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From Empire to Independence: Colonial Space in the Writing of Tutuola, Ekwensi, Beti and Kane

Abstract

This article examines the production of space in four early Anglophone and Francophone West African novels, reading Amos Tutuola's The Palm-Wine Drinkard (Nigeria, 1952), Cyprian Ekwensi's People of the City (Nigeria, 1954), Mongo Beti's Mission terminée (Cameroon, 1957) and Cheikh Hamadou Kane's L'Aventure ambiguë (Senegal, 1961) alongside broader social, political and economic spatial discourses from the 1950s and 60s. By so doing, the article unpacks the articulated correspondences between literary space and its wider materiality in ways which are both explicit and implicit. Drawing on insights from human geography, this essay explores the extent to which the distinct spatial programs of the British and French empires manifest within Anglophone and Francophone West African writing in the years leading to independence, ultimately arguing that the latter displays a range of discrepant, horizontal formulations in contrast to the more monolithic, vertical spatiality of the latter.

Keywords: African literature; space; postcolonial literature

Since its inception as a field, postcolonial studies has placed a particularly high emphasis on space as a category of analysis. Drawing on Edward W. Said's foundational exposition of the "imaginative geographies" of colonial conquest,[1] the field since that time has "identified space in all its forms as integral to the postcolonial experience."[2] Space, as Soja reminds us, functions as more than simply an absolute container or matter of lines on a map. Rather, space and spatiality imply "a struggle that is not just about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, images and imaginings, about competition for land and territory and the search for fundamental and egalitarian rights to inhabit space,"[3] replete with resonances across the interconnected spheres of the mental, the material, and the social realms of existence.[4] Based upon the premise that it is precisely the manipulation of this multifaceted and all-encompassing function of spatiality which served to provide imperial powers with their ostensible

mastery of colonized territories, both material and mythic,[5] the field has foregrounded the social and political urgency of re-imagining and re-constructing spatial formations in the post-imperial world. Yet, in its realization, the centrality of spatiality to postcolonial inquiry has remained curiously under-theorized. The discipline, instead, has fallen into what Lefebvre once characterized as the twinned myths of transparency and opacity, viewing space, on the one hand, as something "out there," an instance of "natural simplicity,"[6] utterly unknowable in any real or true sense; and, on the other, as entirely ideational by nature, no more than the projection of a wholly subjective phenomenon.[7] The literary text, under both of these perspectives, has little function beyond reflection or response. Seemingly manifesting Lefebvre's own claim that as "codes worked up from literary texts are applied to spaces […] we remain [...] on the purely descriptive level,"[8] both of these interconnected views reduce the text to a site of passivity, neglecting its productive, performative function as an aesthetic object and material artifact.

In this paper, I seek to redress these claims through an examination of the production and performance of space in four early Europhone West African novels: Nigerian Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952); his countryman Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954/1963 revised edition); Senegalese Cheikh Hamadou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961, but originally written in 1951); and Cameroonian Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (1957). These four texts share a preoccupation with the spatial in their respective narrative forms, emerging through the repeated occurrence of journeys and quests; the contrast between bounded and open spaces; and the interaction between spatial formations and the development of subjectivities. More importantly, however, each of these texts demonstrates the extent to which literature may not only engage in "creatively rethinking and retheorizing spatiality,"[9] but forms "a vital part of lived experience, as part of the (social) production of (social) space, the construction of individual and societal spatialities,"[10] made more manifest through each text's demonstration of the active "role which literature has played in structuring the experience of the

colony" and its afterlives.[11] By this, I mean to suggest that each of these four texts demonstrates the ways in which, through the textual constitution of space, literary writing may intervene in its production in unique, if not entirely incongruent, ways, exploiting the imaginative potential of literature to re-map and re-script the spatial formations from which they spring. Arising from four highly specific socio-historical contexts, each of these works leverages its textual re-production of space in order to transform, create and invent it anew, forging new pathways for consciousness and struggle. Equally, these novels demonstrate the highly distinct literary modes through which these concerns develop, foregrounding both the diversity of spatial formations and the specifically aesthetic nature of space's literary performance across locations and contexts. It is my interest in this paper to trace these preoccupations as they emerge, considering the "articulations" through which these texts speak to and from a larger spatiality which "inscribes itself in the very force fields of [the] texts" in question.[12] Rather than suggest that each novel simply reflects or reacts to the spatiality of its time, that is, I aim to develop a sense of the lines of correspondence which emerge through their reading, while maintaining a sense of the highly-specified landscapes in which each text operates and to which each text contributes.

Rights of Habitation and the Anxieties of Modernity in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*

Publicity materials and records surrounding the 1952 publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Faber and Faber position it not as a product of its contemporary realities, but as an ethnographic artifact illuminating the experience of a timeless African interior. Editorial correspondence, marketing materials, and author profiles refer to the text as a "terrifying but quite fascinating" work that will "burst upon an astonished world unheralded and unrecommended,"[13] lauding its exposition of "the common West African mind."[14] This form of rhetoric has followed both the novel and its author through their afterlives, with perpetual characterizations of the author as "a true primitive,"[15] a "natural storyteller" exuding an "uncorrupted innocence,"[16] who lives in a "hinterland" of "shack-shanties" and "rusting brown tin that

roofs the mud-walled houses that crowd together as if seeking comfort in closeness,"[17] a place where human life is reduced to the smells of open fires and only dust "swirl[s] lazily in the hot tropical sun."[18] Despite the continued assertion of "the cult of the primitive" in the paratextual accompaniment to the novel,[19] a move which endorses a narrative "of unilinear progress, modernisation, development, the sequence of modes of production" in which geographies which exist "*beyond* Europe [must] henceforth [exist] *before* Europe,"[20] the material history of both the novel and its author suggests otherwise. At the time that *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was written, Tutuola served as a messenger in the Nigerian Department of Labour in Lagos, far from the uncompromised primitivity so claimed for him; like its author, the novel, too, develops a spatiality striated with the impositions of colonial modernity, most obviously through its repeated references to bombs, telephones, dance halls, cigarettes, and a British-imposed money economy measured in pounds, shillings, and pence. Commentators have described these features as "giv[ing] sharpness and immediacy to his imagery," creating "a bizarre dream effect."[21] Yet, read through the novel's performance of space, these references function more directly to locate the text within a far-reaching system of social production.

Compounded by the relativizing, and by extension homogenizing, force of colonial modernity, the novel's most potent performance of spatiality comes through its invocation of what Harvey calls absolute space, that "pre-existing and immoveable grid amenable to standardized measurement and open to calculation,"[22] realized in the text through the perpetual appearance of borders, boundaries, and demarcations which tightly enforce the right to space. In one early episode, for instance, the Drinkard finds himself charged with finding and capturing Death for a wealthy old man who promises he knows where the Tapster has gone. Heading in the direction of Death's home, the Drinkard's narration points to the transgressive nature of his act as a violation of spatial order: "Then I began to travel on Death's road, and I spend about eight hours to reach there, but to my surprise I did not meet anybody on this road until I reached there and I was afraid because of that."[23] Juxtaposing its emptiness with the

Drinkard's fear and surprise to find himself alone, the road, operating as a synecdoche for social space more broadly, betrays its implication into a regime of spatiality predicated on totalizing rules of usage and movement, where the crossing of a boundary or flouting of its immutable laws can only result in terror. Elsewhere, the stratification of space allows the Drinkard and his wife to enact a series of narrow escapes, first from the "long white creatures" who "were bound not to trespass on another's bush" (41), later the "mountain creatures" who "must not cross the river at all" (120), and eventually from the Bacchanalian thrall of the Faithful Mother's home, enclosed within a white tree, (66-72), in order to arrive at last in Deads' Town, where "both white and black deads were living […], [though] not a single alive was there at all" (102). In each case, space is demarcated by absolute borders, immovable and mappable as a series of discontinuous zones only to be inhabited by the chosen few. Space, in these reckonings, amounts to little more than a grid of relativized compartments intended for specific purposes and open only to particular populations. Even Deads' Town, which, as Achebe reminds us, is significant for its defiance of the rules of space during an era in which "Whites and Blacks lived in trim reservations or squalid townships separated by a regulation two-mile cordon sanitaire,"[24] remains under the rule of a superseding law of order in which "everything that [deads] were doing there was incorrect to alives and everything that all alives were doing was incorrect to deads too" (102). The constant invocation of absolute boundaries in the novel foregrounds the very intractability of spatial conceptions under coloniality, both compartmentalizing populations and enacting a doubly-layered form of abstraction in which "an appearance of separation" seeks to efface what is in reality "an ambiguous continuity."[25] Though demarcated as spaces of difference through the normative ordering of colonial modernity and its regulation of the rights of habitation, the spatiality of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* simultaneously constructs space as a unilateral appearance in order to efface the productive force of its heterogeneity. By engaging in an illusory "instrumental homogeneity" as a means of "mak[ing] a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in [its] way,"[26] the novel participates in the dual imperatives of colonial

spatiality as a form of abstract space, simultaneously serving as an ordering and an enclosure of difference.

The demarcations of borders and boundaries was of a specific importance in the late days of British rule in Nigeria, as Achebe's remarks above indicate. Beyond the microcosmic managing of the right to space, a larger series of conflicts developed across the deployment of boundaries and borders on the regional and national scales. These tensions emerged during the 1950s across a range of constitutional reforms which would dictate the timeline for self-rule and eventual independence as well as the balance of powers across each of Nigeria's three major regions and the federal government. While historical narratives of the period refer to the reforms leading to self-rule as having occurred in an atmosphere of conviviality and optimism,[27] primary source documents from the period indicate otherwise, portraying a situation of rivalry, conflict, and failed alliances throughout the decade, across regions, political parties, and ethnic groupings. In his President's address at the fifth annual convention of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the dominant political party in Eastern Nigeria, for instance, Nnamdi Azikiwe laments his party's "failed alliance" with the Western Region's Action Group party, citing disagreements between the two parties on the timeline for self-rule. Later in that same speech, Azikiwe calls for national and pan-African unity in a specifically spatial strategy, decrying ethnic violence and vowing both to strengthen the municipal status of Nigeria's smaller cities and "to distribute on a more equitable basis necessities of life" across disparate zones.[28] Elsewhere, internal NCNC memos call for the creation of the Mid-West state as a means of "eradicating the pains of ills of the Action Group", while firmly opposing the integration of Lagos within the Western Region.[29] By the late 1950s, debates centered around the relative threat of balkanization, on the one hand, and the concomitant dangers of centralization; opposing parties would call for regional self-government; the creation of new states as a counterbalance to regional power; a devolved federal system; and a highly-centralized national authority.[30] Across all of these proposals, the right to space, its physical distribution

and its delimitations as a function of power and authority remained central concerns. Within regions, too, were enacted a series of divisions and spatial arrangements organized by ethnic identity, most prominently through the creation of minority areas, intended to produce for each populace its own particular place.[31] In a context of increased devolution of authority, with colonial governments "focusing on educated Africans, bringing them into local government and involving them in development projects, using them as the key agents to bring social change to rural areas," the increased stratification of space into particular regions, locales, and subdivisions speaks to a larger anxiety around the distribution of space and its conception as fundamentally social.[32] Emerging from this background, the repeated assertion of bounded and collectively-identified spaces in Tutuola's novel seems hardly surprising, and yet demonstrates the extent to which larger conceptions and formations of spatiality permeate the text in ways which move beyond simply reflecting or refracting context and into its fundamental re-visioning.

Despite its seeming capitulation to the strictures of colonial space, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*'s performance of space suggests that something more complex percolates under its surface. Throughout the novel, space is figured in dynamic terms, subverting the illusion of stasis perpetuated by colonial conceptions and the accompanying rhetoric of stabilization. Space shifts and morphs, as locations stretch and re-position themselves, simultaneously colluding with and confounding its subjects. In one famous scene, the Drinkard describes his frustration upon approaching Deads' Town: "But as we were looking at the town from a long distance, we thought that we could reach there the same day, but not at all, we travelled for 6 more days, because as we nearly reached there, it would still seem to be very far away to us or as if it was running away from us" (96-7). Unaware that "anybody who had not died could not enter into that town by day time" (97), the Drinkard is left bemused by the incongruence between the appearance of space and its lived realities, strategically unravelling its own monolithic surface. Space creates vastly different subjectivities and collectivities, evidenced in the distinctions between the Red people of Red Town, the creatures of Wraith Island, and the beautiful people of the Faithful Mother's

hall, each of whom bear characteristics reflecting their environment while together contributing to its realization. Despite the intractability of the novel's spatial demarcations, moreover, the Drinkard remains somehow immune, always able to transgress its laws and by so doing to revise its norms. Re-writing space through his movements, the narrative calls attention both to the arbitrary nature of its rules and to its own mutability as a site of conflict, despite surface appearances. Drawn together by the Drinkard's crossing of their boundaries, the discrete spaces of the novel become one, but a one that is many. Space is blown open at its borders through the Drinkard's tactical practices to reveal a radical multiplicity, one "without unity since it is already open to difference, deferral, iteration, transformation, and perversion."[33] Read in correspondence with the spatial formations of its time, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* emerges as a novel less detached from the rhythms of modernity than may at first seem evident. Far from serving simply as embellishments or incongruous points of humor, the irruptions of coloniality in the novel, when approached through a spatial reading, indicate a landscape of conflict, conquest, frustration, and rebellion. Articulated in a fantastical idiom, replete with references to indigenous mythology and vernacular culture, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* performs a productive spatiality in which any appearance of totalization functions under threat from a more generative chaos within.

Mapping Urbanization through the *People of the City*

At first reading, there appear to be few lines of correspondence between *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *People of the City* beyond the shared nationality of their authors and their dates of publication. Indeed, the stark contrast which presents itself between both novels has been the object of some critical attention. A 1958 review published in the influential journal *Black Orpheus*, for instance, states that:

> Amos Tutuola may be the first West Africa to have published a novel in English, but his marshy world of fantasy and nightmare, of ghosts and spirits, is very different from the one described in Cyprian Ekwensi's "People of the City." Ekwensi is a pioneer because he is the first West African

> to write a modern novel about contemporary life. This is the beginning of a new literature and almost certainly of greater interest to West African readers than Tutuola's mixture of fantasy and tradition. Posterity will thank Tutuola for recording a phase of West African life before it disappears for ever. Judgment may be harsher on Mr. Ekwensi in the final analysis, but now, in this day and age, he has something important to contribute. This is the first time that we have seen life in the Big City from the West African point of view; no European could have the same particular insight of knowledge of Lagos life—for what other city could this be? No European could have quite the same spontaneous affection for the warm teeming mass of humanity spilling out into the city streets.[34]

Resounding across critical readings of the two novels is a contrast between the folkloric, mythic poetics of Tutuola and the forward-looking, incisive portrait of Nigerian city life at the cusp of self-government in Ekwensi's work. Where one may be read through its ethnographic exploration of tradition, the other, it follows, may be read as a commentary on the impact of colonial modernity upon West Africa and its populations. Indeed, as much as the paratextual apparatus surrounding Tutuola insists upon his depiction as a rural subject, innocent and naïve in his primitivity, that around Ekwensi focuses on his identity as a cosmopolitan polyglot at ease in all of Nigeria's major regions, a modern citizen with a "penchant for the ways of the city."[35] Yet, as my discussion so far has already indicated, when read below the surface, a more subtle range of articulations appear across the two texts, marking the extent to which each engages with the discourses, symbols, and materiality of late coloniality in 1950s Nigeria. In both *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *People of the City*, that is to say, we see the extent to which the dynamics of social change impinge upon the polyvalent co-constitution of subjectivity in/and spatiality.

According to Ekwensi's unpublished auto-biography, *People of the City* was written over the course of a fortnight during the author's journey on the mv Accra, from Lagos to Liverpool in 1951.[36] Patched together from a series of short stories written for radio broadcast, the novel was first published

in London in 1954 by Andrew Dakers and, after the author's return to Nigeria in 1956, heavily edited, revised and republished in 1963 as the fifth volume of Heinemann's African Writers Series.[37] The novel is organized around the exploits of Amusa Sango, crime reporter for the *West African Sensation* newspaper, band leader at the All Languages Club and bachelor extraordinaire, as he navigates the rapidly-shifting landscape of late colonial Lagos, the hub of modern African life. As Juliet Okonkwo argues, the city serves as "the symbol of the new life," becoming the locus around which "the restricting village environment" could give way to a colonial modernity "offering opportunities for the development of the individual both socially and materially."[38] At the time of the novel's publication, the promises of the late colonial city had not gone unnoticed; by 1948, major cities in West Africa experienced a yearly growth in population of 6.03%, which rose to 8.03% by 1960, vastly outstripping global averages and inaugurating a frenetic pace of urban growth which continues to the present day. Lagos, in particular, was heavily affected by patterns of internal migration, reaching nearly one million in habitants by the post-independence era.[39] Rehearsed across the urban zones of West Africa, the sheer force of internal migration resulted in a paradoxical situation in which urban growth, a prerequisite for economic development, nonetheless engendered large-scale impoverishment under its weight.[40] *People of the City* explicitly highlights the tensions so predicated in Sango's many ruminations on life in a city where "everyday the trains bring more and more people from the provinces," lured in by its promises only to discover a place where "people [...] live ten to a room,"[41] overcrowded and suffering from the misery of rising prices and diminishing hope. Indeed, official statistics state that by 1950 the typical dwelling housed on average twelve individuals, a number which continued to rise in the coming decades.[42] Intensified by official policies which resulted in a "pattern of a continuing denudation of the rural areas,"[43] the spectacular growth of the city in the immediate pre-independence period marked a watershed in the development of the nation more broadly.

Despite official attempts at stabilization, the attempt to create a reliable workforce by "break[ing] up the mass [of the population] into units differentiated by occupation, seniority, and income, and thus into a structured working class, clearly separated from peasants and urban riffraff,"[44] the Lagos of *People of the City* and the varied spatial practices of its inhabitants nonetheless remain beyond the grasp of centralized authority. Describing the masses of young men and women who flock to the city each year, forgoing their filial responsibilities in favor of material decadence, Sango repeatedly bemoans the transformation of the populace into a mass of "brutal and reckless" individuals (20), "content to live on in […] vanity" (32). The city, for all of its promises, offers little, becoming a place of corruption and despair, where only the individualistic and the greedy prosper under its "overwhelming materialism."[45] In the novel, it is described as a space left bereft by a system of British rule intent upon divesting the country of the products of its own labor, a situation exacerbated by post-war debt and the concomitant need for commodities capable of earning hard currency,[46] foregrounded in the increasing dissonance between developmentalist rhetoric and the physical space of the city:

> In half an hour, Sango's van was at the railway crossing. The gates just shut them out... Sango fumed; got out. It was always like this. You were in a hurry on some important assignment, and the gates would close. Some day this city would have roads and railway crossings on different planes, as they did in sensible cities.
>
> Now, why had the gates been shut? Was a goods train coming? If so, it might be exciting to stand by, watching the trains thunder past, draining the city of ground-nuts, cocoa, hides, skins, tin, cotton, darting towards the wharf where the city bade good-bye to the country's products. (51).

A producer of raw goods fit for the sole purpose of metropolitan consumption, the Lagos of *People of the City* is striated by the exigencies of the colonial pact, its own bustle and vitality rendered marginal within a system of imperial spatiality. Where traces of human compassion remain, these exist only as

islands of resistance overwhelmed by a sea of cowardice and avarice. Exemplified in the figure of Bayo, an old friend who Sango describes as a modern day African flâneur of a type existing "in every city in the world [....] present at every social gathering where one might drink free beers or gnaw free legs of chicken" (25), the city is made up of the "young, handsome, strong, idle and penniless" (25). As one missionary report from the era observes, this is a population for whom "the briefest taste of the most uninspiring form of urban life is enough to whet their appetites for more and at once anything seems better than the tight discipline of the family and the dreary monotony of village life."[47]

Yet, there remains a sense in which the city of Ekwensi's novel is not an entirely irredeemable space as much as one whose greatness has led its inhabitants to a state of desperation. Despite its ills, it remains a space in which the possibility of kinship retains its force, created by the tumultuous movements and discrepant trajectories of its inhabitants, what one commentator has described as its potential "to create a common area where all can understand and sympathize with one another."[48] Early in the novel, Sango muses on this symphonic forging of the city as a social space uniting individuals from disparate walks of life:

> The noise of the city came through his concentration. The city was wakening. The sounds of 'buses, hawkers, locomotives, the grinding of brakes, the hooting of sirens and clanging of church and school bells had all become a part of his life that went unnoticed here in Molomo Street (17).

Cutting across social classes, and modalities, the world outside of his room permeates Sango's consciousness, simultaneously providing the rhythm against which his daily life is carried out and embedding itself within it unnoticed, as an unremarked counterpoint to his individual existence. Lefebvre writes that the city is a space dictated by two often-contradictory logics, one based upon "fantasies or phantasmagorias" and the other "rational, state-dominated and bureaucratic."[49] Yet, through its implication in Sango's life, the spatiality of the city in Ekwensi's novel demonstrates a third

logic, foregrounding the undecidability of its own "intensity" as a constant presence.[50] Forming a dense fabric in which the individual threads of hawker, driver, school, and church are somehow both perceivable as single strands and coextensive with one another, the city's reverberations guide its inhabitants across distinct registers, patterns, and speeds, creating itself from their movements. The city space which so emerges is thus both relational, in its implication with these daily lived histories and practices, and radically pluralistic.

Extant criticism of the novel complains that its characters are "are mere urban types," stereotypes led into destruction by a villainous city,[51] living only in "the service of unbridled, and inordinate ambition to achieve prosperity;"[52] while there is certainly an extent to which the Lagos of *People of the City* provides support for these claims, a more carefully considered reading of the novel in correspondence with its contemporary spatiality offers the possibility of another reading in which the city is defined by the very density of its social fabric, created by and constitutive of its inhabitants' subjective experiences. Centered around Molomo Street, governed in equal measure by the hierarchical, materialistic rule of Lajide the landlord and the vernacular, lived existence of the people of the street, this city is a space of contradictions, dramatized in the contrast between the vitality of its social interconnections and the rigidity of its authenticated practices, illuminating the gap between the city as planned and the city as lived. On one level, the city functions as a bifurcated space, always under threat from the absolute and the conceived, organized through the proliferation of borders, zones, and regions open only to the chosen few and highly regimented in the name of (re)productive labor, embodying what Harvey characterizes as "the spatial concentration of power."[53] The people of the city, crowded "in the gutters, in forgotten lorries, in the railway stations, in the market stalls, under stress in the parks" (93), stand in opposition to the elite masses to whom they must live in thrall. Landlords, business owners, and politicians alike map a different sort of city-space, one cut across by private automobiles and trips to exclusive shops "display[ing] the latest lines from Bond Street, Paris and New York" (116),

operating less in concert with the people of the city around them than with the lines and trajectories of multinational commerce. Even the city's central meeting point, significantly named Lugard Square, recalls the violence of Lefebvre's abstract space, becoming the site of rival rallies, meetings of the occult, and public demonstrations built upon the divisive foundations of colonial violence. At the same time, another city, a vernacular city constructed through the spatial practices of its inhabitants and the spaces of representation inaugurated by their interactions, remains potent. Exemplified in the All Languages Club, a place with "no bars—social, colour, political or religious" (75), this is a city of productive transgression, a space where the vitalizing promises of self-rule, though mediated by their predication under British authority, remain felt (91-2). Connecting the seemingly disparate spaces of the city and the nation, Sango's misadventures throughout the novel map out an alternative rationale for space in which its multiplicity is foregrounded in spite, or because, of the continued assertion of its absolutism. Able to navigate through the city's streets, from the offices of *The West African Sensation* to the Magistrate's court to the inclusive space of the All Language Club and external space of the Eastern Greens and beyond, Sango's movements across and beyond the city represent the underlying continuum through which space's relational force pulsates. Performing a subversion of the codes and practices of the stabilized colonial city conceived of by imperial planners, *People of the City* enlivens instead a vernacular city, forced through the symphonic rendering of individual, and often incongruent, spatial strategies.

***Mission terminée*: Uneven Development and the Trials of the Évolué**

Despite their differences *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *People of the City* share a number of features, both explicit and implicit, driving forward each novel's performance of space. Each text develops through an episodic form which dramatizes the compartmentalization of space under absolute boundaries, while simultaneously imbuing this absolutism with an underlying and contradictory dynamism. Both texts unfurl a proliferation of absolute spatial demarcations, mediated through the

relativizing force of colonial modernity and yet somehow transformed into a relational multiplicity through the transgressive movements of a singular protagonist. Both texts, in their own ways, leverage their imaginative possibilities to gesture towards other, incongruous but not incompatible, visions of space coextensive with what appears initially to be the intractable and homogenizing force of late colonial spatiality. By contrast, both *Mission terminée* and *L'Aventure ambiguë* develop a spatiality more rigidly enforced, in which an apparent intractability reproduces itself through the fossilization of relations under a monolithic (re)mapping of the center and periphery binary. While neither text develops the regimentation of specific boundaries and spatial demarcations in quite the same manner as *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *People of the City*, both present a vision of space in which the totalizing force of a homogenizing, abstract system nonetheless serves as an overdetermining specter, notable less for its compartmentalization of space through an absolute gridding and more for the utter singularity of its force. Despite what Nnolim calls "the journey motif" in each,[54] both texts remain imbued with a kind of stasis which obscures the radical potential of space as a site of productivity, particularly at its margins. Though different in form and register, Beti's and Kane's novels share a number of characteristics in their spatial arrangements which set them apart from their Anglophone counterparts. Both end with death, either literal, in the case of *L'Aventure ambiguë*, or figurative in the case of *Mission terminée*. Both novels, too, present a vision of French West Africa in the late days of colonialism in which any hope for maneuvering beyond the dictates of the colonial order remains obscure, felt at best as a shadow or trace realizable only at the moment of annihilation.

During the late colonial period, particularly following World War II and the inauguration of the Union Française, imperial policy in French Africa operated along contradictory lines. An alleged drive towards modernization and development, ostensibly intended to raise standards of living for the rural majority, increase the production of export goods – particularly lucrative cash crops – and enable peasant communities to engage with capital markets through the development of commerce,[55]

functioned in tandem with a larger pattern of deliberately uneven development. Cities and visibly productive regions would thus be treated as a world entirely different from and utterly unconcerned with the rural world surrounding, resulting in what has been characterized as a spatial "disequilibrium."[56] Reports from a 1952 UN Mission to the Cameroon Trust Territory, for instance, note the lacks of "sufficient contact" between educated legislators and the "mass of villagers, the Cameroonian peasants whose evolution has not followed, by force of circumstances, the same rhythm."[57] As the same document notes, a spatially-bounded form of development was perceived as the only solution to this situation, functioning through "a system of representation which is no longer territorial but regional, cantonal" in nature.[58] It is this perceived chasm between the urban and rural which undergirds the satirical humor at the heart of *Mission terminée*. The novel, which recounts the exploits of Jean-Marie Medza, an educated young Cameroonian, as he undertakes a journey into the territory's interior to retrieve his cousin's errant wife, plays with the relative divisions wrought across the various spheres of the sociality to produce a critical exposition of French colonialism. Significantly, the actual journey which Medza undertakes is not one of great distance, functioning within the ethno-national and linguistic territory of the Beti people. Rather, the distance which Medza supposes he will travel stems from the psychological and physical distancing wrought under French colonialism, manifesting in part from his own alienation as an évolué, or educated subject. It is particularly relevant that Medza undergoes his journeys not by train, the symbol of colonial modernity, but first by dilapidated bus and later bicycle and on foot, reflecting the heightened sense of fragmentation wrought by the underdevelopment of infrastructural improvements focused less on ostensible claims for social development and welfare and more on maximizing economic productivity and revenue. As one commentator from the time notes, "there was no real development planning between 1945 and 1960, and even less concern was given to planning Cameroonian agriculture. It was more a matter of using a few fixed ideas, of dividing the aid assured by France to Cameroon through the Social and Economic

Development Investment Funds (FIDES) created by the French law of April 30, 1946" and by so doing, yoke the colonial territory into long-term debt to the metropole.[59] Split between an imbalance across the Southern and Northern regions of the country and, within the former, the more prosperous coastal areas and interior hinterlands, the uneven development of Cameroon in this period served to exploit customary practices to engender greater revenue for the metropole, with concentrations of reform around the "fertile crescent" emanating from Douala.[60] Despite the prevalence of a rhetoric of colonial rule predicated on the need for development – records from FIDES from the end of World War II to 1956, the conclusion of the second four year plan, show a total expenditure of 28,912,354,245 CFA – several parts of the territory failed entirely to benefit from plans for infrastructural and social development.[61]

Opening with the scene of Medza's disgraced departure from the colonial school, *Mission terminée* develops from the start as a text permeated by the abstract violence of this form of colonial rule. That the colonial school should take a central role in the novel is of no little consequence, foregrounding the specifically political import of the so-called cultural mission of French colonialism. As one internal report from the time argues,

> a majority of intellectuals and quasi-intellectuals (students and civil servants in particular) are "anti-white" because they do not accept the colonial fact. This refusal comes in large part from a feeling of frustrated human dignity due to what they perceive as the poor behavior of many whites. Their desire for independence is more sentimental than rational'. [62]

Based on the desire to counter this affective rejection of the fact of colonialism, the process of acculturation produced by a French-based education held a significant role in the containment of anti-colonial agitation through the production of a comprador class of native informants inculcated into French normativity. Medza himself embodies this phenomenon, trapped between an encroaching bitterness and a feigned jocularity he describes as a "drôlerie,"[63] resulting in a split self whose value is

engendered by a colonial system which absorbs and domesticates all sentiments of resistance in order to assure its maximum efficiency. Initially reluctant to undertake his mission to Kala, it is only on musing over the benefits of undertaking "une aventure assez facile, parmi des populations naïves – ce qui est le souhait et même le vœu de tous les aventuriers" (32) ("an *easy* adventure, among comparatively simple people – this is both the desire and the vow of the adventurer " (15)) that Medza submits to the wishes of his cousin.

Despite his belief that, as an urban évolué amongst rural paysans, his adventure would be one of superiority and mastery, Medza finds in Kala a space beyond his comprehension:

> C'était un village immense, long de plus de deux kilomètres, dont les cases s'alignaient comme chez nous des deux côtés d'une très large chaussée. Mais ici, c'était une fausse chaussée, puisqu'il n'y avait pas de route : simplement, au sortir de la forêt et à la lisière du village, le sentier sur lequel j'étais venu s'élargissait. Kala, étiré, avec ses cases coquettes et peu distants les unes des autres, avec cette espèce d'avenue qui le traversait, avec toute cette immense forêt qui l'entourait et dans laquelle il semblait s'être creusé comme le lit d'un ruisseau au pied d'un précipice, me produisit une impression à la fois de sauvagerie et de sécurité, la même que l'on doit éprouver sur une île martelée de vagues et dont on sait pourtant qu'elle ne sera pas submergée. A la nuit tombée, il y régnait une animation qui évoquait les faubourgs indigènes des villes. (50)
>
> (It was a huge village, nearly two miles long, its houses ranged along either side of a wide street. This street was rather deceptive; it led to no through road at all. All that happened was that between the edge of the forest and the village the track by which I had travelled broadened out considerably. Kala gave me a simultaneous impression of savagery and security: it was as though one was on a small island, pounded by heavy seas, and yet safe from drowning. The neat huts

and bungalows were well spaced out down their long avenue; yet the whole place was encircled and overshadowed by the immensity of the forest, like a gully at the foot of a high cliff. As darkness fell, the street became as busy and animated as any town's native quarter. (27))

Regardless of his scrutiny, Medza's observations of Kala fail entirely to locate the village's geography within a meticulously planned regime of strategic development operating at the intersection of social, economic, and political concerns. The French acquisition of Cameroon following the end of World War I was of great significance; as reports indicate, the inclusion of the territory into the French empire both consolidated French interests in West Africa, while guaranteeing continued economic, political, and social control, heightened through Cameroon's position on the cusp of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa, France's two major blocs of power on the continent.[64] French rule during this period was predicated on a regime of surveillance and terror, what the Committee of African Organisations would later refer to as a "widespread policy of repression and extermination,"[65] intended ostensibly to flush out sympathizers from the radical leftist Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), whose demands included immediate and full independence and the reunification of the British and French Cameroons.[66] Characterized by censorship, surveillance, and requests for collusion with British authorities in operating cross-border raids in search of exiled UPC leaders, the period leading to Cameroonian independence was one of frequent and often appalling violence, particularly in the populous Sanaga Maritime, Bamiléké, and Mungo regions of the south and west of the territory.[67] Contiguous with these regions, the South-Central lands of the Beti described in the novel became sites of particular interest because of the deep-seated French fear that support for the UPC might spread to this region.[68] In the midst of this climate of anti-colonial agitation and French repression, a series of spatial measures were undertaken to better control the movements of populations and their potential exposure to the UPC's radical ideology. Amongst these were "the abolition of periodic markets, the closure of roads for the transportation of passengers, and the imposition of curfews at night in rural

areas,"[69] as well as the imposition of a "relation of villages along the roads and railways' in which villages were "grouped and placed under the strict control of military posts."[70] In direct contravention of claims that Cameroonian "novels published during the fifties do not bear the direct marks of that struggle [between the UPC and the French],"[71] Beti's description of Kala performs a dual function located squarely in the bounds of this conflict, developed through Kala's contradictory positioning as a space both savage and secure, empty of human life in the one instant only to come alive with the commercial animation of any town's native quarter in the next. Both radical in its resistance to suppression, the shadows of the immense forest pointing to the possibility of another life in the maquis, and utterly subjugated in its regimented intensity, open for surveillance along a broad track with no through road for escape, Kala performs a series of spatial imperatives betraying its location in a larger regime of spatiality.

On its surface, the social space of the village, like its physical instantiation, appears to lend credence to the myth of rural primitivity, amplified by Medza's own sense of self-importance when faced with a people who he views as mere "bushmen de l'arrière-pays" (*31*) ("backwoods bushmen (14)). Yet, during the period in which the novel is set, this was far from the truth. Internal documents from the time highlight the necessity of convincing the Cameroonian peasant "to participate, through the intermediary of people he knows, in the gestation of matters he knows: those of his village and subdivision."[72] Citing the "incomprehension on the part of indigenous groups who do not see that it is in their interest to follow the advice given to them," official recommendations focus upon the need to ameliorate the "traditional mistrust of the peasant towards all innovation," recommending a program of development and education.[73] Throughout his stay in Kala, Medza slowly learns the paucity of his preconceptions, as he is forced to reckon with a space that is less discrete from his own experience and far more tightly wound into a layered system of colonial and imperial spatiality based upon a vertical form of spatial stratification. From the village's chief, who, in the ease with which he exploits "ses

sujets, ne connaissant guère ou même point les dispositions de la Constitution d'octobre 1946" (179) ("his subjects, who have little idea (if any) of the terms of the 1946 Constitution' (116)), deliberately parallels the chief of Medza's own village, "sûr de n'être jamais révoqué par cette administration à laquelle il obéissait comme un robot idéal, redouté de tous" (35) ("sure of never being called back by this administration, whose orders he obeys like a robot, dreaded by all' (17)), to his own uncle, whose invocation of "la communauté du sang" (126) ("community of blood" (81)) stands as little more than a means of acquiring the livestock gifted to Medza for his own use, the inhabitants of Kala, like the space in which they function, betray their implication into the logic of Greater France. Far from the rural idyll which he pictured, Medza is instead forced to acknowledge Kala as a shifting social space, his initiation into which drives the text.

By the novel's end, despite his ostensible embrace of the villagers' way of life as a corrective to the imposed normativity of his French education, Medza finds himself unable to remain in Kala, now revealed as a space fabricated from the workings of French puissance. Abandoning the village to return to his father's home for a final confrontation with his authority, Medza's story ends with his consignment to a life of endless wandering, a perpetual state of exile that he describes as "[u]ne vie d'errance sans fin" (250), punctuated by women, imprisonment, and torture. Described as "a psychological time-warp,"[74] in which all possible avenues of resistance to colonial rule are disabled, the conclusion to Medza's journey exposes the overdetermining force of a colonial spatiality impossible to exceed and avoidable only through entrance into a spatial limbo. Indeed, while some critics have argued that this conclusion marks an aesthetic failure to the novel,[75] a spatial reading of the text binds it more closely with a larger centrifugal stasis underwriting the socio-political evolution of French West Africa. With the 1956 Loi Cadre, materialized under the Statute of Cameroon in that territory, came a shift towards territorialized legislative authority and increased devolution away from the metropole.[76] Yet, even at this late stage, internal documents point directly to a reassertion of French power in claims that

these reforms would serve neither as a "condemnation" of French imperial structures nor "a glorification of British politics in Africa which have not resulted to the present day in particularly remarkable results."[77] Within a mere few years, African leaders and colonial officers alike would characterize the Loi Cadre, with its purported commitment to devolution, as little more than a form of lip service that failed "to respond to the hopes placed upon it."[78] By positioning itself as the sole locus of unification or cooperation French power and French influence became entrenched anew under the Manichean order of (post)colonial conquest. Likewise, through the homogenizing influence of the French center under the continued auspices of the colonial pact,[79] the alternative potentialities of social space would be subsumed by the workings of a hegemonic power bent on its perpetual re-centering.

Mythic Spaces: *The Ambiguous Adventure* and the Re-Centering of the Metropole

While Cameroon's status as a UN Trusteeship territory placed it in a somewhat unusual position within the bounds of the Union Française, the spatial dynamics realized in that territory rehearsed themselves to varying degrees across French West Africa. In Senegal, at the heart of the federation, tensions around space emerged particularly through the struggle to maintain horizontal lines of pan-African allegiance against the strictures of a vertical French authority. Set in this context, *L'Aventure ambiguë* tells the story of Samba Diallo, a child of the Diallobé aristocracy located in the far north of the territory. The novel chronicles the existential crisis which follows Samba as he moves from the Koranic school of his village to a metropolitan education in the city of Louga,[80] eventually arriving in Paris to read for a philosophy degree. Ending with Samba's return to the land of the Diallobé and subsequent death at the hands of the fool, or last ardent believer, *L'Aventure ambiguë* enacts a series of conflicts around the relative (im)possibility of collective affiliations in the face of colonial encroachment. Kane has been lauded for his "dramatization of the conflicts affecting traditional African elites on the eve of decolonization,"[81] fashioning a text in which Samba's "quest for identity *is* the quest for his […] society's

identity."[82] Elsewhere, Samba's story has been likened to a synecdochal tale which can be read either as "a commentary on the paradoxes of cultural conversation in the face of the hegemony of mainstream European cultural norms" or as "an allegory of the subjective experience of a generation of African intellectuals."[83] Densely philosophical in its register, the novel takes the form of a series of extended dialogues, with few temporal and spatial markers delineating its boundaries. Throughout, pre-colonial African tradition is rendered through the idiom of Islam, a narrative move which "allows the novel to examine colonialism both as a fatal clash of two value systems, contingent upon history, and as a deeply disruptive collision between two fundamentally opposed metaphysics."[84] The use of Islam, introduced in the eleventh century, as a synecdoche for Diabollé self-identification creates something of a spatial mise-en-abyme in the novel, through which the struggle for survival can only be staged upon the detritus of earlier erasures and conquests. Fusing together the aristocratic traditions of the Diallobé with the hierarchical organization of Islam, the novel indicates the overarching power of new spatial and social formations as means of effacement. By so rendering the space of the Diallobé, the novel, despite its seeming estrangement from the materiality of its time, betrays its position within.

The land of the Diallobé is figured as a vast, empty land characterized by decay, as its remote tranquility – what is described as the Diallobé people's ability to stand "plus proche de la mort " (161) ("closer to death" (134)) and, by extension, closer to "un regain d'authenticité" (161) ("something like an aftermath of authenticity" (134)) – falls under the weight of an encroaching metropolitan center.[85] Caught in this conflict, the land becomes a place of poverty whose inhabitants "chaque jour un peu plus, s'inquiétaient de la fragilité de leurs demeures, du rachitisme de leur corps" (44) ("each day became a little more anxious about the stability of their dwellings, the unhealthy state of their bodies" (29)]. Marked by its own waste, the country of the Diallobé can only be temporary, its centuries-long tradition a teleological journey to an inevitable destruction. Confinement, both metaphorical and physical, defines the novel, emerging through the recurrent appearance of bounded, interior spaces punctuated

by scenes of futile wandering and aimless movement. The tension at the center of this simultaneous detachment and embedding is most clearly seen through the figure of the Teacher, a man described as singular in his devotion to his vocation but who, despite the influence he wields, refuses to offer a directive to the conflicted people of the Diallobé:

> Dans la case silencieuse, le maître seul était demeuré. Les disciples s'étaient envolés avec le crépuscule, à la quête de leur repas du soir. Rien ne bougeait, sinon, au-dessus du maître, le froufrou des hirondelles parmi les lattes enfumées du toit de chaume. Lentement, le maître se leva. Le craquement de toutes ses articulations nouées par les rhumatismes se mêla au bruit du soupir que lui arracha son effort pour se lever. […] Son corps, chaque jour davantage, accentuait sa fâcheuse propension à rester collé à la terre. (40)
>
> (Only the Teacher had remained in the silent cabin. With twilight, the disciples had taken flight in quest of their evening meal. Nothing stirred except, above the teacher, the swallows fluttering among the smoke-blackened lattices of the thatched roof. Slowly, the teacher rose. The crackling of all his joints, stiff from rheumatism, made a sound which was mingled with the sigh wrested from him by the effort to get up […] More every day, his body emphasized this sorry propensity to remain glued to the earth. (27))

Entrapped within a "smoke-blackened" hut on the margins of village life, left only with his "crackling joints" and "grotesque misery of [a] body" now "glued to the earth" and barely capable of performing the physical act of prayer, the Teacher's encroaching stasis serves as a synechdochal representation of the suffocating confinement of the Diallobé more broadly, conceived as bound to the land and its soil, and smothered under its own weight in an intractable position. Yet, for the Teacher and his fellow leaders, the knowledge that a flight to tradition would do little to teach the children of the Diallobé "à lier le bois de bois… pour faire des édifices de bois…" (21) ("join wood to wood—to make wooden

buildings" (8)), is not enough to justify a wholesale acceptance of the colonial fact: "Cependant, la question est troublante. Nous refusions l'école pour demeurer nous-mêmes et pour conserver à Dieu sa place dans nos cœurs. Mais avons-nous encore suffisamment de force pour résister à l'école et de substance pour demeurer nous-mêmes?" (21) ("Nevertheless, the question [of sending our children to the new school] is troubling. We could refuse to send them in order to remain ourselves and to conserve God's place in our hearts. But do we have enough force to resist the school, and enough substance to remain ourselves?" (9)). Seemingly figured as a spiritual struggle, the battle for Samba's soul may thus be equally read as embodying the struggle over spatiality, as the mythic system of the Diallobé is slowly overwhelmed by the encroachment of imperialism's abstract logic.

Financial and legislative records from the 1940s and 50s indicate the growing importance of the far north of Senegal to French imperial aims, made more urgent by a general sense that production in the territory failed at profitability.[86] A 1951 internal report, for instance, calls for the construction of a railway line to support the trade of goods during the milking period in the area between Saint Louis and Louga,[87] a region elsewhere noted for its rapid population growth over 1950 and 1951.[88] More generally, records from FIDES during the 1950s show a heavy investment in the development of agriculture and animal husbandry in the north of the country, resulting in a need for more highly developed infrastructure and the installation of cultural and community centers.[89] With the development of export lines in the region, the north of Senegal would become a more significant factor in the economic modernization of the country as a whole, having previously been relatively neglected compared to the large port cities of Saint Louis and Dakar. The failure during the era to form a true confederation of West African states as a counterbalance to French authority, moreover, exacerbated the intensity of French developmentalist rhetoric, re-centering the metropole in various ways. Located in this shifting landscape, the land of the Diallobé finds itself with few defenses. Even the Koranic school, the "foyer ardent" or glowing hearth of unworldly purity, can only exist at a distance of some remove from the

village proper, confined to a marginal position in this shifting landscape in which its physical detachment functions in uneasy concord with its spiritual centrality as the most potent location in which the truest virtues of Islam may be encountered. It is in response to this situation that the Most Royal Lady is able to claim that "nous acceptions de mourir en nos enfants et que les étrangers qui nous ont défaits prennent en eux toute la place que nous aurons laissée libre" (58))"we [the Diallobé] should agree to die in our children's hearts and that the foreigners who have defeated us should fill the place, wholly, which we shall have left free." (42)) Like the fields which, in order to grow fecund again, must be burned, the children of the Diallobé, in the Most Royal Lady's estimation, must be burned down and buried so that they may survive for another year, enacting another conquest towards a new normativity, gesturing towards the earlier erasure of indigenous practices by Islam and echoing the larger sentiment that "decolonization could take place through closer integration with the *métropole* rather than through secession from it."[90] Under this logic, horizontal affiliations and collective unity fail to resonate against an overwhelming center with its promises of development and modernization. With a continuation of a center and periphery model of spatial arrangements, the promise of localized, vernacular, and alternative affiliations erodes, leaving behind only a certain intractability.

Caught in a stultifying limbo, Samba, by the novel's end, is left utterly bereft, trapped in an existence in which he has no choice but to "devenu les deux […] une nature étrange, en détresse de n'être pas deux" (163) ("become the two […] a strange nature, in distress over not being two" (135)). No longer a believer and now an unwilling embodiment of the "new man" of French colonialism, even the landscapes of the nation of the Diallobé become foreign to him on his return:

> A la horizon, le soleil couchant avait teint le ciel de pourpre sanglante. Pas un souffle n'agitait les arbres immobiles. On n'entendait que la grande voix du fleuve, répercutée par ses berges vertigineuses. Samba Diallo tourna son regard vers cette voix et vit, au loin, la falaise d'argile. Il

se souvint qu'en son enfance il avait longtemps cru que cette immense crevasse partageait l'univers en deux parties que soudait le fleuve. (183)

(On the horizon, the setting sun had dyed the heavens with a tone of blood-stained purple. Not a breath of air stirred the motionless trees. The only sound to be heard was the great voice off the river, reverberating from its dizzily steep banks. Samba Diallo bent his gaze toward this voice, and saw the clay cliff in the distance. He remembered that in his childhood he had believed for a long time that this immense crevasse divided the universe into two parts, which were united by the river. (154))

The land, once the source of his spiritual growth and fraternal connection, is now another empty space, motionless and devoid of all signs of life, save the bloodstained traces of its own destruction. All that remains, for Samba, are his memories of childhood, a time where he once believed "that this immense crevasse divided the universe into two parts which were united by the river" (154). Awakened to a world which is no longer united in its multiplicity, Samba is left existing under a single totality, a system in which, by not being two all that is left is the logic of the one, the center, and the same. Kane has argued that "this is not a hopeless ending" because, with the death of Samba Diallo, comes "the proof that there is a real conflict,"[91] indicating the extent to which death functions both as "a celebrative instance" and "an annihilation."[92] Yet, the conclusion to *L'Aventure ambiguë* does not allow any resolution to this contradiction to gesture towards itself, nor does it allow for any sense of a sociality beyond the vestiges of an intractable conflict between an overdetermining and encroaching center and failing periphery. Space, through its overwhelming presence, proves a stultifying force, where even the crumbling remnants of Samba's childhood can do no more but reinforce the abstract violations of coloniality.

Conclusions

Colonial space has been described more generally as a form of homogenization of space in which it "appears to be fixed, territorial boundaries unquestionable."[93] Yet, when taken together, Kane's and Beti's novels, along with Tutuola's and Ekwensi's, demonstrate that colonial space, abstract space, and any other such ordering functions in a manner which is far from uniform and far from regular. Operating beyond the boundaries of orthodox notions of statehood, the colonial state – and the imperial state within which it serves as a component – maintain a particularity irreducible to any attempt at generalization. Through its inherent displacement and implicit diversity in its instantiations, colonial spatiality can only be accounted for through its contextualized specificity and its shifting location within a larger spatial construct. While commonalities may emerge across the forms of colonial spatiality (re)produced in Nigeria, Senegal, and Cameroon, these by no means function congruently; instead, each system, each social formation, betrays a specific form of spatiality which, along with its inhabitants, serves a co-constitutive function in the development of the sociality more broadly. Equally, these novels demonstrate the extent to which spatial formations function through a holistic system of social, political, and economic movements, means, and ends. Far from serving as a mere container or backdrop for action, that is, space in these four novels is alive, itself a shifting phenomenon and driver of subjective development and action. Space shapes and is shaped, as its rhythms, pulsations and the conflicts therein drive forward in an ever-changing movement; at the same time, the literary text injects itself into the historical making of space and, by extension, colonial society itself.

Much has been written about the distinct systems through which British and French imperialism operated. The majority of these discussion highlight the difference between Lugardian indirect rule in the Anglophone sphere of interest, on the one hand, and what has been termed "the salience of the cultural dimension" in French systems of control, on the other.[94] While the extent to which the lived realities of colonialism actually differed across the French and British contexts remains debatable, it is nonetheless the case that certain distinctions and certain concordances emerge, both between and

within imperial systems. In the Anglophone case, the status of colonies as external to the metropole, in contrast to the internal vision of Greater France, results in what appears to be a greater productivity in horizontal spatial imaginings. Yet, as exemplified in the distinctions in idiom, subject, and style between *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *People of the City*, these spatial concordances are realized in vastly different manners and with distinct, if not unrelated, results. Both *Mission terminée* and *L'Aventure ambiguë*, moreover, serve as important critiques of the workings of late coloniality in the French empire. While neither text offers an optimistic picture for its respective protagonist, each, by exposing the stultifying workings of spatial formations upon the colonized territory, highlights the urgency of alternative paradigms for the production of social space and, within, through, and upon it, social subjectivity. Though lacking the linguistic and narrative experimentation of their Anglophone counterparts, these novels gesture towards the radical possibilities constrained within a monolithic vertical ordering by their very absence. Equally, all four of these novels illustrate the means through which literature extends beyond a merely descriptive function. By engaging, consciously or not, with the movements, conflicts, and debates undergirding the spatiality of their time and place, each text works through its productive function, alternately as critique and exposé. Perhaps most importantly, all four of these works comprise part of a larger, alternative archive of resistance and of contrapuntal spatial imaginings, a fact made more resonant by the status of each work's author as an active participant within spatial systems, both as artists and, in some cases, statesmen and activists. Literary writing, as demonstrated here, is far from passive, instead engaging with, intervening in, and constituting new possibilities for the larger production of space on the cusp of empire and independence.

Notes

[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]), 49-73.

[2] Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone, "Introduction," in *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.
[3] Edward W. Soja, "Foreword," in *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), ix.
[4] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), 9-11.
[5] John K. Noyes, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 20.
[6] Lefebvre, 29.
[7] Ibid., 28.
[8] Ibid., 7.
[9] Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 14.
[10] Ibid., 46.
[11] Noyes, 1.
[12] Kristen Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (London Verso, 2007), x.
[13] Richard de la Mare, quoted in Bernth Lindfors, *Early West African Writers: Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi and Ayi Kwei Armah* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2010), 30; Peter Sautoy, quoted in Linfords, *Early West African Writers*, 31.
[14] Letter from Faber and Faber to Daryll Forde, quoted in Lindfors, *Early West African Writers* 21.
[15] *New York Times Book Review*, in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1975), 15. All references to publicity material and press clippings around the publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* were consulted in the Bernth Lindfors papers at the Harry Ransom Centre (HRC), University of Texas-Austin.
[16] *New Yorker* book review, in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1975), 17.
[17] "Amos Tutuola: Neglected Palmwine Drinkard," *Sunday Tribune Magazine* 11 February 1986; Edward A. Gargan, "From a Nigerian Pen, Yoruba Tales," *New York Times*, 23 February 1986.
[18] "Author Interview: Amos Tutuola," *BOOKS*, April 1988, 15-19.
[19] Charles R. Larson, *The Ordeal of the African Writer* (London: Zed Books, 2001), 5.
[20] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005), 68; Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 27; see also Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: SAGE, 2002), 84.
[21] Gerald Moore, "Amos Tutuola: A Nigerian Visionary," in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1975), 52; Eldred Jones, "*The Palm Wine Drinkard:* Fourteen Years On," in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, ed. by Bernth Lindfors (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1975), 111.
[22] David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 121.
[23] Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014 [1952]), 8. Hereafter cited by page number.
[24] Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 86.
[25] Lefebvre, 87.
[26] Ibid., 285.
[27] See for instance, Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004).

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[30] Ibid., Extraordinary Meeting of NCNC Leaders 15 April 1957"; Ibid., "N.C.N.C. SPECIAL CONVENTION, APRIL 19, 1957.
[31] School of Oriental and African Studies Library (SOAS Library), PP MS 35, Cole Box 37, Final Press Communiqué, Nigeria Constitutional Conference, 1958.
[32] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 214.
[33] Marcus Doel, *Postmodern Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1999), 32.
[34] "Book Reviews," *Black Orpheus*, October 1958.
[35] Ernest Emenyonu, "The Man, Cyprian Ekwensi," in *The Essential Ekwensi*, ed. Ernest N. Emenyonu (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1987), 3
[36] Cyprian Ekwensi, *In My Time: The Autobiography of an African Writer*, unpublished manuscript, HRC, Charles R. Larson Papers, 8.2.
[37] The vast majority, if not all, of critical commentary on *People of the City* is on this revised edition. Here, however, my readings will focus on the original edition of the novel, which contains several significant episodes, characters and motifs absent from the Heinemann imprint.
[38] Juliet I. Okonkwo, "Ekwensi and Modern Nigerian Culture," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 7.2 (1976): 35.
[39] SOAS Library, PP MS 46, Hake, Box 53, Introduction to the Urban Problem in Tropical Africa, 1966.
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[41] Cyprian Ekwensi, *People of the City* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1954), 86. Hereafter cited by page number.
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[44] Cooper, 19.
[45] Emmanuel N. Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 102.
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[48] Okonkwo, "Modern Nigerian Culture," 37
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[50] Ash Amin, Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift, *Cities for the many not the few* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2000), 8.
[51] Obiechina, 103; Ernest N. Emenyonu, *Cyprian Ekwensi* (London: Evans Brothers, 1974), 37; 43.
[52] Okonkwo, "Modern Nigerian Culture," 40.
[53] Harvey, 235.
[54] Charles E. Nnolim, "The Journey Motif: Vehicle of Form, Structure, and Meaning in Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala,*" *Journal of Black Studies* 7.2 (1976): 183-4.
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[57] Aix en Provence, Archives nationales d'outre mer (ANOM), FM 1AFFPOL/930, Cameroun (1952), Documents ayant servi à l'élaboration des rapports à l'ONU sur le Cameroun, 33.
[58] Ibid.
[59] HIA, Box 1, Claude E. Welch Collection, Assemblée territoriale du cameroun, session budgétaire de mars-avril 1957; HIA, Joanny Guillard Collection, Changements de l'agriculture au cameroun oriental 1945-1960.
[60] Atangana, 28.

[61] HIA, Box 1, Claude E. Welch Collection, Assemblée territoriale du cameroun, session budgétaire de mars-avril 1957. Indeed, the "gift" of FIDES, half of which took the form of loans from the Caisse Centrale de la France d'Outre mer (CCFOM), often proved to be a curse, tying the developing nations of French Africa into long-term relationships of debt and dependency on the metropolitan centre.
[62] ANOM, FR ANOM DPTC37, Incidents, attentats (1953/1959), Note sur les evenements actuels au Cameroun, 31 December 1956.
[63] Mongo Beti, *Mission terminée* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1957), 13; Mongo Beti, *Mission to Kala*, translated by Peter Green (Aylesbeare: Mallory, 2008), 1. All English translations are taken from this version, with my slight alterations to preserve meaning from original. Hereafter cited by page number.
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[65] SOAS Library, Movement for Colonial Freedom, Box 38, Cameroon, *Rape of Cameroons*, 3
[66] ANOM, FR ANOM DPTC37, Incidents, attentats (1953/1959), Note sur les evenements actuels au Cameroun, 31 December 1956.
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[69] Ibid., 61
[70] Ibid., 90.
[71] Gerald Moore, *Twelve African Writers* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 193.
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[83] Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 59.
[84] Kadiatu Kanneh, *African Identities: Race, Nation and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism and Black Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1998), 32.
[85] Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'aventure ambiguë* (Paris, Julliard, 1961), 161; Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, translated by Katherine Woods (New York: Melville House, 1963), 134. All English translations are taken from this version, with my slight alterations to preserve meaning from original. Hereafter cited by page number.
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[88] ANOM, FR ANOM 4101COL915/8, Sénégal (1941/1954), Gouvernement Géneral de l'Afrique Occidentale Française, Territoire du Sénégal, Rapport Économique, 1951. The combined urban population of Dakar, Kaolack and Louga, according to this report, rose to 327,440 inhabitants by the end of 1951 from 263,784 in 1950.
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[92] Kanneh, 35.
[93] Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2009), 3.
[94] Chafer, 13.