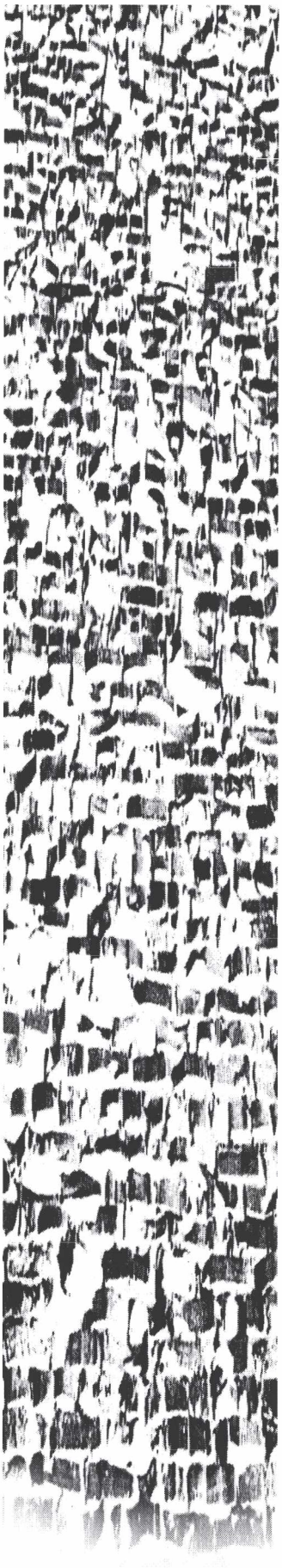

Imagined Temporalities:

The temporalizing of neocolonialism and nation-narrations in Aminata Sow Fall's Ex-père de la nation and Juan Balboa Boneke's El reencuentro: el retorno del exiliado

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If imperial literatures frequently take space as their narratological axis – the expanding territorial holdings of the empire and the dramas, historical and fictionalized, that play out upon them – then postcolonial texts often center implicitly about representations of time instead. Rare is the Western novel set in the colonial or postcolonial world that fundamentally considers events as happening *again*; rather, such works as Conrad's Heart of Darkness and Bellow's Henderson the Rain King focus on a trajectory of non-repetitive events, commonly in the form of a physical journey whose philosophical counterpart for the protagonist is spurred by the one-time transit through the foreign space itself. The works of many African novelists, on the contrary, begin at a starting point that in hindsight turns out to be a point but not a start: the Independence which does not yield independence, the date of freedom from centuries of colonization followed by endless dates of further repression and continued lack of popular autonomy. This return of the oppressive, presided over by the new national heads of state but often championed and directed by the old colonial forces, is the benchmark of two West African novels from the 1980s, Aminata Sow Fall's Ex-père de la nation and Juan Balboa Boneke's El reencuentro: el retorno del exiliado. Yet these texts adopt opposing strategies of temporal representation in their narrative of the failed creation of the autonomous African nation: for Sow Fall, the persistent and pernicious presence of neocolonialism, represented principally in the form of the advisor Andru, reveals a cyclical warping of time so that the horrific postcolonial present seems merely a repetition of the colonial past; whereas for Balboa, the postcolonial moment has been terminated definitively by a new era, a post-postcolonial period brought about by a coup, and this linearity of national progression allows him to reevaluate the colonial past and, in contrast to Sow Fall, measure more ambivalently and optimistically the contours of the neocolonial future. In so doing, these two novels establish a possible ba-

sis for distinguishing West African literature into postcolonial and post-postcolonial aesthetics, according to a given text's representation of the temporality of an African nation as a reiterating, stunted cyclical movement whose narrative present is only a foreclosed repetition of the narrativized past, or as a singular, ongoing historical trajectory that admits of an open-ended future.

The extra-literary contexts of Ex-père de la nation and El reencuentro resemble each other in several aspects. While still young, both Sow Fall and Balboa left West Africa to pursue higher education for a number of years in their homelands' respective imperial seats, France and Spain. The voluntary stay of seven years turned out to be a one-time event for Sow Fall, as she returned to Senegal permanently in 1969, but Balboa was to experience a second period of expatriation, this time forced, as he spent most of the 1970s in exile from Equatorial Guinea on the Spanish island of Mallorca. The familiarity of both writers with European culture is apparent throughout Ex-père de la nation and El reencuentro, and it is their negotiation of that presence – particularly as it arises in the form of neocolonialism – that establishes disparate baselines for their evaluations of imperial power in the new African states. Sow Fall's novel recounts the rise and fall of Madiama, a fictional country's first post-independence leader, told in the form of his memoirs. As such, the narrative is literally over before it starts, a closed and circular structure that serves as a metaphor for the nation itself: controlled by Andru, a machiavellian aide sponsored by the old colonial regime, and ultimately succeeded in a coup by Massiri, a new dictator, Madiama lives in an iterative present that seems but the reenactment of the autocratic past and future. Balboa's text, on the other hand, traces the return of an exile to Equatorial Guinea upon the toppling of the country's first post-independence leader, the real historical figure Francisco Macías Nguema. The protagonist (also named Balboa) of this semi-autobiographical novel believes that a distinct new era has begun in his country, and he travels the land trying to discern how the colonial, ethnic, national and neocolonial factors that are present might somehow combine to construct an autonomous political state in West Africa.

In one sense, then, El reencuentro begins its story where Ex-père de la nation concludes, for the overthrow of the nation's first elected president – conceived of in both cases as long overdue, given the increasing quantity of atrocities committed by that leader – is the starting point of the former text and the final plot development of the latter. Yet the two novels do not simply take place along different moments of the same timeline because their very notion of time, indeed of linearity, radically differs. The fundamental question for Sow Fall and Balboa is aesthetic and ideological at once: are the past, present and future aligned with distinct political moments in national history (colonialism, post-independence, post-postindependence or however the second and successive national governments are termed), or is time itself a largely iterative medium that denies the closure of the colonial past and the possibility of a singular national future? The respective strategies in representing time therefore carry political predictions as to whether African nations can hope one day to achieve the autonomy hitherto denied them. The divergent answers implied by the temporal-political structures of Ex-père de la nation and El reencuentro are particularly noteworthy given that the texts appeared virtually simultaneously on the West African scene, in 1987 and 1985, and so are nearly absolute contemporaries. Furthermore, on a fundamental level, both texts owe their very existence to the old colonial order they seek to critique, as they are scripted in French and Spanish, not Wolof and Bôhôbe, and published in Paris and Madrid, not Dakar and Malabo. Yet though they thereby implicitly partake in a common discourse on West African nationhood from within the same general post-imperial framework, their temporalizations of neocolonialism are strikingly dissimilar.

From the very commencement of Ex-père de la nation and El reencuentro, the respective first-person narrators adopt opposing rhetorics of time, literally as well as metaphorically. Madiama opens his narrative by deliberately obscuring his calendrical frame of reference and also by indicating the closure of his personal trajectory through time: "En ce jour de l'hivernage de l'année 196.. où je décide d'écrire mes souvenirs, rien ne me lie plus aux contingences de la vie."[1] ["In this day of the wintering of the year 196.. wherein I decide to write my memoirs, nothing ties me anymore to the contingencies of life."] This double move – giving an unspecified year and presenting the text as "souvenirs" of a life now effectively over – establishes a present that is unfixed and a past whose circumscription forecloses any possibility of a future. In contrast, Balboa (the protagonist)* opens his narrative by situating himself firmly in the present and in determinate calendrical time: "Por fin vuelvo a casa...Tras once años, once largos e interminables años...Han transcurrido varios meses del brote providencial del rayo de luz que barrió la oscura noche tempestuosa que, durante más de una década, cubrió y azotó nuestro país. En los ribetes de ese acontecimiento, una fecha se hizo presente y tomó cuerpo y vida en nuestra historia: El 3 de agosto de 1979."[2] ["Finally I am returning home...After eleven years, eleven long and interminable years...Some months have passed since the providential outbreak of the ray of light that swept away the dark and tempestuous night that, during more than a decade, covered and battered our country. Among the particulars of that event, a date

made itself present and took on bodily form and life in our history: August 3, 1979."] By anchoring his narrative in the immediate present ("vuelvo a casa" ["I am returning home"]) and a specific historical date (that of the coup that toppled Macías, the first post-independence leader of Equatorial Guinea), Balboa implies the existence of an open (as yet unwritten) future about to scroll forth chronologically upon a determinate period now past, the eleven years of the dictatorship. This temporal linearity – straight and ever stretching both forward and back, divisible into successive historical segments – establishes a framework for the ongoing trajectory of national history that is denied by Madiama in his literal rejection of both an absolute calendar and the existence of a future beyond his own text.

The passage of history, however, can be measured not only by dates and subjective positioning but by mobile metaphorical glyphs as well, by the movement (or lack thereof) of signs across space. Coincidentally, both Madiama and Balboa choose natural symbols as their principal markers of metaphorical time. Each of the opening four paragraphs of Madiama's memoirs commences by invoking temporal constructs, yet only the first does so with reference to a calendar. The latter three instead focus directly on the sun:

> L'astre royal avance imperceptiblement…Et le soleil avancera toujours…Je pourrais bien comparer mon destin à celui du soleil, mais je ne suis pas le soleil et la plus grande erreur de ma vie aura été d'avoir cédé au mirage et d'avoir cru que je lui ressemblais. Le soleil décline pour prendre le temps de renaître. Demain, à cette heure-ci, il recommencera son ascension vers le sommet de sa gloire pendant que moi, Son Excellence en désillusion, je poursuivrai mes détours dans le labyrinthe de ma conscience obscurcie par huit années de règne, de sécheresse, de faim et de malheur.[3]
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> [The royal star advances imperceptibly…And the sun will advance always…I could well compare my destiny to that of the sun, but I am not the sun and the greatest error of my life would have been ceding to the mirage and having believed that I resembled it. The sun sets to take the time to be reborn. Tomorrow, at this same hour, it will recommence its ascension toward the summit of its glory while I, His Excellency in disillusion, I will continue my turns in the labyrinth of my conscience darkened by eight years of reign, drought, hunger and misfortune.]

Solar allegories of time are inherently dualistic, allowing for a conception of time as either inherently cyclical (as ever-repeating rise and fall) or endlessly progressing forward. Madiama clearly recognizes a certain heavenly cycle as occurring, but he frames it directly within a vision of an eternal march ahead in which he does not participate: his "plus grande erreur," ["greatest error"] in fact, was believing that he too would "avance." ["advance"] Unlike the sun, "le temps de renaître" ["time to be reborn"] is not permitted him, and the only transit he will mark is circumscribed within "le labyrinthe de ma conscience obscurcie." [the labyrinth of my darkened conscience"] This metaphorical alienation from temporal advancement underscores his isolation from both calendrical and personal linear time as noted above, as the future is foreclosed to him at all levels and the past is but an eternal *revenant*. Allegorically, this does not bode well for the nation whose existence he once incarnated, he who upon election had been apotheosized as "Un fils du pays pour le destin du pays, enfin! Cela manquait depuis trois siècles."[4] ["A son of the country for the destiny of the country, finally! This has been lacking for three centuries."] Metaphorical and literal time conjoin to shatter the erstwhile belief that independence would mark a new, definitive era after three centuries of colonialism: the past can be replayed but not passed, and of this the once and future fils, père, and ex-père is convinced.

Balboa also intends to structure time symbolically from the very opening of his narration. His starting point, specific unlike Madiama's, is the 1979 date most denominate as "El Golpe de la libertad" ["The Coup of liberty"] but that he characterizes as "el inicio de las jornadas de reflexión, con vistas al futuro."[5] ["the beginning of the days of reflection, with visions set toward the future."] The discrete calendrical moment of the coup marks a definitive break with the past: "esa fecha abrió en nuestro hogar del exilio una nueva ilusión del viejo y cada año renovado proyecto, del retorno definitivo a casa. Esa jornada hizo renacer…la esperanza, en los miles de corazones guineanos. Todos empezamos a mirar hacia el futuro. Hacia el futuro hoy imprevisible, cuyo resultado final depende únicamente de nosotros."[6] ["that date opened in our exile home a new dream of the old and every-year renewed project of the definitive return home. That day gave rebirth to…hope in the thousands of Guinean hearts. We all began to look toward the future. Toward the future today unforeseeable, whose final result depends only on us."] The "temps de renaître" and "jornada [que] hizo renacer…la esperanza" ["day that gave rebirth to…hope"] from which Madiama – and by extension, his nation – is excluded indicates here the explicit potential of an unscripted future for both Balboa and his country. This time (also: in this time) Balboa is like the sun Madiama sees, advancing through space and time and ever rolling back the night. The first pas-

sage from El reencuentro cited above styles the 1979 coup as the "rayo de luz que barrió la oscura noche tempestuosa que, durante más de una década, cubrió y azotó nuestro país."[7] ["ray of light that swept away the dark and tempestuous night that, during more than a decade, covered and battered our country."] Adds Balboa a few paragraphs later, "La tétrica nube, inexorablemente, sumiría a nuestro país en una larga y cruel noche de una década de duración. Lentamente avanzaba y a su paso iba quebrando en mil pedazos las recién moldeadas tinajas rebosantes de esperanza y fe en un futuro prometedor."[8] ["The gloomy cloud, inexorably, would plunge our country into a long and cruel night of a decade's duration. Slowly it advanced and in its path went along breaking in a thousand pieces the recently molded earthenware jars brimming with hope and faith in a promising future"] The trope of a stormy night representing the toppled dictatorship (i.e., the first postcolonial government) surfaces throughout the novel, with the moment of the coup associated with solar rebirth and renewal and therefore linear progress through time, that same solar and temporal advancement that Madiama and his nation-narration is denied.*

Madiama is literally and figuratively a spectator to time; Balboa is a participant in its construction. The implications for their respective national histories is crucial, for the temporalization of the narrative of the nation renders differentially the distinctness of its past from its present and future – indeed, posits whether that future is theoretically possible in the first place – and suggests the potential that the post-independence polity, both as an organic entity and as a composite of discrete individuals, may or may not have to shape the nation autonomously. Two particular moments of explicitly temporalized visions of the nation-narration reveal in relief these contrasting strategies of representation, as each narrator seeks to situate the present within opposing schema of temporal imbrication. In a significant passage just before his acquiescence to the crackdown, urged by Andru, on the crowd outside the presidential palace, Madiama observes the main street in the capital as follows:

> Elle [l'avenue] avait été témoin des grands moments de l'histoire de notre pays depuis l'époque où elle n'était qu'une longue allée rectiligne dans l'enceinte de la forteresse qui se dressait à la place du Château. Lorsque, de l'observatoire de la forteresse, les vigiles avaient décelé un mouvement de troupes en direction de la ville, la batterie sonore de tams-tams spéciaux déversait sur l'allée tout ce que la zone comptait en hommes valides. Plus tard un colonne de soldats venus du nord s'y était engagée et avait avancé centimètre par centimètre, à travers un brouillard rouge de latérite, sur des cadavres, sous le choc des lances et des sabres…L'allée fut par la suite goudronnée et baptisée "Avenue du général Béret", en hommage à l'homme qui avait dirigé la conquête. Depuis l'indépendance elle est l'"Avenue de la liberté" et abrite le défilé de la fête de l'indépendance.[9]
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> [It [the avenue] had been witness to the great moments of the history of our country since the epoch when it was but a long straight path within the walls of the fortress that rose up in place of the Château. When, from the observatory of the fortress, the watchmen had detected a movement of troops in direction of the town, the sonorous battery of the special tam-tams poured out over the path as the zone filled with able-bodied men. Later, a column of soldiers come from the north was engaged there and had advanced centimeter by centimeter through a red fog of laterite over cadavers, under the clash of spears and sabers. The path was subsequently tarred and baptized "Avenue of General Béret" in homage to the man who had directed the conquest. Since independence it has been the "Avenue of Liberty" and sheltered the parade of the independence parade.]

Clearly, Madiama deliberately deconstructs the superficial linear temporality established in this vision – the chronologically successive eras of national history – to reveal that all of those periods are reiterations of one another. After all, the basic script is always the same: though different armies march up the main street in the names of different generals and different conquests, the récit itself of military conquest is perpetually repeated. The distinctions of epoch and precedence fade before the similarities of narrative recurrence. The current name of the "Avenue de la liberté" thus no more marks a novel period than did "Avenue du général Béret," for the people of the nation still do not possess independence and autonomy, a fact about to be made violently clear as Madiama and Andru send in yet another army to march down the main street. It is obvious that Madiama's militia will not be the last to do so either, and that the street's next name will signify not a new political order but a repeated one.

A parallel passage in El reencuentro could not temporalize nationhood more differently. Upon sighting the primary island of Equatorial Guinea from his inbound plane's window, Balboa gazes at his nation's history as a series of distinct, successive eras:

> Ayer, en el remoto ayer y en su feracidad tradicional, [la isla] pertenecía al reino del

"ERI", denominación por ello "ETULA ERI". En la versión del colonizador, en honor de su redescubridor, descubrido para Europa, isla de Fernando Póo. Hoy, por el fenómeno extraño de nuestra reciente y azarosa historia, dos veces se le ha cambiado de nombre: Isla Macías Nguema, durante el reciente régimen derrocado. En la actualidad, Biôkô. Ante tantos cambios, me pregunto: Mañana, ¿isla de qué será? Yo...con el debido respeto que me merece su actual denominación, prefiero otorgarle, en mi intimidad, ese rango de reino: "reino de ERI". Es lo suyo.[10]

[Yesterday, in the remote yesterday and in its traditional rich fertility, [the island] belonged to the "ERI" kingdom, and therefore was denominated "ETULA ERI". In the version of the colonizer, in honor of its rediscoverer, discovered for Europe, the island of Fernando Póo. Today, for the strange phenomenon of our recent and turbulent history, twice its name has been changed: Macías Nguema Island, during the recent, overthrown regime. Currently, Biôkô. Before so many changes, I ask myself: Tomorrow, the island will be what? I...with the respect due from me to its current denomination, prefer to bestow upon it, in my privacy, that royal rank: "ERI kingdom". That is its own.]

Each new name of the island therefore corresponds to a distinct historical period, from the quasi-mythical royal past, colonization and independence to the determinate present and the unscripted future. Each epoch in turn also corresponds to a novel political structure for the land: an indigenous foundational myth yields to colonial domination from the North, followed by an autonomous postcolonial dictatorship and, now, the post-postindependence order whose signs are of uncertain stability. Whereas Madiama narrativizes national history as forever temporally imbricated unto itself, Balboa separates history into distinct layers that are inextricable from their differentiated and successive political structures; the récit each time is a new one. Each time, in fact, really is a new time, and where Madiama utilizes a superficial temporal linearity to underscore its very lack, such as in his history of the main street, Balboa chooses a wistful but impossible cyclical vision – returning the island to its mythic, original name – that only underlines his fundamentally progressive development of the nation-narration itself.

Clearly, any text that seeks to discourse upon history must necessarily adopt a subjective attitude towards temporality, for time is no more absolute than the nations who claim a place in it. In postcolonial allegories as in all narratives, time is scripted like everything else, and a passage of time literally is that: a passage, structured and scrolled, signed and signified for ends that are themselves inevitably rhetorical and politicized. Even naturalist-realist narratives that purport temporal veracity by privileging series of dates are essentially no more literal than the solar glyph that may or may not ever circle or ever advance; even calendrical time is but a metaphor, and the "196..." that Madiama alludes to is only the half-pronounced sign of the latest version of a particular calendar based upon a particular foundational story. Narrators of new nations cannot eschew time, for there is no such thing as an atemporal imagined community: signs must be assigned to imagined pasts, presents and futures, or else the imagined community itself dissolves into unnarratability and, therefore, theoretical impossibility. But what happens when the narration of the novel is faced with the intrusion of a pretext? Does the pre become post or the post, pre? What happens, in short, when the neocolonial enters the postcolonial? Does time turn back on itself, forge on ahead, or sunder into untextuality? And what nation-narrations does post-independence African literature posit as a result?

The Temporalizing of Neocolonialism

A common criticism of the term "postcolonial" is its seeming implication that colonialism is a terminated stage of national history, a conclusion that often seems faulty at best given the presence of neocolonialism, economic and cultural as well as political. Neocolonialism itself, however, is problematic semantically because it is precisely the colonialism which is not "neo" at all but, if anything, retro. Furthermore, "neocolonialism" masks the question of whether the influence of the former colonial power upon a new African nation represents a temporal continuity of the forces that were present prior to independence, or whether there has been a temporal disjuncture and the presence of the neocolonial is actually a discrete second coming. The difference is critical to narrativizing the nation because the former implies wholesale cyclicality and repetition (of time, plot and conclusion) of the national récit while the latter, though allowing for such reiteration, also offers the possibility that the cycle can be broken, that linear time indeed has transited during the initial post-independence period and that this may happen again, even under the presence of neocolonial forces. The representations of neocolonialism in Ex-père de la nation and El reencuentro reveal that the structures of temporality are indissoluble not only from the portrayal of the old imperial powers but from the very question of whether new African nations might one day exist as truly autonomous polities.

Both novels open by countering their respective nation-narrators with archetypal representatives

of the former imperial governments. Andru, Madiama's chief aide, arises from the old colonial regime and unctuously tells the president upon national independence, "Nous sommes ici, Excellence, pour vous donner nos humbles conseils afin de consolider votre règne."[11] ["We are here, Excellency, to give you our humble counsel in order to consolidate your reign."] Madiama, impressed by Andru's encyclopedic knowledge of the country, notes, "Je venais de me rendre compte que je n'avais pas saisi toutes les demensions du pays, parce que tout simplement j'avais cru qu'il suffisait d'être un fils et de regarder sa mère pour la connaître...Mon ignorance m'avait surpris. Andru m'était apparu comme une encyclopédie. C'était suffisant pour mériter mon respect."[12] ["I had just realized that I had not grasped all the dimensions of the country, because very simply I had believed that it was sufficient to be a son and to regard the mother in order to know her. My ignorance had surprised me. Andru seemed to me like an encyclopedia. That was sufficient to merit my respect."] But Andru is not the only neocolonial influence operating at the nation's birth, for Madiama himself was picked by the outgoing imperial power as a medium for continuing colonial exploitation: "Tout le monde savait que le peuple allait entériner le choix de l'autorité coloniale qui, quatorze mois auparavant, avait déposé l'indepéndance de mon pays entre mes mains en ma qualité de président du Conseil du gouvernement...En réalité je ne gouvernais pas. L'armée, la défense, les finances, tous les secteurs clés étaient encore contrôlés par l'ancienne autorité comme au temps de l'autonomie."[13] ["Everyone knew that the people were going to ratify the choice of the colonial authority who, fourteen months previously, had deposited the independence of the country in my hands in my position as president of the Council of the government...In reality I did not govern. The army, defense, finances, all the key sectors were still controlled by the former authority as in the times of the autonomy."] The former rulers barely disguise their continuing interest in the new country by telling its citizens, "Avec Madiama, nous serons à vos côtés en cas de difficultés."[14] ["With Madiama, we will be at your side in case of difficulties."] The rule of law, then, is overseen by the ostensibly departed colonial power so that neither temporality nor the national script has changed. No new era has been inaugurated with independence because the old era is now merely repeating itself under a different name.

Balboa too frames his nation-narration with an interlocutor from the old imperial order, this time an Spanish ex-colonist who is his seatmate on the plane heading to Equatorial Guinea. The Spaniard, like Balboa, had fled from Macías many years earlier and is now returning for the first time to see what is left of his lands and whether they might be recovered. But crucially, this return does not mark a repetition, a neocolonial rewriting of the postcolonial. After initiating the conversation, the Spaniard comments, "Pasé la mejor época de mi vida en Fernando Póo, ¡perdón!, en la Isla Biôkô."[15] ["I spent the best period of my life in Fernando Póo, pardon!, on Biôkô Island."] Unlike Andru and Madiama, the Spaniard recognizes that an epochal disjuncture has occurred; his hastily-corrected slip of the tongue shows an understanding that a new temporal-political order now exists in Equatorial Guinea distinct from that under imperial rule, the proof of which lies in the same signs later signalled by the narrator, the changing names of the island now known as Biôkô. The Spaniard's return to the country is therefore not a reiteration of the colonial past but some sort of nuanced new temporality in which the presence of old imperial forces is actually part of a novel chapter in an open-ended narrativization of the nation. Balboa acknowledges this contributory element and asks the Spaniard, "¿Cómo ve el futuro de nuestro país?"[16] ["How do you see the future of our country?"] The unscrolling national text now has shared authorship – "nuestro país" ["our country"] – and the Spaniard even hesitantly refers to Balboa three times as "paisano."[17] Madiama certainly attributes authorship of the national text to the omnipresent and omniscient Andru, but this is always clearly a foreign hand at work, using the same imperial pen that also scripted colonialism; Balboa, however, is willing to admit the once-banished, now-returning colonial into the writing of the new national era. He asks for and listens attentively to the Spaniard's prescription for the Equatoguinean future, namely, that a state of law be established. This emphasis on the as-yet-unmarked future contrasts sharply with Andru's presence as the enforcer of the already-written past.

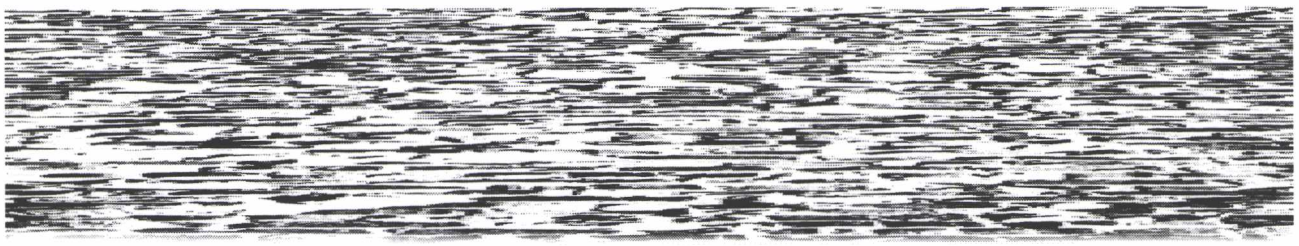
These distinct temporalizations of the neocolonial, therefore, lead to dramatically different conceptualizations of the nation-narrations at hand. Both Andru and the Spaniard represent the old colonial order, but the former is situated in reiteration and the latter in novelty. The nation as a legal construct becomes but one more allegory of scripted time, for Andru's autocratic law is the circumscribed past and the Spaniard's projected state of law is the unpenned future. Madiama's nation-narration is absolutist and foreclosed because it does not admit of difference, only eternal sameness, and there is no permissible relationship between empire and former colony in the post-independence order save for the old exploitative one. Balboa's text, on the other hand, is open temporally and therefore semantically and semiotically and so can conceptualize a future relationship between the former empire and new nation that leads forward and not back: he tells the Spanish ex-colonist, "Guinea y España están condenados a entenderse. Es fundamental la normalización y entendimiento profundo entre los dos países."[18] ["Guinea and Spain are condemned to understand *(or: to get along with; or: to communicate*

with) each other. Normalization and profound understanding *(or: communication)* between the two countries is fundamental."] The two countries may be condemned by historical momentum to relate to each other, and yet if done properly this may actually lead to a mutual narrativization on new grounds. The problem for Madiama and Andru is that their countries understand each other all too well – there is no room for negotiation of meaning – for there is no temporal *différance* in which that inscription can be signified anew.

Both Andru and the Spanish ex-colonist initially engage in a teacher-student relationship in which their knowledge of and prescriptions for the new African nation are received as wisdom by the impressed ex-colonial subjects who narrate the two novels at hand. But this position taken by Madiama and Balboa gradually sunders as the former increasingly sees Andru's influence as nefarious and machiavellian: "je me sentais de plus en plus irrité par la lutte que je menais perpétuellement contre moi pour ne pas être manoeuvré par lui comme une marionnette."[19] ["I felt more and more irritated by the fight I was perpetually leading against myself to not be maneuvered by him like a marionette."] This manipulation by the neocolonial soon is (re)written as infernal: "J'eus envie de réduire en bouillie ce gringalet machiavélique...Andru en remplissait tout l'espace avec sa tignasse du diable, ses prunelles étincelantes du diable, ses moustaches du diable."[20] ["I felt like beating to a pulp this machiavellian runt...Andru filled up all space with his shock of hair of the devil, his sparkling pupils of the devil, his whiskers of the devil."] Madiama's realization that the old hellish imperial order has never ceased to rule the nation, that time did not move ahead with independence but merely repeated itself and will do so again, is an understanding that Andru shares as a matter of course. In response to Madiama's outrage, the aide responds smoothly, "Au revoir, Excellence. Je suis à côté, toujours disponible pour vous servir quand vous le désirerez."[21] ["Goodbye, Excellence. I am at your side, always available to serve you when you desire."] For the neocolonial, "toujours" ["always"] really is a literal and eternal "revoir," ["to see again"] and Madiama (and allegorically, the nation he incarnates) will never experience a future that has escaped from its past.

On the contrary, the structural scripting of temporality and neocolonialism established by Balboa is precisely what allows for the most significant non-event in his narrative: the absence of a backlash against the neocolonial teacher. In stylized conversations throughout his text, Balboa lectures various Equatoguineans on the need for the legalistic nation recommended by the Spanish ex-colonist. Thus, Balboa informs his sister-in-law Bônay that "Es necesaria una obra de infraestructura en el terreno legal. Es preciso garantizar, lo más urgentemente posible, un Estado de Derecho que afiance definitivamente la libertad e integridad de la persona, sea de donde fuere."[22] ["A work of infrastructure in the legal terrain is necessary. It is imperative to guarantee, as urgently as possible, a State of Law that definitively consolidates the liberty and integrity of the individual, wherever he may be from."] And to his aged aunt, Balboa praises Spain as a model for Equatorial Guinea because "En ese país, la ley está por encima de todos y obliga todos. Está por encima incluso del presidente, por encima del rey."[23] ["In that country, the law is above everyone and obliges everyone. It is even above the president, above the king."] Balboa thereby writes the Spanish ex-colonist's suggested récit for Equatorial Guinea into his own narrativization of the national future. This is only possible in the first place because Balboa conceptualizes the neocolonial presence not as a reinitiation of an earlier historical chapter but as a novel opportunity for a potentially scriptable nation. The particular encoding proposed by the ex-colonist, however, is not palimpsestic, for Balboa does not wish to erase the past but instead write the future; the question of what the island will be named tomorrow does not imply a denial of its significations in previous and successive political temporalities. And yet there is the sense of *différance* proportioned by the palimpsest in which, though the shadows of the older national narration may yet be discerned, the new scripting of the same space may evoke a different plot and conclusion. The colonialism represented (also: re-presented) by Andru, on the other hand, does not allow for even a rewriting of the earlier récit so much as its retracing, this time in the looping pen of Madiama and next time, presumably, in that of Massiri, the dictator who succeeds him. The absolutist, personalized law of Madiama (and above him, Andru and the neocolonial power) admits no negotiation of the present, much less defers signification to the future, whereas the state of law envisioned by Balboa and the Spanish ex-colonist is a construct that will be negotiated into existence to handle differences in a future present. In short, the political order of the nation and the temporal structure of the text (that of the two novels and the nation-narrations they script) are one and the same thing.

Neocolonialism is an unstable term and replete with variegated imports, and neither Andru nor the Spanish ex-colonist represents fully the neocolonial in Ex-père de la nation and El reencuentro. In the former, figures from the old imperial order like Baudrain and the "partenaires du Nord"[24] [partners from the North] also reemerge intermittently to underscore that neither time nor political power has changed; Baudrain, the neocolonial agent whose two appearances signal the beginning and end of the Madiama cycle of national history, is thus duly recognized the second time by the president as "Un revenant!"[25] [A ghost!] All



ghosts, as Derrida observes, make only repeat appearances; all *revenants* literally do come again.[26] The return of the colonial in El reencuentro is also not restricted to a single figure, that of the Spanish ex-colonist, and as with temporality, Balboa's representations are more nuanced and admitting of differential verdicts than Madiama's. For although Balboa accepts wholeheartedly the need for a European-style state of law, he argues that his nation-narration would be improved if shorn of cultural and economic neocolonialism, from the Christian church setting in which a Bôhôbe religious ceremony now takes place to the foreign alcohol that has replaced the traditional palm wine. Balboa's ability to discern among positive and negative aspects of neocolonialism is permitted *a priori* by his acceptance of the existence of temporal-political *différance* that is inconceivable to Madiama and the nation-naration scripted in Ex-père de la nation.

In the end, Madiama recognizes the fundamental temporal-political cycle of that nation-narration, that text of the life of himself and his country that is enclosed and foreclosed, encircled by and circling within neocolonialism. Finishing his memoirs, he writes, "Cela fait déjà trois ans que je suis enfermé dans ce réduit...Ceux qui m'adulaient hier me blâment aujourd'hui. Ils ont transféré sur Massiri tout ce qu'ils m'avaient donné. Est-il assez naïf pour y croire! Il semble y croire, ou joue à le croire. Il finira par y croire sans s'en rendre compte. Dommage...."[27] ["It has been three years that I have been enclosed in this redoubt...Those who adulated me yesterday blame me today. They have transferred onto Massiri all that they had given me. He is naïve enough to believe them! He appears to believe them, or pretends to believe them. He will end up believing them without realizing it. Pity..."] The conclusion for Madiama's narration and, in a larger sense, for all the African nations attempting to be scripted, is profoundly nihilistic: history, regardless of whether it is forgotten or denied or unknown or ignored, is condemned to be repeated. But the final positioning for Balboa could not be more different, as he reflects,

> Si ayer gané mi libertad como país, si hoy rijo mi destino lejos de la presencia física colonial que me forzó a adoptar una conducta de vida extraña a mi sentir como pueblo y como africano; si ayer, pese a la fina represión colonial, viví sin temor, recorrí las calles y plazas de mi pueblo...lo lógico es que hoy, con El reencuentro conmigo mismo como país, esos conceptos del terror y desconfianza estuvieran totalmente desterrados de nuestro entorno. Tengo fe que algún día ese temor desaparezca...[28]
>
> [If yesterday I won my liberty as a country, if today I govern my destiny far from the physical colonial presence that forced me to adopt a lifestyle foreign to my sensibility as a people and as African; if yesterday, despite the fine colonial repression, I lived without fear and traveled the streets and plazas of my people...the logical thing is that today, with the reencounter with myself as a country, those concepts of terror and lack of trust could be totally banished from our setting. I have faith that some day that fear will disappear...]

Yesterday comprises the discrete period of colonialism, the moment of independence, and the barely speakable terrors of post-independence; today marks a reencounter of self and nation that is not a meeting again but a meeting anew, a distinct temporality from which the uncertain future may be projected. The outlook for African nation-narrations, by extrapolation, is not pessimistic precisely because the horrific past need not ineluctably trace itself forevermore into the present and future. Temporal *différance* allows for epochal political differences, so that neocolonialism and time are mutally signifying allegories. Perhaps, then, Ex-père de la Nation may be said to belong to a postcolonial aesthetics, characterized generically by its representation of neocolonialism and the nation-narration as cyclical, and El reencuentro to a post-postcolonial aesthetics, in which the national script is linear and neocolonialism is distinct from colonialism. Other contemporary African novels of nation-narration, such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Matigari, perhaps could be identified as leaning more towards one temporal-political aesthetic structure or the other, the postcolonial or the post-postcolonial. For imagined temporalities, like the communities scripted within them, are written in particular ways for particular purposes, and their récits are nothing less than the projected narrative of Africa itself.

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Notes

[1] Aminata Sow Fall, Ex-Père de la Nation (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987), 7.

[*] All subsequent references to "Balboa" will be to the protagonist of El Reencuentro, not the author.

[2] Juan Balboa Boneke, El Reencuentro: el retorno del exiliado (Madrid: Ediciones Guinea, 1985), 9.

[3] Sow Fall, 7-8.

[4] Sow Fall, 11.

[5] Balboa, 9.

[6] Balboa, 9-10.

[7] Balboa, 9.

[8] Balboa, 11.

[*] Other examples of linear solar time abound in El Reencuentro. For instance, referring to the new period now following the Macías dictatorship, Balboa writes, "...la tranquilidad que nace después de la noche aciaga llena de tormentas tenebrosas. Y nuestra noche fue larga, muy larga: Fue la noche cruenta de una década de duración. Afortunadamente ya pasó. Ya es historia. Una historia tétrica que espero no se reproduzca jamás en nuestros [sic] solar, ni en ningún otro del mundo. Que tanto los dirigentes de hoy, como los de mañana y los de siempre, luchen con honradez y tenacidad por encontrar...la visión clara." (63) ["...the tranquility that is born after the tragic night full of dark gloomy storms. And our night was long, very long: It was the bloody night of a decade's duration. Fortunately, it is now past. Already it is history. A sad and gloomy history that I hope will never be reproduced in our homeland, nor in any other in the world. May the leaders of today, as much as those of tomorrow and those of forever, fight with honor and tenacity in order to find...clear vision."] According to Balboa, the light that has followed the long night of dictatorship will advance forever into the future, a linear vision of solar time that precludes (he hopes) the cyclical repetition of that night in a reiterated form.

[9] Sow Fall, 136.

[10] Balboa, 34-5.

[11] Sow Fall, 8.

[12] Sow Fall, 9.

[13] Sow Fall, 10.

[14] Sow Fall, 11.

[15] Balboa, 17.

[16] Balboa, 17.

[17] Balboa, 21, 23 and 26.

[18] Balboa, 24.

[19] Sow Fall, 91.

[20] Sow Fall, 93.

[21] Sow Fall, 93.

[22] Balboa, 81.

[23] Balboa, 132.

[24] Sow Fall, 79. The term is also used elsewhere in the novel.

[25] Sow Fall, 164.

[26] See "Injunctions of Marx," the opening chapter of Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International, Trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 3-48.

[27] Sow Fall, 188.

[28] Balboa, 225-6.