

Africa Sf: Introduction

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In 2010, Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009), the first Kenyan sf movie, won the best short film award at the Cannes Independent Film Festival, and Neill Blomkamp's South African co-production *District 9* (2009) was nominated for four Oscars. In 2011, Nigerian-American Nnedi Okorafor became the first author of African descent to win the World Fantasy Award, with *Who Fears Death* (2010), and South African Lauren Beukes became the first person from Africa to win the Arthur C. Clarke Award, with her second novel, *Zoo City* (2010). In 2012, Ivor W. Hartmann edited *AfroSF*, the first anthology of sf by African Writers.

Kahiu is currently adapting Okorafor's novel to film; Blomkamp has graduated to Hollywood blockbusters, with *Elysium* (2013); Hartmann has a sequel volume of novellas in preparation; and Leonardo DiCaprio has bought the rights to adapt Beukes's new novel, *The Shining Girls*, for US television.

If African sf has not arrived, it is certainly approaching fast.

This collection situates African sf in three broad contexts: the history and recent development of the genre in Africa; sf produced within the African diaspora; and the treatment of Africa in sf. It is intended to complement and add to the growing literature on afrofuturism, Afrodiasporic sf, race and ethnicity in sf, and on the relationships among sf, imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism, globalization and Empire.¹

¹ See, for example, such journal issues as *Social Text* 20.2 (2002) and *Science Fiction Studies* 102 (2007) on Afrofuturism, *African Identities* 7.2 (2009) on the "Black imagination" and sf, and *Science Fiction Studies* 118 (2012) on sf and globalization (2012). Relevant monographs include De Witt Douglas Kilgore's *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space* (2003), Adilifu Nama's *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (2008) and *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (2011), John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), Patricia Kerslake's *Science Fiction and Empire* (2010), Jessica Langer's *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011), Isiah Lavender III's *Race in American Science Fiction* (2011), and Eric D. Smith's *Globalization, Utopia and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope* (2012). Edited collections include Marleen S. Barr's *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory* (2008), Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal's *Science Fiction, Imperialism, and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2010), Masood Ashraf Raja, Jason W. Ellis, and Swaralipi Nandi's *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics, and Science Fiction* (2011), and Isiah Lavender III's forthcoming

Africa has had a place in the sf imagination as long as the genre has existed. Jules Verne's *Cinq semaines en ballon/Five Weeks in a Balloon, or, Journeys and Discoveries in Africa by Three Englishmen* (1863) and *Aventures de trois Russes et de trois Anglais dans l'Afrique australe/The Adventures of Three Russians and Three Englishmen in South Africa* (1872) feature scientific expeditions across the continent, which also forms a backdrop for non-science-fictional adventures in *Un capitaine de quinze ans/Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen* (1878). In *Le Village aérien/The Village in the Treetops* (1901), an expedition into central Africa discovers the Wagaldi, a species somewhere between human and ape, while *L'Invasion de la mer/The Invasion of the Sea* (1904) describes an engineering project to create an inland sea in the Sahara. In *L'Étonnante Aventure de la Mission Barsac/The Barsac Mission* (1914), a mad genius has built a superscience city on the banks of the Niger, somewhere in the Sahara, that is sustained by native slave labor.²

Before Verne's debut novel, Herrmann Lang's *The Air Battle: A Vision of the Future* (1859) depicted a 6900A.D. dominated by three empires, all controlled by dark-skinned people, centered around the Sahara, Madeira, and Brazil. The commander of the Saharan air-fleet advocates miscegenation as a way to raise the white race from the primitivism into which it has fallen.³ Despite thinking in racial terms, the novel contains none of the white supremacist terror that marks the not dissimilar setting of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Beyond Thirty* (1916).

In Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890), Uganda provides a defensible haven for white characters fleeing the racially-mixed, American proletariat rising up against the massive economic and social inequities intrinsic to capitalism. In the same year, Theodor Hertzka's *Freiland, ein soziales Zukunftsbild/Freeland* (1890) proposed the

Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction. These issues have also been addressed by a number of recent fiction collections, including Sheree R. Thomas's *Dark Matter* (2000) and *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* (2005), Nalo Hopkinson's *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* (2001), Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan's *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Visions of the Future* (2004), Lavie Tidhar's two volumes of *The Apex Book of World SF* (2009, 2012), Grace L. Dillon's *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012), and Derwin Mak and Eric Choi's *The Dragon and the Stars* (2010).

² In the 1920s and 1930s, German architect Herman Sörgel proposed and gained some support for Atlantropa, a real-world project to dam the Straits of Gibraltar so as to generate hydroelectric power and, more importantly, to be able to lower the level of the Mediterranean by 200 meters, opening up vast new areas of land in southern Europe and, especially, North Africa for cultivation and utopian colonial settlements.

³ Nothing is known about the pseudonymous author, other than that he seems to be British, but rather intriguingly the narrating persona identifies himself as black.

construction of a utopia for white settlers, featuring an ameliorated version of capitalism, in East Africa. In George Griffiths's *The Angel of Revolution* (1893) and *Olga Romanoff, or the Syren of the Skies* (1894), the hidden valley of Aeria, somewhere in Africa, provides a base from which the anarchist airfleet of the Brotherhood of Freedom enforces world peace. Among the earliest sf novels by African Americans are T. Shirby Hodge's *The White Man's Burden: A Satirical Forecast* (1915),⁴ which depicts an African anarchist utopia of color, and George S. Schuyler's *Black Empire* (1936-38), in which the Black Internationale throw the entire world into bloody chaos so as to establish a superscience black utopia in Africa.

Probably the major use of Africa in early sf was as a setting for lost race tales, which often drew upon such sciences as Egyptology, archaeology, anthropology, and philology, as well as evolutionary discourses, and sometimes depicted superscientific technologies (see Rieder). This tradition starts with H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1886-87) and runs at least until Pierre Benoit's *L'Atlantide/Queen of Atlantis* (1919), both of which novels were so widely known that P.C. Wren's foreign legion novel, *Beau Geste* (1924), refers to them quite explicitly in its final pages when the protagonists encounter an unknown African culture. A more overtly weird variant of this tradition can be observed in Bertram Mitford's *The Sign of the Spider* (1896), Edward Lucas White's "Lukundoo" (1907), Julian Huxley's "The Tissue-Culture King" (1926), and V.F. Calverton's *The Man Inside: Being the Record of the Strange Adventures of Allen Steele among the Xulus* (1936). Elements of the African colonial adventure still recur in sf, in novels as various as Michael Crichton's *Congo* (1980), Michael Bishop's *No Enemy But Time* (1982), Brian Stableford's *The Empire of Fear* (1988), Ian McDonald's Chaga saga (1995-2000), and Paul J. McAuley's *White Devils* (2004). As early as 1903, the African-American Pauline Hopkins had substantially reworked the pattern of such fiction by placing African American and African characters at the center of her *Of One Blood, or, the Hidden Self* (1903).

The earliest sf produced by Africans that I have been able to identify was by settlers in South Africa, such as clergyman Joseph J. Doke, printer Archibald Lamont, architect and illustrator William M. Timlin, farmer and occasional journalist Leonard Flemming, and University of Witwatersrand history professor Arthur M. Keppel-Jones. Doke, an associate of Gandhi and the amanuensis/author of *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot* (1908), wrote a lost race novel, *The Secret City*:

⁴ Hodge is a pseudonym of Roger Sherman Tracy.

A Romance of the Karroo (1913), and its prequel, *The Queen of the Secret City* (1916). Lamont's *South Africa in Mars* (1923) recounts the narrator's posthumous encounters on Mars with sundry historical figures, from William Shakespeare to Cecil Rhodes, and a supernatural/interplanetary scheme to save South Africa from its own manifold weaknesses. Timlin's *The Ship that Sailed to Mars* (1923), as much fantasy as sf, "was considered the most beautiful children's books of the 1920s" (Barben). Flemming's *A Crop of Chaff* (1925), a collection of mostly humorous articles, stories, and vignettes, includes "And So It Came to Pass" (1925). In this brief future history, whites have been massacred, and the surviving blacks and coloreds eradicate each other, destroying the human race. Keppel-Jones's *When Smuts Goes: A History of South Africa from 1952 to 2010, first published in 2015* (1947) predicts the end of white Anglophone government and the rise of a fascist Afrikaner state, with catastrophic consequences for the entire country.

Later sf from South Africans of European descent includes: Peter Dreyer's *A Beast in View* (1969); Claude and Rhoda Nunes's *Inherit the Earth* (1966), *Recoil* (1971), and *The Sky Trapeze* (1980); Ivan Vladislavić's "The Omniscope," "We Came to the Monument," and "A Science of Fragments" in his *Missing Persons* (1989) and *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996) collections; Zambian-born naturalised South African Nick Wood's Young Adult *The Stone Chameleon* (2004);⁵ Botswana-resident Jenny Robson's Young Adult *Savannah 2116 AD* (2004); and Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* (2008), *Zoo City* (2010), and *The Shining Girls* (2012). The 1991 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, South African Nadine Gordimer, depicts a near-future South Africa in *July's People* (1981), and her countryman and fellow (2003) Nobel-winner J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) are science-fictional. The 2007 Nobel winner Doris Lessing, born in Persia (now Iran) but raised in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), also wrote a number of sf novels, including *The Four-Gated City* (1969), *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), the Canopus in Argos: Archives series (1979-1983), and *Alfred and Emily* (2008).

Sf by indigenous Africans, either written in or translated into English, includes:

- from Algeria, Mohammed Dib's *Who Remembers the Sea* (1962)
- from Congo, Sony Labou Tansi's *Life and a Half* (1977)
- from Djibouti, Abdourahman A. Waberi's *In the United States of Africa* (2006)

⁵ Nick Wood's website (<http://nickwood.frogwrite.co.nz/>) contains useful materials on African, and specifically South African, sf.

from Egypt, Ahmed Khaled Towfik's *Utopia* (2008)
 from Ghana, Victor Sabah's "An Imaginary Journey to the Moon" (1972), J.O. Eshun's *The Adventures of Kapapa* (1976), and Kojo Laing's *Woman of the Aeroplanes* (1988), *Major Gent and the Achimota Wars* (1992), and *Big Bishop Roko and the Altar Gangsters* (2006)
 from Kenya, David G. Maillu's *The Equatorial Assignment* (1980) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006)
 from Mauritius, Azize Asgarally's *The Chosen Ones* (1969)
 from Nigeria, Valentine Alily's *The Mark of Cobra* (1980), Flora Nwapa's *Journey to Space* (1980), Buchi Emecheta's *The Rape of Shavi* (1984), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), and Ad-
 aobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You By Chance* (2009)
 from Senegal, Ousmane Sembene's *The Last of the Empire* (1981)
 from Zambia, Mwangali Bonga's *The Feller of Trees* (2012)
 from Zimbabwe, Dambudzo Marechera's *The Black Insider* (1990)

Ivor Hartmann's *AfroSF* brings together short fiction by 21 contemporary settler and indigenous writers from Gambia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. There are undoubtedly more African sf texts in indigenous languages—such as UK-based Zimbabwean Masimba Musodza's *MunaHacha Maive Nei?* (2012), the first sf novel published in the Bantu language chiShona—that have not been translated into European languages,⁶ and in French, Portuguese, and other settler languages that have not been translated into English.

In this collection, Mark Bould discusses three of these novels—by Dib, Tansi, and Towfik—that together map, in science-fictional form, the processes of anti-colonial struggle, the disillusionment of the postcolony, and the depredations of neoliberal neo-colonialism. In doing so, these novels also pose particular problems for their First World readers. How are we to read them, understand them, categorize them? Can we move beyond European models of fiction, without neglecting the long history of interactions and influences between continents? And what are we to make of the images of Africa, and the African possibilities, they present?

Taking up this final question, Lisa Yaszek surveys a range of contemporary, African-authored fiction (and a film) concerned with the apocalypse. She explores the strategies by which Kenyan Wanuri

⁶ *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* identifies a number of untranslated Arabic sf works from North Africa and the Middle East. See http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/arabic_sf

Kahiu, Ghanaians Jonathan Dotse and Kwasi A. Kwakwa, and South Africans Jenny Robson, Mandisi Nkomo, and Nick Wood variously recontextualize, rewrite, and refuse the apocalypse. She argues that recent African sf not only develops the long history of apocalyptic sf in particular ways, but also offers a counter-narrative to the futures industry's relentless, opportunistic depictions of Africa as a dystopia, crumbling under the weight of natural and man-made cataclysms, which only Western corporations can save.

In a similar vein, Malisa Kurtz argues that South African Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* and *Zoo City* rewrite cyberpunk in such a way as to reveal the enduring legacy of apartheid, the exploitative logic of which is perpetuated in contemporary, racialized capitalism. Kurtz draws upon Avery Gordon's hauntological notion of ghostly matter to explore the ways in which Beukes makes visible the systemic—and thus otherwise invisible—violence of the “democratized,” neoliberal, post-apartheid state.

African sf exists in multiple media, with South Africa and Namibia providing locations, personnel, and resources for a number of recent sf films and television series, including *Doomsday* (2008), *Outcasts* (2010), *Dredd* (2012), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2014), as well as *District 9* and *Pumzi*. The latter two examples—along with Ethiopian-American Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993), French-Tunisian Nadia El Fani's *Bedwin Hacker* (2003), Cameroonian Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes* (2005), Beninese-French Sylvestre Amoussou's *Africa Paradis* (2006)—point to the gradual emergence of an African sf cinema. Nigeria is home to Nollywood, the world's second largest film industry (after Bollywood) in terms of the numbers of titles produced per year, but it has mostly steered clear of sf. In his essay, Noah Tsika attempts to recover from critical ignominy *Kajola* (2010), purportedly the first Nollywood sf movie, Nollywood's most expensive movie to date, and a flop so massive it does not even seem to have been pirated. He situates it within the two traditions (the primarily US urban sf film; Nigerian literary fiction that contains science-fictional elements, such as the novels of Cyprian Ekwensi) so as to outline its affiliations to a globally circulating sf cinema while also teasing out its Nigerian particularities.

As demonstrated by the *Superpower: Africa in Science Fiction* exhibition, curated by Nav Haq and Al Cameron at the Arnolfini gallery, Bristol (UK) in the summer of 2012, an African sf is also evident in the fine arts.⁷ In her essay, the artist Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum, born in Botswana and now resident in South Africa, distinguishes between the

⁷ For a brief account of the exhibition, see Bould.

much-heralded Afrofuturism and an African futurism that is concerned with imagining Africas-to-come as a radical act. Drawing together Afro-mythology, sf, magical realism, and a number of works by artists from Egypt, Kenya, Angola, and South Africa, as well as quantum physics, she contextualizes her own gallery work and proposes a project to imagine other, and better, futures.

A similar utopianism pervades Marleen S. Barr's reading of Beukes's *Zoo City*. Barr also draws on quantum physics, specifically Karen Barad's discussion of quantum entanglement, along with Derrida's hauntology, to situate the novel in relation to the post-Truth-and-Reconciliation South Africa. Elaborating upon apartheid as a structure of separation, she draws attention to homologous and intertwined systems of power, both material and discursive, such as that of species difference. She sets in opposition an ethics of connection, drawing inspiration from the Protungulatum donnae, the rat-sized critter that is the most common ancestor shared by over 5000 species of living mammal.

The second half of this issue, which focuses on First World, primarily Afrodiasporic, authors, starts with Patrick B. Sharp's interview with African-Canadian activist and author Minister Faust. He describes his self-styled Imhotep Hop fiction as a subgenre of Afrofuturism that specifically and explicitly connects sf to African culture and civilizations. Joyously didactic, it reclaims a past erased and overwritten by European colonialism, and thus shares important affinities with Indigenous Futurism.

African-American author Andrea Hairston, interviewed by Grace L. Dillon, emphasizes the importance—for all of us, not just those who create and enjoy sf—of a broader conceptualization of science than that championed by positivist empiricism. She identifies Afrofuturism, along with feminism and indigenous knowledge, as part of the essential toolkit for rewiring a world living in the aftermath of the apocalypse known as patriarchal, European colonialism.

Lisa Dowdall examines the ways in which Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* rewrites First World conceptions of Africa as a war-torn hellhole. A feminist critical dystopia, it does not shy away from such contentious issues as rape being used as a strategy for ethnic cleansing or the practice of female genital mutilation, but finds alongside them potentials for profound, utopian transformations. Okorafor ultimately posits plurality and alterity not merely as a possible future but also as the means of struggle against current dystopian realities.

Neal Easterbrook considers Ian McDonald's African-set Chaga saga as a combination and revision of the colonial adventure novel and the evolutionary sf story, both of which can be traced back to the period of

the late-nineteenth century scramble for Africa. A white Briton, born in Manchester in 1960 but resident in Northern Ireland since the age of five, McDonald identifies with the Irish as a colonized people, and this perspective on imperial power is evident throughout his work. While the Chaga saga's generic heritage means that it inevitably runs the risk of transforming Africa, and the alien transformations overtaking it, into nothing more than an exotic symbol, Easterbrook outlines the ways in which McDonald's self-consciousness forestalls this and points the way to a more fully postcolonial sf imaginary.

De Witt Douglas Kilgore investigates another rewriting of colonial adventure fiction, this time in the treatment of the first black superhero in mainstream comics, Marvel's T'Challa/Black Panther, by writers Christopher Priest (1998-2003) and Reginald Hudlin (2005-10). From the character's first appearance in 1966, Wakanda, the "lost" African kingdom over which he rules, was depicted as having long possessed highly advanced technology. However, the sheer inertia of colonial fictions and images kept even the best-intentioned writers and artists from pursuing the implications of this. Priest, having first attempted to refashion the Black Panther as a post-racial hero, turned to imagining Wakanda as a global superpower. Hudlin developed this even further, emphasizing the connections between Africans and African Americans, and positing a world in which Wakanda might be at the center not only of global events but of cosmically significant ones.

This collection then turns to three major Afrofuturists: Sun Ra, Octavia E. Butler, and Nalo Hopkinson. John Rieder describes musician Sun Ra as an organic intellectual giving direction to the Arkestra he gathered around him and played with for forty years—and to African-American culture more generally. Outlining Ra's strategies of syncretism, recoding, and boundary disruption, Rieder arrives at the utopianism at the heart of his music and performance: his refusal of the market's connection between labor and exchange as he and the Arkestra refused to distinguish between rehearsal and performance, creative endeavor and life.

Gerry Canavan explores Butler's often-neglected first novels, the *Patternist* series (1976-84). The first of them to be published, *Patternmaster* (1976), depicts a feudal far-future Earth governed by superhumans, while the four prequels trace its development through a millennia-long breeding program conducted by an East African vampire that began centuries in our past. Canavan argues that, in addition to placing issues of power center stage, as would become characteristic of her work, Butler's secret and future history draws heavily on the comic books she read as a child and young woman.

In a wide-ranging interview, Hopkinson discusses, among many other things, her use of words from multiple languages (and the words she just makes up), the experience of teaching creative writing as a genre writer, writing complex (and unsympathetic) characters, growing up in the Caribbean, the multiculturalism of Toronto, the pigeonholing of identities, and the elusiveness of identity.

To close, Nick Mamatas and Andrew M. Butler review, respectively, Samuel R. Delany's most recent novel, *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* (2012), and the 2013 reissue of his graphic novella, *Bread and Wine: An Erotic Tale of New York* (1999); Nisi Shawl reviews Ivor W. Hartmann's *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers* (2012); and Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed reviews Lauren Beukes's *The Shining Girls* (2013).

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