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# Mouthwork

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the politics and aesthetics of the mouth in Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) and argues that the novel reflects on the speculative logic of finance capitalism. The essay departs from the scholarly consensus that views *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* as a novel about the slave trade and its traumas and instead argues that it engages with the capitalist economies generated by slavery. These economies are revealed in Tutuola's representation of the mouth as a site for the production of abstract value, a production enabled by the mouth's ability to mimic and enact the logic of destruction. Building on Ian Baucom's insightful readings of the slave trade and finance capitalism, in which he suggests that destruction is indispensible to the rise and success of finance capitalism and thus productive of more lasting and tangible benefits, the essay reads the recurring image of the mouth as an instrument that converts loss into gain. For this conversion to be possible, one needs to see consumption as a productive process I call "mouthwork." Tutuola's novel renders the relationship between consumption and production more complex and less polarizing than it might initially seem and casts redemption as capitalism's underlying and galvanizing sentiment.

**Keywords:** Amos Tutuola, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, mouthwork, capitalism

It takes only a few pages of Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) to note the narrative's economic feel and the way it hinges on a range of practices, locations, maneuvers, and values that are easily recognizable and instantly familiar. Narrated by a boy who is seven at the novel's open, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* immediately establishes its

historical background and economic concerns by revealing the circumstances of the boy's appearance in the eponymous bush and his first ordeals therein. Set against the backdrop of the slave trade, the narrative begins with the boy and his brother being given "two slices of cooked yam" (Tutuola 18) and left to their own resources by their mother, "a petty trader who was going to various markets every day to sell her articles" (17). Unwarned by their father's two hateful wives of an approaching war and left behind to fend for themselves, the boys flee their house and their village only to realize they have to separate if at least one of them is to avoid capture. The older brother runs away, leaving the younger under a fruit tree from where he unexpectedly enters the "dreadful bush" (22), a supernatural world full of fantastic creatures and incredible events. "[V]ery hungry" upon his arrival (22), the boy begins his sojourn by eating the two pieces of fruit he and his brother picked under the tree and which his brother forwent for his sake.

*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* is mostly set in the eponymous bush, populated by grotesque spirits and characterized by bizarre incidents. The seven-year-old narrator stumbles into it quite unexpectedly trying to avoid a slave raid. While the raid provides an important frame of reference, it is never contextualized in terms of time or place. Indeed, as Laura Murphy points out, "Tutuola does set his novel in a kind of mythic time" (49); nevertheless, the "impetus for the narrator's journey into the bush is the slave trade itself" (Murphy 51). Wandering in the bush, the boy travels from town to town, each numbered and usually ruled by a more or less horrid and cruel ruler. Most of these rulers offer the boy little more than a dreadful ordeal, forcing him to flee to yet another ghostly town. The boy's misadventures in the bush are countless, the violence he experiences unending, and his escapes numerous and often truly miraculous. They last over twenty years, until he manages to find his way out of the forest, unexpectedly finding himself under the same fruit tree that provided entrance to the bush.

As if to maintain the spirit of consumption that inaugurates the boy's over twenty-year-long stay in the horrifying land of ghosts, the narrative has him choose the most pleasing of the three ghosts who dwell inside a hill. He enters their house to discover "a junction of three passages" (23)

that lead to three rooms: golden, silverish, and copperish. His choice is dictated by sensory impression; each of the ghosts tempts the boy with delicious food: "But as I stood at the junction of these passages with confusion three kinds of sweet smells were rushing out to me from each of these three rooms, but as I was hungry and also starving before I entered into this hole, so I began to sniff the best smell so that I might enter the right room at once from which the best sweet smell was rushing out" (23). While the boy considers choosing the copperish ghost's room because he offers African food, he is aware that each ghost wants him "to be his servant" (24). He also glimpses the work that will be expected of him as he wanders around the bush noting that certain chores have apparently been done even though no workers can be seen: "Every part of this small hill was very clean as if somebody was sweeping it. . . . The entrance resembled the door of a house and it had a portico which was sparkling as if it was polished with brasso at all moments" (22–23).

As the last quotation illustrates, the apparitional nature of labour and the erasure of labourers from the ghostly landscape as well as the concomitant promise and prominence of consumption constitute the economic foundation on which the narrative and the boy's travails in the bush rest. They also indicate the critical orientation the narrative offers. In the bush of ghosts, work and those who go about it recede into the background in favour of consumption. Even when labour and laboring bodies are visible, they are rendered either hideous and obnoxious (and thus repulsive to watch) or utterly insignificant to the events at hand. For example, when the boy is saved from the three brawling ghosts, he is taken by a smelling ghost, one of the inhabitants of the seventh town, where he is soon turned into a spectacle that cycles between a horse, a camel, and his original human form. While he is forced to work, his true value resides in his visual utility to the ceremony his master-ghost holds for other ghosts to celebrate the master-ghost's good luck. Mounted, kicked, and flogged mercilessly, the boy is used to produce "gladness in the presence of bystanders" (38).

Paradoxically, then, while the novel is about enslavement and exploitation and uses the slave trade as historical background, it does not make labour its central thematic concern or a locus of profit and value. Rather,

in the economic archive the narrative builds up, consumption and its most characteristic symbol and organ, the mouth, take centre stage. Consumption propels the narrative by rendering the boy-narrator an edible object perpetually on the run from the monstrous and ravenous ghosts. The fear of being eaten sends the boy from town to town, running for his life. For example, he is nothing but meat for the smelling ghost who saves him from the three brawling ghosts; his entire journey in the ghost's bag is spent listening to his defender ponder whether "to eat [him] or to eat [half] of him and reserve the other half till night" (30–31). When he at last escapes the violence of the seventh town of ghosts by unwittingly turning into a cow and thus falling prey to a lion and ending up caught by cow-men, he imagines with resignation that one day he will "be killed or sold to a butcher who would like to kill [him] as an ordinary cow" (43). Yet unable to eat like a cow and hence too lean to be sold for meat, he is bought to symbolically feed a god in a ritual and literally feed those participating in the ceremony. Soon after a short moment of respite, he is caught by a gang of uncountable ghosts of "dreadful appearance" (66) who, the boy fears, will "eat [him] alive" (67). They change him into a ceremonial pitcher, and he is nearly consumed by the dripping saliva from their mouths (75). Managing to escape them, he ends up stuck in a spider ghost bush, "wrapped as a chrysalis by the web" (89), mistaken for a ghost's dead father, and rescued from a burial ceremony by another ghost in order to be "roast[ed] and eat[en] as meat" (93).

Tutuola represents consumption with epic proportions and both colossal and grotesque bodies, thus highlighting its centrality. This prominence is also underscored by the sharp contrast between the bodies that consume (the bodies by which consumption is represented in the novel) and the bodies that labour (the bodies that work is made to assume), which are always timid, distorted, subjugated, insignificant, and violable. It is significant that in this spectral landscape of the bush, bodies of consumption sport monstrously large, sometimes endlessly multiplied mouths (at times summoned by scenes of eating or items of food) and formidable appetites. And yet however striking the contrast between consumption and work, Tutuola's critical agenda extends beyond their

polarization and points, instead, to consumption's complex relationship to work. *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* casts consumption as a productive activity through which the novel conceptualizes and depicts the production of abstract value. More specifically, it deploys the mouth as an instrument whose work mimics such production and enacts its logic.

The narrative prominence of the mouth and the novel's context of slavery reveal the capitalist economies with which Tutuola's text engages. While the mouth is a symbol of consumption in the novel, the mouth's work supports a reading that aligns the novel's economic lexicon with the finance capitalism of the eighteenth century. That is, despite the novel's explicit references to the slave trade and its chilling portrayal of labour, its connection to slavery comes via (and with) the idea of the production of abstract value that emerges from the mouths of the dreadful ghosts and the work they do.

The mouth's digestive value resides in destruction, and destruction is, as Ian Baucom writes, a concept indispensible to the eighteenth-century repertoire of capitalist inventions, which is mobilized to secure the value of objects under finance capitalism, as I shall explain in more detail below. The mouth is an ideal organ with which to conceptualize the productive character of destruction given its physiological properties and the alimentary fate of food. In this essay I explore the mouth as a site where destruction becomes a trope signifying capitalist economies that rely on a conversion of what is lost or destroyed into profit and value. This conversion inevitably turns the act of consumption into a productive process. This transformation reveals the most interesting critical proposal Tutuola's narrative offers: in translating what is lost into something of value, consumption redefines itself as a form of production. The oxymoronic "mouthwork" does not indicate the conflict between consumption and work/production but, because eating narrates the always already economic life of the mouth, signifies this conflict's dissolution and reveals capitalism's drive to recast consumption as production. In *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, such mouthwork (re)produces the ruling ghosts' power.

Beginning with Achille Mbembe's exposition of the postcolonial economies of the mouth and the role of consumption in the production

and maintenance of political power in the postcolony (something that Tutuola's novel anticipates), I examine the critical life of the mouth—its representational usefulness in narratives of European colonialism and capitalist exploitation as well as its function as a site of "political intensity" (Tompkins 9) and "economic reflection" (Panagia 177). Reading the mouth as a site of "economic reflection" helps situate the mouth in the context of slavery and the finance capitalism that was bolstered by the slave trade and relied on new, destruction-bound ways of thinking about value.

**I. The Consumption of Power**

One of the ghostly towns the boy ends up in is ruled by "a lame ghostess who can only creep about instead of walking" and her husband, "the most powerful wizard[s] among all the wizards in both the Bush of Ghosts and in the earthly towns" (Tutuola 115). Their power "to be giving orders to every one" (115) stems from and is augmented by the weekly feasts held at their house; the consumption of food precedes their administration of justice. After the banquet is finished, the two ruling ghosts hear and respond to complaints from their guests—also ghosts—about wrongdoers guilty of various misdeeds. They then decide whether to "give them the order to kill their offenders or not" (115). The process, in which the distribution of death follows the festive consumption of food, highlights the narrative proximity between ruling and eating, food and cruelty (the story of these rulers makes it clear that the judgements delivered are arbitrary and absolute). The common consumption of food also (re)produces the power dynamic between the rulers and their subjects. To eat together is to consent to the power that distributes and shares the food; the body politic must consume and turn that consumption into a ceremony. For the proximity of power and food to be productive of authority and submission to it, commensality is required.

Although the ghosts' weekly gathering, which always follows a strict protocol, is held in order to display the alimentary logic of power, the narrative is rather reticent about the kind and amount of food prepared for the occasion. No lavish tables are mentioned; no sumptuous meals

described; no wealth flaunted. And yet we do know that the ghosts' weekly dinner is made out of a ghost's "killed and cooked" child (117), a peculiar, appalling, and totally arbitrary rule laid down by the powerful rulers. The culinary protocol, according to which ghosts have to consume their own offspring "whenever it is his or her turn" (117) applies to everyone, including the rulers. This gruesome gastro-necropolitics suggests that power literally needs bodies for its own sustenance and also reveals the curious economy that underlies the regular reproduction of rule. Rather than relying on a (visual) display of alimentary opulence that would bespeak their wealth and might the rulers have inscribed loss as the most precious signifier of their political wealth. By making loss essential to the ghostly regime, the narrative suggests that this wealth is born from what is lost in the mouths of the dining ghosts.

Decades after Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* was published, Mbembe wrote that the "'[m]outh,' 'belly,' [and] 'phallus' . . . contribute integrally to the making of political culture in the postcolony" (*On the Postcolony* 107). For Mbembe, the postcolonial relationship between the ruler and the ruled is "not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can be best characterized as convivial" (104). This conviviality stems from the fact that the ruler and the ruled "[have] to share the same living space" (104), which leads the latter to internalize and reproduce the authoritarian epistemology which subjects them (128). "Mouth" is not only a word used by the ruled in their convivial engagement with the ruler but also an apparatus of the autocrat's power. If, as Mbembe notes, bodies have always provided the most vivid imagery and an especially apposite repertoire of signifiers with which power represents and reproduces itself, then the postcolony has singled out "a body that eats and drinks" (107), a body whose excessive consumption must be put on display and dramatized so that "the male ruler . . . demonstrate[s] publicly a certain delight in eating and drinking well" (110).

But ruled bodies are also needed for the state's performance of its own power. Conviviality, and sometimes connivance, requires that there are other bodies ready to partake in power's feast, "dramatize [their]

own subordination," and thus "play with" and "modify" the power that necessitates it (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 128–29). The ruled bodies "kidnap power and force it . . . to examine its own vulgarity" (109). The "grand theatre" of the postcolony (109) is a space of alimentary delight, demonstrated by the ruler (110) but also eagerly sought by the ruled, whose "aim is to share the table of the autocrat, to 'eat from his hands'" (123). Mbembe insists on the significance of the body to "postcolonial dramaturgy" (123)—the way it functions as the medium and material with which power displays itself and makes itself spectacular. It is not surprising that consumption is centre-stage in this process: it involves the body as its own vehicle and evidences "the excesses of fine food and drink, characteristic of an economy of pleasure," that mark the postcolony (127). Within this economy the mouth and the belly are "an idiom" with which the *commandement* organizes itself and provides the "symbolism" for its narratives of grandeur (106).[1]

In Mbembe's formulation, the mouth is not merely a motif in the life of the postcolony or a metaphor for an autocrat's abuses. It is a site where power literally enacts itself (132) and is munched into being; the mouth produces and codes power as pleasure. The distribution of this pleasure requires a distribution of food and a careful arrangement of who will eat what, with whom, on what occasions, and for whom to see. Mbembe contends that the mouth and the belly are "historical phenomena in their own right. They are institutions and sites of power" (132). Institutions are places where the state can bring itself to life and manifest itself; they are places of control, regulation, hierarchy, and systematized behaviour. To credit the mouth with the political power Mbembe does is to recognize its highly coded character as well as its ability to produce sensations other than gustatory ones and signify in non-saporific ways. In his reading, the power the mouth produces and signifies must be propelled by an economic might that can afford and display profligacy and voracity. The autocrat must be able to stage sumptuous feasts that highlight the power differential at work (131). The postcolonial obesity of power turns the mouth into something that signifies economy itself: the mouth's ability to (demonstrate) waste(fulness), hence also loss, in order to speak of (political) wealth.

**II. Value in/of the Mouth**

While Tutuola's novel abounds with representations of the mouth and assigns it an essential narrative function (to signify economic logic and political power), its most striking image comes with a pitcher, a sacrificial container into which the boy is suddenly transformed in the ninth town of ghosts. He is locked in a dark underground room only to later notice that "this doorless room changed to a pitcher and unexpectedly I found myself inside this pitcher and at the same moment my neck was about three feet long and very thick, and again my head was so big that my long neck was unable to carry it upright as it was very stiff as a dried stick" (Tutuola 67–68). Reduced to what may appear to be an insignificant receptacle, the boy/pitcher possesses a value for the ghosts of the ninth town that exceeds his/its material parameters: "[T]he whole of [the crowd of ghosts] surrounded me," the boy observes, "then all were singing, beating drums, clapping hands, ringing bells and dancing round me for a few minutes before they killed all the domestic animals which they brought before me and poured the blood of these animals on to my head which ran to the long neck and then into the pitcher in which the rest of my body was" (69). The boy is transformed into a sacrificial object whose greatest merit lies in its permanently open mouth.

Detached from human anatomy and rendered lifeless, the mouth becomes abstract, producing symbolic meanings that have value other than alimentary value. That the meanings extend beyond the physical realities of the pitcher and its contents becomes clear when the boy relates that other ghosts "were trying their best to steal me for their towns as they thought I am really a god" (71). The divine value these meanings convey can be found in the desire others feel for the pitcher and its symbolic economies. The boy may not be a ruler himself, yet his pitcher body is essential to the power of the ghosts who hold him. That the pitcher and its mouth are an emblem of coveted superiority can also be glimpsed in the qualities of limitlessness and loss that coalesce around and are produced by the pitcher: "[B]lood was always pouring on me" (73), the boy states, revealing the great value of the always open mouth that consumes but is never full. Though the pitcher is an object of veneration, what makes it especially valuable to the ghosts who have

it or would like to have it is its ability to signify something that exceeds its physical form but is firmly anchored in it, something that keeps the mouth forever open and assigns a symbolic value to this openness and limitlessness as well as to what gets swallowed by it.

Mbembe's theorization of the postcolonial body of power is particularly pertinent as it brings the mouth, economy, postcoloniality, and sovereignty into conversation.[2] Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can be understood as an antecedent to both Mbembe's critical project and Tutuola's novelistic take on the economic and political import of the mouth. It is of similar geographical provenance and critical import in terms of how it figures the mouth in relation to politics and economy and grants the mouth a supreme place in the symbolic economy of European colonialism and capitalism. Marlow's first encounter with Kurtz, "that atrocious phantom[,] . . . that apparition" (Conrad 99), ushers in a ghastly figure whose gaping mouth animates his otherwise deathly body: "I saw him open his mouth wide—it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly" (99). While Kurtz's emaciated body on the brink of death is surely remote from the postcolonial autocrat's gluttonous figure, this image of Kurtz, which confounds the production of commanding words with the consumption of the world, nonetheless speaks eloquently of the cannibalizing appetites of imperial capitalism as well as the mouth's political significance. That there is something abiding about the mouth as image and as threat and in the masticating work it does (or desires to do) in *Heart of Darkness*' imperial economy, something that apparently survives, or transcends, Kurtz's dead body, is glimpsed pages later when Marlow, now far away from the "conquering darkness" (116), sees the mouth emerge again. Though he attempts to exorcise this recurring image, Marlow is haunted by Kurtz's mouth, which returns, conjured up from memory, in a more edacious garb: "[B]ut before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I had a vision of him on a stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind" (116).

What remains, then, is another vivid vision of the mouth. Amidst the stillness of urban architecture, Kurtz's mouth is the only moving thing. And yet it is also held in abeyance, the act of consumption postponed by the "as if" that lends the image an eerie endurance, with the world and mankind perennial objects of Kurtz's never-satisfied planetary appetite. This image of suspended consumption illustrates the workings of consumer capitalism: the endless production of appetites that will never be satiated. As Fred Botting and Scott Wilson write, "capitalism has to produce the desire to endlessly consume new products[,] . . . [b]ut for capitalism to sustain the desire, it must necessarily fail to satisfy it" (30). Yet Botting and Wilson's Lacanian take on the capitalist excesses of consumption fails to address the distribution of this desire—the direction of its flow, the political constitution of the desiring bodies, and the designation of its objects in contrast to its agents. Conrad is more precise in his depiction of the geographical circulation of desires and appetites driven by capitalist dispensations. Kurtz's never-closing voracious mouth—and let us not forget that Kurtz is an employee of a European company that trades in African ivory[3]—is an accurate representation of the commercial and capitalist value of Africa to Europe and North America. This value has a history that encompasses such recent "exportable commodities" (Wenzel 452) as petroleum—the "black gold" of what has been called petro-capitalism (Watts 201, 195)—as well as earlier forms of merchandise such as palm oil and slaves. As Fernando Coronil argues, speaking of capitalism's relationship to nature, (post) colonies have been important "providers of natural resources that continue to be essential for the development of capitalism" (356). In other words, Kurtz's mouth seems an apt metaphor for the rapaciousness of colonial capitalism.

I will now go on to explore how economic subjects (individuals and themes) are cultivated in/through the mouth and how the mouth is an organ of "economic reflection" (Panagia 177) and value production. Among the plethora of meanings the mouth conveys, its economic signification reveals itself particularly eloquently given the way it brings together the supposedly mutually exclusive processes of consumption and production—the former always involving some form of destruction

(of food), the latter relying on the creation of non-alimentary value and profit.

**III. Slavery and the Production of Imaginary Value**

In his work on slavery's dependence on finance capitalism and the "capital logic of the slave trade" that allowed it to thrive (61), Baucom writes of the "novel epistemology appropriate to a revolutionary new world of speculation and speculative transactions" (94) underlying value production and profit generation that arose in the eighteenth century in the context of the slave trade. This epistemology, Baucom argues, "derived from a modern banking system which had taught eighteenth-century Britons to value the existence of imaginary things by training them to credit the power of the imagination to bring a new world of objects and values into existence" (94). Yet for this epistemology to work, it needed a proper legal life, a "social practice" that ensured the public's belief in "the existence of imaginary values" and sundered "the expression of value from the existence of things" (Baucom 94–95). Insurance fulfilled these conditions: "[T]he real test of something's value comes not at the moment it is made or exchanged but at the moment it is lost or destroyed," writes Baucom in reference to "the genius of insurance" and "*its* contribution to finance capitalism" (95; emphasis in original). In the "money culture" that Baucom argues came into being in the eighteenth century, "value survives its objects" because, according to the logic of insurance, value

> does not await the moment of loss to become real. It exists the moment an object is insured[,] . . . conferring upon that object a value that neither depends on its being put to use or entered into exchange as a commodity but results purely from the ability of two contracting parties to imagine what it would have been worth at the imaginary future moment in which it will have ceased to exist. (95)

Insurance turns value into something independent from an object: "It annuls the object, abolishes it as a bearer of value, and so frees value from the degradation of thingly existence" (Baucom 95). The "capi-

tal logic" of slavery and its economic success depended, therefore, on both the production of and belief in imaginary value. They redefined the character of the objects of exchange and paradoxically ascribed this value to what was physically no longer there.

In exploring the production of the imaginary value that fuelled and enabled finance capitalism, Baucom focuses on the notorious *Zong* massacre of 1781 and, specifically, two contracting parties: the group of Liverpool merchants who owned the *Zong* ship and the marine underwriters "who insured the ship and its cargo for over 15,000 pounds" (Baucom 15). The *Zong* set out on a voyage from Africa to Jamaica in September 1781. It carried 440 slaves. When the ship mistakenly sailed past Jamaica and ran low on water and food, Captain Luke Collingwood decided to get rid of some cargo to be able to later claim compensation for lost goods. 132 slaves were thrown into the sea (Baucom 108). The insurance claim was successful; the ship's owners "convinced a jury in the Guildhall Court that in drowning the slaves the ship's captain . . . was not so much murdering them as securing the existence of their monetary value" (8). The claim was largely successful, Baucom writes, because it was "an insurance case, that form of valuing things" in which the value of the insured things "survive[s] the moment of their destruction" (96). As critics such as Baucom, Anita Rupprecht, and Zenia Kish and Justin Leroy note, the *Zong* case foregrounds the intimate connections between the transatlantic slave trade and the practice of insurance. The latter supported empire building (Rupprecht 12) and provided "a central structure for the take-off of finance capitalism" (13).

Baucom's meticulous perusal of the *Zong* archive exposes an unpalatable truth about profit-making under finance capitalism: "[T]he money forms of the trans-Atlantic slave trade could attach themselves not only to the slaves who reached the markets of the Caribbean alive but also to those drowned along the way" (92). Gruesome and appalling as the *Zong* massacre is in how it emblematizes the monetary value attached to the destruction of slaves' lives, it also reveals finance capitalism's capacity to dematerialize the embodied existence of the human in the service of abstract value:

> The *Zong* trials constitute an event in the history of capital *not* because they treat slaves as commodities but because they treat slaves as commodities that have become subject to insurance, treat them . . . not as objects to be exchanged but as the 'empty bearers' of an abstract, theoretical, but entirely real quantum of value, treat them as little more than promissory notes, bills-of-exchange, or some other markers of 'special value,' treat them as suppositional entities whose value is tied not to their continued, embodied, material existence but to their speculative, recuperable loss value. . . . [The slaves] are bearers not simply of a commodified exchange value but of an utterly dematerialized, utterly speculative, and utterly transactable, enforceable, and recuperable pecuniary value. (Baucom 139; emphasis in original)

This conversion of "slaves into paper money" (93) reveals capitalism's innovative drive and ingenious spirit, its ability to turn destruction into production and transform bodies into instruments of profitability that transcend their labour-derived utility. As Kish and Leroy argue, "the function of financial instruments premised on slave labour was to multiply the forms of profitability that could be anchored in their bodies" (633). The insurance case that followed the *Zong* massacre "represented the ability to extract value from the bodies of Africans even after they could no longer perform actual physical labour" (Kish and Leroy 633–34).

While Tutuola's writing, particularly *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, has been read as exploring "networks of production, consumption, and exploitation" (Wenzel 450) and offering "an economic analysis of resource extraction and labour relations" (449) in reference to oil as well as other valuable Nigerian commodities, I examine *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* as a novel that meditates on the speculative logic of the finance capitalism that was fuelled by the slave trade and inaugurated "an abstract, speculative, hypercapitalized modernity" (Baucom 33). This speculative logic survived that particular historical moment to define what Baucom calls the long twentieth century. While no paper money or any of the in-

tricate financial practices on which finance capitalism was (and is) based ever appear in Tutuola's novel, it nevertheless brims with economic imagery and often uses an economic language whose context harkens back to the times of slavery and returns to capitalist sentiments and canonical practices, namely consumption and production. It also relies on the mouth as an organ with which to represent the imaginary production of value.

## IV. *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and Postcolonial Aesthetics

Published two years after Tutuola's first novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* is situated at the intersection of several capitalist currents and histories. The novel was written at the dusk of the colonial era, a mere two years before "Shell's discovery of commercially viable oil deposits" in Nigeria (Wenzel 452) and thus on the cusp of the country's "neo-colonial petro-future" with its "promise of wealth without work" (451). Like *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, *My Life* offers no narrative evidence of this future, but as Jennifer Wenzel persuasively argues, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*'s foregrounding of one of Nigeria's (Africa's) exportable commodities—palm—and Tutuola's thematic concerns with capitalist sentiments make it possible to read the narrative as proleptically engaging with the devastating consequences of petro-magic capitalism. Just as petroleum and palm connect Nigeria to the circuits of global capitalism, as Wenzel argues (453), so too does slavery, the practice at the centre of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, a novel no less economically sensitive than Tutuola's first.

While the novel never specifies its historical timeframe (it is a fantastic tale of ghosts and as such suspends any claims on the real), it nevertheless explicitly names slavery as what gives rise to the boy's travails in the supernatural bush of ghosts. He enters the bush having fled various wars, including "the slave wars" (Tutuola 18). Indeed, the boy's description of what awaits those caught during such wars sounds like a presage of his own dreadful fate among ghosts: "These slave wars," he says, "were causing dead luck to both old and young of those days, because if one is captured, he or she would be sold into slavery for foreigners who would carry him or her to unknown destinations to be killed for the buyer's

god or to be working for him" (18). Enslaved, exploited, and subject to all sorts of violence, the boy moves from one unknown destination to another, hoping to finally return home.

The novel's explicit references to slavery notwithstanding, this essay is more interested in the other, more implicit ways it engages with the slave trade.[4] Focusing on the economies signified by the mouth and their representations, my reading traces how the mouth produces imaginary value indispensible to the rule of the ghosts. In this sense, it is in line with approaches to Tutuola's fiction (such as Wenzel's) that alert us to his economic sensitivity and reveal him to be a discerning critic of capitalism.

Tutuola's interest in resource extraction capitalism, the commodities it favoured at particular historical junctions (slaves, palm, petroleum),[5] and the kind of economic relations it engendered; his extraordinary medley and juxtaposition of historically and contextually disparate objects and sentiments; and his engagement with the lingering economies of the slave trade and the capitalist logic that was born at the time of slavery but exceeded the moment of its inception—all of these demonstrate his understanding of what was yet to be named the postcolonial. *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* confidently mixes traditional Yoruba tales with such signs of modern times as the television and the radio; the world of fantasy and the brutal reality of slavery; and real and unreal time. Such incongruous aesthetics make the novel a uniquely postcolonial text that recognizes the necessarily impure character of the relationship between colonizer and colonised. As Stuart Hall persuasively argues, the critical potential of the postcolonial lies in its transcendence of the binarism "on which the histories of imperialism have thrived for so long" (247). In his view, "the term 'post-colonial' is not merely descriptive of 'this' society rather than 'that', or of 'then' and 'now'. It re-reads colonisation as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural 'global' process. . . . Its theoretical value therefore lies precisely in its refusal of this 'here' and 'there', 'then' and 'now', 'home' and 'abroad' perspective" (247). Hall's nuanced defence of the postcolonial relies on postcolonial theory's distinctive approach to the scope and significance of colonisation; Hall considers the extensive character and influence of colonisation, its di-

versity across time and space, and its "complex and differentiated" forms (253) foundational to capitalist modernity.[6] He implicitly points to the continuities and overlaps that cut across spatial and temporal contexts, the "transversal linkages" (250) and "transcultural movements" (251) that characterize the colonial and postcolonial condition (250). This understanding of the postcolonial situates Tutuola's novel in the cultural contexts that precede it and follow it; reveals the continuity of capitalist inventions such as the production of abstract value; and highlights the links between the economic value of destruction and slavery.

*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* enacts such a postcolonial aesthetics, rupturing the seamless compartmentalization of the world into a "clearly demarcated inside/outside of the colonial system" (Hall 247). Tutuola's narrative manifests an awareness of the capitalist continuities and overlaps that inform and underlie Nigeria's (post)colonial economies. The novel's striking reticence about the particulars of its setting highlights its thematic concerns, and its traversal of historical time—from slavery to Tutuola's present day—suggests capitalist modernity. If, as Andrew Apter demonstrates, there is a continuity between the black Atlantic economies—with palm oil "gradually supplant[ing] the slave trade" (Apter 165) and, later, petroleum replacing palm oil (124)—Tutuola's focus on slavery, which he unlocks from its historical time, accentuates an economic lexicon that helps him spotlight the capitalist mechanisms that fashioned finance capitalism.

**V. The Value of Destruction**

In a narrative that begins with and is propelled by punishment for labour—the boy ends up in the spooky forest because his mother is away working and thus unable to protect him—consumption is, unsurprisingly, valorized and inflated to monstrous and grotesque proportions.[7] The story pivots on the act of consumption represented by and through an eating body in order to mark and orchestrate consumption's superiority. In contrast to the cornucopia of scenes of consumption is a dearth of work and labouring bodies, brutalized objects of those who eschew exertion. Chapter Twelve, "The Short Ghosts and Their Flash-Eyed Mother," aptly illustrates the narrative's tenor. In it, the boy lands

in the thirteenth town of ghosts, which is ruled by the "flash-eyed" mother (Tutuola 96), "an old woman . . . [who is] fearful, dreadful, terrible, curious[,] . . . [and] dirty" (97). The entire town is taken up by the mother's giant body "as she alone filled the town as a round vast hill" (97). Her subjects, "short ghosts[,] . . . just exactly a year and a half old babies" (98), are made to hunt bush animals for her and the "millions of heads" sprouting from her massive body. Her rule is based on depriving her puny subjects of food, space, growth, and pleasure. Any act of disobedience or failure to capture a big enough animal leads to punishment. The hunters are flogged into discipline by "the fire of her eyes," which burns the "skins of the animals that every one of [them] wore" (102). Everything in the town depends on absolute obedience: the ghosts wake up to "a terrible alarm which was in a hidden part of her body" and must stand in "a single line before her as soldiers" to be served pap "as when soldiers are receiving their rations before an officer" (103). This quasi-military regime is set up to keep the mother's and the million mouths' appetite satisfied. Its magnitude is graphically represented through the mother's body, particularly her monstrous mouth:

> [The] mother had a special long and huge head which she was using to talk and to feed herself, it was above everything in the town and it showed her out from a distance of about four miles from this town. She had a large mouth which could swallow an elephant uncut. . . . There were over a thousand thick teeth in this mouth, each was about two feet long and brown in colour, both upper and lower lips were unable to cover the teeth. . . . Both her hands were used in stirring soup on the fire like spoons as she did not feel the pain of fire or heat, her finger nails were just like shovels. (98–99)

The mother's gargantuan mouth, a means of consumption and intimidation, is permanently open, indicating her constant readiness to eat. It also turns the superior head, which towers above everything, into an emblem of the town's major political pursuit and preoccupation: eating. Since the narrative equates the political space of the town with the mother's body, her consumption is a ceaseless process that reproduces,

daily and mundanely, her rule. This banal reproduction of the mother's rule—biologically and politically sustained—finds a telling representation in her permanence and immobility (she "sat on the ground in the centre of the town permanently. She did not stand up or move to anywhere at all" [97]): the colossal endurance of this massive physique always on the verge of eating renders the open mouth indispensible to her sovereignty.[8] The mother's body is a sovereign body and capitalist imaginary because alimentation rests on the logic of reproducibility: it requires reiteration to sustain the political fictions it creates.[9] In other words, consumption itself must be reproducible, locked in cycles of reiteration which the eating body so aptly articulates. But it must also manifest this reproducibility, make it tangible and material and thus credible. This requirement is illustrated in the mother's alimentary body:

> Millions of heads which were just like a baby's head appeared on her body, all circulated set by set. Each of these heads had two very short hands which were used to hold their food or anything that they want to take, each of them had two eyes which were shining both day and night like fire-flies, one small mouth with numerous sharp teeth, the head was full of long dirty hair. (98)

The mother's body is a product of consumption, composed of layers of waste that both testify to the efficiency of her alimentary tract and signal a demand and readiness for food. Urine and excreta, "which . . . wet all her body" (102), are signs of this reproducibility and a call for more provender to fill the body's empty viscera. This waste extends an invitation to continue eating. In this eerie image of consumption, it is not taste or tastefulness that count but the act of consuming and the demand for reiteration it always brings in its wake.

The mother's monstrous body reveals what happens to the notion of excess under the economic logic ushered in by finance capitalism. It seems, at first, that her enormous appetite is a rampant voracity which knows no limits. Yet this is a misleading impression. Her consumption proceeds according to a protocol, which never exceeds the limits of satiety: "Having cooked [the animal] she served all the heads to their entire

satisfaction, after that she served herself to her satisfaction and then served us last according to the rule and regulation given to her by the heads" (103). She employs a strategy, a careful portioning that on the one hand reflects the hierarchy of her body/territory and on the other seems at odds with what is typically understood as excess. Signalled (explicitly or not) by the adverb "too," as Zygmunt Bauman writes, excess signifies redundancy; it tells us that "something is not really necessary, desirable or pleasing" (85). No such redundancies can be glimpsed in the mother's multi-bodied, multi-headed body. Her acts of consumption may be obnoxious and dreadful to watch, but they are governed by a calculating mind.

The repulsive repasts of the eating mother/body do speak of excess, but excess is also found among the army of labourers. Yet it is not their number that conveys excess. Rather, excess seems to originate from the liberty the mother has to dispense with and dispose of the subjects no longer able to hunt or who are offensive to her regime. Annoyed by their slackness, the mother threatens her subjects with nothing short of a ghastly execution: "[S]he ordered us to go to bush at once and we must not come back without an animal, otherwise all of us would be burnt to ashes willing or not, she concluded" (102). It is not that she no longer needs them but that she must put them to a different use. Since they have failed to reproduce her authority by working for her, she must tease out of them a different (political) gain necessary to sustain her rule. Her cruelty demonstrates that it is possible to create value out of someone's death. The mother uses her fire whip to discipline and incinerate disobedient subjects who can no longer work efficiently and enacts an economy in which the seemingly redundant is redefined into something useful to her sovereignty. If this economic operation sounds eerily familiar, we should not be surprised. As discussed above, turning redundancy into utility was a capitalist manoeuvre carried out by the owners of the *Zong* slaves who were thrown mercilessly into the sea. Both the *Zong* massacre and the ghost mother's rule demonstrate that even excess does not escape the utilitarian and redemptive workings of capitalism. Paradoxically, in both situations excess acquires a phantom quality (that it assumes the body of a ghost in Tutuola's novel only em-

phasizes this point). Excess is the redundant put to a new use; it is what must be destroyed, if need be, to create value that would not otherwise be redeemed.

The novel's approach to excess also illustrates Baucom's reconstruction of the logic of finance capitalism as profiting from the redemption of what seems no longer capable of generating value and profit. There are other instances in the novel, too, that reveal this logic at work, especially if we note that to many of the ghosts, the boy's greatest value does not lie in the work he is made, expected, or unable to do but in his destruction, which is meant to uphold a particular regime or, in a more material way, a body that both represents and constitutes this regime. A vivid example of the value of destruction comes with the boy's ordeal in the spider web bush where he is mistaken by one of the ghosts for the ghost's long dead father. The boy says: "He was exceedingly glad as he discovered me as the dead body of his father, then he took me on his head and kept going to the town" (90). More gruesomely yet, he is put into a coffin and a grave while the ghosts "performed the ceremony which is to be performed for deads" (91). The burial never occurs because the boy is abducted by another ghost whose "aim was to eat the spiders which were on the web that wrapped [him] and also to eat [him]" (92). In a perverse way, he is valuable to both of the ghosts precisely because he is considered dead. "Killed" to create funereal and alimentary value, the boy comes to represent the logic that haunts the entire narrative: the capitalist logic of the production of value out of the destruction of the bodies that are supposed to but do not quite embody it. The novel stages this imaginary creation of value as a ceremony and thus something to be celebrated, observed, and revered. Because the novel dramatizes this creation, it also renders it theatrical; it is a representational form whose aesthetic value is no less significant than the boy's dead body.

## VI. Consumption as Production

But if *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* represents eating/consumption as productive of sovereignty and authority, it essentially turns consumption into production, as demonstrated by the mother's outlandish body.

The mother's tirelessly performed culinary routines demonstrate how the food consumed goes into the making of the working body—how, through the act of eating, she literally creates herself. However, her body yields profits that exceed her anatomy: making herself with her own hands by means of food, the mother is a self-architect whose consumption must never cease to nourish her sovereignty.

Yet indispensible to this anatomy is the mouth, an organ Tutuola focuses on in the flash-eyed mother chapter and others. What counts most to Tutuola is not only the visual value of the mouth but also its adequacy for narrating the logic of capitalism. Yet it should also be noted that in Tutuola's novel, not everyone's mouth is assigned the same value. Nor does everyone's mouth signify power in the same way; for some, the work their mouth does is solely for someone else's benefit, while others have no means of translating their mouthwork into political value. Therefore, the various representations of the mouth cited in this essay illustrate not just the unequal distribution of the productivity indexed by the mouth but also another point illustrated by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: appetites have their geographies (as did the speculative logic of the eighteeneth century), which position eating bodies in specific relationships to others. These relationships determine whose bodies, dead or alive, are capable of generating value for the benefit of others. They also reveal why consumption by some (e.g., Mbembe's autocrat or Conrad's Kurtz) produces value that exceeds the mere satisfaction of want. For example, while the boy's mouth is frequently put to alimentary use, it can generate value only for the ruling ghosts.

In Tutuola's narrative, the mouth is an ever-present entity summoned by allusions to and representations of alimentary work. If work is given a negative valuation at the start of the novel for its production of neglect and under-consumption, consumption, and, by implication, the mouth are credited with a magical and liberating potential: they execute an instant transportation to a substantially different world populated by phantasmagoric creatures (seemingly) removed from the threat of enslavement posed by the world of labour. As discussed, the boy and his brother initially flee their village and find shelter under "a fruit tree" (Tutuola 19) whose fruit they collect to sustain their flight. The boy, left

alone, enters the bush from this location. The mouth, emphasized by the brothers' intended consumption, becomes the site of the boy's introduction to a world that re-values consumption as production but whose geography presupposes whose mouthwork will or will not be capable of such re-valuation. This geography leads him not away from but into capital(ist) imagery that continues to devalue labour yet recasts consumption as a productive activity clad in the ceremonial garb of power that the boy must serve but never enjoy himself.

Upon his arrival in the bush, the boy "immediately . . . ate both fruits . . . because he was very hungry" (Tutuola 22). Very often throughout the novel, he remains un(der)fed or downright starving, constantly searching for food or struggling to eat what he is given (usually something that marks him as different from those who give it). He eats the fruit, but it does not appease his hunger. Indeed, the boy's arrival in the bush sets a recurring pattern: his sojourn there begins with eating and will continue to require eating, which he fails to do satisfactorily. Tutuola's novel mobilizes the mouth for the purpose of self-production and the concomitant production of freedom and sovereignty for those who find themselves in enabling locations (as in the case of the flash-eyed mother); however, the boy never achieves this end.[10]

The boy's mouth remains unproductive of satisfaction because he is either not given food or given food he does not or cannot eat. Unlike the other ghosts he encounters, he is unable to satisfy himself through eating. Since in the logic of the bush to eat to one's satisfaction is to be/come oneself by liberating oneself from hunger and the need to labour, the narrative not only perpetually withholds food from the boy but also deprives him of the capacity to choose, an indispensible condition to the (capitalist) economies of satisfaction. The boy's initial choice between the golden, silverish, and copperish rooms and the ghosts therein, discussed above, demonstrates that choice is tied to the delectable pleasures of consumption. The narrative equates consumption with servitude at this point (the boy must serve the ghost whose room he chooses), exposes the illusory character of consumer agency, and thus ostensibly subjects consumption to moral censure. However, it also signals a broader principle underlying the economic life of the bush. The valorization of

consumption lies, the economies of the bush of ghosts suggest, in the productive life of destruction.

From this moment forward, the novel persistently magnifies the mouth and its properties, giving the mouth a visual and narrative prominence unenjoyed by any other organ of the ghosts. For example, the boy's frequent transformations into edible bodies, both human and other, foreground the mouth, as do the many instances of eating, hunger, and thirst, the provision and withdrawal of food, the use of vessels, and the capacity (or lack thereof) for speech.[11] But the mouth also becomes a character in its own right, and as such reveals an eloquence whose lexicon leads the mouth beyond its material limits, usual functions, and familiar shapes. Thus, at one point a giant pipe able to "contain half a ton of tobacco" (74) is forcibly inserted into the boy's mouth so that he can blow smoke for the purpose of ceremonial merriment while he, changed into a pitcher with only his head sticking out from its mouth, is abridged to the very mouth whose outbound contents contribute to a collective ritual. In another moment, the pitcher-boy belches out song-driven smoke suffused with the ghosts' fetid saliva: "After a while all of them surrounded me closely, opened their mouths downward and looked at me with surprise. . . . So as they bent, their mouths which opened with great surprise downward onto my head the spit of these mouths was dropping on me and wet me as if I bathed with water" (75). The various defamiliarizations of the mouth endow it with surplus meanings and contents that reveal it as a site where political (dis)ability and forms of subjection register; they also illustrate how the novel's rich archive of economic phenomena such as profusion, production, excess, value, and inflation coalesce around and within it.

**VII. Mouthwork**

If consumption connotes destruction—given the negative meanings of "consume" which are, as Botting and Wilson contend, "to use up, expend, exhaust, destroy or waste" (29)—the mouth does too, not simply by implication but also by the very logic of its work. To mouth something is already a form of capture; the mouth is a signifier of containment and undoing, a space of ruination. For an example of this view, we can turn

to Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's late nineteenth-century masterpiece, *Physiology of Taste* (1884). Couching ingestion in quasi-military terms, it vividly dramatizes the work that the mouth does, almost rendering food an enemy to be destroyed by the gourmand: "As soon as an edible body has been put into the mouth, it is seized upon, gases, moisture, and all, without possibility of retreat. Lips stop whatever might try to escape; the teeth bite and break it; saliva drenches it; the tongue mashes and churns it; a breathlike sucking pushes it toward the gullet; the tongue lifts up to make it slide and slip" (Brillat-Savarin qtd. in Gigante 1). Consumption is a battle the eater's mouth must wage for gustatory pleasure to arise. In another example, Jacques Derrida muses on what it means to eat well:

> For everything that happens at the edge of the orifices (of orality, but also of the ear, the eye—and all the senses in general) the metonymy of 'eating well' (*bien manger*) would always be the rule. . . . And in all differences, ruptures and wars . . . , 'eating well' is at stake. . . . This evokes a law of need *or* desire . . . , orexis, hunger, and thirst . . . , respect for the other at the very moment when, in experience[,] . . . one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorized." (114–115; emphasis in original)

Both assume, though in different ways and to different effects, the mouth's appropriating, enclosing properties. For Brillat-Savarin, the mouth is a maw, a prison-like locus of destruction with a life of its own. For Derrida, the assimilating mouth devours difference.

Tutuola's narrative shares in such a history by frequently drawing on the imagery of the destructive mouth (as an organ of excessive consumption and political violence) in order to reinvent consumption as production and to both heed and engage with the principle of destruction that governs mouthwork and which Baucom suggests is the logic underlying the practice of insurance which, in turn, fuelled the eighteenth-century slave trade. The novel suggests that consumption can transform into profit and reminds us of the historically contingent character of such reinvention by observing that the slave's body becomes the body of such reinvention.

*My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* travels beyond the neat progression of capitalist development and ahead of present-day readings of capitalism such as those offered by Kish and Leroy, which highlight its ingenuity and creative spirit that work, tirelessly, to produce sites for "new value creation" (632). Rendering poverty "into novel forms of financial productivity" (646), philanthrocapitalism, as they call it, may be one of the contemporary forms capitalism assumes to yoke seemingly disparate and conflicting practices or sentiments together in the name of profit making. Philanthrocapitalism reveals, as does Tutuola's novel (and as did the practice of insurance that bolstered the eighteenth-century slave trade), capitalism's capacity to work against its own logic only to reaffirm and reinstate this logic again. Revaluing consumption as a productive act through the deployment of the mouth, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* provides insightful commentary on the workings of capitalism by bringing into focus its capacity for turning less palatable practices and sentiments into forms of productivity (whether what is being produced is the self, power, or profit). Tutuola's mouthwork, which wends its way through the entire narrative and gives rise to sovereignties and satieties, illustrates capitalism's dependence on (this logic of) redemption. Thus the work the mouth does produces something in excess of what is consumed/destroyed and tampers with the line that neatly separates consumption and production. The mouth points to a re-moralizing drive meant to salvage the destruction-in-consumption from the moral dubiety it raises. That the novel constantly tinges consumption with moral and aesthetic ugliness both exposes and justifies the work of redemption.

Thus, Chinua Achebe may have inadequately gauged the moral import of Tutuola's fiction when he praised him for valorizing labour as opposed to consumption. "For what could be more relevant," Achebe asked in a 1977 lecture on Tutuola's writing, "than a celebration of work today for the benefit of a generation and a people whose heroes are no longer makers of things and ideas but spectacular and insatiable consumers?" (qtd. in Wenzel 451). Tutuola's interest in the ethics of labour as opposed to the moral degradations of consumption goes beyond their opposition: *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* exposes capitalism's ruse, its drive to re-moralize itself by rendering consumption a productive act

beyond reprobation. The novel proposes that a productive critique of the problem does not lie in juxtaposing insatiable consumption with work in order to bemoan the corrupt character of the former but rather in noting how consumption is often clad in the garb of productivity—how it recreates itself as productive of something that extends beyond the mere act of consuming (and the parameters of the mouth). The ghostly mouthwork that fleshes out the narrative may be an odd metaphor to denote the productivity of consumption, yet it captures the kind of labour at stake in the translation of consumption into an act of production.

**Notes**

1 Mbembe uses the word *commandement* "as it was used to denote colonial authority"—that is, as a term that includes "the images and structures of power and coercion, the instruments and agents of their enactment, and a degree of rapport between those who give orders and those who are supposed to obey" (*On the Postcolony* 134n8).

2 In this essay, I follow Mbembe's understanding of sovereignty, which he outlines in his reading of Tutuola's fiction: "The ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die. To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" ("Life, Sovereignty, and Terror" 1).

3 For a discussion of the representation of ivory and the ivory trade in *Heart of Darkness*, see Ross.

4 Murphy reads the metaphors of slavery in Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and focuses in particular on the metaphor of capture. She relates it to historically grounded stories about capture in the times of slavery and afterward and demonstrates how "fear of capture" (48) informed West African memories of the slave trade and how the different instances of capture that the novel's protagonist experiences signify both capitalist economies and record the collective trauma of the past. See "Magical Capture in a Landscape of Terror: The Trope of the Body in the Bag in Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*" in her *Metaphor and the Slave Trade in West African Literature*.

5 For an extensive discussion on the links between the slave, palm, and petroleum trades in the Niger Delta region, see Apter.

6 In Hall's words, "the 'post-colonial' refers to something more than direct rule over certain areas of the world by the imperial powers. I think it is signifying the whole process of expansion, exploration, conquest, colonisation and imperial

hegemonisation which constituted the 'outer face', the constitutive outside, of European and then Western capitalist modernity after 1492" (249).

7 On Tutuola's use of devices such as inflation and multiplication, see Nuttal.

8 See Mbembe's "Life, Sovereignty, and Terror" for his reading of Tutuola.

9 Tompkins discusses how eating and food and the eating body encode political fictions in her introduction to *Racial Indigestion*.

10 Here, my interest is more in the eating rather than the speaking mouth and the ways the former works for the production of power, thereby recreating the logic of the production of imaginary value that underlies finance capitalism. However, the mouth as a site of the production of speech merits a more careful and extensive discussion than the passing references I accord it here. Let us briefly note that while food and consumption share the same production site, and while in Tutuola's novel the mouth's (in)ability to speak is frequently paired with the (in) ability to eat, the silenced mouth does not always connote unproductiveness. On the contrary, the narrative demonstrates that at times being silenced provides shelter from power, protecting the boy from its abuses and the violence of others' mouths.

11 On the mouth as a site of consumption and production of speech, see Panagia.

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