another existence. Mabanckou's ultimate literary achievement in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* is visible from the way he makes the dialogic aesthetics of eating to

encapsulate the motives and objects of the **gicaandi** genre and the tale-riddle promoting the idea of the African chronotope as the dialogic novel.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 THE MAGIC OF THE SLIDING SIGNIFIER IN BEN OKRI AND MIA

#### COUTO'S AFRICAN CHRONOTOPIC DOUBLE

The “tale-riddle consists of a chain of episodic events ... with one event starting where the other ends” (Akínyemí, *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, 118.)

#### 4.1 Introduction: “Time and Cycles of the Sliding Signifier”

The chapter interrogates how Ben Okri and Mia Couto use representations of time and space in *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* respectively to create a sliding signifier upon which the awareness of the idea of the African chronotope becomes visible to the reader. Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri's riddle of the cyclic African time and space in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road*, discussed in Chapter Two, and Alain Mabanckou's riddle of the comic human-animal double in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, discussed in Chapter Three, culminate into the riddle of the African chronotopic double. Importantly, Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* uniquely address themselves to the riddle of the African chronotopic double through a chain of episodic events on dream and waking creating a sliding signifier. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, as indicated in the epigraph above, Akíntúndé Akínyemí points out that the African tale-riddle consists of a chain of episodic events, with one event starting where the other ends (118). Cued by Akínyemí's observation, the chapter argues that Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* are approximate versions of the African

tale-riddle exhibiting motives and objects that promote the idea of the African chronotope.

In *The Age of Magic*, Okri organizes the chain of episodic events on dream and waking as camera shots presented in the documentary mode. He structures the novel into seven main parts labelled, “BOOK ONE, BOOK TWO, BOOK THREE, BOOK FOUR, BOOK FIVE, BOOK SIX and BOOK SEVEN” (7-221). The novel’s arrangement into seven books finds numerical equivalents in the spelling of the word Arcadia containing seven letters and the seven-member crew filming the TV documentary on the journey to Arcadia. The voiceover for the documentary explains that the seven-member crew were on the train from Paris to Switzerland when Lao, the presenter of the documentary, finds himself talking to a Quylph:

“What are you afraid of?” it said.

“Why should I be afraid of anything?” Lao replied.

“Maybe you are afraid of Malasso?”

“Why should I be afraid of him?”

“Everyone else is.”

“I don’t know him.”

“People are afraid of what they don’t know.”

“Never met him. Why should I be scared of him?”

“You tell me.” (9)

Here, the dialogue between the Quylph and Lao produces the motives and objects that characterize the gicaandi genre of levelling and stratifying one voice into two voices which then enter into dialogue with each other. Consequently the voiceover is split into Lao's voices of dream and waking. In "The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre," Kimani Njogu observes that "gicaandi is poetry composed by at least two poets who enter into dialogue with each other" (49). Njogu's observation refers to the poets engaged in the exchanges of the **gicaandi** genre. Nonetheless, in *The Age of Magic*, Okri assigns Lao, one of the main characters in the novel, many personas including that of a poet as seen in the poem that he composes in an attempt to define Arcadia (200). The author is able to create Lao's multiple-persona through genre blending, an important trait in the **gicaandi** genre.

The inscription of the Quylph awakens anxiety in Lao, who earlier on appears to exude confidence in life. It bothers him because despite occupying an unfamiliar space in the train, it seems to be perfectly at ease. Subsequently, Lao's sense of being at home in the train as he presents the documentary on the journey to Arcadia is upset by the Quylph's probing: "Then it must be life you're afraid of." (9). Later on in the novel, the voiceover explains that Lao seldom discusses his mysterious longing for Africa. When probed by Bruno, who serves as the driver to the filming crew, he keeps silent: "Lao wasn't sure what to say ... He had met many people with nostalgia for Africa ... said they had Africa in their souls.

Reincarnation was a subject Lao seldom discussed. To know something means needing no explanation and having no need to explain to others” (108). It is this masking of anxiety to awaken the great mystery of life that the Quylph probes in Lao. In the dream, Lao’s claim to knowledge is disturbed by the dialogue with the Quylph. It sets him off on the journey of deciphering the hidden meaning. The Quylph gives Lao a hint on the subject of the challenge telling him that the luckiest thing is to be at home anywhere. It denies him an immediate answer telling him that he has lost his chance and should be more awake next time.

The dialogue between the Quylph and Lao nominates the dialogic relation between dream and waking as the way of experiencing the world in the novel. The Quylph cues Lao to anticipate the dream-waking mode in his future encounters with the world, thus: “You may see me again later ... But don’t look out for me” (10). The voiceover explains that between dreaming and waking Lao realises that outside the window the mountains had changed from white to green. Okri uses the dream-waking dialogic relation to create an equivalent of rhythm encapsulating the travellers lull to sleep to the nursery rhythms of the wheels such that the outside world is constantly new. To simulate the rhythm of dreaming and waking, the author artistically uses the upper case with a given phrase at the beginning of each camera shot. The emphasis in the phrases creates short circuits which combine to simulate the rhythms of filming for the seven-member crew. To use BOOK ONE for illustration, when the short circuits are put together they read

thus: “SOMETHINGS ONLY THEY WERE ON LAO SLEPT THEY WERE MAKING WHILE HE WAS WAITING HUSK, WHO WAS WHILE THEY WERE THE FILM CREW LAO NOTICED, LAO SHOOK HIMSELF, LAO DIRECTED HIS ‘I WANT TO ASK AND SO EMILY, THE TRAIN SPED” (8-25). It is difficult to make complete sense out of this construction yet somethings explode in the memory. “EMILY, THE TRAIN SPED,” for instance, explodes into the idea of the train-toy called Emily or Emily Dickinson’s poem “The Railway Train.” Here, Okri uses the short circuits to create equivalents in the explosion of memory and the click of the camera.

In *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, Couto organises the chain of the episodic events as the short circuits of civil-war arranged in twenty-one chapters. The short circuits create a rhythm of dream and waking in the characters making it difficult for them to translate what happens around them into a visible language. The challenge in the short circuits is introduced in the epilogue by the translator of Tizangara. He explains that he is the one who transcribed the talk contained in the novel into visible Portuguese. He was a translator working for the administration at Tizangara. He witnessed everything narrated in the novel, heard confessions and read the statements. Like in the **gicaandi** genre, the translator of Tizangara is stating his authority in order to lay the basis upon which the reader should interpret the story. While describing the nature of the narrative in the **gicaandi** genre, Njogu observes that “The narrative recapitulates a past experience and

projects towards a possible world” (51). In tandem with Njogu’s observation, the narrator in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* uses his past experience of transcribing into visible Portuguese everything about the inquiry into the missing United Nations soldiers in Tizangara to create equivalents in everything narrated in the novel. He explains the problem that necessitates the telling of the story as that of the blue helmets who started to explode one after the other. To project into the possible world he poses the question, “Now, let me ask you this: did they really and truly explode? That’s what they call it for lack of a verb ... Did the soldiers of peace die? Were they killed? I’ll leave you to seek the answer in the following pages” (Epilogue). Here, the narrator sets the reader off into the imaginative world where the explosions of the soldiers of peace should not be taken literally but allowed to shatter in the memory for the meaning to become visible to the reader.

Indeed, the representations of time and space in the novel become visible through the episodic bursts of dream and waking. In one of the dreams Massimo Risi, the United Nations representative in Tizangara, encounter an old woman, Temporina, in the corridor of his hotel, and then later at night he dreams with her: “That night, he was gripped by a strange dream: the old woman from the corridor came into his room and undressed, revealing the most appetising flesh he had ever set eyes on. In his dream, the Italian made love to her” (40). The dream explodes in Risi’s mind as overpowering mixed feelings of lust and embarrassment. Waking up, he

tries to convince himself that it was just a nightmare but as he is leaving the room an arm grabs him. The old woman pointed at her stomach pronouncing that she was pregnant by him. The dialogue between the Italian and Temporina is overheard by the receptionist and the translator of Tizangara thereby expanding the incident into a possible rumour. The receptionist heightens the Italian's anxiety by pointing out that he might explode like the other soldiers of peace. The receptionist's reference to the subject of the exploding soldiers of peace encapsulates the translator of Tizangara's question about whether the soldiers really died or whether they were killed.

The receptionist points out to the Italian that the translator of Tizangara could explain the puzzle of Temporina. So for the investigator to get the exploded meaning he needs to slide to the the translator. To hint on the nature of the inquiry required, the receptionist offers Risi a piece of advice: "the best thing you can do is grab that walking stick and beat her with it. That's the only way you'll get her out of your dreams" (42). The Italian is surprised at the advice but presently he is distracted by a praying mantis on the floor. He takes the walking stick and kills it. When the receptionist sees the dead insect he gets alarmed, and he exclaims in a high-pitched voice, "-You've killed her!" (42). Here, the Italian's mission of inquiry in Tizangara is levelled into a voice for probing Tizangara's cultural beliefs. Accordingly, the translator of Tizangara explains to him that the praying mantis represents Hortensia, a revered ancestor in Tizangara. Out of the

explanation, the Italian realises that he is dealing with a dream-like world made up of beliefs that require him not to take things literally: “A praying mantis wasn’t just any old insect. It was an ancestor visiting the living. He explained this belief to Massimo: the creature had gone there at the bidding of a dead man” (43). The translator of Tizangara’s explanation implies that the praying mantis acts as the double of the ancestor. Subsequently, the belief is exploded into the bar of change upon which the puzzle of Temporina gains a new dimension for Massimo.

The dialogic relation between dream and waking that governs the representations of time and space in both Okri’s *The Age of Magic* and Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* can be illustrated as shown in diagram 4.1 below:

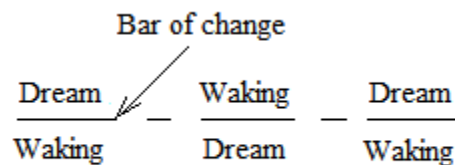


Diagram 4.1 Dream-Waking dialogic pairs

In the first dialogic pair, as indicated in diagram 4.1 above, the Dream is at the top of the bar of change since it contains the enigma. The meaning of the Dream is sought in the Waking which lies below the bar of change. However, the outside world has changed and the Waking itself cannot yield the meaning of the Dream. Therefore, in the second dialogic pair Waking becomes the new enigma and hence it moves to the top of the bar while the Dream slips below the bar of change. The dialogic pairs of dream and waking keep alternating in this manner

forming a chain of signification upon which the representations of time and space in both *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* become visible to the reader.

In the dialogic chain of signification, the bar of change presupposes the category of history. In Okri's *The Age of Magic*, Lao, one of the main characters, muses thus: "History might be the story of personality acting on time and memory" (16). When Lao's supposition is considered within the dialogic chain of signification, time explodes in the category of Dream while memory bursts in the category of Waking. Personality occupies the bar of change upon which time and memory explode into new meanings. In congruence with this view, the narrator in Mia Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* quotes a saying from Tizangara, thus: "The world is not what exists, but what happens" (1). Here, 'what happens' implies a leveling of personality into voices of time and memory for witnessing the action taking place in the world.

#### **4.2 "Encountering the Sliding Signifier" in Okri's *The Age of Magic***

As the characters in *The Age of Magic*, especially Lao, make their documentary journey to Arcadia they encounter enigmas which make them experience a "strangely pleasant feeling of being in the midst of a language [they] did not understand" (44). Consequently, they feel lost for they cannot make sense of their being in relation to the strange encounters which become increasingly

compounded as the journey to Arcadia progresses. Trying to make sense of the enigmatic encounters, Lao, the presenter of the documentary to Arcadia, notices curious detachment and/ or attachment of life to the West's adoption of Judeo-Christian spirituality and Greek mythology together with their symbols of materiality, which seem to be interconnected as though they were interflowing rivers: "Four rivers flow into the Garden of Eden. In one of them, as an old commentary says, the gold of the land is good. A fifth river can be said to flow from Eden to Arcadia, and its allegories are wonderful, its gold good" (18). The Garden of Eden is a paradisiac idea and place for home and/ or exile for humanity as portrayed in Judeo-Christian mythology while Arcadia is a paradisiac home and/ or exile in Greek mythology. The sliding signifier is created by the motion of the train making the scenery by the window rush out of sight before the crew could have a better view.

Lao and Mistletoe, his companion, think that life is a reliving of the first encounter. Lao ventilates: "I think the first seeing, the first mis-reading is the truest ...I think something of our deeper selves lives in the magic of our first enchantment, but only very rare experiences reawaken it" (100). Lao's observation implies that the first magi of the first encounter is in dialogic relation with all other encounters forming a sliding signifier. Writings on encountering the enigma go back to the dawn of history. Interestingly, the engravings of such encounters have endlessly typified human discourse, especially on philosophy and

civilization. In *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, Peter Hulme posits that Jan Van der Straet's remarkable engraving depicting clothed and armed Europe encounter with naked America, "epitomizes a meeting whose narrative European discourse has repeated over and over to itself ever since the end of the fifteenth century [, in stories of] Columbus and the Cannibals, Prospero and Caliban, John Smith and Pocahontas, Robinson Crusoe and Friday [and] Inkle and Yarico" (xiii). Curiously, the European narrative of the encounter with the Caribbean repetitively depicts the latter as primitive. Hulme observes that whether historical or anthropological, European accounts, "always tell the same basic story [of the] Caribbean Islands ... populated first by the gentle agriculturalists Columbus met on his first voyage, who turn out to be Arawaks, and then by the fierce, man-eating, nomadic Caribs" (47). Tellingly, the narrative of the Euro-Caribbean encounter is a basis for understanding the colonial fragmentation of space/ time into home and exile through detachment and/ or attachment to the Greek modernity.

In *The Invention of Africa*, V. Y. Mudimbe posits that for the subjugated societies, a panoramic view of colonial encounter as a spatial configuration reveals discourses that go successively, "[From] discourses on primitiveness to modernist commentaries on organization of production and those of power [with] body of texts on [one] side supposedly [unveiling] a tradition [while those] on the [other] witness rupture, transformations, and challenges brought about by the

efficiency of colonialism” (191). Mudimbe’s position implies that the colonial encounter, which forms the narrative imagination in *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, works through a tradition of detachment and/ or attachment of space/ time to discourses on modernity and political power.

Human civilization, therefore, supposedly rents its time from ‘the age of magic’ that could be traced to the romanticized tradition of a certain place. Accordingly Lao reveals that “Virgil’s *Eclogues* [is] one of the primary texts that shaped the idea of Arcadia” (60), for the television documentary that the seven-member crew is making in *The Age of Magic*. His revelation indicates that *The Age of Magic*, as a novelistic discourse, gets its literary vision from Virgil’s attempt in *Eclogues* to fashion the Roman culture alongside that of the Greek. Subsequently, for Lao, and the entire crew, the reading of Virgil’s *Eclogues* is an encounter with detachment and/ or attachment of the enigmatic idea of Arcadia to the Roman culture. In “A Vision of Arcadia,” Jill Line fittingly maintains that “For centuries the mythical land of Arcadia has been the romantic setting for stories of simple pastoral life ... the inspiration for poetry and music, painting and sculpture, architecture and landscape gardens ... it has found its way in all the arts” (95). Line’s position revealingly implies that the idea of Arcadia is uniquely used to fictionalize the idea of home and/ or exile for humanity. Classically, in *The Age of Magic*, Okri seems to read Virgil’s Arcadia as a signifier that slides, albeit in a literary sense,

on the rails of the characters' lives as the characters search for the golden memory of their being.

Interestingly, as Line observes Virgil's bucolic poems, "*Eclogues*, as they became known in the first century BC [are] pastoral dialogues and verses, supposedly extemporized by shepherds ... Virgil named his setting 'Arcadia' but, inspired by Theocritus, he moved the landscape itself to the wooded hillsides and lush pasturelands of Sicily" (100-101). Following Line's observation, it is easy to read the literary value of *Eclogues* for the development of the idea of Arcadia. First, through the transplantation of the 'Greek Arcadia' to the new, Sicilian landscape, Virgil dethrones Arcadia from the fixity of space and time to create a sliding signifier – an idea moving on the wheels of life. In terms of enculturation, it means that the European idea of home and/ or exile has its basis on the Greek mythology. For the worlds of Africa, South East Asia and South America, which are eclipsed by the European thought, it means that the sense of being home and/ or exile for the travelling subject is created by a fictionalized detachment and/ or attachment to the West's philosophical adoption of the Greek idea of modernity.

Secondly, the "sheep and shepherds, the gods and music of Arcadia [encounter] perfected beauty of nature, where shepherds and nymphs, in the company of gods, [spend] leisurely [lives] falling in love and singing songs of love" (101). Here, Virgil poetically paints the enchantment of being alive in a literary Garden of

Eden. In the same breath, Lao observes in *The Age of Magic* that “To live is to love, evolve, create” (29), in a paradisiac home for humanity. Interestingly, then, when Lao and rest of the crew interview travellers on their idea of Arcadia, they appear to be questioning not only anxiety of life but also affectivity of death. Therefore, the characters’ search for Arcadia inevitably leads to an interview with the imps of life which seem to be etched in the word Arcadia itself. Importantly, the idea of Arcadia gives the impression of concealed magic which the leading characters in *The Age of Magic*, especially Lao, try to find. Curiously, then, as Lao contemplates the architecture of the word Arcadia, “It occurred to him that letters might be symbolic, might hold deeper meaning” (18). Lao’s thought of letters as symbolic is quite significant for the thesis of the sliding signifier. Importantly, the magic of letters may be primarily explicated through the character of acrostic poems in which initial letters, when read vertically, form a particular word, and horizontally they create different verses. The lost dream in the journey to Arcadia, for example, is described through the acoustic word “AIOTA,” thus:

A train gliding  
 Into the dark light.  
 Oxen in the grass.  
 The fields singing.  
 A lost dream. (25)

The above poem subtly expresses the crablike movement of human civilization. In terms of pronunciation, the acoustic word 'AIOTA' seems to coincide, but orthographically resist to coincide, with 'Iota,' the ninth and smallest letter of the Greek alphabet. Semantically, it could mean a jot, a very small, inconsiderable quantity. In *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster posits that one of the movements of human mind which could be observed in the novel is "the shy crablike sideways movement," (245), expressing human civilization. Therefore, the poem 'AIOTA' echoes, through the symbolic, acrostic properties of the ninth and smallest letter of the Greek alphabet, the puzzle of the slow, almost unobservable movement of human civilization.

Since the idea of 'Arcadia' is the focus of the television documentary being made by the film crew in *The Age of Magic*, it forms the photographic signifier whose referent is the notion of home. In the socio-historical world of the film crew, the notion of 'Arcadia' and its referent of home are, therefore, indistinguishable. The signifier and its referent achieve meaning through the decision and focus of the camera. As a documentary, then, Arcadia is not just an observational world but it contains interpretive focus for subjective and/ or objective truth of the stories of home and/ or exile in Greek modernity. The narrator/voiceover in *The Age of Magic* observes that Lao concludes that the symbolic truth within the word Arcadia is that "When we are young we set out with dreams. In the middle of the journey of our lives we find that perhaps we have lost the way. At the end we find

the origin; and we begin again” (18). Here, what subsists in the journey of life is a sliding self, a self who does not become separated from their image at different points of the journey but slides into different focus of the camera. The journey to Arcadia in *The Age of Magic* is thus anisotropic since it involves detachment and/or attachment of the image of the self to the idea of Greek modernity which is philosophized by the West as the origin of home for humanity.

Consequently, the film crew’s search for Arcadia is a search for the truth about the notion of home for humanity that is professed by the West’s bodies of modernity. In *When the Law Goes Pop: The Vanishing Line between Law and Popular Culture*, the legal scholar Richard K. Sherwin itemises three kinds of truth: “factual truth,” “a higher truth,” and “symbolic truth” (49-50). The factual truth is observational, it constitutes what can be seen in the socio-historical world and, therefore it is photographic in nature. Noteworthy, the photographic element, which basically relies on the photographer and the camera, is at the heart of the documentary style. The photographer is the interpretive agent while the camera is the main instrument for recording elements of the representation of time and space. Significantly, in “Understanding a Photograph,” John Berger posits that a photograph is an “automatic record [in which there] is no transforming ... only decision, only focus” (181). Berger’s position implies that Arcadia, as a photographic element, has no distinction between the signifier and the referent. Then, how does the photographic element of the documentary in *The Age of*

*Magic* signify meaning? In *Camera Lucida*, the theorist Roland Barthes argues that a photograph is “never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents)” (5). Barthes’ argument leads to the conclusion that perhaps the photographic signifier of Arcadia slides to its scenic idea of home and/ or exile for signification to take place. It does not abide to Ferdinand de Saussure’s representation in which the signifier ‘TREE’ and its referent bear distinct socio-historical object and mental image.

Arcadia is an acrostic universe whose seven letters stretch out into the world of the documentary and its seven-member film crew. Cued by Lao’s musing over the word Arcadia in *The Age of Magic*, the letters could be assigned meaning as follows. First, the word starts and ends with ‘A’ and it is split in the middle by the same letter. It could, therefore, be perceived in two parts. Secondly, the ‘A’ in the first part symbolizes being ‘Alive,’ which is to be in full focus of the camera; ‘R’ represents ‘Reading,’ trying to make sense of life; and ‘C’ is the ‘Camera,’ which implies attempts to attain a permanent memory of life. The border between the two parts is marked by ‘A’ which symbolizes ‘Awakening,’ trying to know what the self is in socio-historical world. In the second part, ‘D’ implies ‘Death,’ the realization that the self has lost the way; ‘I’ suggests ‘Imps of impersonation,’ personalities that the self assumes in their search for the way and; finally, ‘A’ implies ‘Arrival’ to the realization that the self needs to go back to the origin. The

seven-member film crew assumes the roles symbolized by the letters as they make the documentary of the journey to Arcadia.

In *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster argues that at the heart of the novel is a story that narrates “life in time” (49). Therefore, when the factor of time is brought into consideration, the acrostic universe of Arcadia in *The Age of Magic* becomes a diachrony – a world in two times, with a meaning that repels fusion to overlap and not to overlap. Lao observes that the word Arcadia reveals a configuration of letters which alphabetically, “Begin at the beginning; at the mid-point begin again; and at the end return to the beginning” (18). In the model, the x axis denotes time while the y axis is the radius of the universe. Consequently, the semi-circle starts at the time axis, at the mid-point it touches the time axis and at the end it returns to the time axis. Ingeniously, it encounters time, then makes an arc back to time, and repels in another arc that tries to coincide and not to coincide with time. The word Arcadia, thus would be split in the middle to read ‘ARC’ and ‘DIA’ on either side of the time axis on which ‘A’ coincides.

Revealingly, Lao conceives the motion initiated by the configuration of the letters in the word ‘Arcadia’ to symbolically mean, “Never move far from the alpha of life. Replenish yourself in the aleph. Renew the core with the alf. In A we begin and to A we return” (18). Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and aleph is the first letter of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet, such as Hebrew, while alf (alif)

is the first letter of the Arabic. In other words, alpha, aleph and alf are all beginnings of the alphabet but in different semiotic domains. Therefore, they resist fusion to coincide and not to coincide and hence create a sliding signifier as shown in diagram 4.2 below:

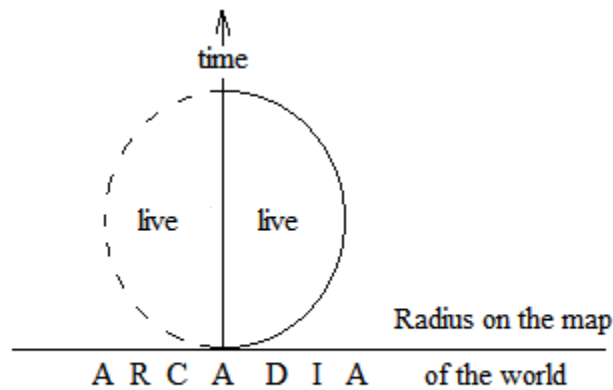


Diagram 4.2 ARCADIA on Time-Map of the world axis

In Physics, ARC is a flash of light that happens when electricity flows between two separated points. Perceived within the above diagram of the sliding signifier, ARC coincides with the sign of live. It is thus the flash of light that makes what is nominated by the temporal signifier ‘live,’ which is in the focus of the camera, to be transitorily and/ or permanently etched in the travelling subject’s memory. However, since the flash could only be attained when energy flows between two domains of the world, the travelling subject in *The Age of Magic* becomes aware of it as an encounter with the photographic image of the sign ‘live,’ albeit in the other domain, denoted as DIA on the radius of the universe. To take Lao’s conclusion that, “In A we begin and to A we return” (18), as a working thesis, the DI- of DIA must be a prefix of A. Then, since A coincides with the time axis, DI

would analytically express the sense of two times within which the synthesis of meaning for the photographic signifier of ARCADIA is achieved. The argument finds backing in etymology where DI- means two or twice. It follows, then, that for the sliding signifier DI- implies two beginnings within the same universe, the thesis and the inversion.

Of great interest for the study, DIA is the sign of the sliding signifier that signifies a beginning in the other domain of the universe but which must return to its original beginning and, hence it becomes a (dia) chronic. Peculiarly, here, ‘chronic’ infers the problematic of DIA – sign of live – that is always happening or returning to its origin and is thus very difficult to dispel. Consequently, the encounter with the flash of life is a thesis that seems to be felt as a new encounter, an inversion, in the other domain of the universe. Therefore, it is not just an encounter but a double encounter which repels fusion to overlap and not to overlap. The double encounter is hence two-fold: a sign of time that resists to coincide, and another that resists not to coincide. In *The Age of Magic*, Lao is surprised at the revelation for the possible symbolic interpretation of the word ‘live’: “[He] could have sworn that someone whispered into his ear that the inverse of the word live is evil” (29). Following Lao’s lead the sign of live in DIA, indicated in the above diagram, would be an inversion, which is the word ‘live’ read backwards to create ‘evil.’ Surprisingly, DIA itself reads backward as AID, a word that perfectly makes sense when it is taken to mean utility for (live).

The sign of live signifies an encounter with the enigma, an encounter which is not finite but infinite. In *God, Death and Time*, Emmanuel Levinas appropriately observes that the infinite could be investigated through the dialectic of the saying, “here I am, which identifies with nothing if not the voice that utters and surrenders,” (192), to the enigma. Reasonably, the infinite implied in Levinas’ saying ‘here I am’ could be used to explicate the diachronic sense of the sign ‘live.’ First, the saying is an expression of the adverbial ‘on-screen’ for it broadcasts a presence. It seems to coincide with the synthesis of the encounter in *The Age of Magic* in which a seven-member film crew is “Making a television documentary about a journey to Arcadia, Greece” (13). For the film crew, the encounter with Arcadia is felt as being on-screen as they shoot the documentary. Second, ‘here I am’ invites the adjectival ‘living or animate,’ which indicates that the subject is alive for the encounter. Third, the saying infers to the verbal ‘exist or reside’ which communicates that the subject ‘I’ occupies the world of the encounter. Subsequently, the saying ‘here I am’ could be used to express the diachronic sense, two times, of the sign ‘live.’

The problem of the sliding signifier is in its nature to repel synthesis. It follows, then, that by encountering, the study means the character of the sliding signifier for beginning at the beginning and returning to the beginning via different domains of the universe. In *The Age of Magic*, the encounter with the spark of human life is expressed in a number of signs within different domains of the

universe. Lao, revealingly, interviews the travellers in the train thus: “I WANT TO ask you all what your personal Arcadia might be. What is your idea of a private paradise? Is it a place, a book, a person, a piece of music, a painting?” (23). From Lao’s interview, it is evident that the sign of life could be a place, a book, a person, a piece of music or a painting. As far as place is concerned, the film crew in *The Age of Magic* is making a “television documentary about a journey to Arcadia, in Greece. They had started in London and had filmed in Paris and were now bound for the Goetheanum in Basel, Switzerland” (13). Perhaps, more importantly, each of the places has documentary value in forms of legendary persons, such as Emperor Augustus, books such as Virgil’s *Eclogues*, music and paintings, such as Poussin’s.

More precisely, in *The Age of Magic*, the narrator/voiceover rightly observes this about the film crew: “They were making a journey to a place, but in truth they were making a journey to an idea” (13). Cued by the voiceover in the documentary, the locus of the study is not actually the places, the people, books, paintings or music that the film crew visits, but the ‘sliding’ idea that emerges from the interview of such a journey. Within the documentary, the idea would spin out as cutaways that tell a story. In *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster rightly posits that in the novel the story, “runs like a backbone – or ... a tapeworm, for its beginning and end are arbitrary” (45). Forster’s position implies that the pertinent question of the journey to Arcadia would be what the backbone supports, why it

supports whatever it does, and for whom. Curiously, the backbone or tapeworm seems to prop an inquiry into the West's idea of home. In fact, the progression of plot in *The Age of Magic* is mainly achieved through the film crew's (dis) encounter with the idea of home as slippages in Virgil's *Eclogues*, the Biblical Eden, Plato's *Atlantis*, Goethe's *Faust*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, *Emperor Augustus*, *Tarot and Stall*, Poussin's painting of Arcadia and Camus's essays.

Ironically, there is an internal disorder in the discourse that appears to delineate home as exile for the human subject. In *The Age of Magic*, the narrator observes that "In Virgil's *Eclogues*, one of the primary texts that shaped the idea of Arcadia, there is a sinister intuition. Something in the landscape of Arcadia creates inner disorder. Some of the dwellers of Arcadia are haunted by madness and extreme passions" (60). In the light of the narrator's observation, the search for a private Arcadia would, then, be for a word/ idea that creates peace. As earlier noted, Line accurately observes that "For centuries the mythical land of Arcadia has been the romantic setting for stories" (95), which implies that a lot has been said of Arcadia in postscript. However, the narrator in *The Age of Magic* notes that *The Bhagavad Gita* rightly asserts that, "More blessed than a thousand words, is one word that brings peace" (23). Perceived in this light, the search for a private Arcadia is a meditation on the encounter with the Alpha of life.

Interestingly, meditation becomes possible through (dis)encountering with philosophies of life. Undoubtedly, then, meditation itself is a theory of time. Then, it is no wonder that the narrator in *The Age of Magic* uses Lao's meditation on the architecture of the word Arcadia to ascribe letters with a symbolic meaning such that each letter in the word appears to represent a body of philosophies. Subsequently, the filming of the journey to Arcadia is credited with a temporal character involving a seven-member crew: "In those days seven people were needed to film such a journey" (13). Each member of the crew would thus be taken to stand for a philosophy of life upon which the subject (dis) encounters in their search for home. However, every single member of the crew makes the journey for peculiar reasons. Lao, for instance, "suspected that on the journey might be found the keys to the treasure house of Arcadia" (197). He intuitively realizes that though they have been travelling in the world by train, "to find the essence of Arcadia he would have to travel in a different way, into a text, into himself, to its original and lasting place [, and that] Arcadia would not be found on the map" (197). Therefore, the true journey would be by the train of ideas into classical texts, such as Goethe's *Faust*, upon which the sign of humans' original home, Eden, appears to slide from enchantment of one semiotic domain to the other.

Achille Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason* appears to be a suitable text to turn for some light. Laurent Dubois, the translator of the text, posits that for Mbembe,

Black Reason is what organizes Reason as we know it in the Western thought: “the reason of state, the reason of capital, the reason of history. To understand the category of Blackness, one must understand the history of modern world, its forms of conquest and exploitation ... the forms of resistance and voicing, the totality and its fragments” (ix). As if being prophetic on Mbembe’s ‘Black Reason,’ Okri is thus able to uniquely address himself to the lure of Euro-American modernity in *The Age of Magic* without being visibly dragged into the much weathered post-colonial debate that is prevalent in African literary texts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Through *The Age of Magic*, Okri seems to invite literary readers to look, not merely into the physical occupation of Africa by the West, but more keenly into the West’s philosophical mind that has been subtly organizing, since classical Greek time, the cycles of home and exile for the world.

#### **4.2.1 “The Train of Life’s Magic”: Journey as Home**

The main thesis in Okri’s *The Age of Magic* seems to be “The Journey as Home” (7). The novel, therefore, appears to fit quite well in the enigmatic African literary world, in which, as noted in chapter one, philosophy of life spells and, is itself spelt by, cyclic rather than linear time. The enigma in Okri’s *The Age of Magic*, as well as in the African literary world, is thus the infinite latitude of the journey motif in search for home. Accordingly, in *Infinite Longing for Home: Desire and the Nation in Selected Writing of Ben Okri and K. S. Mariam*, David C. L. Lim

posits that in Okri's literary world, "the abiku cycle is a condition of bad infinity [in which, those] fated (or who condemn themselves) to loop ad infinitum ... achieve no progress" (70). While the abiku is a journey motif that is noticeably present in Okri's *The Famished Road*, its prophetic vision expands in *The Age of Magic*. As observed in chapter two, the abiku allegorises the infinite idea of home, in terms of a speaking body of modernity, which the West commissions for Africa. In a documentary style, the journey motif in *The Age of Magic* focuses on the abiku on location, Greece, which is at the heart of the West's idea of home for humanity.

The prophetic vision in the abiku forms a sliding signifier that is anisotropic in nature, it can go back and forth, in a loop of time. It is not a cross-section, synchrony, but a diachrony of time. In *Introducing Cultural and Media Studies: a Semiotic Approach*, Tony Thwaites, Lloyd and Warwick Mules observe that "the state of the sign system at any given instant ... something like a cross-section ... at one point on the time axis ... characterise ... a synchronic semiotics" (41). Such a sign system presupposes a linear notion of time and takes for granted the problematic of the working of the sign. However, Thwaites et al further observe that "The aspects of signs which are time-bound ... are, by contrast, called diachronic" (41). In a diachrony, time is not a cross-section but it exists in two parts such that it is possible to make an infinite journey back and forth.

The diachrony of time for the idea of Africa and the West, on which colonial discourse slides, is uniquely addressed in Okri's *The Age of Magic*, an important detail that is used to delineate the text as the locus for the discussion on the magic inherent in the journey motif. Notwithstanding, African classical predecessors to *The Age of Magic* subsist in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Okri's *The Famished Road*, discussed in chapter two, in which the journey motif is at the heart of the narrators' search for home. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the narrator journeys across the world for ten-years to the Deads' Town in search of his dead tapster whom he intends to persuade to return with him to the world of the living. Interesting, reading the novel means that the reader, together with the narrator, embarks on the journey, albeit in the mental panorama, to the Deads' Town and back to the world of the living. The magic of the journey motif in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, *The Famished Road* and *The Age of Magic* is realized as vestiges of life which the narrator(s) get or loss from their detachment and/ or attachment to the European thought of modernity.

At the first encounter, the reader might think that the novel is simply about an unreasonable palm-wine drinkard who is driven to search for his dead palm-wine tapster by his addictive desire for palm-wine. However, as the reader journeys on, sooner or later they realize that the narrator's alcoholic problematic is not really a physical craving for palm-wine but a symbolic addictive colonial gaze. Curiously, through the gaze the West seems not only to entice Africa to perceive journey to

the West as home, but also to delete the memory of the West as the culprit who turns Africa's home into exile through colonialism. Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, therefore, suitably heralds the journey to Arcadia in Okri's *The Age of Magic*; a journey to the West's idea of home.

Likewise, Okri's *The Famished Road* hinges on the journey motif within which the African tries to understand who/what they are in the diachrony of home and exile. The novel revolves around the cycles of birth, living, death and rebirth in which the abiku-narrator undertakes anisotropic journey by which he is born into the African world of the living, to the same or different parents. Then, he soon wills his own death, following a binding pact with the king of the deads, in order to return to the world of the dead for a potential rebirth. Puzzlingly, at first, the novel appears to be a mere African mythology about the abiku, but as the reader moves farther into the abiku's journey, bodies of the idea encountered earlier in the journey, yet not understood at the moment, become clearer. The magic of the journey motif is thus felt by the reader as the realisation that the abiku-narrator is a powerful allegory for the infinite idea of colonial gaze. The abiku-narrator is, in essence, an infinite body of enchantment, such as structural adjustment programmes, neoliberalism and global economy, which the West uses to entice Africa into further underdevelopment and perennial poverty. Precisely, the abiku's anisotropic journey to Africa and back to the West appears to be a literary precursor for the journey to Arcadia in *The Age of Magic*.

The journey motif classically runs through all the six texts selected for the study, but it importantly culminates in Okri's *The Age of Magic* and explodes in Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*. The journey motif in the novels spins as a kind of documentary that re-enacts socio-historical realities in the world. Noticeably, *The Age of Magic* actually revolves around the making of a television documentary about the West's idea of home for (her) self and the other. In *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols observes that defining documentary is problematic and, hence: "It is common today to revert to some version of John Grierson's definition of documentary, first proposed in the 1930s, as the 'Creative treatment of actuality.'" (6). Nichol addresses himself to documentary in film, but Grierson's definition is also workable in the novel, especially in the journey motif. Accordingly, the balance between fiction and the actual socio-historical world, suggested by the definition, seems to be quite important for the understanding of the journey motif in Okri and Couto's unique approaches for addressing (neo)-colonialism.

In any case, the novel has the potential for addressing all kinds of human experience, including documentary film. In *The Age of Magic*, for example, Okri uses documentary filming as the literary backbone for narrating, to use Forster's diction in *Aspects of the Novel*, the characters' life, "in time. And what the entire novel does – [for] it is a good novel – is to include the life by value as well" (49).

The journey motif in *The Age of Magic* thus boasts of a double allegiance to ‘life in time’ (history) and ‘life by value’ (human development/ civilization). In *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning*, Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro maintain that “Most critics would agree that documentaries are what they are because they make particular claims about the socio-historical world” (12). Therefore, by assuming the documentary style in *The Age of Magic*, Okri is able to make certain claims about the West’s socio-historical world, especially the idea of home that it commissions for humanity.

In the reading of Goethe’s *Faust* in *The Age of Magic*, for example, Okri seems to invite the interpretive audience to be more thoughtful on how the classical text is used to commission modernity as home for humanity. In *The Age of Magic*, Jim, the television documentary director, reads *Faust* and then, tries to invoke the infinite of modernity that the Devil appears to promise the eponymous Faust. Jim explains to Lao thus: “The Devil seduced me not by anything he did or said. He seduced me with his serenity” (66). Here, ‘serenity’ has to do with aesthetic appeal that promises nothing but stretches forth a feeling of being balanced in the body of epistemologies. In “Faust’s Begehren: Revisiting the History of Political Economy in *Faust II*,” William H. Carter observes that most commentators of Goethe’s *Faust II* are interested in “the creation of paper money in act 1, Faust’s renewal activity in act 4, and commercial ventures of Faust and Mephistopheles in

act 5” (103). The commentators seem to selectively focus on the historical materiality in Act 1, 4 and 5 in *Faust II* but there is a gap in Act 2 and 3.

In addition, Carter notes that most commentators disclaim Act 2 and 3 in *Faust II* as having any stake in historical materiality since they are acted in Faust’s head. However, for Carter, Goethe wonderfully “accentuates in act 2 and 3 the subjective nature of value, particularly as it relates to the principal of demand. Goethe repeatedly employs and couples Wert (value) and Begehr/en (demand) in the scenes leading up to and including Helena episode” (103). Here, Carter importantly raises the question of value and demand as the locus for the commissioning of modernity. In *The Age of Magic*, Jim recounts to Lao how he summons the Devil because he is “NEARLY DRIVEN INSANE by the astonishing success of some of [his] mediocre colleagues” (65). However, when the Devil appears, he does not offer Jim “the kingdoms of fame or success” (66). Contrastingly, in *Faust*, Mephistopheles offers Faust modernistic fame and success. Though Jim is ready to sell his soul to the Devil for the glamour of modernity, he discovers, to his chagrin that the Devil, “wasn’t interested ... He wasn’t buying, and he wasn’t selling” (66). Therefore, Jim seems to read the enigma of the Devil as the absurdity of life. For him the Devil-Modernity signifier spells the infinity of self-effacement which seems to characterize human nature.

Curiously, when the Devil-Modernity signifier is made to slide back to Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, discussed in chapter three, the question of self-effacement seems to become clearer. In *Broken Glass*, the Credit for human civilization seems to be a journey motif to the West. However, the characters who go to the West ready to give themselves for modernistic success, are eventually wrecked. Mabanckou ingeniously creates a griot who reassembles the voices of the wrecked characters, such as Holden in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, so that the interpretive audience is able to hear them tell, by the word of mouth, their untold stories of colonial encounter. Here, the magic of the sliding signifier is felt as a slippage that allows the interpretive author and reader to hear, the subaltern's story of their journey to the West in search of home, and how the journey eventually pitches them into exile.

The enchanted working of the Devil-Modernity signifier is allegorised in Mabanckou's *Memoirs of a Porcupine* through a local collaborator, Kibandi, who initiates a porcupine-narrator, whom he names Ngoumba, into a harmful double. He commissions Ngoumba to henceforth write out of existence Africa's beautiful home of oral tradition and historical memory. Ngoumba recounts how he is initiated into reading of the European text, thus: "my master just had to be reading, he brought all sorts of books back to the house ... it was around this time that I too began to pick out letters among the thoughts passing through my mind" (81). The translation of thoughts into letters in Ngoumba's mind spells the infinite

of modernity whose locus is writing. In Goethe's *Faust*, Mephistopheles, who represents the devil, translates the infinity of modernity in Faust's mind not only to classical books but also paper money. Faust's modernistic success, which is also sought by Jim in *The Age of Magic*, seems to centre on, to use Ngoumba's diction in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the West's ability to "set down their thoughts, their imaginings on paper" (81). It then follows that subscribing to Faust's imaginings of writing implies effacement of the oral sign.

However, Jim as well as Ngoumba appear to resist to coincide with Faust. Therefore, Africa's self-effacement, as assembled in modernistic memoirs, such as Goethe's *Faust* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which deify the European classical thought of master/ servitude double gain a new significance. In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the infinite of master/ servitude double, upon which subjugation of Africa continues to flourish, despite the official end of colonialism at the close of the twentieth century, is put to the witness box through the imagined animal-human double. The porcupine-narrator in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, like Jim in *The Age of Magic*, is seduced by the enigma of the Devil, through his modernistic outlook. Interestingly, Ngoumba in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Jim in *The Age of Magic*, and even the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass*, resemble Faust in Goethe's *Faust II* Act 2 and 3 since the infinite of modernity seems to equivocate in their minds for the subjective meaning of home.

The reading of modernity as a text for home is not an easy journey since it spins out an infinity of, what Forster terms in *Aspects of the Novel* as, “life in time” and “life by value” (49). Subsequently, Okri employs the expository documentary mode in *The Age of Magic* to cue the reader to the journey, with a stand-alone cutaway, “READ SLOWLY” (6). Curiously, the cutaway implies that the novel needs to be read in a certain way, different from all other ways of reading. In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster properly maintains that in a prophetic novel “It is the implication that signifies and will filter into the turns of the novelist’s phrase” (182). Therefore, Okri’s phrase, ‘READ SLOWLY,’ which stands in a prophetic tone, sets the reader to a peculiar thoughtful plane. In *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bill Nichols observes that the expository documentary mode, “arose from a dissatisfaction with the distracting, entertainment qualities of fiction film” (32). Subsequently, through the expository cutaway Okri seems to delineate *The Age of Magic* as a novel-film whose chief purpose is not to entertain, but to provoke atypical thought about history and human civilization.

Why is there a need for reading *The Age of Magic* slowly? Nichols observes that in a documentary mode the “Voice-of-God commentary and poetic perspectives sought to disclose information about the historical world itself and to see that world afresh” (32-33). Therefore, reading the documentary is a unique reading for which, as hinted by the voiceover in *The Age of Magic*, “SOME THINGS ONLY

become clear much later” (8), after the encounter with the journey motif. In the voiceover’s hint, the word ‘ONLY’ seems to preclude the synchronic aspect of the sign from the centre of the journey motif. Thwaites maintains that semiotics could be understood as “a system of signs” (39) that could be read as “a cross-section ... at one point on the axis of time ... accordingly [called] synchronic semiotics,” (41), or as “time-bound ... called diachronic” (41). It then, follows that when the narrator in *The Age of Magic* talks of ‘much later,’ they imply that the sign is time-bound. Therefore, the kind of reading implied in *The Age of Magic* is not momentous or synchronic, but diachronic. It involves a temporal journey in which the sign slides back and forth through the time axis for the synthesis of ‘life in time’ and ‘life by value’ to come into the reading cycle.

In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster speculates “as to the future of the novel, will it become more realistic, will it be killed by the cinema” (244). Decades later, Okri seems to reiterate the importance of the novel by incorporating the cinematic mode as the style and character in *The Age of Magic*. Subsequently, he creates a new paradigm of writing that could be dubbed novel-film. *The Age of Magic* opens an infinite of reading the enigma encounter initiating a journey motif to the sign of home for humanity, which seems to be hitherto frozen in the classic Greek thought through synchronic semiotics. In Mabancou’s *Broken Glass*, the Stubborn Snail, a Euro-centric literary executor attempts to enforce a synchronic time for interpretive readers that detaches and/ or attaches memory to the European

tradition of writing and the African oral tradition. Quite importantly, in Okri's *The Age of Magic*, the interpretive reader is invited to journey right into the Greek typical memory of home. The film-novel form carries with it a double illocutionary power which undercuts popular reading of history. In the novel, the narrative is experienced through cinematic elements, such as the voiceover and close-ups, as well as novelistic mode like third-person narrative voice and descriptive techniques.

However, reading *The Age of Magic* is not an easy journey, even when the interpretive reader heeds the voiceover's advice to read slowly. The interpretive reader must contend with the train journey as well as the interviews of the travellers. In addition, both the interviewees and the film crew are engaged in a journey of reading classic texts, such as Plato's *Atlantis*, Goethe's *Faust* and Albert Camus' essays on the absurd. In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster posits that in his analysis of the aspects of the novel he could observe "these two movements of the human mind: the great tedious onrush known as history, and the shy crablike sideways movement," (245), of human civilization. He observes that both movements are problematic: "history because it only carries people on, it is just a train of passengers; and the crablike movement because it is too slow to be visible" (246). Reasonably, then, the train journey in *The Age of Magic* represents a three-fold journey. First, there is the apparently more visible documentation of 'life in time' which forms history. Secondly, there is 'life by value' or the crablike

movement of human civilization. Thirdly, there is the problematic of reading which is borne out of the synthesis of history and human civilization.

What, then, does a journey to history portend for the travelling self? Husk, who is in charge of the filming logistics, in *The Age of Magic*, chooses four people who are “white, middle-class, American,” (15), and travelling together, for the documentary interview. She thinks that among the passengers they are the best candidates for the interview. Husk’s chromatic choice of the interviewees indicates that the journey to history that is fictionalized in *The Age of Magic* speaks of fragmentation of humanity through detachment and/ or attachment to the privileging and/ or devaluation of race in Greek classics. Subsequently, Lao, the film presenter, explains to the interviewees that “The idea behind Arcadia ... is the suspicion that we have lost something, the feeling that we tend to lose our best dreams. Take Atlantis ...” (21). Then, Scott, one of the interviewees, passionately takes the claim, thus: “they always seem to lose it. Something keeps creeping in and they destroy themselves. Rome was the last lot” (21). Here, Scott seems to refer to the vanity of the modernist attitude of empire-building. A journey to history, it seems, brings to focus the human nature for self-effacement, by which the crablike movement of human civilization gains explanatory power.

The witchdoctor Andorinho, a character in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* speaks his mind, thus: “There’s a lot of talk about colonialism. But

that's something I doubt ever existed. What those whites did was to occupy us. It wasn't just the land: they occupied our very selves, they put up camp right inside our heads" (124). Here, Andorinho unusually, yet rightly, writes off the idea of colonialism. It is easy to see why he rejects the term. Colonialism, like Fukuyama's 'end of history,' implies a finite process that would come to closure with the physical withdrawal of the European colonialists and the subsequent political independence of former colonies. For Andorinho, what the West actually did is place the infinite in the very selves of the Africans. In *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas observes that for Descartes, the idea of infinity is the "idea of God ... placed in us" (217). Curiously, then, the European powers seem to read Plato's *Atlantis* in a way that deifies them while the Africans are read as the West's loyal servants.

The African subject, therefore, cannot rationalise their encounter with the West since the infinite placed in their souls is always pointing to the West as the credit for home. To think what they are, they need a train by which they can bridge the finite and infinite idea of home and/ or exile that is mythologized in Euro-American models of modernity. In *The Age of Magic*, the narrator reveals that "A train is a bridge between two realities, a space that enables people to take stock, to dream, to muse. It gives a sense of freedom. Maybe that is why people like train journeys" (39). It then, follows that the train in *The Age of Magic* is a literary trope upon which the magic of the sliding signifier in the journey motif becomes

visible for the interpretive reader. The reading of both Plato's *Atlantis* and Goethe's *Faust*, by certain passengers in the train, sample out a mythical journey into the West's drama of deities and man. When put in the focus of *Atlantis* and *Faust*, the witchdoctor Andorinho's emphatic claim in Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* that colonialism never existed seems to make perfect sense. In fact, what the sliding signifier reveals is a well-crafted spirituality of the West rather than colonialism. The train journey in *The Age of Magic* reveals that the sliding signifier is an unstable carrier of meaning upon which the travelling subject experiences intermittent detachment and/ or attachment to the idea of home and/ or exile in Greek modernity. The permanent literary value of the sliding signifier lies in its efficacy for destabilizing conventional reading of the historicized Greek idea of home and/ or exile for humanity whose civilising symbols are dream, will and desire.

#### **4.2.2 “Desire, Dream and Will”: The Civilizing Signifier**

It is important to note from the onset that the civilising signifier in *The Age of Magic* is read by the travelling subject from the synthesis of the texts of dream, will and desire for Judeo-Christian and Greek idea of paradisiac home and/ or exile that are mythologized in Greco-European classics such as Plato's *Atlantis* and Goethe's *Faust*. Basically, human civilization could be perceived from what, in *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster calls “life by value” (49). However, the concept of ‘life by value’ is problematic since it, of necessity, invites the principal of

demand. While tracing the history of political economy in Goethe's *Fuast II*, Carter maintains that the drama in Act 2 and 3 reveals a "subjective nature of value, particularly as it relates to the principal of demand" (103). In the context of historical materiality, value implies a price, cost, charge, or assessment that places a request or call in life. In *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas equates the call to "the utterance of here I am, which identifies with nothing if not the voice that utters and surrenders" (192). The call, therefore, makes the human a subject of value. However, value does not present itself as a physical body, but it manifests as a higher truth, a dream by which, will and desire come into being.

Interestingly, the dream of value places a void in the human subject which makes them desire for fulfilment. In *Desire of All Ages*, Ellen G. White posits that "In the hearts of all mankind, of whatever race or station in life, there are inexpressible longings for something they do not now possess" (iii). White's observation implies that human beings always desire to achieve a value that is presently beyond their reach. Then, it follows that the call of value is inherently civilizing, calling human beings to higher truths, to what they long to have. Desire is an infinite call of value, and it constitutes an important part of the civilizing signifier. The other part of the civilizing signifier is will. In *The Will to Power*, Friedrich Nietzsche observes that "Life is not the adaption of inner circumstances to outer ones, but will to power, which, working from within, incorporates and subdues more and more of that which is 'outside' ..." (361). Nietzsche's

observation implies that will involves the power to invoke the world into the self. Then, what is the distinction between will and desire?

Desire and will may seem synonymous, perhaps, because they have the unique character of vanishing into each other, the way the signifier and the referent do in a photograph. In *The Age of Magic*, Jim, the director of the documentary to Arcadia, fervently argues that “The will is the right hand of the master. Seven years of willing transformed Van Gogh from a dissatisfied banker ... to a great artist. Beethoven’s will was legendary, triumphing over the abyss and deafness. Where there’s will there’s a way, the saying goes; and it is true” (83). It is curious that Jim tries to give his argument substance by quoting the common saying about ‘will and way,’ but, it importantly depicts will as a journey motif to human value of Greek modernity. Noteworthy, the civilising signifier is photographic in nature, and therefore as Berger observes, the photographic involves, “only decision, only focus” (181). Here, it implies that for Jim will is the decision or focus on human value at the heart of the working of the civilising signifier. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes seems to concur with Berger by pointing out that a photograph is “never distinguished from its referent” (5). Nevertheless, the certainty of distinction does not imply that the photograph and its referent are the same thing. This seems to be the relationship holding between will and desire. They both talk about a journey to human value, but will is a presence or power, while desire is a representation of that presence.

The shadowy presence who works the film crew “Through their fears, fantasies, secrets, and undefined creativity” (132), raises the consciousness of the aesthetics of group identity. The film crew associates the call for the journey to Arcadia to this shadowy presence whom they refer to as Malasso. Depending on the film crew’s mental orientation the shadowy presence, “grew with their breath. Their thoughts filled out his insubstantial form. Their desires were his gains. He acquired might from their floating dreams. Moving between two realms, he was both visible and invisible” (132). Here, the collective character of the filming demands that crew’s desires and dreams come together.

However, every dream has got its electrifying music to which the human subject dances. Lao and Mistletoe, for example, are magnetized by the music of the dream inherent in the journey to Arcadia: “They danced themselves into signs and symbols, and celebrated the depths of mystery and joy in the body” (229). Here, when Lao and Mistletoe dance themselves into signs, it implies that the dream of Arcadia initiates a system of semiotics that transforms those who dance to it into time-bound signs which, then, operate as codes in the socio-historical world. As signs, then, Lao and Mistletoe’s story would be made up of what Forster calls “life in time” and “life by value” (49). How could they change themselves into signs and symbols? First, by choosing the value, in this case the dancing style, of the ‘Other,’ they initiate Desire. Secondly, by choosing the value of the ‘Self,’ they call for Will. They each dance to their private myths: “Mistletoe’s

movement's had a jagged beauty, a style all of her own, fractured geometries of Dionysus. Lao combined flamenco, salsa, and African, surrendering himself to a compendium of dances" (229). Here, Mistletoe appears to choose the value of the 'Self' while Lao chooses that of the 'Other.'

Mistletoe's will is represented as 'fractured geometries of Dionysus,' which initiates a journey to the drama of the Greek gods. In *The Anatomy of Nietzsche's Transformation of Dionysus*, Thomas Drew Philbeck observes that Nietzsche presents, "Dionysus as the concomitant creative aesthetic principle to Apollo [and that] Apollo and Dionysus are at first two sides of the same coin" (14). Mistletoe appears to conciliate quite well with the character of Dionysus since, like the god, she is a companion of the 'Other,' but during the dance she chooses to fracture away into a distinct 'Self.' Dionysus also fractures himself from Apollo's in an act of will. Mistletoe, like Dionysus, wills herself into a god, and rises, "into a mountain body song" (230). However, Lao dances himself into "a blue space," (130), which implies chromatic tones, mixtures of green and yellow, and he hears someone calling to him: "You have to find the treasure or die. The clues are everywhere" (130). By choosing the value of the 'Other,' therefore, Lao hears the call of desire.

Will has been philosophized with all kinds of modernistic phrase. In *The Age of Magic*, Jim believes that will is the engine of life: "The will built nations,

empires, civilizations. Every human achievement is founded on will. It is the quality that distinguishes human beings from animals” (82). For Jim, will is the overriding civilizing factor that could be used to explain the success of Euro-American synchronic time for empire building and/ or failure of Africa, South East Asia and South America to take the cue. However, if the evidence for will is building of nations, empires and civilizations, and the distinction between human and animals, it could only be will as romanticized by the West. The permanent result for this kind of will is fragmentation of humanity as seen in the 1884 Berlin Conference for the partition of Africa and its attendant unethical and/ or ethical colonial implications on Africa and the West. Jim, who appears to allegorize the West’s romanticized will, is in a frenzy to produce more evidence: “Our heroes are people of will: Napoleon and his forced marches that collapsed time, Alexander the Great and his astonishing feats of endurance, Picasso and his phenomenal energy, Churchill and his indomitable spirit” (82). Jim’s evidence implies that the heroes of the West attained greatness by demonstrating inimitable will for collapsing the time and space of those that they wish to detach or attach to their modernistic empires.

In Jim’s list of heroes, Alexander the Great visibly bears the appellation of greatness. Importantly, Alexander’s will reveals how will that is based on unethical considerations flies at the face of the wishing subject. He, therefore, merits some special focus. In *Alexander the Great I*, the biographer W. Tarn

observes that “Alexander III, son of Philip II and the Epirote Princess Olympias, was born in Summer 356, and was twenty when in 336 he succeeded the throne of Macedonia,” (1), to rule in place of his father who had just been mysteriously assassinated. At such an early age, Alexander the Great must have had a lot of will for him to rule the expansive empire of Macedonia. In “Alexander the Great and the ‘Clash’ of Ancient Civilizations,” Mădălina Strehie posits that “Alexander became the Great because of his ambition to conquer the world from one end to the other [, and that] with Alexander, the West fully demonstrates its expansionist tendencies, conquering at first an empire and civilization after civilization” (421). It follows, then, that when Alexander the Great’s expansionist body is ‘exploded,’ it would most likely reveal a black box of unethical desire rather than ethical will. Basically, it would not be different from the case of the United Nations’ soldiers in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* whose penetrative bodies explode leaving only “a severed penis ... just outside Tizangara. A large organ on the loose” (1). Like the United Nations’ soldiers, who are sent to Tizangara for peacekeeping, the text of Alexander the Great represents the West’s engagement with power in their project of colonizing the world.

Indeed, Alexander the Great has been eulogized in the West through heaps of books as the epitome of will. Therefore, the dream of the art of ruling that Aristotle and Olympias taught him, for they were his greatest influence, continue to sift to humanity through the reading of the ‘classics.’ Tarn observes that when

Alexander was the age of thirteen, his father Philip invited Aristotle to Macedonia to tutor him: “During their three years at Mieza, Aristotle taught him ethics and his own views on politics and on the geography of Asia, and perhaps some metaphysics; later he wrote for him a treatise on the art of ruling, and perhaps another on colonisation” (2). As observed in chapter three, cartography is an essential part of the West’s project for subduing the world. Evidentially, Alexander the Great is taught the geography of Asia by Aristotle, and curiously when he ascends to the throne of Macedonia, he desires to conquer the Persian Empire.

Subsequently, the will and desire of humanity seems to be placed into being through the dreams contained in classic books. In *The World of Dreams*, Havelock Ellis posits that there are different ways of writing a book on dreams, such as, the literary method in which one, “goes to books or to the memories of other people for one's material, and so collects a great number of more or less wonderful stories” (v). Though Ellis rejects this method as untrustworthy, and it might be, especially for specialized psychoanalytic purposes, it seems to be the most suitable method for a critical examination of the working of the civilizing signifier.

### 4.2.3 “Falling into the Map”: The Dialogic Aesthetics of Attachment/ Detachment

In *The Age of Magic*, the seven-member crew is making a television documentary about the journey to Arcadia, which suggests travelling to a place on the map of the world. However, they were also making another journey into classic books such as Goethe’s *Faust*. The voiceover explains about Lao’s journey into books: “he picked up his copy of Goethe’s *Faust Part Two*, and began to reading ... Lao meanwhile was making a complicated journey into the book” (194). Lao’s journey into Goethe’s *Faust* means that he travels through the consciousness of Faust and it would lead him to a different map from that of the journey by train though the two journeys take place simultaneously. He is also travelling into himself.

Later he has a dream in which Malasso is showing him the map of the world: “In the dream Malasso was showing a map of the world. I looked at it and I fell in ... This is the Arcadia you’re looking for ... he showed me the map again ... then in the same dream he showed me a third map ... It was minuscule ... microscopic” (207-208). Lao experiences his search for Arcadia as a dream in which he is falling into the maps of his journeys as illustrated in diagram 4.2.2 below:

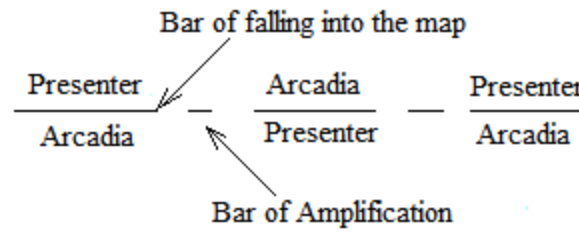


Diagram 4.2.2 Dialogic pairs of Presenter-Arcadia

In the first dialogic pairs, as indicated in the diagram above, the presenter of the documentary is at the top of the bar of falling into the map, while Arcadia is on the map. Through the bar of amplification, Arcadia moves to the top of the bar of falling into the world while the presenter falls below the bar. In third dialogic pair, the presenter moves to the top of the bar while Arcadia moves below the bar. The dialogic pairs form the chain of signification upon which Lao experiences his journeys into the different worlds.

While reading *Faust II*, in *The Age of Magic*, “Lao struggled with the book, in just the same way he struggled in his dream. And the book was a strange dream indeed, one of the strangest ever composed. Lao was confused by it, but determined to understand” (196). The voiceover in the novel rightly observes that *Faust Part Two* is actually one of the strangest dreams for, “To read the book is to journey into the mind of Faust, the representative mind. It was in the underworld of that mind that [the reader] sought the ideal that was Helen of Troy” (196). If Faust’s mind is the representative mind for the journey to Arcadia, then what does its model of ‘Helen of Troy’ suggest for the interpretive reader? In “The Ghost

Tradition: Helen of Troy in the Elizabethan Era,” Adriana Raducanu observes that Helen of Troy is represented in Greek mythology as “Reputedly the most beautiful woman who has ever lived ... Homer wrote that the greatest war of the Western classical antiquity started because of Helen’s adultery followed by her elopement to Troy” (22). Here, the ideal of Helen of Troy that Lao is pursuing allegorises the beauty of modernity, which is typically elusive, especially for the former colonies of the West, through its strange sense of decampment.

Falling on the map of the world, Lao appears to allude to Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), a country in South East Asia. It has been gradually developing along the West’s model of modernity, and it can be perceived as a good representative of what is termed, in global economy, as the developing countries. In “Structural Policy Country Notes: Lao PDR,” the country is hailed for its development record: “The Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) continues to develop at a commendable pace. On the back of such growth, it graduated to the rank of lower-middle-income country in 2006” (3). Here, Lao PDR seems to have a strong will of conquering her economic oddities in order to attain modernity: “It is now enjoying the fruits of its investment in infrastructure, economic and social development, as well as regional co-operation and integration” (3). In *The Age of Magic*, Lao, seems to represent the countries for whom modernity has been commissioned by the West through the dream of global economy. Interestingly, the voiceover in *The Age of Magic* observes that,

“For a long time gloom had been [Lao’s] normal mode of being. It was an inseparable shadow. But on this journey his gloom had become less familiar, like an old shoe not worn for a long time” (30). The voiceover’s observation implies that for a long time Lao had no hope for economic development until the West commissions it for her.

However, for Lao, modernity seems to initiate a peculiarity of gloom which coincides, and at the same time resists to coincide, with his usual misery of economic underdevelopment – he feels as though he is wearing an old shoe after a long time. Therefore, the journey to Arcadia momentarily buoys Lao into a dreamy mood of development but soon he is pitched into exile: “he had wandered away from the Arcadian mood awoken by the silent lady” (30). Here, the silent lady refers to Mistletoe, Lao’s companion, whose glow makes him aware of his gloom. She appears to represent the dream of modernity that the West has placed in Lao. She is thus Lao’s sobriquet for modernity. Then, how does Mistletoe operate as a sobriquet of modernity? In “Vectors, Viscin, and Viscaceae: Mistletoes as Parasites, Mutualists, and Resources,” Juliann E. Aukema observes that “Mistletoes are aerial, hemi parasitic plants found on trees throughout the world. They have unique ecological arrangements with the host plants they parasitize and the birds that disperse their seeds” (212). Aukema’s description implies that mistletoes place themselves on trees with the desire to parasitize on

them. Consequently, they could demonstrate the consciousness of being on top of the world during an adventure.

Indeed, the sign of being on top of the world, mostly experienced by Mistletoe and Lao in *The Age of Magic*, appears to have a biology that coincides with the biology of mistletoes. In “Mistletoes in Focus: An Introduction,” Malcolm Calder observes that the etymology of the word ‘mistletoe’ could be traced to the Anglo-Saxon words meaning “dung-on-a-twig” (1-18). Subsequently, mistletoe thrives on a unique placement of conducive environments on an already existing body of life. In “Mistletoe – A Keystone Resource in Forest and Woodlands Worldwide,” David M. Watson observes that “Mistletoes obtain all of their water and minerals from the host through a vascular connection termed a haustorium [, a] swollen holdfast [that] serves both to attach the mistletoe plant to the host and to divert water and minerals to the parasite” (219). The parasitic character of the mistletoe conciliates with the penetrative tendencies of the West for tapping into the resources of other countries, directly through colonialism and, subtly via remnants of colonialism.

There is a unique ecological relationship between the characters, Mistletoe and Lao. Mistletoe is not described as an essential part of the film crew for the journey to Arcadia: “There were eight of them: seven involved in the filming, and Mistletoe, Lao’s companion” (13). Mistletoe seems to ride on her unique

relationship with Lao rather than functionality in the filming. Since Lao is the presenter of the television documentary of the journey to Arcadia, he is constantly in focus. However, what really gains focus, eventually, is his companion, while he himself is pitched into the position of host. Mistletoe, hence, parasitizes on Lao's dream of journey as home. She allegorizes the West's desire for tapping into resources of Africa, Asia and South America, through the lure of modernity; while Lao allegorizes the body of Africa, Asia and South America, which serves as host to remnants of colonialism.

In *The Age of Magic*, Lao's reading of Goethe's *Faust II* seems to place in him "the ideal of Helen of Troy" (196). As already noted, Helen of Troy is reputed in Greek mythology as the most beautiful woman to have lived under the sun. Likewise, Mistletoe is described in *The Age of Magic* as being so beautiful that she could artistically become one with her works of art. Like, Helen of Troy, Mistletoe seems to draw the attention of men in an unusual way: "She had noticed in the past that when she and Lao had a little break-up, men seemed to find her unusually attractive. It was as if his leaving made her magnetic" (214). Mistletoe is aware of her feminine lure. Similarly, Helen of Troy readily exercises her erotic power to the point of being depicted as adulterous. She even eloped with Paris to Troy. Curiously, in Homer's *The Odyssey*, the persona narrates how his ship crew and he came upon "the coastline of the Lotus-Eaters who live upon that flower" (70-71). He sends out some men to scout on the race that inhabits the land, but

they are fed on the lotus. The persona recounts: “They fell in with the Lotus-Eaters, who showed no will to do us harm, only offering the sweet lotus to our friends ... who ate this honeyed plant ... browsing on the native bloom forgetful of their homeland” (73-83). The inference made from *The Odyssey* is that certain plants have been mythologized in human power relations of inclusion and exclusion from home.

Indeed, mistletoe is one of the plants that forms allegories of power in many cultures. In “Christmas Curiosity or Medical Marvel?” Jonathan Briggs observes that, “In Greece, Aeneas was guided to the abode of the dead by plucking the ‘Golden Bough’ of mistletoe [while] the Norse God, Balder, was slain by an arrow of mistletoe, soon after everything living in the earth had sworn not to harm him” (252). Like Balder, Africa is slain by the arrow of mistletoe, but in this case, it carries the sobriquet of remnants of colonialism. The problematic of remnants of colonialism is that it is spirituality rather than visible control. The voiceover in *The Age of Magic* revealingly observes that in a spirituality: “The way you live depends on the pact you made with your spirit” (30). Therefore, Lao tries to rationalize his relationship with Mistletoe by reading Goethe’s *Faust*. He seems to coincide with the Rationalist in *Faust*. In the play, the Rationalist raises the idea of spiritual control by discounting the Young Witch, thus: “I tell you spirit to your face: For me, spirit-rule has no place: Because my spirit can’t exercise it” (182). Here, the Rationalist becomes a subject of spiritual control through his disbelief.

For him spiritual control might be an impossibility, but for the Young Witch, the possibility is her only desire for attaining spiritual control over the whole world.

Like the Rationalist in *Faust*, Lao in *The Age of Magic* suffers disbelief by which he becomes a subject of the West's spirituality. Accordingly, he slides to the world of dreams where he encounters a Quylph, a spirit, who seems to henceforth control his mind: "They were on the train from Paris to Switzerland when the white mountains and nursery rhythms of the wheels lulled him to sleep. He found himself talking to a Quylph" (9). The encounter with the Quylph gains spiritual focus in Lao's awakening with Goethe's *Faust* on his lap: "Lao slept in a shining orb. He woke up at his table, with a book on his lap, and the world was different" (11). The Quylph introduces an important contradiction in Lao's rational mind. First, it detaches him from the home of rational thinking. Secondly, it makes such an inquiry about Lao's state of disbelief as to pitch him into an infinity of anxiety, thus:

'What are you afraid of?' it asked.

'Why should I be afraid of anything?' Lao replied.

'Maybe you are afraid of Malasso?'

'Why should I be afraid of him?'

'Everyone is.'

'I don't know him.'

'People are afraid of what they don't know.' (9)

Curiously the Quylph turns around Lao's journey in *Faust* such that the idea of rationality is no longer an end-to-being but it is set in motion by the anxiety placed in his soul. Subsequently, Lao becomes thoughtful about being as he tries to "decipher the inscription that was the Quylph" (11). In *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas rightly observes that for Heidegger "the time of being there ... is fulfilled in anxiety and dispersed in everyday" (55). It follows, then, that the anxiety of life is what seems to awaken Lao's thought.

What makes anxiety a problematic of the human dream is that it appears to operate incognito. By telling Lao that perhaps he is afraid of Malasso, for instance, the Quylph gives anxiety a definite name, yet the name does not itemize a concrete thing but a shadowy presence. Accordingly, Lao expresses disbelief by the rationale that he does not know Malasso and, therefore, he has no reason to fear him. Then, the Quylph succinctly concludes that Lao's anxiety is based on life: "Then it must be life you are afraid of" (9). The Quylph's conclusion appears to be well-placed since Lao is always meditating on how to attain vitality: "I would like to master the art of living, he thought, and suddenly he heard demonic laughter somewhere behind him ... Again the name Malasso slipped into his mind" (45). For Lao, Malasso is an incognito, a shadowy presence, which keeps intruding in his life. Subsequently, he strives to understand it, and this becomes his desire; to know what the shadowy presence means and, why it seems to watch him, without ever coming out in the open.

Of great interest, the shadowy presence appears to be rooted in the journey to Arcadia: “The alchemy of Arcadia worked on the group in unexpected ways. Malasso was one of those ways. Had they all created him? Was it true that he was a group entity?” (132). Perhaps, the answer to these questions seem to lie in the body and character of those who are subjects of Malasso. To begin with, the name Malasso gives the film crew jitters; they do not want it to be mentioned. As the film crew is heatedly discussing the civilizing force of will, for instance, they become distracted by a mere suggestion of the name. Jim, the film director, advises the crew to ignore Lao’s claim that there is a civilizing factor greater than will: “Ignore him. And the other one too” (93). Lao wonders who the other one is, but he soon understands, as the other members do. The ‘other one’ implies Malasso, though none of them mentions the name directly. Indeed, Jute, one of the members of the crew implores: “Can you please not mention that name? ... I want to sleep tonight” (93). Here, Malasso is a shadowy presence who creates wakefulness for the film crew.

On the map of the world, the name Jim has a unique place in American history. In *Jim Crow Laws*, Leslie V. Tischauser observes that “From 1881 to 1964, JIM CROW LAWS separated Americans by race in 26 states. The laws created de jure segregation or the legal separation by race of Americans” (xi). In Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, as well as Okri’s *The Age of Magic*, Jim seems to be a personality that hides a certain fact. However, the incognito could be unveiled when perceived within

Jim Crow Laws. Tischauser notes that from the 1820s to the 1870s, Thomas Dartmouth ‘Daddy’ Rice depicted an elderly black slave, Jim Crow in a popular minstrel show. He performed jokes, a song and dance number: “in a white version of black dialect titled ‘Jim Crow.’ Rice said he first heard the song while walking down an alley in Louisville, Kentucky. The singer, an elderly black slave, worked in a blacksmith’s shop and was called Jim. Rice picked ‘Crow’ because crows are black” (1-2). Malasso, who haunts Jim in *The Age of Magic*, is the fact of being black.

In essence, Jim is the fact of blackness which beguiles Lao in his presentation of the journey to Arcadia. The blacks, whom Lao represents, appear to be accused of will for their underdevelopment. In *The Age of Magic*, Jim maintains that “Intelligence is useless without will. That is why people can see what needs to be done, but lacking will, they let evil flourish. They allow menacing weeds to ruin the garden that is their nation” (83). Here, the accusation of will seems to be based on ‘life in time’ that does not bring forth a fruitful ‘life by value’. The shadowy presence in *The Age of Magic* is thus the anxiety of life which spins in two simultaneous parts – time and value.

If the word Malasso is subjected to Lao’s revelation that the inverse of ‘live’ is ‘evil,’ it would read backwards thus: ‘Ossalam.’ To make sense of the otherwise semantically impenetrable word, it could be broken into three syllabic units:

‘Oss,’ ‘al’ and ‘am.’ Curiously, the magic of ‘Ossalam’ is revealed as historical slippage. According to *Office of Strategic Services, 1942-1945: Official Exhibition Catalogue*, “The OSS became the first centralized intelligence agency of any note in American history, one which united various functions under one roof” (3). Here, OSS is a historical organisation that spells American espionage during the Second World War, and even after. For Thomas Troy, OSS, “would collect information, conduct research and analysis, coordinate information, print and broadcast propaganda, mount special operations, inspire guerrilla action, and send commandos into battle” (3). Perceived from this historical background, OSS is a signifier that easily slides to the European project of empire-building.

In addition, ‘Al’ is usually used as the abbreviation for Alabama, a South American state which has a unique history of colonialism. In *Alabama History Notebook*, the Alabama Department of Archives and History observes that “The history of the word or name Alabama, has been discussed by researchers for many years. It was the name of an important Southern Indian tribe whose habitat was in what is now central Alabama when the Europeans came to Alabama” (2). Therefore, OSS could be read as the colonial network by which colonialists maintain their grip on those they desire to subjugate. Finally, ‘am’ suggests Heidegger’s idea of being. The question of being for Alabama, as a state or nation, typifies the character of the civilizing alchemy, Will-Dream-Desire.

### 4.3 “Translating Time” in Mia Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*

In the epilogue, the translator of Tizangara discloses that translation is at the core of the story narrated in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*. Mia Couto presents the mission of translation through episodic events of dream and waking arranged in twenty-one chapters. In chronotopic terms, the chapters are perceived in the study as chronotopic cycles. In the chronotopic cycle labeled “Introducing the teller of the tale” (28), the translator of Tizangara tells the story of his life to Massimo Risi, the Italian investigator representing the United Nations in Tizangara. He points out that his mother was quite instrumental in the formation of his philosophy about life. She perceived life as a live fish in the flow of water and whoever wanted to possess it must kill it. She spoke of life as though it were contained in the stream representing the irretrievable course of time. The teller of the tale explains that his mother has evented the fable of the flamingos as an approximate version upon which the course of time could be understood: “For her, it was the flamingos that pushed the sun so that day could begin on the other side of the world” (31). The migration of the flamingos implies a reoccupation of the spaces they had earlier left. The sighting of the flamingos heralds alternating seasons in the world they leave and the one they migrate to. Consequently, the translator of Tizangara proposes a philosophy of translation of time based on the reoccupation of the spaces that the motives and objects of aesthetics have left or migrated to.

Therefore, the translation mission in Tizangara becomes evident from the way the Italian investigator tries to reoccupy the spaces of the civil-war in Tizangara after leaving Italy. The translator of Tizangara pities him being all alone in a foreign country. Couto artistically presents Massimo Risi's sense of detachment and/ or attachment to the body that constitutes the world in Tizangara through a special use of the dash creating disjointed speech as shown in the quote below:

–You know, Massimo, I pity you being all alone. I couldn't bear to be left so utterly on my own.

–Why?

–Even if I was torn away from here, if I was taken to Italy, I wouldn't be in such a difficult position. Because I know how to live in your world.

–And I don't know how to live in yours?

–No you don't.

–That doesn't bother me. All I want is to carry out my mission. You don't know how important this is for me, for my career. And for Mozambique.

(83).

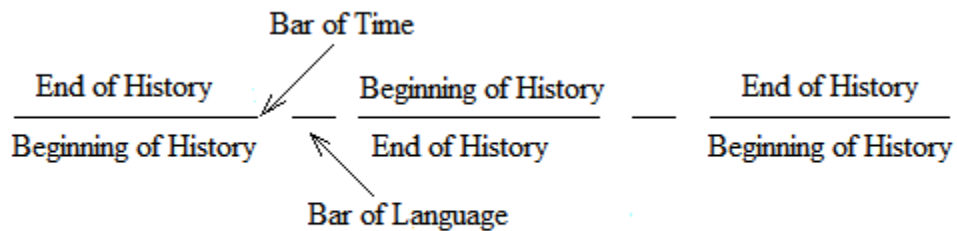
The quote above suggests that the translator of Tizangara, on one hand, would be at home everywhere he goes because, like the flamingos who periodically migrate to the other world, he knows how to reoccupy spaces. Massimo Risi, on the other hand, compares to a flamingo making its last flight to the world of no return. However, it is worthwhile to note that the dialogue between the translator of Tizangara and the Italian investigator plays out like the exchanges of the

competing poets in the **gicaandi** genre. Njogu observes that in **gicaandi** performances, “performers may boast and exaggerate their ability to compose ... Generally boasts are meant to influence the [other] in diverse ways” (57). In this light, the translator of Tizangara boasts about his knowledge of Italy and throws taunts at Massimo Risi’s ignorance of Tizangara to challenge the Italian to try harder to crack the puzzle of the exploding soldiers.

Massimo Risi is not bothered by the translator of Tizangara’s taunts. He declares that his immediate mission is to crack the puzzle of the exploding soldiers. The narrator gives cues on the Italian’s capability of investigating in the way he uses different versions of his name – Massimo Risi, Massimo or Risi – at different points in the story. The versions Massimo and Risi create short circuits to Massimo De Angelis’ *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* and Vincenzo De Risi’s *Mathematizing Space*. Perceived from the translator of Tizangara’s proposal of reoccupying spaces as the philosophy for translating time, the short circuits imply that the action of translation involves mathematizing of space into a beginning of history. The image of the beginning of history in Massimo’s book is based on value struggles and global capital. The migratory path for Massimo’s image of the beginning of history goes back to Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History*. In *The Beginning of History*, Massimo explains that “Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History* took much the same form of Hegel’s own pre-emptive dialectical closure nearly two centuries prior, [due to

being] blind to the internal tensions of globalizing capital” (1). Here, Massimo implies that Fukuyama’s conceptualization of the end of history fails to recognize the conflict of aesthetics at the heart of a globalized capital.

In *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, therefore, Massimo Risi’s ability to crack the puzzle on the exploding soldiers depends on the way he uses the historical knowledge about the end of the civil-war in Mozambique to extrapolate the representations of time and space in the current war-like situation of the globalized aesthetics in the fictive town of Tizangara. The mathematizing of space in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* can be represented through the dialogic pairs of “End of History” and “Beginning of History” as shown in diagram 4.3 below:



**Diagram 4.3 Dialogic pairs of End-Beginning of History**

In the first dialogic pair as indicated in diagram 4.3 above, the category of “End of History” is at the top of the bar of Time while “Beginning of History” is below the bar. In the second dialogic pair, “Beginning of History” moves to the top of the bar of Time reoccupying the space it had earlier left while “End of History” slides beneath the bar. Using the fable of the flying flamingos as a viable model of

describing the end of history and the beginning of history signs, the dialogic pairs alternate in taking flight to the top of the bar and landing beneath the bar forming a chain of signification upon which translation of time becomes visible through the disjointed bar of language. The sign's alternating flight and landing produce language characterized by disjointed utterances.

In the chronotopic cycle labeled "A large sexual organ on the loose" (1), in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the translator of Tizangara recounts what happened in the town, "a severed penis was found right there on the trunk road just outside Tizangara" (1). Severed from the body, the organ becomes an object of interest and therefore it occupies the space on top of the bar of time. Accordingly, a crowd of people gathered around the object wondering what it portends. Rumour occupies the space below the bar of time concretized in the detached speech of the curious onlookers as indicated in the quote below:

–Someone pick that thing up before it gets run over.

–Run over or run into?

–Poor fellow, he was crippled in his middle! (2)

By the virtue of the severed organ lying on the trunk road, one might assume that it occupies the space below the bar of time. However, the question "Run over or run into?" indicates a leveling and stratifying of the object into two parts: the severed male sexual organ and the body it has been detached from which is the object of the rumours in the town.

The body is missing but one of the curious onlookers suddenly catches sight of a blue cap hanging in the sky: “–Look up there, on top of the tree!” (2). Here, the demonstrative tone guides the crowd’s eyes to the top of the bar of time where they discover the cap like the ones worn by the soldiers of the United Nations. The cap is felt like a knife making the crowd to change the topic of the conversation and to break up leaving the detached organ on the road. The relationship between the severed organ and the cap on top of the tree coupled by the crowd’s reactions create the awareness of fear that grips the people of Tizangara whenever there are signs of re-emergence of civil-war. The tree together with the cap creates a short circuit to Ferdinand de Saussure’s representation of the signifier ‘TREE’ and its referent as a socio-historical object and a mental image. The cap becomes the signifier upon which the people of Tizangara experience the fear of re-emergence of war in the novel.

In the epilogue, the translator of Tizangara establishes the verve of the inquiry into the case of the exploding United Nations soldiers in Tizangara and the attendant translation as a search for the verb: “Now, let me ask you this: did they really and truly explode? That’s what they call it for lack of a verb” (“Epilogue). Here, the translator of Tizangara proposes composition of the verb as the means of interpreting the puzzle of the exploding soldiers. Therefore, the representations of time and space in the novel become visible to the reader from the way the characters create equivalents of the verb for describing the enigma of the

exploding soldiers. The translator of Tizangara's questions, in the epilogue, about the exploding soldiers characterize the introduction in the **gicaandi** performances. Njogu observes that in **gicaandi** performances, "The poet explains his [or her] understanding of the utterance to the larger audience before proceeding to compose his [or her] verse" (51). In agreement with Njogu's observation, the manner of inquiry adopted in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* portrays the motives and objects of **gicaandi**.

In the chronotopic cycle labeled "The Mission of inquiry" (8), the translator of Tizangara recounts how the town prepares for the important delegation with Mozambican and United Nations soldiers that was about to arrive. Rumour went round that a certain Italian by the name of Massimo Risi, of no known rank, would also be part of the delegation. The administrator, Estêvão Jonas, was anxious about the delegation and hence he issued orders and then made new orders cancelling the earlier ones. He kept shouting at the reception committee to line up and then "he unlined then thirty times" (9), turning them into caricatures of anxiety. The crowd displayed banners with huge letters such as "Welcome to our Soviet comrades! Long live the internationalism of the proletariat!" (9), but the administrator ordered them to be immediately withdrawn. In these rehearsals the administrator of Tizangara is trying to find the best format for receiving the delegation. The detachment and / or attachment of the committee and the crowd in line with the administrator of Tizangara's orders approximate the action of being

done up and being undone upon which the original format of the soldiers of peace is exploded.

#### **4.3.1 “God Willing Truth will be Revealed before Dawn”: The Dialogic Aesthetics of Truth**

In Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, an important delegation with Mozambican and United Nations soldier arrive at Tizangara, a fictional town in Mozambique, to find out the truth about the cases of some missing soldiers of peace and the detached large male sexual organ found on the trunk road outside the town. However, none of them is able to solve the problem. The mission of inquiry is done in a way that simulates the performance of the **gicaandi** genre in which poets compete in problem-posing and problem-solving. Therefore, unable to solve the enigma of the large male sexual organ, the administrator of Tizangara proposes that they summon Anna Godwilling whom the townspeople considered an expert in such matters. However, the important delegation newly arrived at Tizangara is confused because they do not know the proposed expert.

The people of Tizangara assume that the name Anna Godwilling refers only to the sensibility it evokes in them. Therefore, when the administrator of Tizangara proposes that they summon Anna Godwilling they think that everyone would automatically understand the reference. Due to the globalized aesthetics, as the quote below indicates their assumption is far from the truth:

–With all due respect, your excellencies: suppose we summon Anna Godwilling?

–And who is this Anna?– the minister asked.

There was a crisscrossing of voices: how could anyone not know the Godwilling woman? She, the town’s whore, the most knowledgeable expert in local manhood.

Whores? Have you even got them here?

And the administrator, puffed with pride, murmured:

–It’s all because of decentralisation, Minister, we are encouraging local initiative!– And with he repeated, swollen with pride: –Our own Anna!

(12)

For the people of Tizangara, the presence of Godwilling in the town is as a result of globalization of aesthetics. The administrator of Tizangara implies in the words ‘Our own Anna’ that they have remodeled the idea of a whore to suit their own sensibilities. In the light, Anna represents the problem of globalized aesthetics that results from the undeterred movement of persons, goods and technology within and across different countries.

The investigation about the severed large male sexual organ and the missing United Nations soldiers in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* is thus riposted as the search for the identity of Anna Godwilling. Using Alain Mabanckou’s aesthetics of the dialogic novel, discussed in Chapter Three, as a practical interpretive

model, Anna Godwilling encapsulates Robinette, the social worker in *Broken Glass*. During the **gicaandi** of pissing between her and Casimir in *Broken Glass* she entices the audience to keenly watch the performance declaring that: “God willing, the truth will be revealed at the first light of dawn, to have and have not, that is what we are about to discover, my friends” (60). Perhaps, the patrons of the bar *Credit Gone West*, who form the audience, had forthwith nicknamed her the Godwilling woman. As Mabanckou demonstrates in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the aesthetics of the dialogic novel enables characters to travel across the fictional worlds of books. It is therefore viable to assume that the Godwilling woman in Tizangara encapsulates Robinette’s aesthetics of truth transposed to Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*.

Consequently, the reader who is familiar with Robinette’s aesthetics of truth in *Broken Glass* might quickly conclude that Godwilling, the social worker, in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* is Robinette newly arrived at Tizangara with her expertise in truth finding gathered from the **gicaandi** of pissing in the Stubborn Snail’s bar *Credit Gone West*. Nonetheless, both Robinette and Anna Godwilling embody the search for the truth that characterizes Mabanckou and Couto’s novels under study. Therefore, in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* she is not only the expert for solving puzzles but also the comparative model for approximating the verb for expressing what really happens to the exploding soldiers. The translator of Tizangara recounts that the enigma of the social worker

is in the way she exhibits too much flesh but not enough dress: “Her high heels sank into the sand like the eyes that skewered her curves. The townsfolk round about gazed at her as if she were not real. Until recently, there hadn’t been a prostitute in the town. There wasn’t even a word for such a creature in the local language” (14). Here, Anna Godwilling is an enigma because of the too much flesh she exposes but her scanty dress makes her true identity undetectable. She represents the consciousness of the missing verb at the heart of what really happens to the exploding soldiers in Tizangara.

Although Godwilling’s presence in Tizangara might be traced back to the fictional world of *Broken Glass*, her first name Anna suggests another destination, Leo Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina* and its translation into the theatrical vision in Nilo Cruz’s play *Anna En El Trópico (Anna in the Tropics)*. In *Anna Karenina*, Alexey Alexandrovitch (Karenin) is surrounded by rumour about an obvious end of his political career in the Imperial Council perhaps due to his misfortune with his wife, Anna Karenina who elopes with another man, Alexey Vronsky, and his newly developing intimacy with Countess Lidia Ivanovna: “Thus people talked incessantly of Alexey Alexandrovitch, finding fault with him and laughing at him” (678). Here, Anna Karenina is not only a source of sexual rumour but also that of detachment and/ or attachment to political power that surrounds her husband’s career. Anna Karenina encapsulates Anna Godwilling in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* through her sexual rumour. Cruz’s title *Anna in the*

*Tropics* suggests a global movement of Anna Karenina across the fictional world of the books. Therefore, the question about Anna's identity is a question about the problem of the free movement of aesthetics envisioned in the project of globalization.

In addition, 'Godwilling,' seems to point to Ali Riaz's "God Willing," a text that addresses the contest of political power through the communicative strategy to which the Quranic verse 'Insha Allah,' which means 'God willing,' functions within aesthetics of the Arabic oral sign. Therefore, Anna Godwilling seems to be a globalized character. Accordingly, in "God Willing," Riaz observes that the former Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, declared in a rally in the port city of Chittagong on fourth April, two thousand, ahead of the general elections in Bangladesh that, "God willing, we shall form the next government" (301). Zia's declaration implies that the format of the government in Bangladesh would have to be 'exploded' for a new political dispensation to set in. Within Zia's context, 'God willing,' suggests the embodied rumour of power in which the incumbent and the alternative are always under inquiry by the political agents for a possible exposure, removal or renewal to political commission.

Furthermore, Godwilling appears to refer to the transfer of the technology of the tape recorder to Tizangara. The translator of Tizangara explains that the Minister from the Capital had recorded her for Massimo's care, and her talk belches from

the tape recorder like a spiked drink. Here, Godwilling seems to infer “God Willing,” a song by Dropkick Murphys, which has a refrain “God willing, it’s the last time I’ll say goodbye/ God willing, I’ll see you on the other side” (“God Willing”). In *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* the song is visualized as a beautiful lady who operates like a social worker since she belongs to no man. Accordingly, she confesses that when the Zambian soldier walked into the bar, she noticed someone putting some spells in his drink which she attributes to the work of men: “the jealousy of those who didn’t want their womenfolk interfered with. As for me, Excellency, I actually feel proud of their jealousy. For I’ve never belonged to anyone. Never. If there are men fighting over me, I felt I belonged, as if I belonged exclusively to one man” (64-65). In this context, Godwilling embodies Murphys’ song ‘God Willing’ playing in the bar where the Zambian soldier has become a regular patron.

The people of Tizangara have reordered the song by blowing it out into the body of the singer and since anyone can listen to it they have assigned it the sensibility of a social worker. The song’s aesthetics of leaving one world implied in the words ‘God willing, it’s the last time I’ll say goodbye’ encapsulates flight from one world to another. Then the rejoinder, ‘God willing I’ll see you on the other side’ creates the dialogic aesthetics of the globalized vision. In “The Polyphonic Nature of the Gicaandi Genre,” Njogu observes that the performer in **gicaandi** could be the common person who is given a literary voice encompassing an

organic intellectual who “emerges from the people and ... performs for them” (52). In agreement with Njogu’s observation, Anna Godwilling is a common person who emerges from the people of Tizangara’s imagination. They creatively reorder Murphys’ song ‘God Willing’ into the consciousness of the conflict of translation contained in the globalized aesthetics of Tizangara.

The administrator of Tizangara praises the Ann Godwilling visualized in Tizangara as a woman of a thousand imperfections: “an artist of invariable routines ... she alone would be able to offer a definite opinion on the identity of such an organ” (13). The administrator considers Anna Godwilling as a professional artist adept at her protocols of finding the truth about the dismembered organ. The severed large male sexual organ that Godwilling is summoned to identify is variously referred by the administrator of Tizangara as “the relevant part ... the thing ... The matter pending” (13). The administrator of Tizangara’s faltering description implies that the sexual organ under examination is not to be conceived in the literally sense. On her part, the social worker protests at being called out for a job only to discover that there was no artifice which implies that it is not a real male sexual organ. She describes it as “the polemical discovery lying on the road ... the disfigured organ, fallen like some flaccid worm ... the fleshy hyphen” (15). Like the administrator of Tizangara, Godwilling seems to be trying to place the organ within the sensibilities of the globalized

town of Tizangara. By describing it as ‘the fleshy hyphen’ she implies that it constitutes the written sign, perhaps in terms of a drawing.

The severed male sexual organ, like the social worker, has newly been discovered in Tizangara due to the globalized aesthetics. The translator of Tizangara explains: “here’s what happened: a severed penis was found right there on the trunk road just outside Tizangara. A large organ on the loose” (1). Being a relevant part of the globalized aesthetics the identity of the organ lies outside Tizangara. Put within Mabanckou’s idea of the dialogic novel cultivated in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, as discussed in Chapter Three, the area described as ‘outside Tizangara’ implies the dialogic world of books. Consequently, the large male sexual organ in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* can be traced to the drawings of big sexual organs used by the eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* as part of his teaching aids in the Biology class. In *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the discovery of the drawing of a large male sexual organ on the trunk road causes a stir in the cultural sensibilities of the people of Tizangara because they comically visualized it as having been severed from a real man.

### 4.3.2 “The Civil War of Aesthetics”: The Dialogic Aesthetics of Sayings and Sirens

The conflict of aesthetics in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* becomes visible through the chain of sayings arranged as epigraphs to the twenty-one chapters of the novel. Ordinarily, sayings operate as para-text to the reading of the literary landscape that they particularise. In “Senghor’s Prefaces between the Colonial and the Postcolonial,” Richard Watts aptly maintains that “Translation, a central trope of postcolonial studies, is the mechanism by which the unknown becomes known and the unknowable becomes knowable, and it is precisely this operation that the para-text effects” (76-77). Watts’ assertion implies that the para-text functions as a means of translation in a text by making the unknown to become known and the unknowable to be knowable. In Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, sayings from Tizangara serve as para-texts for inscribing the different sections of the story. Though sayings may exist in folk knowledge for quite a long time, they rarely degenerate to clichés, that is, their power to communicate is not easily lost. Perhaps, their ability to raise bells/ sirens in the psyches of the interlocutors is what makes them live on in time. The sirens are normally raised in the interlocutor’s ‘life in time,’ and they, therefore, form a link for decoding and recoding time.

In Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, there is civil war in Tizangara, a return of war after a few years of peace: “Those cases of explosions” (16), in

which a handful of locals as well as five UN soldiers have been blown off. Massimo Risi, an Italian UN representative, has been sent by the Secretary General of the United Nations to investigate the cases. The administrator of Tizangara is quite anxious and he sends his adjutant Chupanga to summon the narrator whom he “appointed official translator with immediate effect” (5). The narrator wonders into what language he is supposed to translate but the administrator slyly responds, “That doesn’t matter. Any government worthy of respect has its translators. You are to be my personal translator” (5). What is clear, here, is that the narrator has been appointed to translate, not language per se but, the administrator’s official position regarding the time of renewed explosions in Tizangara and, the stance of the civilizing government, which has ordered the inquest.

The section of the story in which the appointment of the translator is done bears the label “A large sexual organ on the loose” (1). To all appearances, the label seems to merely express the existence of a somewhat strange and free enormous sexual organ. However, as the reader tries to make sense of the label, they find an epigraph below it that reads, “The world is not what exists, but what happens (A saying from Tizangara)” (1). The epigraph implies that the world labeled ‘a large sexual organ on the loose’ raises a problem of aesthetics from what happens upon its discovery. The narrator recounts that the large sexual organ on the loose has been discovered outside Tizangara, “And it took up a whole day, a ring of curious

onlookers, cooking up rumours,” (1-2). What really exist on the trunk road outside Tizangara is a drawing of a large male sexual organ but it becomes a source of rumour.

The onlookers freely and humorously express their speculations, “– someone pick up that thing before it gets run over. – Run over or run into?” (2), until someone discovers “one of those caps worn by the soldiers of the United Nations [hanging] from a branch, it swayed at the whim of the breeze” (2). The discovery of the cap makes the onlookers not only to scatter but also to switch the topic to ordinary happenings like the coming of the rains. The soldier’s cap seems to ring bells in the minds of the onlookers. Thus it functions as sirens. Later, the translator-narrator recounts how Chupanga, the administrator’s adjutant, “clicked his heels like a soldier,” (3), to express the urgency of the administrator’s summon. The translator-narrator interprets the sound as a warning. The sirens raised by the soldier’s cap, therefore, give a warning of war. The onlookers scamper away from the scene of crime because the soldier’s cap warns them about a possible war.

In the chapter labeled “The Mission of Inquiry” there is an epigraph reading “That which is not allowed to flower at the right time ends up exploding” (8). The aesthetics of disjointed utterance that explodes in confusion is envisioned in the saying. Consequently, the administrator of Tizangara is in a state of confusion as he prepares for the UN delegation. He is constantly reconsiders his use of words

due to the way they raise reverberations of the history of value struggle in the cold war between the communist and capitalist blocks of global capital. He welcomes the translator-narrator, thus: “– Come in, my comrade ... I mean my friend” (4). The administrator seems to be torn between the lure for communism and capitalism. The administrator’s wife, Dona Ermelinda, dresses in a strange turban and gown and claims that it was typically African dress though the translator of Tizangara observes that those who consider themselves Africans in both mind and soul had never seen such a dress. Ermelinda reveals her purpose of dressing in such way, thus: “– What I want, speaking from my own point of view as Ermelinda, is for them to realise that here in Tizangara, we have simultaneous translation” (6). Ermelinda’s mixed code of dressing is as a result of the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara. However, due to the political meanings assigned to each of the codes, such as the Arabic sign suggested by the turban, her dressing creates a conflict of aesthetics.

The conflict of aesthetics in the globalization project in Tizangara results from the short circuits that are created when the meaning is not followed through to its logical conclusion. The globalized aesthetics appear to wear mixed codes the way Ermelinda does. If the mixed codes are not allowed to flower so that the both the original meaning and the transposed meaning are fully understood, sirens of war will suddenly be heard. The rumours in Tizangara appear to have a wide oral spectrum for investigating the cases about the severed male sexual organ and the

missing UN soldiers in a way that resonates with the rumours surrounding the 1988 death of the British tourist Julie Ward in Kenya. In “Remapping Urban Modernities: Julie Ward’s Death and the Kenyan Grapevine,” Grace A. Musila observes that “rumour as a type of urban text which interrogates the officially proclaimed rationality of the modern state ... [is] a medium that contests the legitimacy of hegemonic ‘truths’ proclaimed through modern institutions in Africa” (37). Musila’s claim about the power of rumour implies that the rumour in Tizangara is a powerful modern text for disambiguating the legitimacy of the official ‘truths’ that are offered by the local administration and the UN body of inquest about the explosions in Tizangara. The double-dress code that Tizangara’s First Lady, Ermelinda, wears to the scene of the explosion becomes a sirens for the civil war of aesthetics in the global project in the fictional town.

The turban raises sirens that promote the idea the dimwit’s demise in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*. The chapter has an epigraph that reads, “Life is a sweet kiss in a bitter mouth” (125). The epigraph is sourced as the witchdoctor’s statement. It expresses the contraction in globalized aesthetics. Dimwit might automatically be taken as an inference to Mark Brook’s Dimwit. In *Dimwit of the Yard*, Brook narrates how Dimwit, a nine-year old boy, hails a radio-controlled, mini-cab driver to take him to Sunderland: “Had he known better, Dimwit would have recognized the professional quality of the radio-controlled, mini-cab-driver by the size of the bandage he wore on his head. Clearly a sign of the number of

times he had banged his head on the steering-wheel” (“Dimwit”). Here, the turban is disapprovingly referred to as a bandage and a sign of a reckless driving. In *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, Ermelinda’s turban represents sirens that warn about the destruction of the fluency of Euro-American modernity and the eventual embarrassing exposure of its attendant exploitative nature in the form of a detached large male sexual organ. Surprisingly, as she prepares to visit the place where the detached sexual organ lay, she demands for sirens “– Haven’t I told you to buy some sirens? Down south, in the nation, don’t the chiefs go round with a siren?” (7). The contradiction inherent in the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara raises the consciousness of a sweet kiss in a bitter mouth because globalization is a wonderful idea envisioning unrestricted flow of goods, people and technology across countries yet it creates the problem of translation.

Nonetheless, the most unique siren at the centre of the inquiry is Anna Godwilling. She is summoned by the administrator of Tizangara to offer her opinion on the identity of the severed large male sexual organ. In Chapter seven labeled “A spiked drink (Godwilling’s talk) (60), the epigraph is an extract from a dialogue between the Italian and Godwilling as shown below:

–I miss my home, back in Italy.

–I’d like a little place of my own too, where I could  
return to and feel cosy.

–Don’t you have one, Anna?

–I haven't got one. None of us women have one,

–How come?

–You men come back home. We are the home. (60)

The Italian, as indicated in the above quote is suffering from homesickness and would like to return to Italy, However, Godwilling has no home. Here, the dialogue between the Italian and Godwilling opens the aesthetics of home into the have and have not.

By summoning Anna Godwilling, that is, the rumour of power, the administrator is trying to wreck the ship of the UN commissioned inquiry whose mandate is to investigate the case of the severed sexual organ and the other cases of the missing UN soldiers. The other important sirens in the inquiry are Dimwit, the young brother of Temporina, Hortensia and Temporina. Gikandi observes that, “the history of the novel after modernism, especially among those writers who came to be designated as postcolonial, is an attempt to create counseled individuals and to turn them, in the guise of storytelling into witnesses and counselors of others” (156-157). True to Gikandi's observation, in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo Couto* creates characters who experiment with globalized aesthetics using sayings and sirens to raise the consciousness of mixed cultural codes in the transfer of cultural materials across counties or place envisioned in the idea of globalization.

Therefore, the translation of time in Tizangara could be represented as shown in diagram 4.3.2 below:

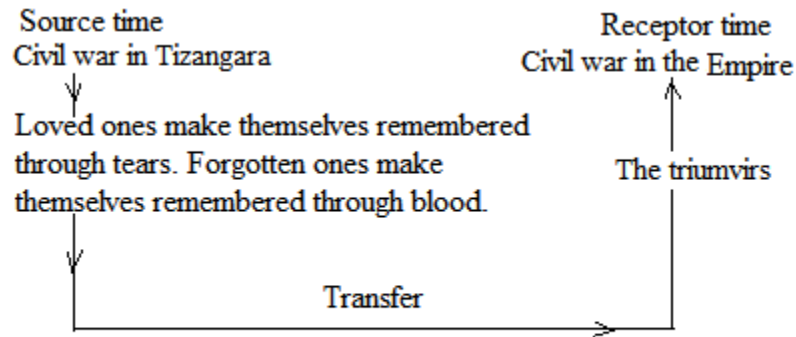


Diagram 4.3.2 Saying-Siren Translation Dialogic Pairs

From the diagram above, the source time denotes civil war in Tizangara. It is analysed through the saying that pities the action of the loved ones with that of the forgotten ones. Hortensia alludes to the lady who dared the triumvirs with her unique oratory assets. In *Appian's Roman History IV: Civil Wars Book III*, Octavian, the son of Caesar, and his supporters write a letter to Marcus Antony reminding him of his and their loyalty to Caesar who had been brutally murdered, “seeing that Caesar’s acts were not altogether without friends, were not forgotten, were not unappreciated” (13), the war is not over. When the triumvirs are able to consolidate power, they proscribe those people who stand in their way, but reward their friends, only the ones who might not turn into future foes. So the saying on loved ones and forgotten ones is transferred and restructured as the triumvirs (sirens) of civil war in the Empire. However, the Empire is moved to address the war of aesthetics.

### 4.3.3 “The Flying Flamingo”: The Dialogic Aesthetics of Translation

The translator of Tizangara states the problem of aesthetics within the idea of globalization as that of finding the suitable verb for expressing the transfer of cultural materials across countries or places. Subsequently, when the important delegation with the Mozambican and the United Nations soldiers visits the scene outside Tizangara where the severed male sexual organ lie, they are unable to solve the mystery. The representative of central government poses a metaphysical question about the detached organ: “was that thing in the middle of the road an organ or an organism? If it was an organ, disparate and desperate as it was, from whom had it been cut?” (12). Here, the representative of central government re-poses the problem that the translator of Tizangara had posed earlier in the epilogue. In “Semantic Fit in Riddles,” Lyndon Harries observes that “Every time a riddle is posed, it is posed as if for the first time” (319). Harries’ observation implies that in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the riddle of the exploding soldiers is re-posed as though for the first time every time a new model is introduced in order to fit it semantically to the new comparative situation.

In *Translation: Literature and Letters*, the Mexican poet Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz posits that “When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate; the child who asks his mother the meaning of a word is really asking her to translate the unfamiliar term into the simple words he already knows” (152). Here, translation is not about merely transferring meaning from one language to another, but it is

about creating a communicative link between the familiar sign and the other which is unfamiliar. In the idea of globalization that is fictionalized in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the sign becomes unfamiliar from the way it attaches itself onto the new world it has migrated to. Accordingly, the detached male sexual organ is unfamiliar to the local and the United Nations representatives because of the way it attaches itself onto the middle of the trunk road outside Tizangara without revealing its original body from which it has been detached.

Therefore, the Italian investigator together with the whole delegation gets in the wrong verve of translation by presuming that the severed organ is exclusively a Mozambican problem whose solution could be found by investigating the trunk road where it lies. By examining the mere representations of material things denies the Italian a clear understanding of the translator of Tizangara's cultural method of translating. However, after struggling with the unfamiliarity of the cultural sign in Tizangara he suddenly gets a glimpse of the translator's methodology prompting him to clarify issues with him as shown in the quote below:

– Who are you?

– I'm your translator.

– I can speak and understand. The problem isn't language. What I don't understand is this world here. (26).

By seeking to understand how the translator of Tizangara relates to him, Massimo Risi has begun to learn how to translate. It dawns on him that the first step in the project of translation is to establish a clear relation with the translator.

Henceforth, a dialogic movement between the investigator and the translator becomes visible to the reader. First, Massimo Risi admits that it has been difficult for him to solve the puzzle of the exploding soldiers and he would readily enlist the help of the translator of Tizangara. Secondly, he firmly states that he has to complete his mission of inquiry in order to get his long overdue promotion. The translator of Tizangara encourages him, assuring him that he will eventually get the promotion. In *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital*, Massimo De Angelis explains that he grew up in the revolutionary Italy of the 1970s where in school they were studying “pamphlets, leaflets, revolutionary books and magazines, arguments and theories confronted, debated, ridiculed and promoted” (x). The global relation between De Angelis’s book and Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* becomes visible through the transfer of the Italian author’s self-proclaimed revolutionary nature to the fictional African world of Tizangara.

The mission of translation envisioned in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* entails the idea of the African chronotopic double, where time exists in two parts. The African chronotopic double in the fictional town of Tizangara becomes

visible in the representations of time and space as the migratory habits of the flamingos. In her PhD thesis *Decolonisation in Mozambican Literature*, Anna Eerika Pöysä observes that in Couto's *O Último Voo do Flamingo* (*The Last Flight of the Flamingo*) an Italian UN representative, Massimo Risi, is trying to make sense of mysterious disappearances of the UN peacekeepers placed in the fictive village called Tizangara but, "It is clear that there are two world views being pitted against each other that do not translate very easily, making the Italian's investigation all the more difficult. Risi has a translator ... who explains – instead of just literally translating – the world view of the people," (187) in Tizangara. Here, Pöysä rightly identifies different world views as the problematic of translation in Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*. However, she does not follow through the two world views to the migratory flight of the flamingos.

The translator of Tizangara explains that his mother visualized, in her evented fable, the flamingos in their flight pushing the sun so that day could begin on the other side of the world: "As the afternoon drew to an end, the flamingos would cross the sky. My mother fell silent as she watched their flight. She wouldn't utter a word until the birds had been lost from sight. Nor could I move. Everything at that moment was sacred" (31). In the performance of the fable, the Translator of Tizangara acts as the participatory audience while his mother is the oral artist. In the rendition, the oral artist uses the flight of the flamingos as a model for interpreting the consciousness of the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara. The

translator of Tizangara and his mother, like Anna Godwilling and the severed large male sexual organ, are parts of the globalized aesthetics embodied in the narrative spaces of Couto's novel as important figures in the fictive town of Tizangara. The translator of Tizangara and his mother find their origin in the fable about the flight of the flamingos.

Couto beautifully replicates the model of the flying flamingo in the unfolding of events in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* so that it becomes the consciousness upon which the movement of aesthetics from one world to another is experienced. Accordingly, during the reception of the delegation, the administrator of Tizangara uses the proverb, "a goat eats whenever it's tethered" (4), to justify his action of diverting the hospital generator to his own personal use. Then the goat is allowed to stray from the world of the proverb in simulation of the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara. The stray goat wanders in the square to the annoyance of the administrator of Tizangara who is waiting to receive the eminent delegation of the Mozambican and United Nations soldier together with the Italian, Massimo Risi. He orders the adjutant to remove it but suddenly there is a screech of brakes and a dull thud of the crash of a car knocking into a body. The translator of Tizangara recounts that the goat "flew higher than a feathery snipe and fell clattering on to a nearby pavement. It didn't die straightaway. For the time being, it lay there, spattered and battered, bellowing ever more loudly against the world" (10). Here, through the car crash the goat attains the image of a feathery snipe

suggesting the idea of a paper-bird being flown in the sky. In addition, due to the force of the crash, one of goat's horns fly off landing near Chupanga, the adjutant, who picks it up and hands it over to the administrator of Tizangara, whom he considers to be the owner of the goat. However, the administrator of Tizangara contemptuously hurls the 'orphaned' horn to the ground. Then he orders the translator of Tizangara to go and kill that bleating battered goat for him.

Through the fate of the stray goat the translator of Tizangara is trying to interpret the administrator of Tizangara's rehearsal for the reception of the delegation as an approximate version of the verb needed for describing what really happens to the United Nations soldiers of peace. Subsequently, the severed male sexual organ and the missing United Nations soldiers find equivalence in the detached horn and the battered goat. Therefore, the stray goat finds its origin in the administrator of Tizangara's saying. The goat has been freed from its tether in the proverb just as the illegal diversion of the hospital generator has been freed from its spaces of corruption. The generator now spreads air through the fan in the administration building creating a new circuit of aesthetics. In *Orature and Yorùbá Riddles*, Akínyemí observes that the artists can "freely adjust the tranfered [literary] materials to raise social consciousness in the minds of their readers – thereby freeing the material from impendiments of a fixed cultural perspective" (180). Accordingly, in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* Couto frees the goat and the hospital generator from their fixed cultural perspectives of the corruption cases

reported in Mozambique during the peace process after the end of the civil war. The missing United Nations soldiers and the severed sexual male organ are also freed from their fixed cultural perspectives of civil-war in order to create the consciousness of the idea of the conflict of aesthetics inherent in the project of globalization.

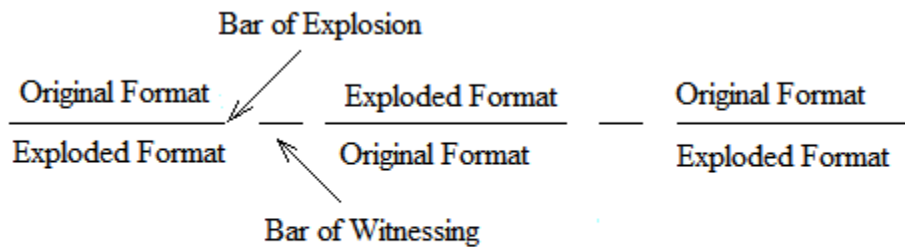
Indeed, Couto makes a levelling of the idea of globalization in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* stratifying it into different voices which henceforth cooperate and compete to find a suitable verb for expressing the consciousness of the conflict of aesthetics that characterize the transfer of cultural materials across countries or places. In *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital*, Massimo De Angelis argues that a political reading of the 'flying geese' model reasonably explicates the continuous process of the transnational redefinition of commodity chains that characterize the idea of globalization. The model, he argues, "defines trade as the most important vehicle for transferring goods and technology across countries/ places following a dynamic process of 'shifting comparative advantage,' and therefore as the instrument for promoting a continuous social and geographical reorganization of production" (125). In agreement with De Angelis proposal, the model of the flying flamingo has been used in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* to raise the consciousness of the 'missing verb' in the translation of the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara. The comparative models presented by the characters in the novel are debated upon, promoted or

demoted, in voices that have been leveled into rumours. For a character to earn promotion they must solve the problematized social relation of aesthetics, such as that of the goat that has been crashed into a feathery snipe.

In the image of the feathery snipe used to describe the administrator of Tizangara's stray goat is debated on and promoted through the sudden appearances of the imagined owner, creating a sense of alarm in Massimo: "It wasn't anything important, just the man who had turned up some days before, the owner of the ill-fated goat. We weren't quick enough to avoid him. The fellow accosted us, full of whispers: –Well then, bosses?" (76). Here, the man is demanding for compensation for the loss of his goat. The translator of Tizangara points at the Italian claiming that he should be the one to listen to all the whining. The man had lost an important goat, a mating animal leaving his many nanny-goats without a breeder. The translator of Tizangara claims that the goat was more elegant than Anna Godwilling.

Apart from the stray goat, the Italian is puzzled by the enigma of the radio transmitter which had been fully installed in the headquarters of the administration, in a room that only he could access. It had been tested and everything worked well. However the following day the transmitter was missing and Massimo was in a state of anxiety: "another soldier reduced to a sexual organ! What could he write in his report? That his men were exploding like soap bubbles

... He felt the wait of Africa upon him” (78). The translator of Tizangara uses the transmitter to represent the United Nations soldiers because of its capacity for spreading news across countries simultaneously. He gives a hint that the soldiers refer to the technology transferred to Tizangara due to globalization. The people of Tizangara rename the radio transmitter as the soldier of peace because of the role it played in preaching peace to end the civil war in Mozambique. However, the people of Tizangara rename the radio transmitter as Dimwit making it inaccessible to the Italian, as though it were a renamed or moved file in the computer where the file extension name is completely different from the name of the original file. The explosion of the soldiers of peace could be represented as shown in diagram 4.3.3 below:



**Diagram 4.3.3 Dialogic pairs of Original Format-Exploded Format**

In the first dialogic pair, as shown in the diagram above, the original format of the soldiers of peace is at the top of the bar of explosion while the exploded format is below the bar. In the second dialogic pair, the exploded format takes flight to the top of the bar of explosion while the original format lands below the bar. The link between one dialogic pair and the next is experienced through the bar of

witnessing. The characters in *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* interchangeably propose experimentation with a certain globalized aesthetics and allow the people in Tizangara to witness how it is blown up from its original form into the exploded format.

Witnessing the globalized aesthetics being exploded, the Italian writes a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations reporting the disappearance of the whole town: “It is my painful duty to have to report the complete disappearance of a country in strange and almost inexplicable circumstances. I’m aware that the present report will lead to my dismissal from the team of United Nations advisors” (177). The Italian has failed to decipher the enigma of the exploding soldiers and he is ready to part with his promotion. However, while at the edge of the chasm that has opened in the town, the Italian gains insight about what constitutes the verb of the exploding soldiers. He proposes to the translator of Tizangara that they wait for another boat but immediately revises to “wait for another flight of the flamingo” (178). At last, Massimo seems to understand that the flight of the flamingo is the best model upon which he could understand the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara.

Consequently, the Italian pulls out the sheet of paper on which he had written the report for the United Nations and folds it making a paper bird. He launches it over the chasm and it glides in the air and gradually lands in the abyss. As he

performed this ritual of childhood, Massimo smiled. He had finally cracked the problem of the exploding soldiers. Their original format had been folded into a childlike toy and then they were launched over the chasm of the world of imagination. Having finally understood the cultural model behind the simultaneous translations in Tizangara, Massimo is considered as an elder of the Tizangara society.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

It is evident from the discussion in the chapter that in both *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* Okri and Couto respectively use the chain of the episodic events of dream and waking to create a sliding signifier upon which the motives and objects for promoting the idea of the African chronotope become visible to the reader. The two novels read as approximate versions of the tale-riddle characterized by episodic events, one beginning where the other ends. In *The Age of Magic*, the magic of the sliding signifier is revealed through the camera shots arranged in the documentary mode into seven major manuscripts, one after the other. The seven books approximate not only the seven-member crew engaged in the filming of the documentary but also the seven-letter word Arcadia, the alchemy of the journey. For Lao, the presenter of the documentary, life is an approximate version of dream which requires to be approached as a game. He believes that the best dreams occur in books but they are more often lost because people only hear some things in recollection. He proposes that to gain

mastery of the dream, the reader should simultaneously interrogate the book at three levels: the actual, the real and the amplified. He explains that the actual is visible in the apparent material representations of things, while the real emerges in the negative spaces of the game as one's potential. The amplified is superior to the other two levels, and it is akin to perpetual inspiration. Okri beautifully uses an imagined train journey involving the seven-member filming crew to encapsulate the aesthetics of attachment/ detachment to the motion of the wheels raising the consciousness of falling into the double maps of Arcadia: the physical place in the material representations of Greco-European modernity and the idea of home anywhere in the world. The magic of the sliding signifier raises the consciousness of civilization the aesthetics of desire, dream and will.

In Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the magic of the sliding signifier becomes visible through the chain of sayings from Tizangara arranged as epigraphs, in the inquiry mode, to the twenty-one chapters of the novel. The question of the inquiry is posed in the prologue by the translator of Tizangara. It is about the United Nations peace-keeping soldiers in Tizangara who explode one after the other leaving nothing of their original format. Using the riddling question-answer protocol, the translator of Tizangara charges the reader to find out from the pages of the novel what happened to the soldiers of peace – whether they died or they were killed. The search for the answer unfolds in a manner that simulates the performances in **gicaandi** genre. Couto appealingly allows the

characters to experiment with various parts of the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara to demonstrate the civil war of aesthetics resulting from the conflicting cultural sensibilities. The United Nations representative, Massimo Risi, finally discover that the soldiers of peace have not been exploding in the literally sense but their original sensibilities have been moved and renamed in the civil war of aesthetics envisioned in the global project in Tizangara. He discovers that the mission of the inquiry in Tizangara involves using the model of the flying flamingo in order to understand how original formats of aesthetics are moved and renamed into new circuits creating a problem of translation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary

The work in this PhD thesis has been reported in five chapters. The interpretation and analysis of data has been guided by the conceptual framework built on Akíntúndé Akínyemí's idea of the dialogic problem-solution/ question-answer that characterize the riddle-narrative in the Yorùbá oral tradition and Kimani Njogu's idea of dialogic problem-solution in **gicaandi**, an African poetic riddle-like dialogue. Qualitative research methodology, in particular textual analysis, has been used to collect the primary data from the selected African novels based on the three research objectives of the study. The six novels that have been examined in the study are: Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Okri's *The Famished Road* and *The Age of Magic*, Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*.

The first chapter one offers the background to the study with the aim of contextualizing the working thesis dubbed 'Representations of Chronotopic Cycles and Consciousness in Selected African Novels: A Study on Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Alain Mabanckou and Mia Couto.' The historical and philosophical underpinnings for such a thesis are explained and supported by inferences drawn from both the novels under examination and relevant secondary sources. The chapter also contains the statement of the problem, research objectives, research

questions and assumptions, justification of the study, scope and delimitation, literature review, conceptual framework and research methodology. The chapter is derived from the research proposal document that has served as a road map for the study.

The second chapter has been developed from the first objective whose demand is to examine how Tutuola and Okri fuse time and space in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *The Famished Road* respectively into a unique African chronotope in which the African subject attains anisotropic character. The objective has been achieved resulting to the analytic chapter with the title ‘The Road to African Literary Chronotope: Reading the Anisotropic Imaginaries of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri.’ The discussion in the chapter is structured as a riddling session in which Tutuola is assumed to pose his riddle of time, ‘The palm-wine drinkard and his dead tapster in the Deads’ Town.’ Then, the projected search for resolution is read from the palm-wine drinkard’s journey from his home to the Deads’ Town with the sole purpose of finding his dead tapster and returning him to the world of the living so that he could continue tapping palm-wine for him. Okri is assumed to pose the second riddle, ‘The famished road that was once a river.’ It builds on the journey motif to the Deads’ Town in Tutuola’s novel, incorporating the mythic idea of abiku, the spirit child, who is believed to oscillate in a cycle of rebirth.

Chapter Three arises from the second objective whose call is to investigate how Mabanckou uses representations of time and space in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to portray the consciousness of being a harmful double in the African chronotope. The objective too has been met resulting to the analytic chapter with the title ‘Memoirs of Dis-embarking at the Bar’: Alain Mabanckou’s Characterization of the African Chronotope.’ The discussion in the chapter revolves around the conflict of aesthetics resulting from the opening of the bar of aesthetics into nodes of the written word and the spoken word in *Broken Glass* and the human and the animal in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. In *Broken Glass*, the eponymous narrator is commissioned by the boss of the bar *Credit Gone West* to write a notebook about the patrons of the bar in a certain cultural that lays claim to the age of the written word. He writes the manuscript in a tale-riddle-like format stratifying it into two main parts labeled “First Part” and “Last Part.” In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the porcupine narrator makes rendition to the Baobab tree about his exploits while he lived as a double of the man called Kibandi, who has recently died. The narrator caricatures the belief that owing to their claim to intelligence human beings are civilized while the animals are dumb and wild.

Chapter Four analytically responds to the third objective. The demands of the objective is to interrogate how Okri and Couto use representations of time and space in *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* respectively to create a sliding signifier upon which the awareness of the African chronotope

becomes visible. The objective has been met resulting to the chapter titled, ‘The Magic of the Sliding Signifier: Ben Okri and Mia Couto’s African Chronotopic Double.’ The chapter argues that both Okri and Couto use the chain of episodic events of dream and waking to create a sliding signifier upon which the motives and the objects that promote the idea of the African chronotope in the novels become visible. Okri organizes *The Age of Magic* into seven main books in which the camera shots for the TV documentary on the journey to Arcadia are arranged, one after the other. The novel’s arrangement into seven books approximates the spelling of the word Arcadia containing seven letters. The documentary is being filmed by a seven-member crew, which again approximates the number of the letters in the word Arcadia. On his part, Couto organizes *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* into twenty-one chapters, introduced through epigraphs comprising of sayings from Tizangara. The progression of plot is visible through the United Nations commissioned inquiry into the mysterious cases of missing UN soldiers and a severed large male sexual organ found outside Tizangara. Since the characters in both *The Age of Magic* and *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* encounter the enigma translation of time becomes quite essential for them. The model of the flying flamingo stands out in the translation mission in Tizangara. The novel addresses itself to the civil war of the globalized aesthetics in the fictional town of Tizangara.

Finally, Chapter Five offers the summary of the study, the findings, the recommendations, and the conclusion. It ties up the study and projects for future research, concisely indicating how the literary endeavour in the current study adds to the existing critical corpuses of the theory and the practice of literature.

## **5.2 Findings**

There are a number of findings that are evident in the study. First, the interrogation arising from the first objective of the study about the fusion of time-space indicators in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Okri's *The Famished Road* indicates that the riddle is at the heart of the fusion of time and space in the African literary imagination. The challenge in the African social realities of time that is experienced by the narrator(s) in Tutuola and Okri's novels results from detachment and/ or attachment of the West's mythic objects of modernity to the African time-space. Consequently, the African narrator(s) is locked in a cyclic self-defeatist character of going to the West for resolutions to the continent's perennial riddle of underdevelopment and, vainly coming back home to worsening socio-economic and political realities.

In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Tutuola effortlessly creates an oral narrator in the written plane of the novel and sets him off on a journey motif of finding his dead palm-wine tapster in the Deads Town. He beautifully expresses the complexities of Africa's dependency on her former colonial masters as an alcoholic foible

which is so sharply felt by the narrator that he journeys to wherever his dead tapster might be residing for a resolution. The dead tapster tries to assuage the alcoholic foible with an array of magic eggs which temporarily works but soon crumbles down whipping the narrator and his people into worse social realities. Okri, on his part, addresses himself to the challenge of the African social realities of time with ease, just like Tutuola, albeit through the abiku trope of the African narrator who has been turned into a spirit-child by the lure of the West's modernity such that he is perennially born and bereaved to the same and/ or different African parents who are thus periodically pitched into ever-more devastating socio-political realities. Precisely, the fusion of time-space indicators in Tutuola and Okri's novels demonstrates the efficacy of the riddle in interrogating the African cyclic time that is bedeviled by (neo)-colonialism.

Secondly, the critical analysis in Chapter Three which is based on the second objective of the study culminates into the finding that Mabanckou characterizes the African chronotope in *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* into the aesthetics of the dialogic novel with a unique ability for summoning the oral and the written texts into the narrative spaces. He updates the image of the monster with mouths to characterize the dialogic novel as a creature who does not have a mouth, ear or nose but is able to feed through the mouths of the narrator and the character(s). He allows the characters to simulate **gicaandi** performances in their problem-posing and problem-solving about the row of the aesthetics caused by

the Stubborn Snail when he splits the circuit of aesthetics into two nodes with the different potential of the written word and the spoken word. The **gicaaandi** of pissing between Robinette and Casimir is particularly interesting. In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Mabanckou beautifully uses the harmful animal-human double to produce the aesthetics of eating upon which the narrator and the character(s) feed on existing corpuses of the aesthetics of the written word and the spoken word. The novel is built on the aesthetics of the fable. The Stubborn Snail believes that life is an approximate version of the fable.

Thirdly, the finding that is evident from the critical discussion arising from the third objective of the study is that in Okri's *The Age of Magic* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the sliding of the signifier becomes visible through a chain of alternating dreams/ dreamlike events and waking. In *The Age of Magic*, Okri readily creates simultaneous journey motifs to Arcadia in Greece, into classical books, especially Goethe's Faust, and into the characters who are travelling in an imaginary train. In *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, Couto uniquely uses the inquest mode to address himself to the civil war of aesthetics resulting from the globalized aesthetics in Tizangara. He allows the characters to experiment with various material and cultural things in order to demonstrate the cultural conflict in the globalized aesthetics. Everything is exploded into new spaces including the song Godwilling, the goat in an African saying and the drawing of a large male sexual organ.

All the six novels examined in the study exhibit motives and objects of the **gicaandi** and the African tale-riddle. The problem-posing and problem-solving is done in a dialogic manner enabling the novels to encapsulate each other within the riddling structure adopted in the study.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The critical examination on Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Okri's *The Famished Road* and *The Age of Magic*, Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* and Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* manifests important insights on the working of time in the African literary chronotope that addresses itself to the open bar of aesthetics into nodes with different potential. The intriguing insight that cuts across all the six novels is that the challenge for Africa is time which is felt in the civil war of aesthetics due to the globalization project. Consequently, the action demanded for Africa by the global movement of aesthetics seems to be buried in time such that time becomes a riddle whose resolution calls for an elaborate new theory of time. Some critics might quickly and justifiably ask whether it is necessary to engage in such a theoretical endeavour when there seems to already exist sufficiently and effectively working theories of time, such as Bakhtin's literary Chronotope.

However, the study on Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Alain Mabanckou and Mia Couto has clearly demonstrated that the verve in literary imagination becomes

observable in the way authors use the aesthetics in the fictional world of their books to revise existing theories producing new ones with more vitality of understanding the world. Mabanckou, for instance, uses the open bar of aesthetics in *Broken Glass* and the aesthetics of eating in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* to revise theories that perceive the aesthetics of the written word and the spoken word or the human and animal aesthetics as circuits that are divorced from each other. The reading of Mabanckou in the study proposes a new theory of the dialogic novel in which different circuits of aesthetics are governed by a dialogic relation. Bakhtin himself formulated his theory of dialogue at the margins of reading, among other authors, Rabelais and Dostoyevsky. He believes that theory is born when writing is at its best by achieving a world view that betters all other world views. Undoubtedly, literary theories of time abound mostly as offshoots of Bakhtin's Chronotopic imagination, yet Bakhtin himself places his theory of time squarely on the critical inquiry of the European novel. Nonetheless, his explication of the literary chronotope as interconnectedness of time and space as expressed in the novel is without demur useful in the theory and practice of literature.

Importantly, though, the margins of reading the six African novels in the study call for review of Bakhtin's theory of literary Chronotope and, the subsequent formulation of an alternative theory of time that would outstandingly shift the perspective of reading the African literary imagination, in particular, and literature from all other parts of the world, in general. The challenge of time within the

borders of the six African novels points to the African narrative imagination that is enthused by the riddle for an apropos theoretical tool for reading the African novel. At the heart of the working of the riddle is the verb 'find.' It invites the narrator to search for the possible resolution in the fictionalized space of the novel. The riddle thus demonstrates a theory of time that shall be referred to as the embedded-verb-time theory. The embedded verb is essentially 'find,' and it initiates a journey motif into the fictionalized world of the novel. The search takes place as though it were, in a mathematical sense, on the ordered-triple (X, Y, Z) of the Cartesian plane. However, the triple-ordered spatial sense of the Cartesian plane is felt in the African literary imaginary as the planes of the living, the ancestors and the unborn.

Noteworthy, the verb 'find' is embedded in space and, therefore, whatever it seeks could not possibly coincide with the triple-ordered sense of the Cartesian plane. It is felt as an 'absence' that has 'gone' to another plane. In the Cartesian plane, though, there are only three planes. Subsequently, the 'absence' seems to 'accuse' the Cartesian plane of foreclosing the possibility of moving from the borders. Curiously, after entering and exiting containers of consciousness within the borders of the Cartesian plane, the 'absence' is finally 'understood' as being embedded in a fictional plane. Therefore, of necessity, the 'absence' invites the fictional plane to be detached and/ or attached to space so that its 'presence' could be found. Remarkably, the journey motif that is initiated by the verb 'find,' and in

which the 'absence' enters and exits containers of consciousness, registers passage of time suggesting that time must be the fictional plane. The resulting fusion of time and space, hence, reveals four superimposed circlets of temporal consciousness which are defined by the embedded-verb 'find,' 'gone,' 'accuse,' and 'understood.' Consequently, the embedded-verb-time theory could be conceptually presented as shown in diagram 5.3 below.

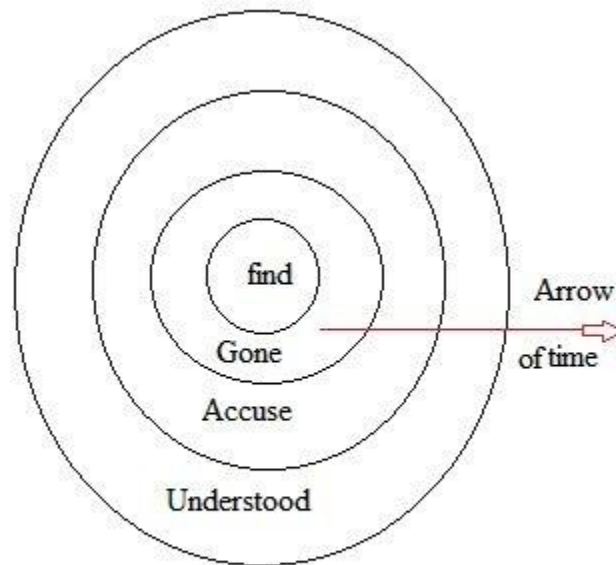


Diagram 5.3 Embedded-Verb-Time Model

In the theoretical model above, the arrow of time is significant in establishing how space and time are fused in the novel, and the direction the fusion takes. The position of the arrow of time is not fixed but it changes depending on the direction the search for the 'absence' takes. To apply the embedded-verb-time theory, the interpretive reader first identifies the challenge of time in the given text. Then, they observe how, by whom, and to what end the search for the 'absence' is being

conducted. The temporal value that is nominated as the 'absence' enters and exits containers of consciousness is established from the journey motif. The movement of space and time becomes visible through the consciousness expressed by the verbs 'find,' 'gone,' 'accuse,' and 'understood.' Consequently, how the 'absence' enters and/ or exits each of the circlets enables the reader to observe the way temporal consciousness is being reviewed and/ or formed in the fictional world under scrutiny. As indicated in the conceptual model, time is felt in cyclic rather than linear sense. However, depending on the end to which space and time are made to fuse a linear sense could be formed, but eventually it would be dispelled by the 'absence,' which almost naturally accuse(s) it of diversion.

In the African literary imagination containers of consciousness actively participate in the search for they are caretakers of the African wellbeing. The riddling protocols involving problem-posing and problem-solving characterize the way the narrator(s) enters and exits containers of consciousness in an attempt to find the one which suitably holds the temporal consciousness for the 'absence' that is being sought. Giving a practical example, in all the six African novels that have been examined in the study the researcher has identified their challenge of time as the open bar of aesthetics into nodes with the different potential resulting to a conflict between the circuits. In the novels, therefore, the narrators enter and exit containers of consciousness in the journey motif whose aim is to find what holds the consciousness of the open bar of aesthetics.

The critical examination on Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in the study reveals that the eponymous narrator's 'absence' finds no suitable container of consciousness in the Deads' Town where his dead tapster resides. The conflict of aesthetics between the world of the eponymous narrator and that of his palm-wine tapster is evident in the style of walking. The eponymous narrator realizes with shock that in the Deads' Town people walk backward and their life is irreconcilable with his life back home. For the embedded-verb-time theory, the irreconcilability implies an 'absence' of verb calling for the mission to translate time. Subsequently, the narrator needs an appropriate verb for reading the consciousness of walking backward that characterizes life in the Deads' Town into a familiar language.

While it is easy for the other, who is translating, to point the wrong way for the search, as the tapster in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* does, the embedded verb automatically initiates a new search, especially when the false resolution crumbles down. Subsequently, the embedded-verb-time theory might have a lot of literary clout, especially in post-colonial literatures, because its journey motif grants the narrator unique opportunities for rediscovering and redefining a given temporal consciousness. The journey motif in the novels examined in the study clearly demonstrates the literary beauty of the embedded-verb-time theory. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the eponymous narrator's lure to the Deads' Town is expressed in the African riddle as addiction to palm-wine. Then, the object of the embedded

verb is the tapster who has fallen off a palm tree and died, leaving the addicted narrator quite devastated. The journey motif eventually makes the narrator to realize that if he continues relying on the dead tapster for a resolution, his temporal challenge would replicate endlessly.

In addition, Okri's *The Famished Road* seems to grant the embedded-verb-time theory more efficacy from its unique employment of the journey motif in which an abiku narrator is locked in a cycle of coming to African parents and going back to the mysterious world of pure dreams. Here, the embedded-verb-time theory enables the narrator to realize that the resolution is locked in a vicious cycle. In the riddling world, the narrator would most likely shift the search to a new container of consciousness or make another journey to the very container that seems to yield no results in order to find out why its consciousness keeps crumbling.

In the riddle in Okri's *The Age of Magic*, the narrator makes a documentary on the journey to the twinned world of dreams and waking in Greek modernity. In Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, the riddle revolves around the Stubborn Snail's open bar of aesthetics into two nodes of the different potential of the written word and the spoken word, and the human and the animal, respectively. The eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* reveals the embedded verb in the representations of the chronotopic cycles and consciousness in the Stubborn

Snail's open bar of aesthetics as pissing. Then, the porcupine-narrator in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* portrays the embedded verb in the riddle on the harmful human-animal double as eating. In Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the embedded verb is portrayed as exploding. Accordingly, the magic of Couto's literary imagination in the novel is evident from the way he explodes a drawing of a large male sexual organ into an enigma on the trunk road in Tizangara causing a river of rumours about the return of civil war. To interpret the strange object, the narrator shifts the action to a local prostitute who attests that the 'thing' does not belong to any of the local men, but must belong to one of the foreigners, supposedly the UN soldiers in Tizangara.

Finally, the embedded-verb-time theory demonstrates inimitable efficacy by its literary ability evinced in the journey motif of time for exposing misleading translations. A case in hand is when the 'absence' is translated as Credit Gone West in Mabanckou's *Broken Glass*. The eponymous narrator in *Broken Glass* is aware of the boss of the bar Credit Gone West's presumptuous nature of opening the bar of aesthetics into nodes of the written word and the spoken word on the basis of memory. Therefore, he produces short circuits of aesthetics in the manuscript *Credit Gone West* through the journey motifs in the patrons' stories allowing the load of the scatology the Stubborn Snail assigns to the spoken word to flow back to the node of the written word thus completing the circuit of aesthetics. In Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, the translator-narrator

admits that the ‘absence’ in the novel emanates from lack of a visible verb for describing what really happens to the United Nations soldiers in Tizangara. The people of Tizangara, therefore, describe the soldiers as having been ‘exploded’ for lack of a verb. The embedded-verb-time theory also makes it easy for narrators to theoretically translate terms that have hitherto opened the bar of aesthetics into conflicting nodes, such as colonialism and home for humanity, into suitable consciousness for the African narrator. Old Sulpicio, a character in Couto’s *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, for example, rightly reviews colonialism as the West’s spirituality. In Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the lure of addiction to the Deads’ Town for the eponymous narrator is translated as journey to death, and in Okri’s *The Age of Magic*, the dream and waking journey of life that characterizes the lure of home is described as the homesickness of aesthetics.

Is the embedded-verb-time theory limited to the reading of the six African novels examined in the study, or can it be applied to interpret a wider scope of African and global literature? Couto’s *Under the Frangipani* speaks to this question since it uniquely addresses itself to the African post-colonial riddle experienced by Mozambicans through the mystic objects of the Portuguese colonialism, civil-war and then Western materialism. In the novel, Couto effortlessly interrogates the riddle through the trope of a dead narrator who has returned to life as a night spirit and then inhabits the head of a Mozambican police inspector who is investigating a weird murder. Precisely, the embedded-verb-time theory seems to have great

potential for adding wonderful insights to the existing critical corpuses on the working of time in the African literary imaginary, in particular, and the global literatures, in general.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The following recommendations for further critical engagement are evident in the study. First, that the working of the riddle in the six African novels itemizes translation of time as an important concern in the African literary imagination. Importantly, Couto's *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* offers interesting latitude for translation studies, especially in African postcolonial literatures. However, a comparative study with a wider scope of African authors and novels might yield greater insights on translation of time.

Secondly, that Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* demonstrate unique aesthetics of eating which enables the novel to encapsulate the aesthetics of the written word and the spoken word giving them an appealing balance in the narrative spaces of the novel. Therefore, *Broken Glass* and *Memoirs of a Porcupine* reveal what could be described as the dialogic novel. The trope of the dialogic novel requires further critical examination, perhaps with a wider scope of African authors and novels, in order to fortify the insights of the study.

Thirdly, that the journey motif portrayed in the representations of time in the six African novels examined in the study portend globalization of aesthetics. In *The Age of Magic*, Okri deploys the documentary mode quite inimitably for granting Lao, who allegorizes a postcolonial country, a literary space for making and recording, for viewing, a journey to the West's idea of home whose ontology is the Greek modernity. Nonetheless, further critical investigation of the documentary trope through an interdisciplinary approach with the latitude for comparing documentary in the novel and the film could enrich the insights of the study.

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