

**HACKING THE FUTURE: THE SPACE AND PLACE OF EARTH IN
POSTCOLONIAL SCIENCE FICTION**

by

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This dissertation offers a spatially attuned reading protocol to assist scholars engaging twenty-first century postcolonial science fiction. “Hacking the Future” first explores the boom in postcolonial SF since 2004, considering the instigations of digital publishing, community-building platforms, and the event RaceFail09. It then examines how spatial studies, particularly the concept of Edward Soja’s thirdspace, the geocritical lens of Bertrand Westphal, and the political attentiveness of Doreen Massey, synchronize with the worldbuilding reading practices proposed by SF theorists Darko Suvin and Samuel Delany. “Hacking the Future” activates this newly spatialized reading practice in the arenas of inquiry highlighted by postcolonial studies to examine how physical, conceptual, and lived spaces function as types of critical revision.

Science fiction (SF) is a speculative genre capable of reaching ‘escape velocity’ from Earth and its histories of violence. Yet, when writing in this imaginative genre, contemporary postcolonial SF authors overwhelmingly produce Earthside stories. Utilizing this dissertation’s proposed combinative protocol allows us to access the interventions and innovations of this new subgenre of writing.

By creating SF, postcolonial writers reclaim their right to not only produce genre fiction, but imagine alternative futures for previously colonized people. “Hacking the Future” contends that by challenging the ethnographic stare of traditional SF, SF authors of the Global South productively shift away from underlying ideologies of the inferior “Other.” Through close examination of Octavia E. Butler’s *Dawn* and “Amnesty,” Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s “Them

Ships,” Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon*, and Samit Basu’s *Turbulence*, this dissertation demonstrates how postcolonial SF spatially revises societal hierarchies, corrupt politics, the Futures Industry, “third contact” narratives between sections of human society, Afropessimism, and citizenship scales. As an additional contribution to the archive surrounding postcolonial SF, “Hacking the Future” includes personal interviews with postcolonial SF writers Samit Basu, Lauren Beukes, Nalo Hopkinson, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Vandana Singh, and SF book cover illustrator Joey Hi-Fi. Using these interviews as critical sources encourages interdisciplinary considerations that bridge creative-critical divides. This project argues that these writers use Earth-spaces to “hack” into constructions of the future, establishing postcolonial SF as a type of literary activism.

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PREFACE

My brain hurt like a warehouse, it had no room to spare
I had to cram so many things to store everything in there
. . . And all the nobody people, and all the somebody people
I never thought I'd need so many people

. . .
We've got five years, stuck on my eyes
We've got five years, what a surprise
We've got five years, my brain hurts a lot
We've got five years, that's all we've got!

(The apocalyptic words of Ziggy Stardust, a.k.a. David Bowie, re-contextualized for the dissertating process, specifically of the work you're about to read. "Five Years," The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars)

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DISSERTATION DEDICATION

I know we don't do dedications in a dissertation, but in today's market, who knows if I'll ever write a book. So, Mom, since you called dibs for so long, this is for you. Thanks for getting me hooked on stories, storytellers, imagined worlds, and books of all kinds. It was very fun being the kid who got her librarian mother to yell at her to "Put the book *down* and go to sleep / catch the school bus / brush your teeth / eat your food / do your homework etc."

(Don't worry, you still get first call if I ever publish a book.)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

“Science fiction carries the potential to change the world. Literally. It *has* changed the world. The concept of the very computer that I am using to type these words was first dreamed up in a science fiction novel. . . .

The power of imagination and narrative should never be underestimated. Aside from generating innovative ideas, science fiction also triggers both a distancing and associating effect. This makes it an excellent vehicle for approaching taboo and socially relevant yet overdone topics in new ways. Oh, *and* these narratives are a lot of fun, too.”

(Nnedi Okorafor, “African Science Fiction is Still Alien,” 2014)

Science fiction (SF) is the genre of the alien, the literal otherworldly, and the future.¹ Alongside other speculative genres, it is the only mode of writing that can produce a diegetic world where it is possible to reach ‘escape velocity’ and forever leave behind our Earth and its terrible histories of violence. Yet, when writing in this imaginative genre, postcolonial science fiction authors overwhelmingly produce Earthside stories. This project attempts to understand what they gain by doing so.

Postcolonial SF writers often do not view Earthside spaces as a restriction, but as an opportunity to “write back” to the traditional lineage of SF and expand current genre markets in their home countries, all while utilizing the imaginative capabilities of the genre to insist upon the right of postcolonial writers to imagine “The Future.”² Their stories complicate the

¹ In this study, I use the abbreviation ‘SF’ for science fiction. Some others use it as the abbreviation for speculative fiction. Speculative fiction is currently understood to be the larger umbrella term that includes fantasy, horror, and weird fiction. I find that “SF” still works well for my purposes, as I am interested in the more inclusive form of science fiction; using SF instead of alternative abbreviations like ‘sci-fi’ may even assuage hardline SF categorizers who would consider a text like Basu’s *Turbulence* to be more ‘speculative’ than ‘science’ fiction.

² The “write back” formation used here and in the title of my first chapter pays homage to one of the earliest and most canonical connections of postcolonial studies and science fiction, the punning title of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth

imbalance of the genre, where “certain ways of dealing with race [and other types of identities] in sci-fi—like metaphor and tokenism—are so common, while others are almost completely ignored” (Berlatsky).³ They do not want to become lost or subsumed in their own versions of the future when they are so often relegated to tokens or completely ignored in the futures of others. As Ivor W. Hartmann wrote in his introduction to the first African SF anthology, *Afro-SF*, “SciFi is the only genre that enables African writers to envision a future from *our* African perspective. ...If you can’t see and relay an understandable vision of the future, your future will be co-opted by someone else’s vision, one that will not necessarily have your best interests at heart” (6-7). Given the opportunity to imagine a future, *any* future, these authors do not concede postcolonial places; they purposefully center the future on them. My work shows that what appears to be an odd creative decision turns out to be a self-invested strategy.

To best analyze the intervention being performed through postcolonial SF, this project entwines the formal methods of geocritically inclined spatial studies and science fiction studies to the contextual arenas of investigation posed by postcolonial studies. I examine how texts that self-identify as postcolonial science fiction employ Earthsided “thirdspaces” (to borrow a term from spatial theorist Edward Soja) as generative modes of social, political, and economic critique.⁴ Postcolonial SF writers use these specific Earth-correlating spaces as “crucibles” (to

Griffith and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989). Their foundational anthology is itself a punning play on Salman Rushdie’s 1982 article “The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance” (in which he argues for literature as being an important way to counter the lineage of colonization), which was a pun on the 1980 *Star Wars* film *The Empire Strikes Back*. The Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies’ critical anthology *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982) is a bit more on the nose as homage from British cultural studies to the popular power of *Star Wars*.

³ As Noah Berlatsky in *The Atlantic* explains in his article “*Star Wars* and the 4 Ways Science Fiction Handles Race,” the famous franchise relies on tokenism and metaphors to address the issue of race in its future. While “Metaphor or tokenism or diversity or direct can all be used well or badly, just like any other aesthetic trope,” I agree with Berlatsky that “it seems telling” that these are the strategies so often employed.

⁴ I also consider texts that are overwhelmingly ‘titled’ by publishers, fans, and critics as being postcolonial. To do so acknowledges the power of marketing strategies, to be sure, but also the long history of science fiction as a genre mutually molded by the receivers (fans, academic professors, critics) and producers (authors, but also fans in zines)

borrow SF theorist Darko Suvin's image) of generative change, both the setting and method of revising inscriptions and limitations on postcolonial places and peoples. I also contend that the Earthside spaces of contemporary intervention used in postcolonial SF encourage a higher rate of feedback oscillation, which thereby increases the potency of the revisionary questions posited by the texts.

My study helps expand science fiction studies' engagement with postcolonial SF texts by moving beyond the idea that these texts are merely "writing back" to the colonial styles and ideas of early SF writers. Instead, they are developing their own type of thirdspace in the bookshelf of the SF canon. Likewise, my study engages with recent concerns over replication in postcolonial studies (such as those expressed by Neil Lazarus and Timothy Brennan), arguing that a spatial engagement with these SF texts facilitates new ways of engaging with underutilized contemporary global writers. This project is itself a trifold venture of science fiction, spatial studies, and postcolonial studies; each of these arenas receives a brief introduction below.

After glossing the fields and methods combined in this project, I illustrate the distinctly different uses of space in early canonical SF (a short novel by Jules Verne) and the contemporary world SF (a novella from the first anthology of African SF, *AfroSF*). My brief exploration of a critically ignored disturbance in the SF community (RaceFail09) finishes my gloss of the SF lineage by contextualizing the relative boom in contemporary world SF that I study. I end with a spatially oriented explanation of my chapter layout, and a defense of using authorial interviews as a crucial source for context and critical insight into this new subgenre.

of its fiction. And while the interviews I've conducted (in Appendix B) suggest some hesitance in self-claiming a postcolonial label, the way the authors I study orient themselves in regard to historical structures of power and opposition clearly connect them to the field of postcolonial studies.

Communications scholar and creative artist Pavitra Prasad has said “[s]o much space *is* found in space. Space enough for other worlds, other configurations of belonging and history” (“Notes on a Terrestrial Performance of Outer Space”). By examining postcolonial science fictional re-visions of Earthside spaces, we come to understand how such optimistic opportunities function a bit closer to home.

1.1 POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES: A PLACE OF POTENTIAL ENERGY

“Everything about human history is rooted in the Earth, which has meant that we must think about habitation . . . At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others . . . What I have tried to do is a kind of geographical inquiry into historical experience . . . Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.”

(Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 7)

Postcolonial studies gained traction in the 1970s and became firmly established as an academic mode of investigation in the 1980s and 1990s; both its rise to prominence and methods of inquiry are rooted in specific political, sociological, and historical contexts.⁵ It is the field of literary studies that “focuses on forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world,” with an underlying drive to “seek to develop new forms of engaged theoretical work that contributes to the creation of dynamic ideological and social transformation” (Young, *Postcolonialism* 11). Postcolonialists analyze cultural products and attempt to answer questions about topics like “the shifting and often interrelated forms of dominance and resistance, about the constitution of the colonial archive, about the search for alternative traces of social being, about the interdependent play of race and class, about the

⁵ For a historically oriented overview, see Robert Young’s *Postcolonialism*.

significance of gender and sexuality, about the complex forms in which subjectivities are experienced and collectivities mobilized, about representation itself, and about the ethnographic translation of cultures” (Loomba et al., “Beyond What? An Introduction” 13). These investments, and their underlying appreciation of literature’s connection to real-world politics, are what make the theories and modes of postcolonial studies so crucial to my examination of the current shift toward world SF.

While other academic disciplines have only recently turned toward spatial studies, Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone remind us that “[i]n the field of postcolonial studies . . . space has *always* been central” (*Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture* 1).⁶ One of the field’s foundational theorists, Edward Said, devotes one section of his spatially dialectical examination *Orientalism* (1978) to “Imaginative Geography and its Representations” (49-73). In it, Said explains how the imaginative spatial arenas of literature such as Dante’s *Inferno* or d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque orientale* provide a main way for the West to go about “*Orientalizing the Oriental*.” The hierarchical ideology underlying orientalism, that of “a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs,’” depends on the geographic separation and literary re-presentation of the Other (Said 67). As these Others live in the uncharted regions “beyond ‘ours,’” any representation of them becomes coded as the “*true*” version, even when those representations are lackluster, wrong, politically motivated, or entirely fictitious. (See my gloss on the SF studies of Rieder and Kerslake below in “Science Fiction Studies: Lineages and Reading Protocols.”) Said’s later work, *Culture and Imperialism*, further meditates on empire and geography, as I cite in the epigraph to this section.

⁶ (Indeed, the name ‘postcolonial’ is a temporal, identity-driven, and location-oriented one; even postcolonialists who do not write about space end up writing about space.)

Homi Bhabha is one postcolonial critic credited with offering a way around, if not out of, the binary ideologies laid out by Said; his concept of the hybrid third space (*The Location of Culture*, 1994; “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” 1990) is not the main one I use in this project, though his work inspires the spatial theories from which I do draw quite heavily (see “Spatial Studies: Trialectics, Swirled” below.) The work of Deleuze and Guattari also injected the postcolonial field with spatially centered thinking with their separations between smooth and striated space and their concept of the rhizome (as evidenced in the content and form of *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1983). Their use of the multi-rooted rhizome also indicates a shift toward a less regulated mode of thought and an alternate to binary argument.⁷ The importance of work on space in postcolonial studies is too various to fully map or engage here, but its presence is inarguable. (The *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* designates separate sections for the spatial topics of “Place,” “Diaspora,” “Globalization,” “Environment,” “Nationalism,” and “Indigeneity.”)⁸

⁷ Moving away from the double-planet revolutions of productive, but inherently self-orbiting, field constructions such as Us/Them, Colonizer/Colonized, East/West, etc.; the same type of catch-22 poisonous gravity fields that Fanon points out in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). My preference for a three-pronged mode of engagement does not ignore that such oppositional binaries are critically useful (see them utilized to great effect in Abdul R. JanMohamed’s *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (1983)), but rather that they still restrict the type of possible discourse. I am invested in seeing what happens if we move into a more dynamic arena of thought; much in the same way that quantum computers offers a range of generative opportunities that exist once thirdstates become viable alternatives to the traditional computing binaries, “[q]uantum processors have quantum bits instead of the usual binary bits that traditional processors have. You know, normal bits store information by taking on one of two states, often named ‘0’ and ‘1.’ Quantum bits, also called qubits, have another capability. They are able to take on both the 0 and 1 states at the same time. This and other properties of quantum states allow quantum computers to perform certain calculations much faster than traditional ones” (Fancie Diep, “Commercial Quantum Computer Actually Works, According To New Testing”).

⁸ For some additional postcolonial engagements with space, see Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, 1983; Elleke Boehmer’s *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, 2005; Susan Andrade’s *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms 1958-1988*, 2011; Shalini Puri’s *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present: Operation Urgent Memory*, 2014; the creative and critical anthology *Rotten English*, ed. by Dohra Ahmad, 2007; Aijaz Ahmad’s “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” 1987; Doris Sommer’s *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, 1991; Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, 1988; William Adams and Martin Mulligan’s anthology *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era*, 2003; Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987; and Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2011. These works range in spatial

While it is vital to acknowledge the historic connection of postcolonial critical work to spatiality, for my project, it is more useful to address a self-reflexive spatial question: Where is the postcolonial field currently oriented, and where is it heading? Postcolonialists are questioning the validity and relevance of the delineation ‘postcolonial studies’ as alternative configurations continue to grow in popularity (global studies, transatlantic studies, world literary studies, etc.). The introduction of the critical anthology *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005) offers the injunction to continue with the field’s ‘traditional’ line of questioning, even as they engage claims of the discipline’s outdatedness or ideological corruption (as “the latest ideological offspring of Western capitalism”). In 1995, Anne McClintock proposed that the ‘post’ in postcolonialism was akin to the devastating silence of the ‘post’ in post-apocalyptic. She depicted an angel of history who, with “hunched wings broods over the wreckage at its feet,” has no ability to fix a “global crisis in ideologies of the future” (*Imperial Leather* 395, 392). In 1997, Brennan contended with how academic canonization of “third-world literature” tainted the publishing and reception process, suggesting that “the oppressive persistence of the role the public critic implicitly asks [non-Western authors] to fill—and rewards them for filling—constructs a discourse that conditions the novels they set out to write” (*At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* 203-4). In his more recent *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011), Neil Lazarus echoes Brennan’s concerns about the type of postcolonial literature that is canonized—and what the canonization process does to the text as a result.

While Lazarus’ proposed alternative rubrics do not quite meet his goal of interrogating and renegotiating the postcolonial field, I admire his underlying impulse to “establish a research ‘archive’ different from the one currently prevailing—differently weighted and with different

engagement, transversing private/public spheres, gendered space, the construction and continuance of the nation, the (in)tangible space of memory, migration, societal hierarchies, liminal borderlands, and environmental criticism.

emphases” (18). By engaging with relatively uncovered texts that nevertheless represent what is actually happening in the world of textual production by writers that consider themselves to be, or are overwhelmingly received as being, postcolonial, Lazarus seems to offer postcolonial scholars one way to increase their range of textual engagement (18).

My project ventures to offer similar types of stimulating approaches via the genre of science fiction. A main goal of this project is to help illuminate authors and stories that are currently ignored or barely acknowledged by postcolonial scholars as well as teachers and critics of global literature. I aim to help make these works more visible and more legible via the frameworks employed by postcolonial teachers and researchers. Unless one’s interest lies in genre fiction (specifically in twenty-first century science fiction), it is possible that the writers I study scarcely resonate with academic readers, even though some of these same writers have been gathering momentum as speakers and political thinkers. As Lazarus chided postcolonial scholars for ignoring writers, texts, and literary arguments that escaped canonization by academics, in this dissertation I wish to extend an encouraging—if strong-armed—hand to my fellow postcolonial researchers. For I think these speculative fictions are one way to help grow the importance of postcolonial studies and reconsider the newly emerging investments and interventions of our twenty-first century global writers. I also suggest that the third-spaced thinking employed by world SF authors may be a generative space for postcolonial critics contending with what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have posited as “power” of global empire (*Empire* 142).⁹

⁹ Vilashini Cooppan suggests in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* that the responsibility of postcolonialists is to enact analytical frames utilizing “spatio-temporal slippage . . . that interprets the morphing of one space-time into another” (96). Doing so allows us to contend with how these still nationally coded spaces meet and revise each other in cultural objects. Cooppan quickly mentions *Bladerunner* as an example of a “U.S. empire dethroned by Japanese capital;” of course, almost all cyberpunk narratives from the 1980s fit this arc (96).

Through this project, I recommend an improved method of reading that reflects and utilizes our current technological and pop-cultural moment in order to investigate our contemporary socio-political global realities. As I've stated previously, postcolonial studies is uniquely positioned as a spatially connected literary field. Though academic progress has been slow in the arena of world SF, there is emerging scholarship heading in this direction, such as the *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*'s special issue on African science fiction (September 2016). But the members of the field seem sluggish, if not oddly hesitant, to pick up texts that are so adamantly published and increasingly circulated. I must wonder why: Is it a dusty, zombified, lingering misunderstanding about what constitutes 'L'iterature (which often includes SF writers that have been canonized, such as Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, China Miéville, and Junot Díaz, but excludes recent SF writers like Vandana Singh); is it a misguided sense of what postcolonial literature strives for/looks like (as Lazarus and Brennan suggest); or is it a reluctance to enter into debates with a type of literature that has been known to produce zealous systems of valuation? (See my discussion of the Sad/Rabid Puppies in the section "A Global Turn," below.) It is difficult to say, and impossible to prove.

I find it vital to jump into this venture because of its potential—these speculative texts are able to engage with what has occurred since twentieth-century (post-)independence and what is occurring now in a new way: by considering the future, where things may not *need* to stay the same. In this way, postcolonial SF offers a type of optimism in an overall forward movement, one that indeed emulates the forward-looking tendencies of independence-movement literatures, which insisted that things would *not* always remain within the same systems and hierarchies. Those systems have changed, but for the countries I focus on (Nigeria especially, but also India, South Africa, and Mexico), the hierarchies have not. Yet there are feasible ways of considering

the present, and imagining the future, that resist an ouroboros impulse at times found in postcolonial literature.

While the spatially attentive methodology I practice is inherent to the field, my project's conjunction with the world SF genre is far more progressive. There are currently only three monographs devoted to postcolonial SF: Ralph Pordzik's *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures* (2001), Jessica Langer's *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011), and Eric D. Smith's *Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope* (2012). Although Pordzik's work is invaluable as one of the earliest critical investigations devoted to postcolonial science fiction, his aim to dissolve the divisions of utopia and dystopia roots his postcolonial analysis firmly in the generic field of utopian studies. My work takes up questions that fit more comfortably alongside the fluid field of postcolonial SF studies employed by Langer and Smith.¹⁰ Langer's book is more heavily invested in a postcolonial lens in her explorations of diaspora, hybridism, race, and indignity, mainly in Japanese, Canadian, Caribbean, and Indian texts; meanwhile, Smith leans into the productivity of the science fictional, probably because he uses the idea of "utopian possibility" as an organizing principle to explore the way SF texts from India, South Africa, and the Caribbean serve as self-aware "critical mappings" of globalization's "imaginative geography" (16, 17). Obviously, my work is in closer proximity to Smith's geographical arenas and his use of methods of science fiction studies to expand postcolonial inquiries.¹¹

My project differs from these earlier contributions in its spatial emphasis. Here, too, I find the most resonance with Smith's work; while Langer demonstrates traditional postcolonial

¹⁰ Like Smith and Langer, I also have the benefit of the post-2009 publishing boom of global SF to help form my claims. Pordzik's truly groundbreaking work did not.

¹¹ Compared to Smith, Langer does not quite push her readings into this truly combinational realm.

spatial attentiveness and Pordzik explores the (non)spaces of fictional -topias, only Smith employs a spatial methodology in his examination of postcolonial SF texts. The parameters of Smith's spatial application differ from my own work, of course, due to his dedication to constructions of globalization, while I employ different spatial theorists (especially Soja, Westphal, and Massey as detailed below) to show the many political arenas that SF writers engage through the generative sites of their fictional Earth-spaces. These include the concepts of postnationalism, citizenship, the Futures Industry, and globalization, but also identity topics of class, gender, and race. I believe studies like Smith's and mine that look at world SF or other genres through a spatial lens are one way for postcolonial scholars to move themselves beyond the same arguments; it is only a question of allowing ourselves to see such maneuvers as opportunities full of potential.¹²

1.2 SPATIAL STUDIES: TRIALECTICS, SWIRLED

"The text feeds the memory of the place. Anyway, it is impossible to exhaust it. . . . By multiplying textual forays through a space and comparing the results obtained, we will know a little more about it. *The fictional text* brings out all the folds of time relating to a place. Or better, it imagines the form that a place can virtually adopt. It *does not reflect only a past history, but anticipates what the city could be in a possible world that it haunts. Thereby, it ensures its survival in its own way.* . . . When the city is no longer produced by the text, as in Calvino [*Invisible Cities*], it ceases to exist. . . . This applies to any place, urban or not. So, to pose a frightening question, *What is this city but the paper on which I write, or that you read, at a given time?*"

(emphasis mine, Westphal, *Geocriticism* 143)

The future is being re-envisioned in postcolonial SF texts, not only by changing the ethnic composition of the often white- or blue-washed inhabitants of the SF narrative, but by changing

¹² If the editors of the *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* anthology found the thrust into history of medieval postcolonial projects exciting, then it must be at least as equally enticing to consider working in a genre that allows for a cyborg to dust off and pick up the angle of history.

the settings from spaceships, distant planets, and the White House war room to postcolonial places on Earth. The spatial methodology I chose to use in this project comes mainly from the work of Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Doreen Massey, and Betrand Westphal. As a Marxist, Lefebvre focuses on the relationship of space to political ideologies and power hierarchies that shape and restrain our different conceptions and uses of space. In his foundational *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre presents three aspects of space: the physical aspect (i.e., the natural world), the mental aspect (i.e., intangible abstractions), and—most crucially for Lefebvre’s intervention and my project—the social aspect, a nexus of merging possibilities that combines aspects of mental and physical space. In this project, however, I use Soja’s slight refocusing of Lefebvre’s categorizations of space, where

Firstspace is the “perceived” physical space of our tangible, empirically existing, geographically defined world.

(e.g., the chair one sits in while writing a dissertation, the pen a committee member uses to mark up the 8.5-by-11-inch pages of the defense copy of said dissertation; the limestone of the forty-two-stories-tall Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh.)

Secondspace is the imagined space, the “conceived” mental spaces of our social structures and imaginations. Soja notes that these imagined spaces can at times take over the perceived space.

(e.g., the ivory tower of academia—the connotations of the name of the “Cathedral of Learning;” the glamour of New York: The Big Apple.)

Thirdspace is the “lived” space, the experienced space. This space is a combination of the other two spaces, the experience of the first space via/partially through the second space. Thirdspace is the most productive (according to Soja) and indeed the most difficult to define.¹³

(e.g., a class in science fiction; the space of a departmental meeting.)

This thirdspace may also, since it is the space of the experienced, most closely relate to the walking views of Michel de Certeau, who suggests that the act of viscerally experiencing a space (such as walking) is what generates a space, or in his own words, that “*space is a practiced place*” (117). For de Certeau, experiencing, or in this case walking through, a space allows for a greater connection between the real and the imagined; the physical experience of space allows the walker to regain a type of estrangement otherwise lost to the abstraction of representation (maps) or the haze of familiarity:

Physical moving about has the itinerant function of yesterday’s or today’s “superstitions.”

Travel (like walking) is a substitute for legends that used to open up space to something different. What does travel ultimately produce if it is not, by a sort of reversal, “an exploration of the deserted places of my memory,” the return to nearby exoticism by way of a detour through distant places. (“Walking in the City” 106-7)

Though Soja is less impressed, de Certeau’s ideas offer my project a unique connection between the estranging principles of SF and that of lived space, even when (I contend) that thirdspace is itself a literary representation of space (and thus representational, imagined space).

¹³ Michel Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia, which I parse more fully in chapter one, is thus recognized by Soja as a thirdspace (in his chapter “Heterotopologies: Foucault and the Geohistory of Otherness”) since it is at once ‘real’ and ‘imagined.’ However, Foucault’s heterotopia functions as a particular type, perhaps even a subtype, of thirdspace, one with specific spatial-temporal characteristics.

All three spaces are only arbitrarily separated to increase their productivity as arenas of critical thought; Soja ensures that readers know that these concepts depend on and bleed into one another by presenting readers with swirling infographics explaining his trialectical thinking.¹⁴

Soja and Lefebvre privilege lived space as a particularly influential spatial arena and as the spatial category that influences the political realm. When he introduces the idea, Soja writes that thirdspace is capable of “[c]ombining the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms . . . these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of ‘counterspaces,’ spaces of resistance of the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning” (68). Soja also specifically connects his idea to Bhabha’s idea of “third space.” Indeed, Bhabha’s conception of the third space as that of hybridity invokes the nebulous arena of two cultures interacting, a realm that can generate productive instability. Soja writes,

Whenever faced with such binarized categories (subject-object, mental-material, natural-social, bourgeoisie-proletariat, local-global, center-periphery, agency-structure), Lefebvre persistently sought to crack them open by introducing an-Other term, a third possibility or “moment” that partakes of the original pairing but is not just a simple combination or an “in between” position along some all-inclusive continuum. . . . Thirling-as-othering introduces a critical “other-than” choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness. (60-1)

¹⁴ While the dialogue-based dialectic mode of inquiry can push us toward similar types of analytical thinking, I do find something particularly interesting in Soja’s idea of the slightly more distinct “thirdspace.” Soja actually offers two levels of trialectics. A swirling infographic separates human existence into three arenas of the “Trialectics of Being,” a higher-order categorization of Spatiality, Sociality, and Historicity. As a spatial theorist, Soja is naturally most invested in Spatiality and details that particular arena with its own three-part swirling “Trialectics of Spatiality,” offering three additional categories of Lived, Perceived, and Conceived spaces. Soja is most invested in theorizing and applying his trialectics of spatiality, particularly the “Lived” element.

Adding a third option creates the opportunity of seeing, and building, even more options, which is perhaps why I so often found that authors highlighted thirdspaces to make their largest interventions. Using the possibilities and combinations within lived space is one of the ways postcolonial SF overwrites previous inscriptions of postcolonial geographical locations and offers self-controlled fictional futures for postcolonial people. While I could track the different streets and buildings mentioned by name in the texts I discuss, I have found it most productive in my readings to explore the textual depictions of thirdspace, the liminal lived space, through SF reading protocols and feedback oscillation (see “Science Fiction Studies: Lineages and Reading Protocols” below). As such, Soja’s “thirdspace” and his use of the divisions between lived, imagined, and perceived spaces appear frequently in my case study chapters.

Of course, using a methodology that is oriented to the specifics of lived spaces means that my readings pay particular attention to the different individual elements coding those spaces—elements like gender, race, and economic class. To facilitate this attentiveness to space, I draw upon feminist geographer Doreen Massey. A more grounded and deliberately political critic than Soja, Massey productively uses lived space to challenge the elements of society she found her fellow spatial theorists overlooking—elements like gendered space (*Space, Place and Gender*, 1994) and the importance of the local within larger systems like capitalism and globalization (*The Spatial Division of Labour*, 1984). Her conception of space focuses on the interactions within lived space, of “our relations with each other, our connections with each other . . . so what we have is a geography which is in a sense the geography of power” (“Doreen Massey on Space”). By prioritizing those who are often ignored or subjugated by power flows, Massey offers a practice of spatial critique that aligns with the socio-political engagements of my postcolonial SF authors. As such, what Massey brings to my use of Soja’s categories is a greater

responsibility to the fact that “different people have various degrees of access to the flows that go into making their place” (Saldanha, “Power-Geometry as Philosophy of Space”).

If Soja provides a conceptual framework, and Massey demonstrates the political productivity of thirdspace, then Bertrand Westphal is the theorist who demonstrates how fully spatial and literary studies go hand-in-hand. His idea of geocriticism builds from previous spatial theories (including Soja’s) to offer a specifically literary spatial practice. In *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (originally published in French in 2007, translated into English by prolific spatial theorist and fellow geocritic Robert Tally in 2011), Westphal presents the main tenets of his proposed field, a

way of looking at the spaces of literature, broadly conceived, to include not only those places that readers and writers experience by means of texts but also the experience of space and place within ourselves . . . geocriticism can examine how the ways in which we are situated in space determine the nature and quality of our existence in the world. (Tally, “Introduction” 8)

As such, geocriticism mainly explores the different ways in which texts connect with their real-world referent (what Westphal calls the “realeme”). This idea of the realeme and its relationship to literary worlds is vital for my discussion of postcolonial SF.¹⁵ Indeed, many of Westphal’s tenets about the connection between literary worlds and realeme referents synchronize with the

¹⁵ Partially because geocriticism provides one way of considering how narratives affect lived spaces. In fact, Biram Mboob cites how the conceived space of Africa, and one narrative in particular, made him want to work as an SF author: “The pervading Afropessimism around the Millennium, particularly *The Economist*’s report on ‘The Hopeless continent’—inspired him to engage with Western canons of science fiction” (Wood, “Africa in Science Fiction”).

SF studies conception of how the SF genre capitalizes on referentiality (see my next section on “Science Fiction Studies: Lineages and Reading Protocols”).¹⁶

In his exploration of referentiality, Westphal instructs his readers to “[n]ever lose sight of the fact that *representation is a re-presentation*, therefore evolutionary and transgressive, and not a static image of a perpetual present” (emphasis mine, 145).¹⁷ Such an idea hinges on the theories put forth by Lefebvre and Soja that our ‘real’ spaces are *simultaneously* imagined constructs, capable of shifting and reordering, especially if we consider the lived spatial arena. In light of this consideration, Westphal insists that potential geocritics should employ multifocalization, contending with the perceptions and representations of more than one writer when analyzing spaces to avoid falling prey to a false sense of “truth” (114, 117).¹⁸ It is impossible to escape from the limitations of perspectives; even by extending one’s textual study to non-literary texts, it is impossible to gather a complete perspective of a space.

Certain things are unpublished, untraceable, living only a fleeting existence through fliers, bus advertisements, radio blasts, popular sayings, smells, recordings; the printed word can only carry out so much of the actual lived experience. However, by focusing on the portrayal of particular postcolonial locations (Mexico City, Lagos, India, etc.) by postcolonial authors, I am

¹⁶ He even uses the concept of oscillation, and several of his close readings focus on the works of speculative authors (including Borges, Calvino, Carpenter, Chamoiseau, Gaiman, Huxley, Lovecraft, Pynchon, Rushdie, Spielberg, and Tolkien.)

¹⁷ Much like Caribbeanist Shona L. Jackson’s use of “re/presentation” to show the shift in Indigenous representation through the colonial, nationalist, and postcolonial periods of the Caribbean (“The Re/Presentation of the Indigenous Caribbean in Literature,” *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, 2014). The stories I study bend the SF genre in such a way. These are the sentiments I express in my project whenever I use hyphenation to indicate a ‘re-vision’ or ‘re-presentation.’

¹⁸ And yet again, Westphal aligns beautifully with a science fictional critical concept: that of the megatext. For while Westphal uses Mars and the moon as sites that would require waiting for geocritical analysis until after local perspectives could be gained, SF writers currently allow for some sense of geocritical survey in their megatextual lineage of the moon and Martians (Westphal 118).

able to engage with perspectives previously missing from the SF canon, helping to re-focalize the genre's re-presentations.

It was apparent in my research that while an SF-enabled temporal shift may be the excuse, the shifts within the spatial register *are* the argument. Science fiction is the only genre that allows the relationship between the realme and its fictional version to look ahead to the future—to represent changes to a space, such as a city, that have not yet happened (*Geocriticism* 108). The shift in time allows for changes in the three spatial components of the location. Often this is precisely what we see occurring in Earthside postcolonial SF where countries like South Africa and India are repositioned in technical, political, and fiscal hierarchies.¹⁹

1.3 SF STUDIES: LINEAGES AND READING PROTOCOLS

“Science fiction is of all forms of fiction today the one that bears the deepest and most interesting affinity with the rigors of dialectical[*] thinking.”

(Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* xv)

*“trialectical”

(Soja, quoting Lefebvre, *Thirdspace* 48)

As with all genres, science fiction does not have a tidy lineage, and those with different stances on what constitutes science fiction possess different formations of how the canon and the

¹⁹ Westphal's work has inspired contemporary spatial-literary studies, ones that are slightly more concrete in scope and method than his, including *Popular Fiction and Spatiality: Reading Genre Settings* (2016; Ed. by Lisa Fletcher), which does not engage global SF. Soja has more specifically spurred the critical anthology *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture* (2011). Tally has been most prolific in orchestrating literary-focused spatial criticism, most notably his edited *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2011) and the recently published *Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (2017). I see my project as building on this spatial-literary swing and encouraging fellow critics to further consider the connections between geocriticism and the reading practices posited by postcolonial SF.

academic field of SF studies developed.²⁰ If we consider the history of SF to begin with Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus* in 1818, then SF has been written in Europe since the early nineteenth century (though it was not labeled as science fiction when published, as that term did not arrive until the twentieth century).²¹ Shelley's novel spurred other works by writers concerned with the dramatic societal changes of the period, particularly the technology of the Industrial Revolution and destabilizing scientific landmarks such as Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Indeed, SF is a genre that has always mused about scientific and societal shifts in more fantastical (speculative) and more scientifically grounded (extrapolated) ways.²² In his overview of SF from this period, Arthur B. Evans notes that less-SF-touted American writer Edgar Allan Poe may have helped establish a more science-oriented mode of SF (see "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal," 1835), which inspired the adventurous *romans scientifiques* (1863-1905) of the widely regarded French author Jules Verne (*The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* 16-9). Often linked with Verne as being a grandfather of the genre, the famous British writer H. G. Wells spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of SF, publishing numerous works (including *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* (1895), and "The Star" (1897)). The genre's more

²⁰ If you are interested in considering the fluctuating limitations of the genre, I refer you to the beautiful confusion of Ward Shelley's diaphanous whale image of "The History of Science Fiction."

²¹ This is certainly not the *earliest* possible text, but it is one of the most agreed-upon. I also find it useful to utilize an anchor so entrenched and recognizable to the general public and non-SF literary population.

²² Regarding speculation and extrapolation, which are most commonly used interchangeably, but also have slightly distinct connotations, Heinlein wrote, "'Extrapolation' means much the same in fiction writing as it does in mathematics: exploring a trend. It means continuing a curve, a path, a trend into the future by extending its present direction and continuing the *shape* . . . 'Speculation' has far more elbow room than extrapolation; it starts with a 'what if'—and the new factor thrown in by the 'what if' may be both wildly, improbably and so revolutionary in effect as to throw a sine-curve trend (or a yeast-growth trend, or any trend) into something unrecognizably different" ("Pandora's Box," 1952, qtd. in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* 25). Perhaps obviously, the most radical postcolonial SF works are more speculative because they wish to challenge the current trend. For SF's connection to societal and scientific change, see works like *The Long Road to Science Fiction* series by James Gunn (1977; reprint 2002); Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder: A Critical Guide to Science Fiction* (2004), *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Tally, 2009); Brian Aldiss' *Trillion Year Spree* (1986); and *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009).

modern conception—not as romantic science stories, but as science fiction—comes from the American era of pulp magazines.²³ As part of the early transition from general-fiction to specialty-fiction pulp publishing, Hugo Gernsback created *Amazing Stories* in 1926.²⁴ Science fiction became so entangled with this American origin, and American writers were so prolific after its conception, that in Brian Aldiss' 1986 history of the genre (*Trillion Year Spree*), he wrote that science fiction was “largely—in emphasis and in fact—an American art form, coinciding with a time of great technological evolution and with the rise of the USA to super-power status” (14). Yet Aldiss also co-edited the first “world” SF anthology in 1986, introducing world SF as both a congress and a collectible realm of texts. Although the *Penguin World Omnibus of Science Fiction* still primarily focused on European nations, it did include stories from Ghana, Chile, Brazil, Japan, India, China, and Colombia. It does not diminish the work's importance for us to reflect on Aldiss' statement that the collection provides SF in which the world “endures. It continues. . . . nothing worse than today's newspaper headlines. This is science fiction for survivors. I like it” (“Introduction,” 16). Current world SF seems determined to do more than survive and endure.²⁵ It also comes from and circulates between more countries.

Then again, current SF is increasingly world-oriented, reflecting and building upon the rapid progress in communication and travel technologies (as I discuss in the section “A Global Turn: RaceFail09 as Instigation/Vital Timeline Point”). My project points to this newly worlded

²³ If we agree with the *SF Encyclopedia*, then that era began in 1896 during a meeting of content and form when Frank A. Munsey switched the “content of *The Argosy* to contain nothing but fiction and . . . printed it on cheap woodpulp” (“Pulp”).

²⁴ On its heels came the stories of what is known as the Golden Age of SF, roughly from the inception of *Astounding* magazine by John W. Campbell in 1938 through the late 1940s, and then the SF New Wave of the 1960s, and the cyberpunk subgenre sparking in the 1980s. During all of these eras, SF production was most prolific in the United States and Europe, though Russia has a similarly long history of SF (*SF Encyclopedia*, “Russia”), as does South America, particularly in Brazil (*SF Encyclopedia*, “Brazil”).

²⁵ For why survival is problematic, see the “Beware the Easy Work: The Future is an Ellipsis” section in my coda, where I quote Octavia E. Butler on the distinction between surviving and winning.

moment in the genre, which correlates to a different political focus, namely, those of specific postcolonial countries. Yet, science fiction textual histories from countries other than the U.S. and Western Europe are not nearly as extensively documented.²⁶ Even within countries that have heavily chronicled SF lineages, there are still telling gaps (see Geoffrey Glover’s “Fables of Difference: African American Science Fiction from 1931 Through 2006” for a comprehensive lineage of the African-American SF novel). It is evident that SF is a firmly rooted genre, even in places that are currently receiving much ‘new’ acclaim.²⁷

Science fiction *studies* started quite a bit later. (Literally: *Science Fiction Studies*, one of the most prestigious SF academic journals, began in the United States in 1973; one of its inaugural co-editors was Darko Suvin, a foundational SF theorist.) The earliest SF journal was *The Newsletter of the Conference on Science-Fiction of the MLA* (1959)—the early form of what

²⁶ Rachel Haywood Ferreira’s *The Emergence of Latin American Science Fiction* (2011) details SF texts from Argentina, Brazil, and—most usefully for my study—Mexico before 1920. There are no comparable book-length works chronologizing African or Indian SF at this time, though scholars have cited Bengali writer Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* (a feminist utopia published in *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine* in 1905) as being one of the earliest Indian SF narratives. Mark Bould considers South African Joseph J. Dike’s “The Secret City: A Romance of the Karroo” (1913) to be one of the earliest African SF texts, though his earliest estimate for an indigenous African SF text is far later: Algerian Mohammed Dib’s *Who Remembers the Sea* (1962); Flora Nwapa’s *Journey to Space* (1980) is a contender for the earliest indigenous Nigerian SF.

Although these national lineages are most relevant for my dissertation’s focus on texts from India, Mexico, Nigeria, and South Africa, other recent world SF archive-building works include: Nathaniel Isaacson’s *Celestial Empire: The Emergence of Chinese Science Fiction* (2017) and Cara Healey’s *How Far is Beijing? Gender and the Capital in Tie Ning’s How Far is Forever and “Night of the Spring Breeze”* (2013), which explore Chinese SF. For a sense of Japanese SF, see Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi’s *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime* (2007). For an example of international connections of SF, see Kathryn Page-Lippsmeyer’s *The Space of Japanese Science Fiction: Illustration, Subculture, and the Body in SF Magazine* (2016) and Takayuki Tatsumi’s *Full Metal Apache: Transactions Between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-pop America* (2006). Most studies on Caribbean SF are focused on the twentieth century, such as Sharon DeGraw’s article “Tobias S. Buckell’s Galactic Caribbean Future” in *Extrapolation* (2015) or Jessica McDonald’s “Beyond Generic Hybridity: Nalo Hopkinson and the Politics of Science Fiction” in *Canadian Literature* (2016), though *Latin American Science Fiction: Theory and Practice* edited by M. Elizabeth M. Ginway and J. Andrew Brown (2012) includes articles that engage in some historicizing. I note these to indicate the type of work—often in only one or two studies—that has been done on SF of the non-Western world.

²⁷ For a detailed introduction to the science fiction genre, see Adam Roberts’ *Science Fiction* (2000, part of Routledge’s *The New Critical Idiom* series), Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr.’s *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, and *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2008). For the history of SF studies, see *Science Fiction Studies*’ “A History of Science Fiction Criticism: Collective Works Cited and Chronological Bibliography” (vol. 26, no. 2, July 1999, pp. 263-384, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240786>), though it only runs up to 1999, and Neil Barron’s *Anatomy of Wonder: A Critical Guide to Science Fiction* (5th ed., 2004).

is now known as the American journal *Extrapolation*; it was followed closely by *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction* (1972), a U.K. publication; and the fourth main SF journal, the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (1988), sponsored by the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, also holds one of the largest current SF annual conferences. These journals helped usher in a new period of academic engagement with the popular genre. Early SF criticism attempted to define the SF genre by analyzing the formal qualities that made SF unique. Suvin's most famous contribution, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979), established the earliest critical framework of science fiction by combining his investment in the SF genre with his previous research in dramaturgy and comparative literature, especially his expertise on Bertolt Brecht.

Suvin's *Metamorphoses* applies Brecht's conception of estrangement to SF's generic ability to distance narratives from our reality. Science fiction as a genre hinges upon the manipulation of space—of world-building within and across texts. This is the primary way for SF writers to achieve what Suvin considers to be the defining function of the SF genre: cognitive estrangement. For Brecht, “a representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” in a pointed way for a specific *purpose* (Brecht qtd. in Suvin, “Estrangement and Cognition” 26). Of course, as Carl Freedman points out, this combinative idea is “actually present in all fiction,” but we may still consider science fiction to be “those texts in which cognitive estrangement is not only present but dominant” (*Critical Theory and Science Fiction* 22). For Suvin, the idea of “cognitive estrangement” occurs when a reader understands an element of a text that also defamiliarizes the text from the reader, generating both interest and critical distance.

Suvin posits that SF achieves a state of estrangement through the use of a novum, or the *act/law/setting* that is different, distanced, and distinct from our own reality. Novums are elements that shake up the comfortable reality of the SF narrative, such as the existence of aliens or technological/scientific breakthroughs.²⁸ While novums can be deployed purely for entertainment value, Suvin's sense of the novum is more pointed. For Suvin,

[t]he aliens—utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers—[the novum is] a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a *crucible*. (emphasis mine, "Estrangement and Cognition" 25)

The novum is more than a tool of mimesis; it disrupts accepted systems, allows the chance for change to occur at the level of speculative thinking, encouraging (re)evaluation within the text and for (re)consideration by the reader.²⁹ When we accept the continuous use of this mode of estrangement, it's clear why SF is often the popular genre of political and social critique.

This system of running comparisons and experiencing the cognitive estrangement causes the reader and science fiction text to enter into a pattern of feedback oscillation, another Suvin-created Brechtian term. This oscillation is a continuous process in which a reader's consideration travels "now from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality to the narratively actualized novum in order to understand the plot-events, and now back from those novelties to the author's reality, in order to see it afresh from the new perspective gained" (Suvin 71). The distance between the reality of the science fiction text and the reality of the reader is constantly at play;

²⁸ One example is H. G. Wells' "The New Accelerator" (1901) where a miracle compound allows humans to behave like the superhero Flash Gordon. Another is W.E.B. DuBois' titular outer space phenomenon in "The Comet" (1920), which brings the population of New York City down to two and, in doing so, destabilizes society's racial hierarchies. When we think of science fiction, the elements of texts that often come immediately to mind (aliens, robots, artificial intelligences, rocket ships, laser guns, translators, cure-all-pills, intergalactic or total-world federations, etc.) are all examples of particularly flashy novums.

²⁹ (This function is not entirely surprising, considering Suvin's use of Brechtian principles.)

attuned readers compare the two worlds they experience simultaneously: that of the story and that which is outside the story.³⁰ As readers continue through a science fiction narrative, they become versed not only in the fictional world/its novum/the differences between that world and their own, but also in how the world/novum/differences relate to their own lived experience of reality—and how their experience of reality affects the experience of the world/novum/differences.³¹

While the type of novum causing the estrangement *is* particular to the generic conventions, the creation of a feedback oscillation is not singular to SF. Suvin admits this, writing, “This oscillation, called estrangement by Shklovsky and Brecht, is no doubt a consequence of every poetic, dramatic, scientific, in brief *semantic* novum. However, its second pole is in SF, a narrative reality sufficiently autonomous and intransitive to be explored at length as to its own properties and the human relationships it implies” (“SF and the Novum” 71). What is generative and distinct, Suvin tells us, is the SF’s diegetic world’s level of independence from the realeme. Postcolonial SF authors achieve this independence through their use of spatial geometries, upsetting what would be pessimistic extrapolations with speculations, ones that don’t have to align with current, most likely forecasts for postcolonial countries and populations.

³⁰ This concept necessarily implies a somewhat stable reader reality, which is elusive. If the reader’s reality is one-half of the formula required for feedback oscillation to occur, what would the feedback oscillation of reader whose sense of reality is “alien” to most other humans look like? For example, perhaps, how would a person with synesthesia relate to an extraterrestrial’s way of processing sensory information? Another question one might have already contended with in SF studies and fandom: What would the feedback oscillation of a reader who has historically not been implied (from a postcolonial country, or a minority, or a female, or a person outside the middle class) look like? I think this second question is already being answered in the outpouring of world SF, in debates like RaceFail09, and in critical works like those I reference later in this Introduction.

³¹ Yes, dear post-1960s academic readers, this means some of the most crucial conceptions of SF criticism are inherently linked to reader-response theory. Do not panic, for we shall utilize these ideas to support an analysis of what the text itself does in regard to its context, anchoring ourselves to Delany’s close reading protocols, in a way that perhaps new historicists and even those self-righteous critics more recently touting “surface” reading should be well-enough pleased.

My particular focus on SF texts set on Earth offers a distinct possibility regarding Suvin's generic functions. Texts that are closer to the reader's reality (if only because they are set on Earth) would seem to have a shorter duration of ping-back time between the points of oscillation (fiction and implied-reader reality). The feedback oscillation may be able to oscillate at high speeds between these closer "worlds." Thus, one imagines, the exchange of comparisons would pick up in frequency "similar to the acceleration of a ping-pong ball between two slowly approaching paddles. After the ball has made many bounces off each paddle, it is going far faster" (Martin Harwit, discussing "Electromagnetic Processes in Space" in his book *Astrophysical Concepts* 198). In this metaphor, it is the energy of the paddles being brought closer together that affects the ball—the decision to make the diegetic "paddle" an Earth-space makes it more similar to and draws it closer to the other "paddle," which is the reader's reality—Earth-space, increasing the rate and intensity of the reader's critical observation (the ping-pong ball) between the SF text and reality (the two paddles).³² There seems to be a greater number of

³² SF also has long utilized the possibilities of bringing the strange, the alien, the future technology into the location of the local and familiar. Perhaps the best example of this is by H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, which brings invading Martians into the heart of the British Empire and their alien technology into the sleepy villages of the pastoral countryside. At the time, Wells lived in Working, and used the developing craze for bicycle riding as a way of gathering "topographical detail." Interestingly, his sentimental romance based on cycling, *The Wheels of Chance: A Cycling Holiday Adventure*, was published in 1896, only two years before the 1989 publication of *The War of the Worlds*. Indeed, his "topographical sense" was of such an informative aspect of his thinking and creative process that Mackenzie notes it separately in the index to their bibliography, listing pages of Wells pretending to burn and conquer the countryside around his childhood location of Bromley (28). Wells does more than decide to place this episode in real locations; he takes into account the characters, the lived experiences, and the emotional connotations of those locations. In fact, he seemed to relish the opportunity of wielding such spatiality, gleefully writing to his friend: "I'm doing the dearest little serial for Pearson's new magazine in which I completely wreck and sack Working—killing my neighbors in painful and eccentric ways—then proceed via Kingston and Richmond to London, which I sack, selecting South Kensington for feats of peculiar atrocity" (Mackenzie 113).

In the critical edition of *The War of the Worlds*, there is a "Glossary of Places Mentioned in the Text"—it spans pages 227-235 and contains 177 entries. These entries include the "name" of the mentioned place, and serve more of a geographical list (a place, a perceived space) than including emotional connotations of the areas (the spaces are given through Wells' narrator, not this list). Some of the places mentioned are used to illustrate the widespread panic, the affectively permissibility of doom, of not being able to escape the Martian plan of conquering, while others demonstrate the distance of England, the lack of real-time information about what's occurring at different areas of the country. Each name-dropped location serves to locate the reader in a real part of England: "a couple of sturdy roughs" can have "just rushed out of Fleet Street with still wet newspapers and staring placards,"

meaningful opportunities for a text to engage its reader in critical consideration of their own world through its interventions if those overlapping movements of estranged connection occur more frequently. This may be why postcolonial SF writers produce so many Earth-set narratives. While they certainly can and do utilize the reader's ability to decipher metaphorical connections between Others/Elsewheres and Earthlings/Earthside histories, eliminating one such distance emphasizes another: the distance between Earth societies, classes, cultures, histories, and environments—in short, Earth realities—and how the text and the implied reader relate through them. This is a necessary point to make, considering the publishing industry still holds more power and prestige (on a global scale) outside of the countries that the SF narratives I study prioritize—places like Nigeria, South Africa, India, and the Caribbean.

Based on these principles of Suvin (cognitive estrangement as instigated by a novum and experienced as part of the feedback oscillation between reader and text), another foundational critic of SF studies, Samuel Delany, proposed that SF requires certain reading protocols.³³ In *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (1978), Delany claims that narrative style is vital for the cognitive estrangement of SF to succeed; style is the easiest and most consistent way for the text to engage the reader in the vital relationship of feedback oscillation. In his estimation, an SF reader must engage with the text, must “process in accord with what we know of the physically explainable universe. And the physically explainable has a much wider range than the personally observable . . . not only does [a science fiction text] throw us worlds away, it specifies how we get there” (44). Since SF often begins *in medias res*, in a

and the Waterloo station contains regular customers, including those “people who had gone out for a day's boating” by using the Waterloo lines toward “Richmond, Putney, and Kingston” (Wells 108-9). Such details not only remind us that the Martian invasion is happening all around—and about to happen in—*London*, but they also tighten the gap between the science fictional tale and the reader's lived reality.

³³ Delany began publishing in the 1960s. He is one of the earliest recognized African-American SF writers, one of the earliest openly bisexual SF writers, and his prolific literary output in the form of SF novels, SF short stories, and literary criticism has cemented his position in the SF Hall of Fame (inducted in 2002).

world where everything *could* be imagined, readers must piece together the narrative world by collecting information about what must exist for the story to unfold. To borrow a classic example from Delany, the phrase “Her world exploded” works perfectly well metaphorically in *any* text—but in the SF narrative world of *Star Wars*, there is the planet-exploding weapon of the Death Star, and Princess Leia’s home planet is literally destroyed.³⁴ In a conversation about writing, Caribbean-Canadian SF author Nalo Hopkinson noted that although all writers strive to construct vivid and emotionally realistic narrative worlds,

When your writing concerns *only* reality, there are things you don’t need to question. Writing science fiction and fantasy means you need to question whether there’s even a sun. And then question what direction that sun comes up in and what color it is. . . . And then, using the answers to those questions: What color does it mean the plants are? What is the composition of the air? Given that composition, what is the biology of creatures on the world you’ve created? (personal interview)

Hopkinson spoke mainly of the extra labor of writing in speculative genres, but readers also contend with this level of world-building engagement. While authors often need to explain their world’s landscapes, political systems, alien biology, and technological breakthroughs to readers, they also suggest the level of difference between the SF world and our own in smaller, more slippery ways.³⁵ According to Delany, it is the reader’s job to notice.

³⁴ His most quoted example is the following from Heinlein: “‘The door dilated,’” which Delany explicates as being “meaningless as naturalistic fiction, and practically meaningless as fantasy. [Yet] as SF—as an event that hasn’t happened, yet still must be interpreted in terms of the physically explainable—it is quite as wondrous as Ellison feels it” (“About 5,750 Words” 42-6). It is in the construction of the sentence where the important difference in the technological reality of the text is compared to our reality (very few of us have experienced doors that do not swing on hinges or slide on rollers, but rather telescope in and out to allow passage); a comparison that is unremarked upon by the text and does not draw attention to itself (in the way an “info-dump” often does)—and it is the construction of this comparison, in addition to the technological invention itself, that actually produces SF.

³⁵ It may seem easy to discount Delany’s idea that SF readers engage in protocols that are distinct from any other type of reading. Do not students engaging with a piece of world literature also have to become acclimated to

This distance between reality and the fictional world is partially space-centric: An SF narrative's novum may be dependent upon or inherently shaped by the story's location. Robert Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* (1966) or "The Menace from Earth" (1957) have technologies crucial to their settings in long-established moon cities. While spatial attentiveness is always beneficial to literature, it is particularly important to SF readers, who know that the story might be taking place in almost any type of world but who need to understand the diegetic parameters of that world in order to make sense of the story's internal logics and experience the feedback oscillation.³⁶

constructing the world of the text through particular constructions of the text's sentences; through tiny clues—or info-dumps—about the physical environment, societal organization, and imaginative beliefs of its characters? While the glossaries at the back of postcolonial/realistic and SF texts differ vitally in that only in SF texts can the glossary include unreal objects and languages, both textual elements still require the reader to engage with the estranging elements of the text. But, just as not all SF texts engage with the places, peoples, and concerns of postcoloniality, it is certainly true that postcolonial/realistic fictions are unable to engage in certain types of textual allusions or build on SF-specific creations *unless* they are also part of that genre. In this way, there is merit to Delany's SF-specific reading protocols. You can have a realist text that includes the sentence, "Her hair was copper" or "His hair was silver," and it will inform the reader about the characters' appearance and (perhaps) age; but only in a speculative text can such sentences indicate that the female character's hair was actually composed of the metal "Cu" with atomic number 29 (and that it might be useful for circuitry), and that the male character's hair was actually composed of the metal "Au" with atomic number 47 (and that he might have an economic advantage over the character made of copper).

³⁶ When teaching science fiction, I like to help readers new to the genre understand this increased importance. I present them with a section of a text they've already read, Heinlein's "The Menace from Earth," for example. I then read it aloud to them, inviting them to interrupt me as soon as they hear something that serves as a clue to the specific world-building of the story. The experiment goes something like this, where the *grey italicized* text represents a gloss of points past classes have made:

My name is Holly Jones and I'm fifteen. I'm very intelligent but it doesn't show, because I look like an underdone angel. Insipid.

I was born right here in Luna City [*STOP. Could be an Earth city we haven't heard of, but "Luna" points us to the moon...*], which seems to surprise Earthside types. [*STOP. She's not Earthside, so the "Luna" probably refers to outer space.*] Actually, I'm third generation; my grandparents pioneered in Site One [*STOP. There's a relatively long history of outer space immigration in this world. "Site" tells us Holly's grandparents were indeed "pioneers." Her family is one of the most established, but there are other families that haven't been there as long*], where the Memorial is. [*STOP. "Memorial" tells us it wasn't easy in the early days of the settlement, and it's possible that there may have been some type of violent disaster, though we haven't gotten any clues to that yet... At the very least, people died.*] I live with my parents in Artemis Apartments [*STOP. Reinforcing the fact that we're on the moon—as the moon-associated goddess, Artemis, plus Luna City certainly tell us where these outer space explorers are living.*], the new co-op [*co-ops are a normal type of living arrangement*] in Pressure Five, eight hundred feet down [*This is potentially confusing until Heinlein reveals his Luna City map and explains how citizens live below the surface in various levels of caverns, but even at this point, it tells the reader that the moon has not been terraformed; "Pressure" is still a vital measurement, probably for locking in oxygen. Citizens like Holly*

For my project, it is vital to consider the SF reading protocols and genre-specific devices and the connection of science fiction literature to the colonial past and postcolonial present. Patricia Kerslake questions the specific construction of empires in her *Science Fiction and Empire* (2007), going as far as exploring modes of “meta-empire.” In a slightly more general study of the ideologies and histories of colonialism, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), John Rieder maps the ways the “colonial gaze” is replicated and distorted in early science fiction. As Rieder explains, early SF writers who engaged with people and places considered “uncivilized” by the British Empire often did so through encoding “the non-European world in all its diversity, not simply as the Other, but in various ways as the veritable embodiment of the past: wild, savage, tribal, barbarous, despotic, superstitious” (30). Such coding is evident in SF through narratives of the virginal “discoverer’s fantasy,” the helpfully corrective “missionary fantasy,” and the anachronistic “anthropologist’s fantasy” in order to question and support elements of the colonial project (30; 31-2, 6). Both Rieder and Kerslake indicate the importance of conceptions of space (territory, primitive zone, empire, alien world, etc.) to science fiction. In particular, Rieder’s work points to the importance of having postcolonial SF authors present fictions alternative to the ideological presumptions in previous

orient themselves to the physical landscape differently than “Earthside” humans—even those living on mountains tend not to know whether they live a particular number of feet above, and eight hundred feet down is very substantial and extra-terrestrial] near City Hall. [We’ve got a possible democratic government, brought over from Earth.] But I’m not there much; I’m too busy.

In these seven sentences, Heinlein doesn’t present the full lived-space of his city, which readers get in the rest of the story, but he does indicate the importance—and nonchalance—of the specifics of Luna City to his story. Of course, I ask students to do this after they’ve already read the story and engaged with the full depiction of Holly’s world. Since they *know* the setting is a moon civilization, such clues are far more obvious, and they’re able to catch the specifics that are explained later in more detail (as with the “eight hundred feet down”). The clues my students discuss are the type of quick addition detection that readers do on their own, just perhaps without conscious acknowledgement. Such spatial attentiveness is required not only for the SF world to make sense, but for the feedback oscillation I’ve described previously to occur: Heinlein’s loonies often compare their locational experiences to Earthside “groundhogs,” even as readers themselves contrast their Earthside experiences to lunar ones and engage in the estrangement of such ‘normal’ elements as subway systems, city maps, flights, racial and cultural stereotypes, gender biases in engineering, and swimming.

SF texts. Writing from authors whose communities and homelands were historically only represented in SF, never included as representation-makers, helps to combat the ethnographic stare identified by Rieder, which considered the subjectivities of the people being represented as “lost races,” aliens, or even primitive non-humans, stuck in the backchannel of historical progression.³⁷ Contemporary world SF is not only able to correct and challenge such early SF representations, but also to productively shift away from the devotion to their underlying stereotypical ideologies that continue today. This is not to extol the virtue of the contemporary, but rather to agree with Westphal, Massey, and Soja’s insistence that fictional depictions have the power to affect real people and places, and to acknowledge that in their SF, postcolonial authors assert control over such potential power to change outside re-inscriptions.

This endeavor is something the SF genre is particularly suited for, if we agree with Fredric Jameson’s contention that the historical precedence of the

‘non-serious’ or pulp character of SF is an indispensable feature in its capacity to relax that tyrannical ‘reality principle’ . . . and to allow the ‘paraliterary’ form thereby to inherit the vocation of giving us alternate versions of a world that has elsewhere seemed to resist even imagined change. (*Archaeologies* 270)

Space has always been a primary way for SF authors to challenge or support societal hierarchies.³⁸ I wish to quickly illustrate with two examples from opposite ends of SF history the

³⁷ For considerations of how to potentially destabilize such an ethnographic gaze in film, see Fatimah Tobing Rony’s *The Third Eye: Race Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (1996); for examples of contemporary SF that still falls prey to the ideologies Rieder explores, see almost any episode of *Star Trek*.

³⁸ Fredric Jameson once contended that science fiction might even be the “spatial genre par excellence” (1987). The 2004 Mundane Manifesto of Jeff Ryman et al. ordained that writing science fiction set on Earth was the only socially responsible mode of political imaginative engagement, and while I think that manifesto was a bit ill conceived, their reasoning does align with recent interdisciplinary concerns of the human-caused environmental wreckage of the Anthropocene. Rob Kitchin and James Kneale compiled their critical anthology *Lost in Space: Geographies of Science Fiction* in 2005. All of which is to say: In this field, there’s a long line of various spatial investments held by writers, fans, and critics. We need to continue and update that investment.

transformation in SF spatial interventions: Jules Verne's *The Vanished Diamond* (1884) and Efe Okogu's "Proposition 23" (2012). Both engage the three spatial categories of Soja to interrogate the realities of societal inscription, but I hope to show the shift from the primary use of physical/imagined space in the earlier narratives to the emphasized and re-oriented lived space (swinging the ethnographic camera around, putting it in the hands, as Trinh Minh-ha suggests—of the previous ethnographic subject).³⁹

1.4 RE-VISIONING AFRICAN SPACE

"Some people dislike science fiction . . . What I like about the genre, however, is that it offers a writer the opportunity to go directly to the heart of an ironical or thought-provoking situation by setting up a theoretical world. Science fiction is a bit like writing a problem in mathematics, reducing reality to a tangle of pipes and cisterns or a group of three people traveling at varying speeds up a mountain, in order to reveal the relationships between matter, time and space."
(Manjula Padmanabhan, *Kleptomania*, 2004)

Verne is the grandfather of science fiction writing devoted to space. The spectacular journeys his protagonists undertake evoke not only the lush, tempting, and perilous expansion of the colonial era, but also the close connection between technological and transportation progress: It is in a Verne story that one can see how technology like the hot air balloon results in a smaller worldscape (indeed, Verne's second published work was *Five Weeks in a Balloon, or, Journeys and Discoveries in Africa by Three Englishmen*).⁴⁰ Verne exemplifies the close relationship of

³⁹ I've chosen Africa for this illustration because I explore Nigerian and South African SF in my second chapter and conclusion, respectively, but also because there is a more complete SF lineage of representations of African countries from early SF to current SF than either India or Mexico, the spaces I deal with in my first and third chapters.

⁴⁰ Unlike *The Vanished Diamond*, this adventure story is classified by *The Jules Verne Encyclopedia*'s authors as science fiction. An argument of taxonomy is not my objective, though I do find it amusing that the parody of SF adventure escapes the classification of SF adventure, when the two stories are actually *quite* similar in the levels of adventure, cliff-hanger, mystery, and romanticism. Sure, Cyprien's science fails—but it is science, just as the

SF to travel writing, a pre-eminent writing mode of the eighteenth century that ranged from “memoir, scenic tour journal, topographical essay, romantic narrative, exploration journal and guidebook” (Smethurst, “Introduction” 5). Since travel writing gained its popularity by escorting readers through new environments, it’s no coincidence, as Rieder explains, that the early travel author’s tendency of “surveying and explaining” can be tracked into the beginning of SF, especially lost-race SF novels of the late nineteenth century through the 1930s (41). Suvin also highlighted the similarity in the world-building of certain types of SF and travelogues, noting that in SF works like Verne’s, “the voyage can only start in the author’s space, and the account of the new reality [of the text] *has to arrive back into that space* so that its telling may be naturalistically plausible” (emphasis mine, 77). SF arises, in part, from the colonial instigation of having *new* places to explore, but it overwhelmingly focuses back on where the traveler travels *from*—the space of the traveled-to country serves as the estranging mirror for the traveler. Readers of Verne’s stories may never travel to South Africa themselves, but they can gain a second-hand experience of having the new and strange grow more familiar while the familiar becomes estranged. This is entirely useful for the traveler (which is why we still urge students to study abroad, though it’s not necessarily as transformative for those living in the places she travels *to*; they hold up the mirror but do not face the silvered surface themselves.)

science that steers the balloon in *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. Rieder describes Verne’s stories as being less about imaginative technology and more focused on “settings and place and especially access to place” (32). Verne himself wrote that his works are spatially attentive:

I wrote *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, not as a story about ballooning, but as a story about Africa. I was always greatly interested in geography and travel, and I wanted to give a romantic description of Africa. Now, there was no means of taking my travelers through Africa otherwise than in a balloon, and that is why a balloon is introduced. [...] I chose Africa as the scene of action, for the simple reason that less was, and is, known about that continent than any other; and it struck me that the most ingenious way in which this portion of the world’s surface could be explored would be from a balloon. I thoroughly enjoyed writing the story, and, even more, I may add, the researches which it made necessary; for then, as now, I always tried to make even the wildest of my romances as realistic and true to life as possible (*The Jules Verne Encyclopedia* 50).

In postcolonial SF texts, travel to a distant land is not often the featured spatial element; instead, it is the everyday and the local. As I've mentioned previously, if we mobilize Suvin, then the world built by the SF story is what allows readers to understand new social and geographic networks; the world of postcolonial SF revises those networks by bringing around the people from behind the mirror. We see this distinction easily when we compare Verne's "science romance" with Okogu's SF novella. Verne's work presents European subjects adventuring in the distant lands of the Empire. While those lands may have been beautiful, they were also exoticized along with their non-European inhabitants, who were, unsurprisingly, exoticized as well in their depiction as "simpler" (36).

Yet, Verne also questioned the cruelties of the colonial project.⁴¹ To illustrate, I turn toward Verne's *The Vanishing Diamond* (1885), a short novel that focuses on the space of South Africa. The novel hinges on the science of geology as it pertains to surveying mines and the question of whether it is possible to engineer a false diamond. A (supposedly) fabricated priceless diamond is stolen. After much running about the South African Veld, the diamond is ultimately found in the gullet of a pet ostrich, and it is revealed that it was a natural stone all along.⁴² Verne depicts an "on-the-ground" romp through South Africa that deals with the realities of intensive mining and with a whimsical giraffe and ostrich steeplechase scene across

⁴¹ One of his most famous characters, Captain Nemo of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, for example, may appear to be an everyman seeking his individual freedom in the "open" realm of the ocean (Nemo translates to "no one"), but the Captain has a very specific origin as a colonized subject: Nemo is an Indian prince who "had joined the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 to fight British rule. As a result, his family was massacred, and he escaped with a few loyal followers to build the *Nautilus* and begin a vengeful underwater existence. He hurled his submarine as a ram on the warships of the hated British" (Taves 2). Although Nemo was originally not an Indian who lost everything after fighting in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, but rather a Pole who been active in the January Uprising, Verne always intended for the Captain to serve as a reminder of the Empire's problematic and pervasive domination—indeed, his editor refused him the Polish origin of Nemo because it would have been too politically inflammatory; Russia had just signed a treaty with France (Anil Menon, "The Politics of Captain Nemo").

⁴² There's a bit more to the conclusion, with the diamond evaporating in a crack of light and noise and Miss Watkins being enabled to marry her true love (the novel's protagonist), but I genuinely feel the punchline of the book is, in the altered words made popular by mystery writer Mary Roberts Rinehart: "The Ostrich did it."

the grasslands (115, 105-8). There's also an obligatory encounter with the leader of cannibal tribe (122-3). In other words, the fantastical (Said would say "imaginative") colonial geography of South Africa is *clearly* active in the text, but it is paired with a concrete spatial awareness and regard for the underlying realities of that colonial representation that still act as forerunners, albeit outside ones, to the contemporary texts I examine in my project.

Indeed, Verne provides the specific location of his story thus:

The scene is at Watkins' Farm, in lat. 29° S. long. 25°E. on the western border of the Orange Free State, and nearly five hundred miles from Cape Town. On the older maps the surrounding district bears the title of Griqualand, but for the last dozen years it has been better known as the Diamond Fields.

. . . Around, as far as the eye can see, there stretches the bare and dreary-looking plain. The Veld, as this plain is called, has a reddish soil, dry, barren, and dusty, with here and there at considerable intervals a straggling bush or a club of thorn shrubs . . . Through this dismal and monotonous plain there flow the two rivers . . . It is in this Veld that the diamond mines are situated—Dutoit's Pan, New rush, and perhaps the richest of all, Vandergaart Kopje. These dry diggings, as mines open to the sky are called, have since 1870 yielded about 16,000,000*l.* [sic.] in diamonds and precious stones. (3-4)⁴³

Unlike Joseph Conrad's enticement with the more amorphous "dark" sections of the imperial map, Verne's version of speculative travel writing uses easily locatable places and even pinpoint coordinates to anchor his romanticized tale into the realities—particularly the financial realities—of the Empire. The story is devoted to the two main exports of South Africa: ostrich

⁴³ I read Verne in translation, though I sympathize with the outrage of Arthur B. Evans, who protests that most English translations of Verne are woefully inadequate ("Jules Verne's English Translations," *Science Fiction Studies*, 2005).

feathers and diamonds.⁴⁴ The ostrich is simultaneously the darling pet, provider of income, and local “culprit” who subverts the potential for colonial seizure of wealth; the South African mines so specifically described in terms of production (16,000,000*l*) are the instigation for the story. Though Verne excuses the mines through the scientific ventures of geology, he also critiques the practice of colonial extraction. Indigenous South Africans are dehumanized through migratory work, traveling “more than four hundred and fifty miles,” arriving with “emaciated limbs, long, naked bodies, parchment-like skins, bony sides, and hollow cheeks . . . more likely to devour a beefsteak of human flesh than to do a day’s work,” and they sit waiting for employment, “brutalized by misery and want” (Verne 35). Yet, there are no Africans, and no African lived spaces, in the story until *after* the mines are introduced; the landscape is deliberately “bare” and “barren” (Verne 3-4). When they do arrive, their lived space is dominated by the priorities of the mines and Verne’s geologist.⁴⁵ The Africans are exhibited for the reader; what is valued are the extorted physical attributes of the landscape and the imagined wildness of the natives (and distanced colonists) as expressed through the overlay of European lived space.

In this novel, Verne pulls the critique/support maneuver documented by Rieder: The African landscape outside the mining town is otherworldly, full of reward and death; the industry of the empire is cruel but unyielding, and the natives and diasporic non-Europeans are discriminated against, but with the best intentions. Verne shows a concern for and ultimate disregard of the lived spaces of non-Europeans in his text. Though his spatial use ultimately boils

⁴⁴ As Sarah Stein writes, “Ostrich feathers were valuable commodities at the beginning of the twentieth century, their value per pound almost equal to that of diamonds . . . Most of these feathers came from the ostrich farming region of the Little Karoo, a section of semi-arid plateau located in the Western Cape region of southern Africa” (*Plumes* 2).

⁴⁵ Indeed, Cyprien treats his Chinese and “Kaffir” servants, Li and Matak, with relative respect, though he often thinks them simple or odd, and they in turn allow him to “elevate” their values. Matak originally wishes to earn enough to afford a wife and advance in the rankings of his community, while Li values his “pigtail” more than his life in the colony; Cyprien educates Matak and cuts off Li’s hair to save his life. After this, both servants work lovingly for Cyprien and call him “Pa.”

down to colonial investment, *The Vanishing Diamond*'s complicated 'seeing but not seeing' of the power geometries of the South African colony demonstrates that even in its early works, during the heyday of colonialism, science fiction offered a way to challenge commonplace politics and social norms, partially through its spatial registers.

Comparing this type of spatial argument to the lived-space focus of Efe Ogoku's cyberpunk novella "Proposition 23" demonstrates the continued use of world-building to achieve SF estrangement, but a decided shift in spatial priorities that align with a change from a colonial to postcolonial perspective. Okogu also critiques abusive financial systems, but (unsurprisingly) his story depicts Africa and Africans as more than commodities. This is more than just a simple relocation to the twenty-first century from an African author; one of the main thrusts of the cyberpunk mode is to reveal how, in a world rampant with corporate and capitalist systems, everyone and everything is commodifiable. Yet Okogu utilizes a balance between all three registers of spatiality, most noticeably the lived space missing in Verne's work, to explore the idea of commodification. The story's critique of capitalist rigging of government and of corporate-sponsored disregard for the environment is emphasized by the entrance into the story, which automatically confronts readers with a section of the populated, digitally drenched cityscape:

Tribal Tech blasted from the modulated walls syncopating the dancers on the floor into the latest rhythms. You could tell by their synchronized movements that most of them let their neuros do the heavy lifting, mere passengers in their own bodies . . . This Victoria Island joint was a lot more upmarket than the Ajegunle bars I usually drank in . . . I walked over, mesmerized by the faux tribal tattoos that covered every inch of her hot

chocolate skin, except her face, endlessly morphing into new patterns . . . “They’re made of gen2 nano-cells,” she said. “My neuro can regulate their body temp.”

. . . I always feel slightly uncomfortable around citizens with that much credit . . . We may live in the same city but we walk on different planes . . . I occupied myself by scrolling my thumb against the touchpad surface of the bar and ordering some palm wine. A hole opened up on the bar and a tall glass emerged. I was about to ask her if she wanted an A1-cola when we heard an explosion in the far distance . . . There was no fear; just confusion followed by the blank stares of citizens googling the interface to find out what was going on. (352-3)

There are no map coordinates provided here; either you know what Victoria Island and Ajegunle are, or you don’t.⁴⁶ Okogu’s narrative is told from the first-hand perspective of Lugard, a Nigerian; readers learn what is normal in the diegetic world through a local, not a colonial visitor. This is not a travelogue to other lands; this is de Certeau’s daily walk into the city. Lugard is also aware of the multiple spaces he walks through, of the stories he and the other citizens tell of their own cityscape, which has “different planes” of lived space. In his use of space, Okogu’s story is lightyears apart from Verne’s—they coexist, but with completely separate orientations. In Verne’s, the Africans “become dark matter, invisible,” while in Okogu’s, the African lived space is central to his consideration of the technology interwoven with Lagos (Thomas, “Introduction: Looking for the Invisible”). Slightly later, we see Lugard describing how

⁴⁶ In which case, rather like the globe/atlas-referencing readers of Verne, you probably Google it. Of course, your map is also *slightly* re-oriented, since it comes up as an interactive representation.

Lagos was a patchwork of amber, fluorescence, and neon, as far as the eye could see. Everywhere, towers thrust themselves into the blank sky like Promethean weapons robbing the sky of fire. Flycrafts darted through the air like fireflies.

. . . As it is now, the only habitable zones lie between the tropics of Capricorn and Cancer, nothing beyond but a barren wasteland of subzero temperatures and deadly radiation.” (loc. 5625)

The apocalyptic status of the environment partially explains Nigeria’s rise to technotopia, though what may be more impressive is the extreme comfort and nonchalance of such a currently unlikely future as reflected in the “futuristic” architectural transport-tech surroundings and the intimacy of the bio-linked neuro technology. As with Verne’s work, there is a similar focus on the disjunction of class, but it is not racially or culturally based. The inhuman in “Proposition 23” are still the disenfranchised, but that disenfranchisement is controlled by the local government puppet of corporations (“Undesirables, or as most people call them, undead, have no neuros . . . Everything from credit to the interface to every machine is neuro-linked . . . Without a neuro you have no access; you literally don’t exist” (loc. 5604). When Lugard has his neuro disconnected later, he is almost murdered by a street cleaner that confuses him, the neuro-less, as trash (loc. 5707). In this novella, the motivating force is not the colonial economy, but the action against a location-less capitalist corruption. In this cyberpunk Nigeria, technological knowledge is not only crucial, but commonplace.

There are other depictions we could add to fill in this illustration of spatial progression from Verne to Okogu.⁴⁷ However, the type of focus exhibited in Okogu’s story makes it more

⁴⁷ George S. Schuyler (writing under pen name Samuel I. Brooks) depicts a version of Africa in his two-part *Black Empire* piece for *The Pittsburgh Courier* from 1936-1938 (Part I: *Black Internationale: A Story of Black Genius against the World*; Part II: *Black Empire: An Imaginative Story of a Great New Civilization in Modern Africa*).

pressing to beg the question: What has prompted the recent outburst of spatially innovative world SF works? I contend this happened as part of RaceFail09—a symptom and a cause of the current movement in the SF community.

1.5 A GLOBAL TURN: RACEFAIL09 AS INSTIGATION / VITAL TIMELINE POINT

“But what uniquely characterizes this genre is its explicit intertextuality: few other literary forms have so brazenly affirmed themselves as argument and counterargument.”

(Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 2)

“i am going to start
a revolution.”

(“archy the cockroach a.k.a. Don Marquis, archy declares war” 128)

If we consider the genre of science fiction to be an ongoing process of clustering that, in the words of Ralph Cohen, is “constructed by authors, audiences and critics in order to serve

Black Empire brings Western technology to the African homeland, using Africa as a strategic base for a coalition of African-Americans to assault white centers of power (particularly Europe and America). Alan Dean Foster’s *Into the Out Of* (1986) portrays a Maasai elder allied with two Americans to stave off evil-spirit-caused international political tension. Mike Resnick’s *Kirinyaga: A Fable of Utopia* (1988) questions whether it is possible to flee from technology overtaking Kenya—and whether doing so actually would “save” the lived space of the Kikuyu tribe. Ian McDonald’s *Chaga* series (most famously *Evolution’s Shore*, 1995) uses Kenya as a backdrop for human-alien interactions. Alastair Reynolds’ *Poseidon’s Children* trilogy (*Blue Remembered Earth*, 2012; *On the Steele Breeze*, 2014; *Poseidon’s Wake*, 2016) tracks the Tanzanian-based Akinya family’s technology empire as it instigates and commands the human space colonization. Through the outer space adventure, Reynolds keeps Earth-spaces present, most solidly through space-traveling elephants.

Chiagozie Fred Nwonwu’s “Masquerade Stories” (2012) riffs on the mythology of the Dogon and places the Nigerian traditions at the center of advanced technology. In Nnedi Okorafor’s *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), New York scientists remove the gifts of an alien tree from its self-selected home in Africa; the only way to resolve the resulting outrage is through apocalyptic fire. Okorafor’s *Binti* novella series (*Binti*, 2015, *Binti: Home*, Jan. 2017, and *Binti: The Night Masquerade*, anticipated in Fall 2017) depicts a Himba mathematician who travels to an intergalactic university and home again; because of her culture, she literally travels sporting the Earth of her homeland. And so on.

If I were to do a similar type of sampling for depictions of India in SF, I would utilize readings from “The Steam House” by Jules Verne (1880; deals with the 1857 uprising), “Birthright” by Shubhada Gogate (in the vitally important Indian 1993 anthology *It Happened Tomorrow*), *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet* by Vandana Singh (2008), *Empire of Bones* by Liz Williams (2002), *Sagramanda: A Novel of Near-Future India* by Alan Dean Foster (2008), *River of Gods* (2004) and *Cyberabad Days* (2009) by Ian McDonald, *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh (1995), and *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* by Ruchir Joshi (2001).

communicative and aesthetic purposes,” we can also agree that within this genre, “Groupings arise at particular historical moments . . . and are subject to repeated redefinitions or abandonment” (210 in “History and Genre,” qtd. in Devitt, 701). In this project, I consider what is changed in the present moment of unprecedented global science fiction.

As the communication and travel technologies of our current world keep evolving, the accessibility of world-generated science fiction allows us to consider how it contends with the tensions, fantasies, and traumas of postcolonial systems of power. Although the level of interest in postcolonial SF is unprecedented, the interest in world SF has a slightly longer line. Brian Aldiss brought attention to world SF with his compilation of *The Penguin World Omnibus of Science Fiction* (1986), which included stories from China, Chile, and Africa. Sheree Thomas edited *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000), the first widely distributed anthology devoted to minority writers. The first self-proclaimed postcolonial science fiction anthology, *So Long Been Dreaming* (2004), edited by Uppinder Mehan and Nalo Hopkinson, welcomed a surge in postcolonial science fiction novels, series, anthologies, and individual short stories. These publishing ventures, dedicated to diversifying the genre and exploring previously uncirculated work by science fiction writers outside of the U.S., Europe, and Russia, were again re-energized by a volatile eruption in the SF community in 2009. Later titled “RaceFail09,” this months-long conversation-turned-argument saw the SF community discuss the importance and place of multicultural, multi-racial, non-Anglo, and non-“Western” diversity in characters, writers, texts, and tensions.⁴⁸ Although this was not the first time the SF community had addressed the genre’s traditional biases and exclusionary tendencies, it was

⁴⁸ The name refers to both the original intention—to address the failings of the SF community in regard to diversity, such as race—but also to the drastic “failure” of the community as the conversation devolved into online boorishness. Some have posited that the name “FanFail09” is more appropriate, but I agree with Hopkinson that such a retitling buries the lede and minimizes the importance of the (short-lived) sincere contributions.

uniquely positioned after publicly addressed forays into such topics.⁴⁹ While most academic investigations of SF ignore this discussion, I take RaceFail09 to be a vital marker of the change in priorities of the SF community, as aligned with the rapidly evolving narrative technologies.

This real-world event needs to be understood by the academic community as an indication that the SF community self-identified a radical shift in science fiction literature, one increasingly moving toward world SF. I indicate on my timeline as beginning at least in the public's eye in the early 2000s (see Appendix A). RaceFail09 is thus an illustrative moment between the increase of SF as a globally consumed and produced genre of popular literature and the lineage of SF's conservative roots. Without considering the arguments made during this event, and how members of the community attribute publishing ventures and media coverage of diverse SF narratives *after* the event, critics run the risk of misconstruing the shift toward global SF as being a 'natural' progression, one without the need for factions to protest, protect, and mobilize various types of active engagements.

RaceFail09 started in January 2009 when American speculative author Elizabeth Bear blogged about how to respectfully write the Other.⁵⁰ Two members of the SF community using the screen names "Avalon's Willow" and "deepad" had a notable response: Avalon's Willow commented that one of Bear's novels utilized the Other problematically, while deepad addressed

⁴⁹ Consider the Carl Brandon Society's mission of increasing "racial and ethnic diversity in the production of and audience for speculative fiction." The society is named for Carl Joshua Brandon, a "fictional black fan writer invented by white writers Terry Carr and Peter Graham in the fifties . . . the existence of a lone, fictional black writer underscores the fact that a fictional voice had to be invented for people of color, because we had none in fandom" ("About"). Society organizers were inspired by Delany's essay "Racism and Science Fiction" (originally published in *Dark Matter*, more widely circulated in the *New York Review of Science Fiction* in 1998). Twenty-first century instances of the SF community considering the question of representation include *Extrapolation's* Fall 2005 issue on "multiculturalism and race in science fiction."

⁵⁰ This is a loaded issue—especially considering the recent debate over cultural appropriation. Consider the angst that spurred Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward to write *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*: At the 1992 Clarion West Writers Workshop, a student "expressed the opinion that it is a mistake to write about people of ethnic backgrounds different from your own because you might get it wrong, horribly, offensively wrong . . . This opinion . . . struck Nisi as taking the easy way out," resulting in a workshop-turned-written-guide (Aqueduct Press publication description).

how often-Othered people—like herself—have local imaginaries that hardly ever populate speculative fiction.⁵¹ While deepad’s creative essay (“I Did Not Dream of Dragons”) is more pertinent to my spatially focused method, many of the next wave of responders engaged with the Avalon’s Willow critique, opening the floodgates. The discussion quickly turned from thinking about how and why to respectfully represent diverse characters and cultures into Internet attacks, screen-name revealing, and general hate-speech. It’s been pointed out that many people of color stepped away from the downward spiral of the talks, which finished two months later with some of the earliest participants apologizing for the disruption in the force of fandom. What remains of the initial argument/conversation among various fans and authors of the genre indicates a genuine and emotional need to help process the parameters of representative genre fiction.⁵² What remains of the latter half indicates the type of poisonous backlash stirred if such diversification is viewed as a threat to speculative fiction.⁵³

⁵¹ She posted about the difficulties of writing a fantasy novel (traditionally European-centered in its generic imagination) as an Indian. Though she wanted to write “an epic adventure with a cross-dressing princess on the run . . . and dragons . . . logically, there would be a tavern,” she was tripped up by her spatial reality: “There were no taverns in India . . . trying to figure out how cross-dressing disguise would work in pre-Islamic India where the women went bare-breasted . . . I had to map out their route to the Himalayas, because dragons can be part of a Tibetan Buddhist tradition—they do not figure in Hindu mythology.” This is more than a writer considering what it means that certain speculative genres are not traditionally transplantable; it also demonstrates the desire to “write about the place” one “lives in.” By examining how authors make use of the Earth-space in postcolonial SF, we can see how writers and texts revise generic absences, and invite readers into a hybridized reading practice.

⁵² It’s tricky sifting back through the conversation, since some of the main websites that hosted discussion disappeared/posts were taken down afterward as tempers cooled and embarrassment reigned; others deleted insulting comment threads. Archive building efforts have been made to reassemble the wreckage. See “Racefail” entry on *Geek Feminism Wiki* (2009); Avalon’s Willow (“A Timeline”); Ann Somerville’s overview of the debate (“A themed summary of RaceFail09 in large, friendly letters for those who think race discussions are hard,” 2014); tablesaw’s “O HAI RACEFAILZ: Notes on Reading an Internet Conflict” (2009); and Ryda Wong’s extensive list of chronological links (“RaceFail09”). On Twitter, #RaceFail09 maps people’s reactions during the event, and continues to be used by people referencing that they just found out about the event (with some shock), that they “remember” the event, or that it spurred them to perform a type of action.

⁵³ This type of self-righteous hate is also exemplified by the Sad / Rabid Puppies fiasco. The Rabid Puppies (led by Vox Day) are, as one might anticipate, much more brash about their white, male leanings, while the Sad Puppies claim to be more relegated to supporting “an unabashed pulp action that isn’t heavy-handed message fiction” (“Sad Puppies”). Both groups are still adamant about balancing out what they consider a left-leaning, singular-politics performance at the Hugo Awards over the past few years. Ironically, on his blog, author Larry Correia shared his reaction to the results of the 2015 Hugo Awards: “I said the Hugos no longer represented all of Fandom, instead they only represent tiny, insular, politically motivated cliques taking turns giving their friends awards. If you wanted to

For SF fans and writers, RaceFail09 was a crucially timed event. I suggest the reaction to the vitriol of RaceFail09 rippled, helping to generate productive literary and community reactions. As I indicated, global SF was becoming more widely available: In fact, one of global SF's most productive proponents, the World SF Blog, started in February 2009. As Hopkinson, in her 2009 keynote address to the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, noted:

RaceFail was a good thing. In fact, I think it was a *necessary* thing . . . for the SFF [Science Fiction and Fantasy] field as a whole. Fans of color began daring to blog their experiences and their feelings about systemic racism in fantasy and science fiction (both in the literature and in the community) because they realized there was some backup. Fans of all stripes . . . began challenging each other to read books by people of color and review and discuss them, and they are by heavens doing it. ("Report from Planet Midnight" 348)

There was a dramatic publishing increase in world SF after 2009, and the reward structures in the SF community have also responded with postcolonial authors being ever more included in "Best Of" collections and placed on nominations for the Nebula and Hugo Awards. Even a quick survey shows the dramatic increase in world SF publishing after 2009 (see Appendix A). It's not that world SF was unavailable or without momentum before RaceFail; it's that this upheaval spurred even greater appreciation and instigation for world SF translated/printed in English.

RaceFail09 also marks a turning point in the SF genre's expansion because evolving technologies for alternative publishing started to truly develop and become normalized. Current debates and coverage of the SF community take place on the pages of blogs and in the social

be considered, you needed to belong to, or suck up to, those voting cliques" ("Sad Puppies 3: Looking at the Results"). The same accusations about one-line politics, anti-outsider hatred, and friend-nominations have been leveled against both the Sad and Rabid Puppies since their creation.

media sphere, not in the editorial sections of pulp magazines or fanzines. The World SF Blog became an invaluable resource for interviews, articles, publication announcements, and short fiction from global SF authors, for the express purpose to “highlight and promote voices seldom heard in genre fiction” (Lavie Tidhar, Ed.).⁵⁴ Many current authors like Nnedi Okorafor, Nalo Hopkinson, and John Scalzi have personal blogs and active Twitter accounts where they posit and discuss problems and exciting developments of the genre.

Likewise, digital networks offer writers new ways to generate SF stories. I refer not only to various types of digital formats,⁵⁵ the global and instant circulation of eBooks for purchase or loan from libraries,⁵⁶ but also Internet-generated opportunities such as the platforms Kickstarter⁵⁷ and Indiegogo.⁵⁸ When fans are as intricately involved as they are in the SF community, digital platforms make it feasible for individual artists and smaller organizations to mobilize evolving and peripheral interests of SF fans. By maneuvering on donation-based crowd-funding websites, smaller pockets of the SF community can attempt big projects, which is an effective strategy for those who feel they are combating discriminatory publishing traditions and markets. Especially in the beginning of this shift in accessible world SF, when large publishers may not have been willing to take a risk on a diverse SF text, the SF community still helped it come into being.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ The blog stopped being updated in June 2013, but it is still available online.

⁵⁵ Digital magazines like *Lightspeed*, self-publishing deals with Amazon, which began in 2009.

⁵⁶ Starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the Kindle arriving in 2007 and the Nook in 2009.

⁵⁷ Beginning in April 2009 and focused on “creative projects.”

⁵⁸ One of the initial crowd-sourcing sites, which began in 2007 and focuses on a broader spectrum of proposed projects.

⁵⁹ Silvia Moreno-Garcia used an Indiegogo campaign to help fund her vampire novel, *Certain Dark Things* (at the time under the working title “Young Blood”). Indiegogo campaigns also helped generate the funds for *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2013) while *We See a Different Frontier: A Postcolonial Speculative Fiction Anthology* (2013) addresses fundraising on the platform Peerbackers in their introduction.

Other examples of fundraising campaigns include the proposed Science Fiction Museum (“Information and Resources”), *Clarkesworld* Chinese Science Fiction Translation project (“Clarkesworld”), SF films like *Afronauts* (“Afronauts”), and *Advantageous* (“Advantagenous: The Feature”) and also the “locally grown science fiction”

The shift toward an ever-accessible and inclusive SF that I track back to RaceFail09 has established a subfield of postcolonial SF that demands our attention as academic critics. This is where my project comes into play.

1.5.1 Postcolonial SF: Academics Going Boldly

Although they continue to neglect RaceFail09, the academic world—especially the ranks of science fictions scholars—has exponentially increased its attention toward postcolonial SF. I’ve already discussed the books of Pordzik, Langer, and Smith, but there have been several critical projects produced since Michael Levy bemoaned the state of coverage in his 2005 *Extrapolation* issue on Multiculturalism and Race in Science Fiction.⁶⁰ Nick Wood presented a useful guide and overview of “South African Speculative Fiction Over the Ages” in *Locus Magazine* (Nov. 2009) and the World SF Blog in (Dec. 2009), and Mark Bould has written extensively about African SF, including in his introduction to his curated Special Issue of *Paradoxa* (issue 25, 2013). This issue includes generative essays by other primary scholars working on postcolonial SF, including Lisa Yaszek’s “Rethinking Apocalypse in African SF.” Isiah Lavender III has not only compiled anthologies dedicated to the multicultural realms of SF (*Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction*, 2014), but has also shown how science fiction reading protocols offer a productive method for re-engaging with foundational texts of the

project of Swedish artist and author Simon Stålenhag in *Tales from the Loop* (“Simon Stålenhag’s Tales from the Loop”).

⁶⁰ In his Acknowledgements, Levy explained: “Check out any issue of *Extrapolation*, *Science Fiction Studies*, or *Foundation*, and you’ll notice that the same subjects tend to appear over and over again. Once we get past Verne, Wells and Shelley, Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke, it’s mostly about Le Guin, Dick, Gibson, and a limited number of other writers who can be labeled ‘postmodern.’ This isn’t a matter of editorial prejudice either—the editors of these journals are all dying for good, publishable essays on other authors. It’s more a matter of the limited number of canonical writers with whom most academics are familiar. And it’s also about the many science fiction and fantasy writers who, despite enormous talent and a respectable publishing record, are not on the academic radar” (*Extrapolation*, 2005).

postcolonial canon in “Reframing *Heart of Darkness* as Science Fiction” (*Extrapolation*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2015). Although their specific arguments are of less use to my project, there are also several critical pieces available that focus on how world SF represents the relationship of postcolonial communities to science and technological progress (e.g., Mehan’s “The Domestication of Technology in Indian Science Fiction” and Suparno Banerjee’s “Dystopia and the Postnational Nation”).⁶¹

I insist that we also consider the critical work done by SF authors, as the interviews I provide in Appendix B show that some of the most insightful critical work on postcolonial SF comes from the “creative” side of the literary world.⁶²

This project works from the premise that postcolonial, or alternatively, world SF is a section of SF that is not only worthy of critical attention, but requires an expansion of the critical efforts already being put forth. The production of world SF isn’t slowing down, nor is the SF community’s relatively welcoming attitude showing indications of frosting over: The 2016 Hugo winners included the African-American author N. K. Jemisin, Nigerian-American author Nnedi Okorafor, and Chinese author Hao Jingfang. Academics interested in SF should see these

⁶¹ For additional examples: In *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (edited by Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal, 2010), there are several critics who have productively engaged Indian SF and the question of the nation in this manner, including Suparno Banerjee’s “*The Calcutta Chromosome*: A Novel of Silence, Slippage and Subversion,” Grant Hamilton’s “Organization and the Continuum: History in Vandana Singh’s ‘Delhi,’” and Dominic Alessio and Jessica Langer’s “Science Fiction, Hindu Nationalism and Modernity: Bollywood’s *Koi... Mil Gaya*.” A bit closer to the work I do in this project, though still surprisingly centered on the nation itself, is the 2011 critical anthology *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonial Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction*, edited by Masood Ashraf Raja, Jason W. Ellis, and Swaralipi Nandi. This anthology includes works like the Banerjee essay cited previously, “The Language of Postnationality: Cultural Identity via Science Fictional Trajectories,” and Nandi’s “The ‘Popular’ Science: Bollywood’s Take on Science Fiction and the Discourse of Nations.” While formulating the ideas that would turn into her book-length work on empire and SF, Michelle Reid shared a few alternative orientations in “Postcolonial Science Fiction” (<https://www.sf-foundation.org/publications/essays/reid.html>), including the one that I find most often erupting in world SF: “postcolonial futures.”

⁶² For instance, in 2008, Vandana Singh and Anil Menon sketched an overview of the status of Indian SF in English, Bengali, and Marathi, and respond to questions and comments from fans and other writers (Singh, “In Search of Indian Science Fiction,” 2008).

changes as furthering their field; academics interested in world literature might see this shift as helping to diversify theirs. As a scholar invested in both arenas, I see my work as being part of this due diligence.

1.6 TYPOGRAPHY OF THE DISSERTATION

In chapter one, “The Empire Writes, Reads, Speaks, and Plays Back,” I engage the topic of aliens by juxtaposing two works of the eminent African-American SF writer Octavia Butler (“Amnesty,” 2003, and *Lilith’s Brood*, 2000)⁶³ with the short story “Them Ships” (2013) by Canadian-Mexican Silvia Moreno-Garcia. Through this comparative lens, I illustrate the Earthside-attached turn of the postcolonial SF writers that I see acting as Butler’s generic heirs. While both writers engage similar postcolonial concerns (discrimination, economic inequality, co-opted language, gender-based violence, etc.), Moreno-Garcia does so within what I term the mode of human-focused ‘third-contact.’ This mode of connection focuses on the crossing of societal, not species, divisions and is encouraged by the social displacement of the story’s heterotopian setting. As such, I contend that the primary focus of the story’s intervention is on the lived space of its narrator.

In the second chapter, “Pivotal City: Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon*,” I examine Nigerian-American Nnedi Okorafor’s multiperspective novel *Lagoon* (2014). When aliens land in Lagos and decide they want to stay, it estranges the spaces of the city. I contend that Okorafor confronts and derails the current place of Lagos in the larger framework of the Futures Industry. In doing

⁶³ *Lilith’s Brood* is a repackaging of her *Xenogenesis Trilogy*, originally published separately as *Dawn*, 1987; *Adulthood Rites*, 1988; and *Imago*, 1989.

so, I argue she also offers an imaginative exit to the trap of Afropessimism, particularly when she bluntly engages and rewrites the creation of canonical postcolonial author Ben Okri. By specifically reprioritizing the space of Lagos, Okorafor also writes back to SF predecessors who normalized modes of writing (cyberpunk, in particular) that offered a way to disengage with the real world. In my analysis, Okorafor ridicules those unable to expand their conception of the world to include places and people—like Nigerians—otherwise marginalized. Indeed, I posit that she provides an explicit example of how *not* to read her novel, which reinforces my application of the SF reading protocols.

In the third chapter, “We Need a Hero: Superpowered Shifts in Citizenship,” I shift to Indian author Samit Basu’s novel *Turbulence* (2012), which offers a glimpse into the globalized world of postcolonial superheroes. I contend that Basu employs the spatial narrative mode and national affiliations of the comic book form (both from its origins in America and from the specifics of the Indian comic book) to present a mode of shifting citizenship-scales dislodged from the national framework to offer a range of citizenship modes. I argue that Basu presents a compelling reconsideration of alternative modes of community, which may offer a way of thirding the binary ideologies that the imagined construct of the nation at times implies.

In the coda, I touch upon the utopian impulse in current works of postcolonial SF. I briefly consider the state of South African SF, where the stories being produced and the publication market indicate that while postcolonial SF may offer an optimistic mode of future engagement, the process of getting those stories published is by no means idealistic.

The chapters progress from the smallest-scaled spaces to the largest. They are also divided by the types of spaces each primary case text uses as estranging crucible, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Chapter breakdown

	Main Text Examined in Chapter	Main Spatial Mode of Intervention	"Size" of Physical Settings Explored in Chapter	Types of Settings Explored
Chapter 1	"Them Ships," Moreno-Garcia	Lived Space	Smallest scale	Alien education center / camp
Chapter 2	<i>Lagoon</i> , Okorafor	Physical space	Medium scale	Lagos, Nigeria (Road, Digital café, Ocean)
Chapter 3	<i>Turbulence</i> , Basu	Imagined space	Largest scale	India, London, International flights, Indian Diaspora in London, The Global Community

While chapter one occurs within one building structure, chapter two expands through the cityscape, and chapter three extends out to the level of the nation and the world. Each chapter also focuses on one main element of Soja's trio of space (lived, physical, imagined), though, as Soja insists in his swirled icons, each one of the three are actually separable from the other two, and my readings for each chapter actively engage all three elements of his spatial categories. This organization ensures that topics of inquiry like gender, communication, historical revisions, and economics overlap across chapters. For example, modes and control of communication will be a main theme in all three of my case studies, although the second and third contend with communication on a larger scale. Moreno-Garcia and Butler focalize through translators, Okorafor's *Lagoon* has mind-reading, communication-technology-hacking aliens that transmit around the world, and Basu's *Turbulence* features a communication- and digital-technology-hacking superhero who frequently meddles on the World Wide Web as a way of repositioning his fellow postcolonial superheroes.

1.6.1 Building Bridges, Not Walls: Filling the Critical Gap

I've argued previously that there is still a discernible academic neglect of postcolonial SF. Since there is still a limited archive of traditional academic criticism, conducting my project necessitated the use of a complementary archive: the critical insights of the authors themselves. In her contribution to *Science Fiction Studies*' "Symposium on Science Fiction and Globalization," Langer notes that while she was writing her seminal book on *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction*, she felt as if she "was in a new analytical space (which is of course very exciting to a PhD student and aspiring academic)," but that through her explorations of artists like

Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor, Lauren Beukes, Minister Faust, Saladin Ahmed, Lavie Tidhar, Aliette de Bodard, Kaaron Warren, Vandana Singh, Neill Blomkamp . . . the vast majority of these writers and filmmakers have come to prominence in the field in the last ten years—maybe in the last five. It wasn't *me* who was entering this new space: it was *them* . . . Science fiction itself is changing. (382-3)

I agree with Langer, both about the feeling of being on the exciting edge of a research topic and about the dangers of ignoring how the generators of that new literature actually conceive of their textual field. SF writers are undertaking thoughtful redefinition and critically aware, if artistic, engagements with global/postcolonial canons. To honor their critical insight, benefit from their experiences in the SF community, and help fill the holes in the still-evolving critical archive, I decided to interview writers for this project.

Of course, creative and critical separations are ultimately false (critical pieces are creative works; creative writers critically engage via their pieces). However, this has not stopped departmental, nor scholarly, separations of Fine Writing and Literary Studies. I think it is time

we extend the now-thoroughly vetted spirit of interdisciplinarity across the creative-critical divide. I know that doing so was crucial to the success of my project. Being able to discuss with Samit Basu, Lauren Beukes, Joey Hi-Fi, Nalo Hopkinson, and Vandana Singh about spatiality, world-building SF community politics, their connection to the term ‘postcolonial,’ and the intricacies of their own works was invaluable.

Through my interviews, I attempted to avoid the criticisms Lazarus levels at other postcolonialists, that of not paying attention to the literary producers. These interviews also helped me fill in specific coverage gaps about these authors. While some of the authors I focus on have extensive extradiegetic writing and recorded talks (Hopkinson or Beukes, for example), other authors (Moreno-Garcia or Singh) are slightly less well known. I was also able to specifically engage the artists on the idea of space, a topic that most other interviewers do not consider to be a primary focus. Although Joey Hi-Fi may seem like an outlier in this collection, since he primarily works as a book cover designer, his discussion of visual spatiality compliments the comic book readings I perform in my third chapter, and he illuminates the spatially hybridized locations that I explore in chapter two. For ease of reference, these interviews are listed alphabetically by the SF artist’s last name in Appendix B.

1.6.2 Last Words Before We Launch

SF offers current postcolonial writers a chance to envision new stories for themselves and their homes. Hassan Blasim, editor of *Iraq + 100: Stories from a Century after the Invasion* (2016), wanted to coordinate a speculative anthology because

it was difficult to persuade many Iraqi writers to write stories set in the future when they were already so busy writing about the cruelty, horror and shock of the present, or trying

to delve into the past to reread Iraq's former nightmares and glories . . . I told them that writing about the future would give them space to breathe outside the narrow confines of today's reality, and that writers needed more space to explore and develop certain ideas and concepts through story-telling. (Foreword)

I saw the same sentiment of broadening the genre-horizons from the authors I examine in this project, who deepen national canons and imagine alternatives to re-inscribed, reiterated fictional representations. While I do not agree that postcolonial SF is necessarily utopian in its impulse, many of the works currently available seem to find somewhat optimistic, genre-afforded ways to confront elements like financial growth, discriminatory social positioning, or corrupt politics that, in other types of fiction, have often triggered more absolute resignation or pessimism.

PROJECT LAUNCH IN

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2.0 THE EMPIRE WRITES, READS, SPEAKS, AND PLAYS BACK

“Let’s destroy all restrictions—external or self-imposed—on what we should write; let’s destroy all interpretive frameworks that would seek to reduce us to a mere type; let’s destroy science fiction and fantasy.”

(Ken Liu, “You Don’t Have to Write Autobiography” 418)

“In the past couple of years, matters have improved, if only slightly. I’ve started seeing Spanish names being hyped on Twitter, on store shelves. Brief mentions in Wikipedia. Editors with Latin American backgrounds soliciting submissions . . . I’m not the only one. There is room for people like me . . . As for my love affair with science fiction, well . . . I’m still not sure I trust it with my heart right now. But I’m open to the idea that genres—like people—can grow and change.”

(Julie M. Rodriguez, “On Falling In and Out of Love with Science Fiction” 427)

Once there was a passionate young writer dedicated to improving her craft. To do so, she attended the Writers Guild of America’s Open Door Workshop in 1969. One of her workshop teachers was the acclaimed science fiction author Harlan Ellison, who saw promise in this young writer. He encouraged her to finesse her work and invited her to join a supported SF writing community by attending the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers’ Workshop taught by Samuel R. Delany. It was there that Delany first met Octavia E. Butler. Delany and Butler have since been continually held aloft as trailblazers—the first two “broadly known African-American science fiction writer[s] to come up through the commercial genre that coalesced before and after the term ‘science fiction’ began to appear more and more frequently” (Delany, “Samuel R. Delany Speaks”).⁶⁴ Octavia Butler (1947-2006) published twelve novels and one short fiction collection, received the PEN West Lifetime Achievement Award (2000), was inducted into the

⁶⁴ The ongoing connection between Delany and Butler as writers and as SF community members is evident in the way Delany speaks on the evolution of the SF genre in this interview, which occurred after Butler’s death in 2006.

Science Fiction Hall of Fame (2010), and was the first SF author awarded a MacArthur fellowship.⁶⁵ The very reality of being an acclaimed published SF author *and* a woman of color was groundbreaking. Butler became a figure who not only inspired, but helped lend credibility to the next generation of authors who sought entrance into the SF published community.

After all, her works were widely read and appreciated then; a black woman *could* write successful and popular science fiction for an audience that conceived of itself as being white, male, and heterosexual during the 1980s and 1990s when she was winning awards, including the Hugo and Nebula. It is vital to understand that the quality and tenor of Butler's novels and short stories prioritized previously "Othered" people and ideas, opening up not only the restrictions on who could *write* SF, but also who SF should be written *about*.⁶⁶ She wrote stories that represented the swirling issues of race, gender, and class within the system of American society, and she did so in a variety of SF narrative modes: from the time-traveling *Kindred*, which refutes simple depictions of slave-master relations, to the post-apocalyptic *Parable of the Sower*, in which hope only arises as a communal-based faith, to various stories of alien encounters and alien co-habitation like *Lilith's Brood*, which questions who (and how) is a person. As an African-American, Butler may not have fit the strictest definition of a postcolonial writer, but she still wrote from the position of the outsider, even as she challenged the label of the "Othered" within her fiction. A name familiar to most SF community members with widely distributed and circulated texts, Butler is one of the foremost predecessors to postcolonial science fiction

⁶⁵ Her published works include her novel *Kindred* (1979), *Lilith's Brood* trilogy (*Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, *Imago*; 1987-1989), her *Parable* series (*Parable of the Sower*, 1993; *Parable of the Talents*, 1998), her *Patternist* series (*Mind of My Mind*, 1977; *Patternmaster*, 1976; *Survivor*, 1978; *Wild Seed*, 1980; *Clay's Ark*, 1984), her last novel, *Fledgling* (2005), and a short fiction collection, *Bloodchild* (1995).

⁶⁶ Through her writing, Butler deliberately communicated life experiences that SF authors had previously ignored, at one point explaining her novel *Kindred* by pointing to the experience of seeing her mother work as a maid: "If my mother hadn't put up with all those humiliations I wouldn't have eaten very well . . . So I wanted to write a novel that would make others feel the history: the pain and fear that black people have had to live through in order to endure" (qtd. in Fox).

writers.⁶⁷ Many current global SF authors are personally familiar with and inspired by her works.⁶⁸

Thanks in no small part to Butler's presence in the SF genre and the resonance of her works, current postcolonial SF writers like Silvia Moreno-Garcia, who I compare with Butler in this chapter, are able to make even more radical arguments that further challenge the genre and its community. With Butler to prepare the way, writers like Moreno-Garcia can drastically further the inclusion of alternative viewpoints in the SF community and in SF texts.⁶⁹ As explained in my introduction, I contend that the main method these writers of the twenty-first century use to further the possibilities and inclusions of the SF genre is to prioritize the possibility of lived space.⁷⁰ This "thirdspace" of spatial theorist Edward Soja is similar to the ways in which Butler refused to operate in Manichean binaries, instead using gender-fluid characters and various forms of hybridity to reconsider social hierarchies.⁷¹ Indeed, both Butler

⁶⁷ In the anthology *Strange Matings: Science Fiction, Feminism, African American Voices, and Octavia E. Butler*, editors Rebecca J. Holden and Nisi Shawl collect critical and creative pieces that demonstrate this intense effect. One of their contributors is contemporary author Nnedi Okorafor, who I deal with at length in my second chapter. In her piece, Okorafor writes how at one point she assured a discouraged "Octavia that she *had* made an enormous difference in many lives. I recited to her all the ways in which her books and her existence had changed me. I told her that because of her, I now knew that it was ok to write strange, disturbing African characters. And that she changed the way I viewed gender and relationships. ...she had inspired, informed, and energized legions of us. She just laughed and said that all this was encouraging" ("butler8star@qwest.net" 219).

⁶⁸ Just consider *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, a 2015 anthology edited by Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown. This anthology not only set out to "make space for people whose identities are marginalized and oppressed within mainstream society," but also dedicated itself to Butler's writings about "the intersections of identity and imagination, the gray areas of race, class, gender, sexuality, love, militarism, inequality, oppression, resistance, and—most important—hope" (3-7).

⁶⁹ Indeed, both Butler and Moreno-Garcia appear in the special edition of *Lightspeed: People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction* (Issue 73, June 2016).

⁷⁰ This is not merely limited to an author's lived experience; rather, I use this term to refer to the lived space of the diegetic sphere. I begin this chapter with an epigraph by Ken Liu for a reason: Global writers should not be expected to only write autobiographically, nor must they be limited to presenting the exotic "authentic" (as Moreno-Garcia makes clear in her piece in the *Lightspeed* special edition).

⁷¹ Although Butler explored what Abdul R. JanMohamed termed "Manichean dialectics" of "white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object," she did so by introducing hybrid and alternative categorizations, complicating and destabilizing the thinking that results from such colonial dialectical opposition (JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics* 4).

and Moreno-Garcia use forms of “third” positioning to communicate dissent, vocalize silences, challenge social status quos, maneuver out of historically rooted positions of victimization, and insist upon accessibility (and hope) of the future. (As we will see in the following chapters, these are the same postcolonial issues and alternative strategies that recur within the works of Nnedi Okorafor and Samit Basu.)

In this chapter, I take a comparative approach with Butler and Moreno-Garcia in order to present the evolving ways in which science fiction authors push back against various types of disenfranchisement. In particular, Butler and Moreno-Garcia write back against similar issues of postcolonial concern: discrimination, economic inequality, co-opted language, gendered violence, and domination. They focus not only on “the survivors—or descendants of survivors—of sustained, racial colonial process,” but specifically on survivors of sustained, *gendered*, racial colonial processes (Mehan, “Final Thoughts” 269). In doing so, Moreno-Garcia and Butler make significant interventions in the ways in which postcolonial literature writes back to the not-so-distant past, when the bodies of women—especially women of color—were legally treated and abused as objects to be used for the pleasure of men, as merchandise, and as a means to both ensure the continuation of the enfranchised male lineage and to repopulate the enslaved workforce.⁷² Although both authors approach the same issues, they push against them quite differently. Butler revises social hierarchies by distancing Earth-side realities, elevating humankind into alien-gifted humans, while Moreno-Garcia questions the same limitations of

⁷² For more on the specific ways Butler engages in these debates, see these examples: Frances Bonner’s “Difference and Desire, Slavery and Seduction: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*” (1990); Naomi Jacobs’ “Posthuman Bodies and Agency in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*” (2003); Angelyn Mitchell’s “Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of Slavery in Octavia E. Butler’s *Kindred*” (2001); Kristen Lillvis’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Slavery? The Problem and Promise of Mothering in Octavia E. Butler’s ‘Bloodchild’” (2014); Valerie Loichot’s “‘We are all related’: Edouard Glissant Meets Octavia Butler” (2009); and Susan Knabe and Wendy Gay Pearson’s “‘Gambling Against History’: Queer Kinship and Cruel Optimism in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*” (2009).

society and prejudice through the unalleviated human.⁷³ I argue that this Earth-based lived space maneuver produces an even more difficult, and effective, estrangement, one reliant upon the principles of heterotopian encounters.

Reading Moreno-Garcia through Butler not only indicates the trajectory of current SF, but it allows us to more fully appreciate what Moreno-Garcia achieves in her short story “Them Ships.” In this chapter, I analyze a few key points of connection to demonstrate how Moreno-Garcia offers alternatives to, even progressions from, Butler’s way of challenging discriminatory societal hierarchies. My contention that Moreno-Garcia operates through lived space necessitates that I closely examine the way “Them Ships” explores the following: the potentiality in the liminal role of translators, the expertise in inexpert competencies of the science fiction genre, symbolic resonances and re-inscriptions of lived space through sentimental objects, the dangers of decoding physical spaces, the revision of patriarchic histories through names, and the repulsion of violence through a fluid gender identity. As each of this chapter’s sections will demonstrate, “Them Ships” is not a comfortable tale. The deliberate openness of Moreno-Garcia’s ending makes it not an insistence on what is right, or even what *is*, but rather a call to arms defending the right of making a choice, and of the right of an “Other” to imagine a different future.

⁷³ Some of Butler’s supra-humans include Lilith from the *Lilith’s Brood* series and Doro and Anyanwu from the late 1970s and early 1980s *Patternist* series. We could consider the protagonist of Denis Villeneuve’s 2016 science fiction film, *Arrival* (based on “Story of Your Life” by Ted Chiang in 1998), to also fit this category after she learns to perceive time in a non-linear manner. The human protagonists from Okorafor’s *Lagoon*, which I explore in my second chapter, and the superheroes of Basu’s *Turbulence*, which I examine in my third chapter, are all also examples of this estranged and supra-human figure.

2.1 WRITING THEMSELVES INTO A GENRE

“At a retreat for women writers in 1988, Octavia E. Butler said that she never wanted the title of being the solitary Black female sci-fi writer . . . She wanted to be one of thousands of folks writing themselves into the present and into the future.”

(Walidah Imarisha, *Octavia's Brood* 5)

Butler desired to illuminate ignored histories by writing fiction for herself and people like her:

When I began writing science fiction, when I began reading, heck, I wasn't in any of this stuff I read.

I certainly wasn't in the science fiction. The only black people you found were occasional characters or characters who were so feeble-witted that they couldn't manage anything, anyway. I wrote myself in, since I'm me and I'm here and I'm writing. I can write my own stories, and I can write myself in. (“Visions: Identity”)

By “writing in” more realistic representations of minorities and their lived experiences, Butler strove to stretch the canon, increasing its inclusivity, and considering alternative ways of imagining the future (that didn't involve being complicit with racism or sexism). She worked to expand the canon by addressing the previously accepted hierarchies of power within SF imaginations and challenging preconceptions about which communities science fiction writers explored.⁷⁴ Indeed, *The Science Fiction Handbook* honors Butler as “one of the finest writers in the field” who “writes from a position of opposition to the ways race and gender have been traditionally represented in SF,” especially in her works that use “the figure of the alien (whether extraterrestrial or not) to challenge . . . culturally constructed categories” (Booker 129). Butler, then, works through the concept of the human species to challenge the overly simplistic way we

⁷⁴ This expansion of the field continues through her legacy—the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship (administered by the Carl Brandon Society) carries out the mission of extending the opportunities Butler received after participating in the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop to new generations of multicultural writers.

consider ourselves to be part of the largest imagined community of all: humankind. Moreno-Garcia is just as interested in escaping this social construction. While Butler often does so through biologic revision, Moreno-Garcia operates through the generative power of lived space.

Moreno-Garcia has worked extensively in speculative fiction, most prolifically in science fiction and horror fiction of a Lovecraft-ian bent, and was awarded the Carter V. Cooper/Exile Short Fiction Emerging Writer Competition in 2011.⁷⁵ The first bound collection of her short fiction (*This Strange Way of Dying: Stories of Magic, Desire and the Fantastic*) was published in 2013. Her first novel, *Signal to Noise*, was published in February 2015 and won the Sunburst Award Society's Copper Cylinder Award for Canadian literature of the fantastic, and her second novel, *Certain Dark Things*, about warring vampire cartels in Mexico City, was published in October 2016.⁷⁶

Like Butler, Moreno-Garcia writes from societal positions that are (still) peripheral to the main SF community. Moreno-Garcia is also not shy about her investment in considering those often left *out* of stories—the people who *exist* but aren't glamorized, who aren't often in a position to write themselves into fictional depictions.⁷⁷ This was demonstrated in a personal interview when she wrote:

⁷⁵ Her work has been published in a wide range of digital and print magazines and anthologies, including *The Apex Book of World SF 2* (2012), *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2013), and *Shine: An Anthology of Near-Future Optimistic Science Fiction* (2010). An anthology titled most tellingly for my point about Moreno-Garcia's permitting of, and working with, lived social space.

⁷⁶ *Certain Dark Things* seems to be related in tone and protagonist to "Them Ships;" although the diegetic worlds are entirely different. Both narratives have trash-picking protagonists who rely heavily upon the use of a music player and become entrenched in the idea of working alongside a supra-human population. Both also focus on the issues of class and communication, are centered on Mexico City, and highlight mythical female figures from the time of the Aztecs.

⁷⁷ See the full interview in Appendix A for Moreno-Garcia's thoughts on class positions of writers, especially those in MFA programs. During the interview, Moreno-Garcia wrote that "many, I would say, most, writers are from a middle class or upper class background."

There is no sense for me in imagining a zombie apocalypse in which the white, beautiful, rich people are fighting zombies because that's every single thing I always read. No one wonders what happens to the poor, to the disabled, etc., during the post-apocalypse. What's more, class structures remain the same in this new world, or a wonderful, macho land is what takes place. One where men save the women with their guns, and the women do the laundry or are randomly raped by the bad guys.

And I think. Well, fuck that. If the world is going to burn, then maybe let's have a zombie post-apocalypse in which a Marxist-feminist commune flourishes. It's as likely as the macho survivalist fantasies. And if Tom Cruise or Brad Pitt get to survive alien attacks, I don't see why someone who lived in the city's dumpsters couldn't make it MORE effectively than these white men who had spent their whole lives with iPads and subscriptions to Maxim and their new car. (Moreno-Garcia, personal interview)

It's clear that even though Moreno-Garcia initially shies away from categorization, writing about whatever social position best fits a story, there is still a drive to continue Butler's venture of expanding the canon, to "write in" perspectives that are often missing or silenced. In an interview with the online journal *Postscripts to Darkness*, Moreno-Garcia responded to a question about the "use of a very idiomatic, informal first-person narration in ['Them Ships']" with an almost curt response: "I hate it when everyone is upper-middle class in all stories, that's the answer."⁷⁸ This is more than just a personal preference; it is also a logical consideration. Moreno-Garcia states, "I don't see why someone who lived in the city's dumpsters couldn't make it MORE effectively," and, indeed, the short story I explore in this chapter follows this

⁷⁸ Her words seem to cut off any speculation about the way she depicted this non-middle-class position, even as her response adamantly reinstitutes that decision with a very personal type of value and meaning. For my own consideration of the informal narration and how it relates to gender coding, see "Gender and Language: Fluidity and Re-Inscription of Epic Protagonists."

exact idea: that a girl from the dumpsters is better suited to alien interaction because she is herself considered inhuman. In “Them Ships,” Moreno-Garcia actually re-visions the future based on the lived experiences of a character.

I consider the narrator of Moreno-Garcia’s “Them Ships,” then, as being a figure who insists not only on her “right to the city” (to be counted as a member of Mexico City society and its spaces), but her right as a human (Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City*). Both of these claims are Moreno-Garcia’s revolutionary intervention and function as “a cry and a demand . . . that is heard . . . and has force to the degree that there is a space from and within which this cry and demand is visible” (Mitchell, *The Right to the City* 129). Moreno-Garcia uses the arrival of aliens as a way to make space for her postcolonial narrator to succeed in making her demand. In “Them Ships,” revising the limitations of postcolonial lived space occurs by casting light upon overlooked material spaces and discounted social spaces. As the rest of this chapter will show, Butler’s narratives cannot harness this tricky strategy of maneuvering because she makes interventions by irreversibly distancing lived spaces when she upends the material and social lives of her characters.

The physical setting of “Them Ships,” an alien education center, combines with the imagined moment of alien contact in order to present the opportunity of a new lived position for Moreno-Garcia’s narrator. More revolutionarily, the narrator can only successfully work toward this newly offered lived position because of her pre-alien *experience* of living in a particular social and physical position in Mexico City. Moreno-Garcia spends most of “Them Ships” providing specific details about this pre-alien lived position, making it clear that the narrator is trying to escape *from* this space. However, the piddling details about the lived space that the narrator is moving *toward* are scattered and immaterial. Since the short story is only six pages

long, diegetic time is limited, and any prioritization must be viewed as meaningful. As such, this imbalance of detail indicates that the movement *away* is what is vitally important to the story—not whatever the aliens may offer in the future—and that the narrator’s experienced space acts as the crucible of change.⁷⁹ Indeed, this story is representative of many postcolonial SF writers in the way that lived space is used to generate “resistance of the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning” (Soja, *Thirdspace* 68). In Moreno-Garcia’s story, the empowering lived space is itself peripheral to the dominant social order: She is a young woman who lives in the slums of Mexico City. This narrator, having undergone an “alien” education even before the arrival of extraterrestrials, is open to engaging with a variety of texts and thoughts. She fights for the chance to remain open to new possibilities because the rhetoric of humankind has never before been applied to her: She writes from the position of the alienated.

However, alienated figures are still capable of deciding to connect and unite with others, whether they are alien or human. In this way, “Them Ships” carries on in the spirit of SF intervention that Butler so vitally helped introduce in works like “Amnesty” and *Lilith’s Brood*. Although Moreno-Garcia operates from lived space and Butler from deleted space, both authors work through the SF trope of “first contact,” contend with the difficulties that arise when those

⁷⁹ In her short story “Amnesty” and in her trilogy *Lilith’s Brood*, Butler places her characters in a controlled physical space in order to question and work out alternatives to these potentially damning and dividing systems of society. One of the main features of these controlled situations is a distanced Earth (alien planets, time travel, alien-enforced decades-long slumber, nuclear winter, and so on remove it from the equation). Butler, then, writes back by placing characters in impossible and morally complicated situations, where initial reactions are always fallible, and it is impossible to condemn her character’s decisions because there is no “safe” option in which humankind escapes unchanged. Her writing harkens back and forces readers to contend with histories like that of African enslavement, where at times working within the system (as evidenced in the plots of *Kindred*, “Amnesty,” *Bloodchild*, and *Lilith’s Brood*) is the only viable choice. In order to keep these decisions unsettling and morally inconclusive, the aftermath of the situation-caused choice is revealed. In these stories, language is often a main (though not *the* solution, but vitally important) way characters work through gendered violence and domination and also escape/reconsider the physical and social spaces of the situations in which they’ve been placed.

who are different (human-Othered aliens *and* human-Othered humans) attempt to communicate. To ensure such arguments are understandable by those less familiar with Butler and Moreno-Garcia, I provide a précis of each text under discussion below.

2.1.1 *Lilith's Brood*: Distancing Earth-Space and Altering the Human Gene

Butler's trilogy is composed of the individual novels *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989), which were collected into a single volume as *Xenogenesis* in 1989. The trilogy was recollected and re-titled as *Lilith's Brood* in 2000, and since readers coming to the series for the first time after the 2000 collection will better recognize that title, I will refer to the series as such. The first book, *Dawn*, shows the arrival of a new, post-apocalyptic era in human history: The survivors of a human-caused nuclear winter are saved by an alien race of genetic traders, the snake-limbed Oankali. The Oankali place the humans in a hypersleep while they reseed Earth with new plants and study some of the humans on their living spaceships. Readers enter the story hundreds of years later when the Oankali decide to fully awaken their newest trade partners and begin the hybridization process.

Less interested in language translation, Butler's story focuses on how humans are educated into accepting the physical forms of the Oankali and their society. This teaching role is given to the series' human protagonist and *Dawn*'s focalizer, Lilith Iyapo, after she demonstrates that she can maintain an imperfect, but functioning, communicative relationship with Nikanj, an Oankali.⁸⁰ Even though the human race must start again "from scratch" after its nuclear

⁸⁰ Nikanj is a young Oankali who matures into an ooloi. Ooloi are a third sex of Oankali, the ones with the genetic ability to take and combine genes to produce construct children. They serve as the lynchpin of the Oankali-human family structure, with two humans (male and female) and two Oankali (male and female) completing the family unit. Ooloi are an interesting thirdspace in their own right, since it is where the genetic tasting, mixing, and creating of

devastation, the human characters question the sexual mating sought by their Oankali rescuers and how the proposed genetic-hybridism would subvert the idea of a *human* future. At the end of the first novel, this tension erupts in murderous violence. Most of the awakened humans are sent to Earth to start the planet resettlement while Lilith remains on the alien ship in her role as educator. She also learns that she is soon going to be the non-consensual mother to the first human-Oankali hybrid child.

Concerned with humankind's future, Butler's trilogy removes a human-controlled Earth and Earth-based experiences from the grasp of her protagonists. Even when, in the following novels, the physical setting is on "Earth," it is an unrecognizable planet, an alien-selected biosphere devoid of all but a few trash-like remains of human settlement. The narrative perspective also shifts toward the more alien as the focalizers change from Lilith to her hybrid children.⁸¹

2.1.2 "Amnesty": Touching on the Inhumanity of Humankind

Butler's later work "Amnesty" (2003) doesn't blow up the planet with a nuclear war, but it still manages to distance the human lived spaces of Earth. Unlike either *Lilith's Brood* or "Them Ships," this narrative depends on nonlinear revelation. We begin by seeing the human

hybrid construct(ed) children occurs—in some sense, they themselves are locations of radical openness, needing to combine and align distinctly different individuals, though this need is more biological than politically driven.

⁸¹ The second and third novels (*Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*) are set on Earth, where Lilith and Nikanj now live with the rest of their human-Oankali families. These later novels are primarily focalized through Lilith's younger, consensual-construct (hybrid) children. The narrative lens thus becomes progressively more alienated "human": *Adulthood Rites* is focalized by Akin, the first construct male who appears mostly human until after puberty, and *Imago* is focalized by Jodahs, the first construct ooloi. These novels continue the story of the Oankali and humans as they resettle Earth, transitioning from early divisions between human-only resister colonies and villages of human-Oankali family groups into a further division where human-only resisters are able to colonize Mars, leaving the Earth for the human-Oankali and the constructs, who will eventually (being half Oankali) set out for the stars in search of a new species to serve as a trading partner.

protagonist, Noah, fully integrated into the world of Earth-inhabiting bush-like aliens called Communities. The first action we see Noah take is that of translation; as a licensed intermediary among different Communities and between Communities and humans, Noah practices the art of communication by spatial inhabiting. Since the Communities are blind and deaf, they can only communicate with humans through a tactile sign language that works best when the human translator is “enfolded” into the larger, plant-like aliens. Being part of the physical “body” of a Community allows for more touch-based connectivity, but it also brings humans into a literal alien space. In this story, Butler reminds us that communication is dangerous—upon being enfolded, human translators will be pressed on and can even be electrocuted if they “say” something displeasing to the aliens.

Much like Lilith, Noah is located as a peaceful bridge between species. The Communities abducted her when they first landed on Earth to establish their territory of “bubbles.” They experimented on human abductees in order to understand them, only comprehending their experiments’ torturous side effects (including starvation, rape, and murder) after collaboratively generating the tactile language. When released from the alien bubble, Noah is tortured by human government officials demanding she share the aliens’ weakness. She is traumatized after being so mistreated by her fellow humans, who, unlike the aliens, fully understand the effects of their actions. After being released, Noah decides to return to the bubble as a contracted translator. The story takes place in the diegetic time after her decision to work with the Communities and effectually shows readers the aftermath of her decision. Part of her translator duty is to share her tale with potential translator applicants who demonstrate a range of reactions to the idea of alien invasion (e.g., anger, fear, worship, love, confusion, scheming). The story ends with Noah revealing a vital secret: When originally threatened with nuclear missiles, the Communities

buried half of the world's nuclear stockpile under each country's capital, retaining the other half for a later time if they felt threatened. As Noah says, "It was a short, quiet war. ...We lost" (Butler 615).⁸²

In her short story and her trilogy, Butler examines women positioned between two species, left to make individual decisions only after their bodies have been violated and their physical and social locations non-consensually reoriented. Her protagonists contend with their own evolving loyalties as they each try to navigate beyond systems of violence into potential understandings. Moreno-Garcia's "Them Ships" protagonist is in a similar predicament, but the physical space of Earth is less distant than in either Butler work. Similarly, the pull of human-only rhetoric is never compelling. Instead, Moreno-Garcia gives readers a narrator that finds a sensible hope in the arrival of aliens. Any potential moral condemnation of the narrator is lessened by Moreno-Garcia's decision to end the story before readers learn the full effects of her protagonist's decision to affiliate with the aliens instead of the humans that have continually alienated her.

2.1.3 "Them Ships": Resistance Through Lived Space

"Them Ships" was originally published in the anthology *We See a Different Frontier*, one of several publications deliberately aimed to expand the inclusivity of the SF genre (as I explained in my Introduction).⁸³ In "Them Ships," an unidentified alien race comes to Earth and rounds up

⁸² I use the *Callaloo* pagination from 2004—easier to note than the first SciFi.com published location in 2003, and earlier than in the *Bloodchild* anthology (2005). However, note that even Butler benefited from online publication opportunities.

⁸³ The anthology was printed by the printing press of *The Future Fire*, a science fiction online magazine published quarterly and dedicated to "beautiful and useful short stories of Social-political and Progressive Speculative Fiction; Feminist SF; Queer SF; Eco SF; Multicultural SF; Cyberpunk" (futurefire.net). Futurefire.net Publishing is likewise

humans for re-education. The aliens provide institutional organization and support in the form of room and board while the humans are contained in their re-education centers. The homodiegetic narrator and main protagonist is an unnamed youth from Mexico City; the story is transmitted through the journaling efforts of this first-person voice. The “Othered” position of the narrator is established by her use of slang, cursing, and informal grammar. We never learn the narrator’s name or even concretize whether this character is male or female. (Later in this chapter, I explain what this openness offers to the text, and why I find that coding the narrator as female presents even more productive connections within and between texts.) However, as mentioned above, certain details about the narrator’s lived space are deliberately concrete: She is from a poor family, did not gain a secondary education, worked as a trash-picker before the aliens arrived, and has a music player she found while combing trash piles.

The narrator is assigned a roommate, Leonardo, a wealthy college linguistics student who befriends the woman partly to use her impressive aptitude for learning the alien language to aid in his escape from the alien-controlled re-education center. Though he promises to take her with him, Leonardo leaves the woman behind during the “jailbreak.” When Leonardo is caught by the aliens and returned for disciplinary action, he asks her to intercede for him. The woman refuses to speak in his defense, and the story closes with her turning on the music player.

Moreno-Garcia’s “Them Ships” is a six-page short story while Butler’s “Amnesty” is eighteen pages long, and her *Lilith’s Brood* is a roughly seven-hundred-fifty-four-page compilation of three short novels. While these texts investigate similar circumstances, their varied lengths affect the reader’s ability to judge the new positioning that occurs due to the

dedicated to social speculative fiction, as evidenced by *We See a Different Frontier*’s call for stories. *We See a Different Frontier* is Futurefire.net Publishing’s second anthology; the press produced its first anthology, *Outlaw Bodies*, about future imaginings of bodies and control (modification and transgression) in 2012, and a disability-themed anthology, *Accessing the Future*, in 2015.

alien/subaltern interventions. We see the aftermath of Lilith's choices in the first novel, *Dawn*, in the following novels (*Adulthood*, *Imago*); we are also told of what happens "after" the alien/human encounters in "Amnesty" because the story is set twenty years after the initial encounter. We never see what occurs due to the choice of Moreno-Garcia's protagonist at the end of "Them Ships" because the entire story is set during the first human-alien encounter. I'm not claiming these differences indicate that Butler portrays a less-valuable encounter. Instead, I suggest that we recognize the restructuring potential in a narrative that does not serve as a long look, but rather as an active glimpse of a heterotopian, diegetic world with a focus on human-to-human interaction.

2.2 THE INVISIBILITY OF THE TRANSLATOR

"From a social and human perspective, the most important people are interpreters, in particular the people who are interpreting in legal situations such as applications for asylum, refugee status, the right to remain, etc. . . . the courts assume that interpretation, and indeed translation, are straightforward processes, whereas in fact they are often exerted as forms of control and reduction. In more general terms, the role of translators is not essentially different in the postcolonial world than in any other, except with respect to the general social consensus today that interaction and understanding between cultures has become more urgently important. Translators are the people who are most able to facilitate and enable understanding between people of different cultures."

(Robert J. C. Young in an interview with Thomas J. Corbett, "Translation and Postcolonialism," 2011)

All three texts focus on boundary-crossing communication, specifically on the act of translating between two different groups.⁸⁴ In Butler's stories, this interaction occurs between aliens and humans. In Moreno-Garcia's work, the translation between aliens and humans is an excuse to engage with the necessary translation that occurs between humans from two distant social

⁸⁴ In this chapter, we begin at a more microscopic and intimate level of communication: Butler and Moreno-Garcia's translators focus on in-person translation possibilities.

classes. There is already ample consideration of the importance—and even impossibility—of postcolonial figures vocalizing their own positions.⁸⁵ The figure of the postcolonial translator complicates these considerations, since these translators are used as methods of communication for others but also speak on their own behalves. A translator, then, can hold a simultaneous lived position of empowerment and dismissal, but they are “always involved in a relation of power, both in terms of the institutional practice of translation and in the general relationship between languages, which are never neutral but always involved in larger formations of power” (Robert J.C. Young, “Translation and Postcolonialism”).⁸⁶ Moreno-Garcia and Butler use the power-bound position of translator to create a distorted echo of historical interpreters within colonized and dominated spaces. I claim they distort this echo because they do not merely replicate previous moments of translator intervention in either SF or postcolonial narratives; they also draw from the realities of such figures in order to position their characters in a unique, crucial, power-wielding liminal third position between the binaries of humans and aliens / humans and alienated-humans. In the following section, I explain why this third position might be usefully coded as a “third contact” zone.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ The most famous consideration of such vocality is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s formulation of whether the subaltern can speak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999), but this topic is also treated thoroughly in anthologies contending with Spivak’s foundational idea, including *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind C. Morris (2010).

⁸⁶ I dedicate significant discussion to parsing out the power-encoded languages that Butler’s and Moreno-Garcia’s characters wield as translators toward the end of this chapter.

⁸⁷ Some of the most easily obtained examples of SF translators come from two of the largest fan franchises: the Universal Translator from the *Star Trek* universe (tiny machines capable of shifting alien languages into the native tongue of the spaceship’s crew), and the *Star Wars* etiquette and protocol droid, C-3PO. *Star Trek*’s practically invisible translator has a vital physical presence in almost every *Trek* episode, but it is not infallible. One near-disastrous problem lies between the semiotic gaps of signifier and signified; the device can linguistically convert the language of the alien Tamarians while still leaving the crew of the Enterprise unable to comprehend the metaphors the Tamarians use to communicate (“Darmok”). With such a “clear” translation, the crew is unable to understand what the deciphered language signifies. When the *Star Wars* etiquette and protocol droid C-3PO is on the job, he is able to package the informational messages being exchanged between parties in different linguistic and cultural packaging. Supposedly, his personality is subsumed by the actors in discussion, like Jabba the Hut or Luke Skywalker; in a maneuver that media theorist Marshall McLuhan would argue with the droid is intended to serve as

This liminal third positioning is revealed slowly. Initially, those in power do not trust the protagonists; after all, they belong to the “other” species/class/race. Each protagonist must learn the language of the empowered species/class as they go along in order to distinguish themselves from the dominated “Others” and gain maneuverability.⁸⁸ To do so, they must attempt to strike a balance between being a replaceable “tool” and a unique compatriot; between being traitors and saviors. They learn to be translators that function as “informants, diplomatic agents, merchants, captives, and slaves, multilingual and multicultural figures able to cross frontiers by choice, interest, or necessity, and to negotiate all sorts of boundaries and constraints (prison and enslavement among them)” (Tessicini 8).

All three women from the stories I investigate are indeed bound by alien environments or even restrained by the aliens themselves as part of communicative efforts. The narrator of “Them Ships” is brought to a specific language-learning center, Lilith is only allowed outside her cell once she bonds with Nikanj, and Noah must allow herself to be completely enfolded by different Communities. In order to serve as translators, these women must overcome the impulse to destroy seemingly restrictive spaces in order to successfully work within them; they must learn how to speak so that those in power are motivated to listen and capable of understanding.

the medium, *not* the message. However, even in his strictest translator role, such as the negotiation between Jabba and Luke, the droid obviously has his own preferences about the end result of the conversation he translates: He wishes to be freed from Jabba the Hut’s enslavement and returned to his previous self-conscripted position in Luke’s care. These characters illustrate the difference between a “living” translator and a tool: unlike the Universal Translator, C-3PO is both a translating “device” and a translator because he is always inscribed for film viewers with the knowledge of his individual personality from those moments when he is not translating the words of others, but communicating his own ideas and fears. Self-aware translators, then, are not separable from their own concerns and self-invested positions, even if they make attempts to appear so. The human translators of Moreno-Garcia and Butler refuse to even dignify the false veil of objectivity.

⁸⁸ Since I work with the English versions of these stories and thus with the narratives in the language in which they were originally written, I do not take this opportunity to engage in the discussion of literary translation, though some of my sources are angled in this direction.

In this way, each protagonist negotiates between her desires and her needs, even as they all work to open channels of the same type of understanding between the human and alien(ated) species. Importantly, Butler arranges Noah and Lilith to be devoted to this act of negotiation not only for their own benefit, but also that of the rest of humankind. However, Moreno-Garcia makes the act of negotiation more radical: Her narrator works with aliens because they offer her the chance to change her lived reality and escape into a better living condition. The fact that she believes their mission is to assist / uplift humankind is less a justification than it is a bonus. This level of self-investment is a way of resisting the positioning of her fellow (and more privileged) humans who try to corral her in the role of an invisible translator that is easily “used.”⁸⁹ As such, Moreno-Garcia uses the position of translator as a way to correct for a lifetime of human exclusion.

2.3 SUBLIMATING “FIRST CONTACT”: THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE “INEXPERT” SF DECODER

“...you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind. ‘Mankind.’ That word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can’t be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interests. Perhaps it’s fate that today is the Fourth of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom . . . We are fighting for our right to live. To exist. And should we win the day, the Fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day the world declared in one voice: ‘We will not go quietly into the night!’”

(President Thomas Whitmore (Bill Pullman), motivating Will Smith and others in the 1996 movie *Independence Day*)

⁸⁹ One additional thought on the invisibility of translators: When Norman Shapiro writes, “A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it’s there when there are little imperfections—scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn’t be any. It should never call attention to itself,” it would follow that “good” translators should make *themselves* invisible—or at least, ignorable in the way of a pair of high-quality sunglasses, assisting the reader in being able to more directly view the sunny landscape of the writer or the speaker (qtd. in Venuti 1). Butler and Moreno-Garcia’s translators do not fit this type of translator position.

Indeed, Moreno-Garcia's introduction warns her readers that the narrator will sublimate the traditional science fiction "first contact" reaction. Several times the narrator indicates that Leonardo is basing his experience of the alien station from American movies and television shows that depict a disastrous first contact with aliens. In her diary, she writes:

Leonardo told me the aliens conduct experiments and we are like mice. . . . He watched too many cartoons when he was a kid. I now have access to some of the alien databanks and there, in our conversations, it's pretty obvious it's not like that. We're too coarse, too violent, too stupid and they are going to help us. I suppose some people would prefer to think they'll cook us for supper. That would be easier to understand. (Moreno-Garcia 29)

Moreno-Garcia suggests the "reader" with the most megatextual knowledge may be incorrectly interpreting the situation because, like Leonardo, the majority of alien SF encounter narratives are biased—Western, privileged, with American soldiers who don't "give a rat's ass 'bout Mexico City," or if they do, it is only to place the city under the command of those sitting in other nations' capitals (Moreno-Garcia 26). These biases reflect in aliens that are dangerous, overly intelligent abusers of their power (H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*) or driven by crude animalistic appetites (director Ridley Scott's *Alien*). Both Leonardo and the unnamed woman are drawing from the knowledge of their previous lived spaces to figure out how to handle being under alien control. Leonardo, having had the privilege of watching a lot of television and having suffered from the loss of his well-off social position, thinks the worst of the aliens. This is logical, but readers never learn whether his distrust is warranted. There is no indication about what the aliens want in return for educating the humans.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Though their potential position as galactic do-gooders is certainly thrown into question with their parallel link to Spanish conquistadors, who brought "civilization" to the New World only in order to expand their home country's economic and political power.

It seems as though the less science-fictionally experienced narrator may be able to consider her situation in ways untainted by a genre that, like some works of detective fiction, can be used to disturb the existing social order only in order to more fully re-inscribe it.⁹¹ Moreno-Garcia discredits the initial reactions of young, middle-class, male SF “experts” like Leonardo by validating the possibility that the narrator is correct: She insists that the aliens differ from traditional fictional portrayals because their goal is to “help” humans with their problematic habit of being “too coarse, too violent, too stupid” (Ferreira, “First contact” 71; Moreno-Garcia 29). Such statements highlight the narrator’s openness of approaching this situation as a flexible unconcretized reader, one free of mainstream SF media’s bias against the “colonizing” aliens.⁹² Indeed, all of the characters in my primary case texts are relatively uninitiated in SF (though the other protagonists have far more access to SF texts than Moreno-Garcia’s narrator), highlighting

⁹¹ At the end of many detective narratives, especially the early ones, social disarray is put to rights as criminal activity is unearthed and criminals punished. For examples of this societal re-inscription in SF, consider John Rieder’s explanation of H. G. Wells. When Wells has Martians attack the heartland of the British Empire, it questions the viability of imperial conquest in real world referents like Tasmania, “demanding that colonizers imagine themselves as the colonized.” Nevertheless, the novel’s “analogy rests on the logic prevalent in contemporary anthropology that the indigenous, primitive other’s present is the colonizer’s own past;” it upholds the underlying logic of the colonial excuse of anachronism (*Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* 5). Likewise, Roland Emmerich’s film (1996) *Independence Day* shows that when aliens attempt to take over the world, the outgunned Americans must be able to stop them with a maverick combination of oddball strategy and military courage.

⁹² So while Leonardo always casts the aliens in the light of H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (1897) or Roland Emmerich’s film *Independence Day* (1996), Moreno-Garcia’s aliens are not part of a violent invasive encounter. Rather, they derive from the “helpful” alien tradition of Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* (1953), and they certainly connect to Octavia Butler’s rescuer Oankali in the *Lilith’s Brood*. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* is a novel about the benevolent transformation of humankind into part of the universe-spanning Overmind. Other “friendly” alien encounters include the satirical law-abiding “Monolithian” aliens of Richard Wilson’s *30 Day Wonder* (1960), who protect humankind from their own nuclear impulses, and even the famous stranded alien-child *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982). The one goal we know for certain about the aliens in “Them Ships” is that they seek to educate humans so that they may serve as translators, similar to the job of Butler’s Noah in “Amnesty.”

Of course, even beneficent aliens can be threatening. The Communities guarantee their safety through nuclear threat and the Oankali can not only control human sterility but also enforce comas in violent humans and clone replacements if they are incurable. Clarke’s apartheid and animal-cruelty ending Overseers usher in decades of peace, health, and prosperity for humankind, but it ends in the evolution of human children into *inhuman* Overmind parts that discard (destroy) the planet Earth and travel among the stars. It should be noted that Overseers have leather wings, horns, and a pointed tail—much like the “devils” of most human religions, which Clarke explains as being due to the humankind’s memory and its position-out of time (remembering the future, and the end, of the human race). This also seems linked to the potential of history repeating itself with the white non-native explorers in Moreno-Garcia’s story.

the different accessibilities of SF narratives and replicating “newcomer” populations to the SF arena.

That’s not to suggest that the narrator of “Them Ships” does not recognize that she’s in an alien invasion tale, only that she responds to it from a different position. Critic Rachel Haywood Ferreira noted that, since Latin American SF authors are familiar with the general SF predecessors and also live in a “postcolonial reality,” Latin American authored “stories of first contact might better be described as stories of second contact due to the degree to which the original historical circumstances and the colonial legacy inform content and perspective” (Ferreira 70). If colonial engagement is the moment of first contact and SF alien-human interactions are the second in locations like Mexico, then I consider Moreno-Garcia to offer a “third contact.”

The extraterrestrials are indeed the “second” set of alien-others to make contact with Earthling inhabitants of Mexico, but within the (hybrid-*raza*-ized) Mexican Earthling population there is yet *another* (third) “alien” contact being made between two populations of humans. These populations have been self-separated, as represented by the middle-class Leonardo and the impoverished narrator. Such “third contact” between human striations occurs only after the revisionary estrangement of “second contact,” effectively establishing the narrator as being even more “alien” to the middle-class human than the extraterrestrial beings. This is why “Them Ships” subverts the tendency to “identify or empathize with the colonized” that Ferreira notes of Latin American SF authors (72). Instead, Moreno-Garcia’s narrator has a specific identification that actively distinguishes between the group of humans subsumed by the outer space aliens (during second contact) and those colonized and Othered by the humans who are alien to the Mexican slums (which flares during third contact).

Moreno-Garcia indicates her story's subverted relationship to the first contact subgenre in the first sentence: "Leonardo says that the Americans are going to fire some rockets and free us from the tyranny of the aliens and I say: who gives a shit" (Moreno-Garcia 26). This is not *Independence Day*, the film that reiterates the original "rockets" that were fired, glaring red to free Americans "from the tyranny" of an "alien" nation (26). Readers are immediately presented with the story's novum intervention: Aliens have arrived and are in some type of control, perhaps even tyrannical. From the beginning, readers learn that it's not going to be about "Anglos defending the world"—and that the female protagonist couldn't care less about that traditional narrative arch or relegating her voice. She is open to the possibility, though it may be disastrous, that the aliens may also offer a *new* system through their exemplary non-humanity.

In all three stories, it is often the privileged humans who remain system-locked, falling back into the same patterns of discrimination, distrust, and abuse even after alien interventions present new modes of being and attempt to dismantle human hierarchies. In the human-Oankali communities of *Lilith's Brood*, the extraterrestrials might patronize their human counterparts, but in separatist communities, humans do far worse to one another. They enslave, rape, and trade in women and children, and discriminate based on religion and race. In "Amnesty" Noah and the translator recruits judge each other quite harshly on their attitudes and backgrounds.⁹³ In "Them Ships," the aliens establish a social system that ignores those human distinctions, as shown through the mixed assignments of dorm-mates. But even here, humans align according to 'normal' classifications such as economic class during the common mingling lunch periods, where human characters choose to eat with their "own kind."

⁹³ Abductees like Noah are treated inhumanely by fellow prisoners in cellmate experiments.

Both Butler and Moreno-Garcia portray the heinous and historical violence that comes from the refusal to revise these systems.⁹⁴ Since humankind's rhetoric does not make space for Othered humans to thrive—or even survive without suffering—it is interesting that in Butler's narratives, the humans are always *excused* from their alien affiliations by being dually motivated/forced into choosing to act with the aliens instead of with human-only factions. In Butler, there is always a choice that is also *not* a choice. Lilith is bound to the Oankali through her relationship with Nikanj, but mostly by forced motherhood. Noah sides with what she views as the more *humane* Communities, but also works to prevent the ever-present threat of alien-detonated nuclear war.⁹⁵ The power of these stories depends on these dual motivations, but they also mean that pro-alien alliances are never fully in protest of human-on-human treatment.

The effectiveness of Moreno-Garcia's story, however, is not in the unpinnable motivations but in the openness of her narrator's choice. "Them Ships" is less specific about potential punishments of siding against the aliens; the narrator is only afraid of losing the opportunity to be a galactic translator. More than the begrudging Lilith and Noah, Moreno-Garcia's narrator is personally motivated by optimism, not blackmail, to consider how non-human systems offer a way to disrupt indifferent human hierarchies. This is why she is resistant to Leonardo's humanist rhetoric. Throughout "Them Ships," Leonardo frames their current

⁹⁴ This is partially done through the narrative perspective. While Butler allows readers to occasionally jump between focalizers, shifting from Lilith and Noah to other humans that problematically avoid the more generative openings Lilith and Noah work through in order to explore the fearful reasons why they may refuse such openings, Moreno-Garcia's first-person narration actually works to 'restrict' readers to the narrator. They are distanced from Leonardo and do not ever fully know what he feels or why he seems so desperate to avoid alien-openings. If Butler prioritizes the often-marginalized, Moreno-Garcia completely Others and often silences the non-marginalized voice (of Leonardo).

⁹⁵ At one point, Noah explains to people who are angry that she is working with the Communities: "'There's no 'away' for them—not for several generations anyway. Their ship was a one-way transport. . . . They're here,' she said for the third time. 'I'm one of maybe thirty people in this country who can talk to them. Where else would I be but here at a bubble, trying to help the two species understand and accept one another before one of them does something fatal?'" ("Amnesty" 606).

location within that of human hierarchies.⁹⁶ By doing so, Leonardo attempts to establish himself as the expert, the hero who will successfully escape and defeat the aliens, restoring societal order. However, this narrative is unappealing to the narrator. She denies his human-centric rhetoric, combating its attempt to cement her alliance by confirming her disassociation from the identities he assumes he can use to mobilize her into action: comrade, rebel, citizen, and fellow human. She has not been, nor does Leonardo ever fully treat her as being, worthy of humankind's full respect or interest. Why wouldn't she, then, desire to become a valued part of a new system? The old human-controlled Earth-based system was doing nothing for her and indeed never prioritized her needs or wants. The narrator has nothing to lose and everything to gain by leveraging her position in the alien heterotopia.

2.4 CHAPTER (AND PROJECT) REFRAIN: DISTANCE OF EARTH = THE PIVOTAL LIVED SPACE

"That's what it's all about."
(The Hokey Pokey)

While Butler and Moreno-Garcia write protagonists that take advantage of the opportunities offered through alien interaction, Butler forces readers to forget the lived space of Earth while Moreno-Garcia uses lived space as an urgent prompter of societal revision. This very real, visceral presence of Earth is what motivates the narrator and Leonardo to their opposite interpretations and actions within the alien-controlled camp. Leonardo tries to escape and reclaim his version of Earth because it is still possible that 'normal' Earth operations and

⁹⁶ Including those replicated in genre-specific understandings (especially that of the pulp SF male-warrior combating aliens).

‘normal’ Earth power dynamics continue outside the aliens’ sphere of influence. At the start of the story, Leonardo believes, potentially unfoundedly, that the American power will rise against the alien usurpers, but the girl tempers his enthusiasm: “Who gives a shit.” To answer her question about who cares if the Americans take over the narrative space and impose human-governed hierarchies of capitalist freedom: Leonardo does. He benefits if human, and in this case national, hierarchies are re-employed without alteration. However, the closeness to Earth is double-edged in this story: It acts as Leonardo’s motivator for system continuity and the narrator’s insistence for the importance of changing the system.

The absence/presence of Earth is the most distinct feature between Butler and Moreno-Garcia’s alien narratives. Butler presents characters operating a “choice-that-is-not-a-choice” because Earth is never retrievable in her stories. Its absence establishes the situations that result in conflicting identifications and system revisions. In *Lilith’s Brood*, Earth is destroyed by nuclear war, but it is the Oankali who carefully destroy any remaining physical reminders of pre-alien social spaces.⁹⁷ In the lived and social senses of *human* space, Earth is gone—the identities it contained, the human effects of various civilizations that made a pale blue dot the planet “Earth,” are irreparably dismantled.⁹⁸ This is why the Resister’s nostalgic attempts to find “scraps” are pathetically represented (Butler, *Adulthood Rites* 389). There is no returning, and

⁹⁷ The physical space of Earth is lost. Curt’s query about his political location (as prisoner of Earth enemies or allies) also highlights his unforeseen physical location: He’s on a living alien spaceship. At the moment, Earth is “down,” a disorienting experience to say the least (Butler 140). Even when the humans are released back onto the planet’s surface, it is to find that even Earth’s primordial aspects have been changed beyond recognition as part of the Oankali’s revitalization project.

⁹⁸ This problem of various hierarchical systems critically shapes Sharon DeGraw’s “‘The More Things Change, the More They Remain the Same’: Gender and Sexuality in Octavia Butler’s Oeuvre” (2004); Patricia Melzer’s “‘All that you touch you change’: Utopian Desire and the Concept of Change in Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*” (2002); Sherryl Vint’s “Becoming Other: Animals, Kinship, and Butler’s ‘Clay’s Ark’” (2005); Jeboon Yu’s “The Representation of Inappropriate/d Others: The Epistemology of Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Feminism and Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Series” (2004); Frances Bonner’s “Difference and Desire, Slavery and Seduction: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*” (1990); and Eva Cherniavsky’s “*Subaltern Studies in a U. S. Frame*” (1996)..

Butler is adamant on this point. The history of lived Earth-space is destroyed so that all characters can move forward from the Oankali-shaped present.⁹⁹ Even the lived experiences of Lilith and her fellow human survivors are placed out of reach: They have two-and-a-half centuries of hypersleep distancing their past Earthly experiences.¹⁰⁰

While Earth is less distanced in “Amnesty,” since the planet and human civilizations exist in recognizable form, Butler still uses temporal remoteness and alien-constructed space to remove human-Earth. The Communities do not eradicate human structures because they establish their dwellings in unpopulated deserts. However, the arrival of the Communities does overwhelm the world’s economy, resulting in global starvation and dismay. The twenty-year gap between the aliens’ arrival and the time of “Amnesty” provides readers with insight into the world’s post-alien economics and political systems, making it obvious that in this story, human-Earth is also ‘lost’ due to alien intervention.

Compared to Butler, Moreno-Garcia’s story places ‘normal’ Earth tantalizingly close. I consider this part of her intervention in the SF canon. The perceived closeness of recognizable Earth-spaces encourages Leonardo to grasp at the whole-human-species discourse of

⁹⁹ The hybridized humans are the ones the trilogy’s narrative follows. The novels suggest that they are the ones that move the species ahead and that aren’t doomed to an eventual, biologically inevitable second humanicide on Mars.

¹⁰⁰ Lilith holds a space particularly distanced from her Earth lived spaces: She’s primed in the present, having chosen to separate from the past, even before the nuclear war. Having lost the job of wife and mother when her family is killed in a car crash, Lilith redefines herself by transitioning into a new career and leaving home to travel the world. She is in the process of reinventing her lived space when the nuclear weapons strike. The revision of Earth’s physical space and the temporal shift of 250 years better position Lilith to even more dramatically reinvent her social position, especially after the Oankali select her as the first mother. Lilith even critiques another human when they inquire about the positions and experiences she had on Earth before the war; for Lilith (and this novel), the past is “Pointless...By the time the Oankali showed up in my room, I was ready to move into the present and stay there” (*Dawn* 135). On one hand, it must be nice to have the past so thoroughly made irrelevant. It allows Lilith to survive, and it allows Butler to make a damning point about how deeply entrenched humanity’s disturbing tendency toward hierarchies really is: It takes blowing up the Earth, having our memories/histories distanced and erased, being placed in subordinate positions to another species, and recoding the genetics of our descendants to even *begin* dismantling discriminatory power dynamics. In this way, we could consider that part of Butler’s investment in the *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy is to argue that the way to an optimistic future is through a minimizing of the past, no matter how enticing lived differences seem. However, it is also possible to move toward a positive future by turning such lived space differences into “a lived space of strategic location,” as Soja suggests (68).

enslavement, human uprising, and freedom fighters. But it also provides a reason for the girl—who never held a position of equality before, and who was never assisted just because she belonged to the group of humans—to resist his humanist propaganda, as I mentioned above. Her expertise is not in SF consumption or in international awareness, but in living as a disenfranchised person in her immediate arena. That is what allows her to successfully navigate the new system where aliens, not humans, are in control.

2.4.1 Keeping Earth Close: Lived Space as Resistance/Tangible Memory

One of the more tangible ways Moreno-Garcia allows the Earth to potentially persist is in having human items brought into a heterotopic alien space. The “Them Ships” aliens permit their humans to keep Earthly belongings that they had at the time of their “abduction.” These are not random artifacts, like in *Lilith’s Brood*, but items of personal importance that Leonardo and the narrator use to anchor their experiences of the alien camp to their previous lived positions. Leonardo keeps the college linguistic books from his backpack, and the unnamed girl keeps a music player she found while garbage-picking (Moreno-Garcia 27). Vitaly, both of these objects are *texts*. Examining how each character engages with these texts further develops my argument that Moreno-Garcia offers a way of moving beyond a stagnated Earth system, and a recursive SF narrative, through lived space.

As a linguistics student, Leonardo should be primed for the role of alien-human translator. Having engaged in theories and practices of language formation and acquisition, he should be at least partially trained in not only learning and using the alien’s language, but also in

the importance of establishing greater communication.¹⁰¹ However, that training is also emblematic of a concrete system, which only changes via academic and bureaucratic processes. A textbook, after all, is a device devised to control a reader's engagement and to specifically formulate *one* set of knowledge and way of performing in a discipline; they do not lend themselves to multiple interpretations. Especially at the college level, it is also a solitary medium, not a text that engages a socially shared experience of language. Although it may be painful to admit, a textbook is not overwhelmingly creative as a text because its purpose is to instill ideas that are new to its reader, yet thoroughly vetted in a larger societal context.

In other words, the medium of a textbook matches Leonardo's rhetoric in the story and his ability to process the narrative scenario in only one way. He always prioritizes "given" hierarchies when interpreting new information, following the tightly structured narrative of a textbook. We even occasionally see Leonardo using his textbooks to teach the narrator, harkening back to Leonardo's attempts to position himself as the expert (on aliens, on linguistics), which is laughable considering that the narrator picks up the foreign diction and syntax of higher education just as well as the extraterrestrial language. She is a better linguistic "student" than Leonardo, and her ease in handling the textbook medium and that of her music player indicates her skill as a code-switching reader. For the narrator's music player is a type of text open to multiple interpretations, engaged with emotional affect and lived experiences, and devoted to a shared societal experience. It is eminently flexible in a way that a textbook is not, and that too represents its owner's capabilities in wielding language and reading various texts and alien scenarios.

¹⁰¹ He is, after all, a student of linguistics. As Dr. Louise Banks, the linguist called to duty in Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" (1998) and Denis Villeneuve's adaptation *Arrival* (2016), shows, that field of study could make him more open to the powerful possibilities of learning new ways of communication.

The music player, much as the textbook medium, is emblematic of the character's lived space and represents how the narrator is willing to interpret the situation of the alien camp. Unlike Leonardo's college books (which he toted around during his privileged existence "studying at the Tec, fucking pretty girls and driving a fancy car"), the narrator's music player is a physical and emotionally evocative reminder of her days as a trash-picker, as someone who may have turned to the player for escape during rough moments, like when she had nothing to eat, when her father was drunk, etc. (26).

The narrator copes with and maneuvers through her situation by controlling silences: deciding whether to vocalize, but also by turning on and off a music player, a physical manifestation of her previous experiences. It would be wrong to discount the frequency with which the narrator mentions using her music player (five times in the six-page story), for when she does it is not merely an act of "tuning" out¹⁰² the predicament of being held under alien control. Often what she tunes out is the status-quo behaviors of her fellow humans: She listens to the player to block out the racist and misogynic comments of Leonardo's middle-class friends¹⁰³, Leonardo's nationalistic ranting, Leonardo's soliciting information for his own benefit, and

¹⁰² Though music and headphones are used for tuning out the unpleasant—and very human—world in other pieces of Moreno-Garcia's work, such as her short story "A Puddle of Blood" (2013), where her garbage-collecting protagonist, Domingo, uses headphones to block the noises of a porn-watcher at an internet cafe ("Tuesday Fiction: 'A Puddle of Blood'"). This idea is explored more fully in her novel *Certain Dark Things*.

¹⁰³ While Paz vacillates between explicating the working classes with the psyche of Mexican nationality (often linking the two, representing how the Mexican is perceived, and self-believed, to be the world's working class figure), he never goes to the less-than-employed, the category that the nameless girl fits—that of jobless trash picker, mercenary, limited in her money-raising abilities. Moreno-Garcia's girl nevertheless displays the "suspicion, dissimulation, irony . . . that shuts us away from the stranger" (70-1). I do not think her use of the music player indicates a "subjected people who tremble and disguise themselves in the presence of the master" (70-1). Even if we were to read the music player as a form of "disguise," it would indicate that the girl disguises herself when she's alone with the upper-class humans, not the now-master aliens.

The girl is, however, suspicious—and rightly so—that Leonardo will indeed play out Paz's idea that "every companion could also be a traitor" (70). Perhaps, then, the music is a way of "escaping from himself" in the same manner Paz writes that "the servant must leap walls, get drunk, forget his condition" (71). The largest difference is that the girl never forgets her condition because her escape comes through a device emblematic of her previous subjugated social space.

Leonardo's pleas when he is captured (Moreno-Garcia 28, 31, 27). In this sense, the music is a way of overwriting familiar interactions—those that position her as an object to be “used” or a worthless figure to be insulted. However, she also uses the player for pleasure and as a form of bonding with Leonardo by sharing an experience, not only of the heterotopian camp, but in the format of something ‘normal’ kids do¹⁰⁴ (29).

Although readers never learn the details about Leonardo's textbooks, it may seem more perplexing that we never learn what songs are on the girl's music player, which is often a personal collection. Yet knowing the songs would not indicate anything about her, since it is not personally selected or intentionally gifted.¹⁰⁵ The music on the narrator's tape does not serve to connect her to a loved one, represent a meaningful moment in her own past, or reiterate a specifically inherited set of cultural tastes.¹⁰⁶ Readers can judge from the player's location in the trash and the reactions of Leonardo's stuck-up, middle-class friends who say the player contains “weird music” that the songs are probably old (29). As a garbage picker, the girl found the player with the music in it; she doesn't select her own music. In this way, the music player is a tangible aspect of the girl's previous lived space. The narrator never has a choice in *what* music she listens to, but she *is* able to shape the *ways* in which she listens to the music and engages in the text. The narrator specifically guards the ability to choose when to play the music, even after the

¹⁰⁴ When people “liste[n] to the same song. For kicks” via headphones, the listeners agree to a social contract even as the cord binds them physically together (Moreno-Garcia 29). And it is only clear that the girl's music player works through headphones. For more about the use of music to form social relationships, see Tyler Bickford's article, “Earbuds Are Good for Sharing: Children's Headphones as Social Media at a Vermont School” (2014).

¹⁰⁵ A popular recent example is the sentimental use of the protagonist's mother-gifted “Awesome Mix” tapes #1 and #2 in Marvel Studios' *Guardians of the Galaxy* films (James Gunn, 2014 and 2017).

¹⁰⁶ Ferreira (2011) reminds us that “Latin American nations are generally not producers but consumers of technology, and unequal consumers at that, in terms of both the distribution of technology in Latin American society and the type of technology, with greater access to mass-market and lower-level devices than to cutting-edge technology.” The type of outdated media player may also remind us (more distantly) of Mexico's place as a nation in the global arena.

aliens move her into the center. This is an engagement with language that allows her some form of choice and control in a life that was previously limited in choices.

And it is only by understanding the music player as an emblem of her lived space, and thus her tested ability to wield individual interpretation and self-direction in even the most suffocating of circumstances, that the ending of Moreno-Garcia's story makes sense. For the narrator turns to the music player after refusing to intercede for Leonardo:

He asks me to convince them that they've made a mistake. Mercy. Intercede.

My advisor glances down at me. I *know* how to say this, of course. But sticking up for a runaway won't look good. I *know* it'll go in my file. I won't be able to fly in one of the pretty ships. Maybe they'll even say I was an accomplice (and I was, it would be true) and punish me too.

There's one of them ships going by, iridescent (Leonardo *taught* me that word)...Sometimes there are no words, in any language, to construct the proper sentence. I remain quiet as he's dragged away.

I'm brave? *I don't know*. It's called surviving.

I turn on the music player. (emphasis mine, 31)

By turning on her music player, the girl not only blocks out the emotions of Leonardo's betrayal (leaving her behind in order to return to the Othering human society) and her own silent betrayal (not pleading his case to the aliens, whose language she's been working to learn) but also to turn to a reminder of her previous life as a survivor of poverty. The scene can therefore only be interpreted if we consider the way she's been interpreting (dare I say translating?) her situation and Leonardo's dismissal of her interpretations throughout the entire story.

The ending depicts the narrator taking full stock of her social position, cycling through the various decoding abilities she has armed herself with; she self-consciously scrolls through all the lived spaces she could choose to fill. Certainly she is Leonardo's roommate and accomplice. She is *not*, however, his lover, and does not indicate a loyalty to him that supersedes her own personal importance or desires as the traditional figure of a woman (and the role expected of women in the early Chicano movement) (Harris, "Critical Introduction: La Malinche and Post-Movement Feminism" xix). It's important to highlight that while redefining traditional sex (including non-reproductive, non-monogamous, lesbian, for-pleasure, controlled by the female sexual partner) is often of crucial importance to Mexicana's and Chicana's revisions of la Malinche, Moreno-Garcia does not bring her narrator's sexuality into play during the story's progression or end (Harris). The narrator's agency in this moment does not depend on the sexuality of la Malinche. There are other tensions that *are* present in the now betrayed relationship between the narrator and Leonardo, such as that of tutor and student, which was revealed through her use of Leonardo's textbook-word "taught" to describe her ultimate goal. Foremost to her own concerns, however, is her position as a translator. Her personally motivated, non-college trained competence of the alien language is also what could have enabled her to argue Leonardo's case.¹⁰⁷

As a translator trainee, she does "know how to say" the words to code Leonardo's escape as a mistake. She understands the power in owning language, for those who do may also *choose*

¹⁰⁷ Since the aliens' language has been prioritized, it "serve(s) to control access to knowledge and opportunities," much like the languages of education, law, and business do. It's particularly interesting that those previously powerful languages (that Leonardo is so fluent in, and has been teaching the narrator) are pointless in the face of this new alien language—but also that the story's conclusion demonstrates the narrator's newfound knowledge and power via both the language of alien and human privilege.

how they wield both words and silence.¹⁰⁸ Since the diegetic form of the short story is that of the narrator writing in her journal, the narrator's refusal to defend Leonardo is a simultaneous silence and speaking; throughout the story, she, as the writer and focalizer, has been interpreting the situation for the reader, and in this end scene she narrates her own voice's absence.¹⁰⁹ In this sense, she still speaks. By refusing to comment or judge the moment of her decision, the narrator adheres to the possibilities of a more open language medium, which parallels her position as the owner of the music player, not the textbook.¹¹⁰ Both the act of recording and the act of refusal itself are moments of *encoding* her choice. The ending is the girl's final rejection of the societal restrictions that Leonardo embodies, and thus serves as a defense of her own right to self-prioritize and try to find a different societal position in a new system.

The narrator that manages to engage with all of these considerations and take such a self-chosen stance could never be one of Butler's protagonists. After all, her choice is instigated by the still-nearby lived space that she held on pre-alien Earth. That position is a previous resident of the slums, one who "knows" the potential outcomes of a traitor and a snitch, and one who understands how to survive the whims of authority.¹¹¹ Thus, when she turns on the music player,

¹⁰⁸ There are potential comparisons with "Foreign Tongue" by Cherrie Moraga in *The Last Generation*. See Appendix C.

¹⁰⁹ In doing so, the narrator enters the consideration of Chicana feminist critique about vocalizing and silencing. As Rita Sánchez writes, "Writing, breaking the silence, subjective as it may appear, becomes a monumental and collective act because it signifies overcoming, freeing oneself from the confines and conditions of history . . . to implement action, critical thought, change. It signifies a voice, a dimension beyond just a presence" (67). By writing her own silence and contextualizing her active decision to be silent at the story's conclusion, the narrator also combats the traditional dual trope of the silent and supportive Mexican woman and passive Chingada who, by not protesting, condones her rape ("You women are guilty of / being victims, [...] and your sentence has been silence" (Verónica Cunningham, qtd. in Sánchez 68)). Her silence is another form of engagement, all the more harsh for being unrelenting, self-aware, and examined.

¹¹⁰ The music player is the type of language that can bypass the limitations of orderly writing and can enable her to work around the fact that "there are no words, in any language, to construct the proper sentence," unless you don't operate within the limitations of sentences, or even of words.

¹¹¹ Indeed, the narrator has even compared the aliens to the Mexico City police several times earlier in the story. As she writes, "Alien cops, space cops, whatever you wanna call it . . . they ain't so different from regular cops. You

it is both an explanation and reminder that she is surviving because she reads in a more open, inexpert manner, drawn from her Earth-experience in Mexico City (Moreno-Garcia 31).

2.4.2 Lived Space's Seepage: Re-examining the Physical Space of the Alien-Controlled Arena

Just as the narrator's inexpert SF position and lived experiences allow her to not only consider but choose the alien system's offering, her interpretation of the physical space where she is held "prisoner" relies on her lived experiences. Butler's protagonists decode their alien-spaces with similar certainty but with relative negativity. As I've mentioned above, Lilith and Noah make the transition from concrete imprisonment to uncharted alliance, entering the new world-state required by Butler's Earth-space deletions.¹¹² Moreno-Garcia, however, does *not* delete the Earth-space and instead relegates her story to the moment of potential transition. Hers is a story located temporally and spatially in a heterotopia, an idea first posited by Michel Foucault, who defined heterotopias partially by their existence out of normal time and space. Heterotopias such as boarding schools, military service, and prisons exist in "a paradoxical relationship to the space of the everyday—a simultaneous inherence *within* and removal *from*—[which] opens possibilities for fundamental reordering" of society's structures (Amanda Dennis, "Heterotopia," 234). The narrator believes the humans in "Them Ships" are located in just such a temporary

just gotta talk the right way, act the right way, think the right way, bribe here and there, and we're all friends" (Moreno-Garcia 30).

¹¹² Indeed, Lilith and the other humans are able to earn the right to occupy progressively freer spaces, moving from closely observed solitary cells to group cabins on the spaceship, and from the containment of the spaceship to alien settlements on the redesigned Earth. However, she is always aware of her dependence upon the goodwill and permission of the Oankali to live unfettered. Butler's "Amnesty" presents a similar system, where humans are first abducted into the alien spaces and later offered consensual employment within a physical "hive bubble" of the alien Communities; Noah indicates this is the only hope humans have of avoiding nuclear eradication at the hands of the aliens. Going to work in a bubble means the human translators reside on Earth, but not in spaces of Earth.

space, and the tight form of the story itself locks the humans into a heterochronic sliver. The center's organizing principles present Earth/human spaces from a distance that clarifies the systems underlying Leonardo and the narrator's 'normal' states, and I contend Moreno-Garcia's center aligns with Amanda Dennis' version of a heterotopia that "exposes the existing order of things, the fact that there is order at all" as a way of "hold[ing] up alternative orders" (235).

Even though the aliens are barely present as characters in "Them Ships," their presence is shifted into the spatial arena, literally the field upon which the third-contact interactions play out. While Butler's intervention *depends* on the aliens (in the mode of second contact), Moreno-Garcia has her aliens place humans into systems of great equalizing effect and then *step away* from the resulting interactions, leaving the focus on strictly human divisions (a heterotopian third contact). All narrative action occurs in a "neutral" liminal space both outside and within the location of Earth, under alien domain but with minimal alien presence. Part of the discomfort of the story comes from the fact that it occurs in a non-optional and impersonal alien space.¹¹³ Moreno-Garcia does not devote much time, and her narrator does not spend much energy, on describing the education center. For someone being brought into a new, and contained, system, she seems to actually *avoid* illustrative language. (See Appendix D for a chart to help illuminate

¹¹³ The way the narrator operates seemingly impersonal spaces inside a larger societal structure suggests that such spaces can still contain private anti-establishment elements that empower, challenge, and save their protagonists—as long as the protagonists understand the opportunities and limitations of their transient spaces. The narrator is afforded greater accessibility for her cooperation (as is Lilith), and she is rewarded for learning the lessons of the center (as is Noah), giving increasingly free access to alien databanks. The narrator's actions are calculated, her loyalties used to quickly advance *out* of the limbo-system and into the opportunity of the new system in a manner that highlights the temporary qualities of liminal spaces like colleges. Butler's Lilith originally maneuvers in a similar way, positioning herself as vital and learning the Oankali preferences of service and engagement so that when the humans are returned to earth, she can run away. This changes when she realizes the Oankali control the sterility of the humans, and that escapees will ultimately die out. Having nowhere to run, since the opportunity for separation comes decades after her decision in the first novel, she becomes more open to the Oankali's plan for a hybridized existence. In "Amnesty," Noah is allowed out of the alien bubble system and is returned to humans after being thoroughly analyzed by the Communities. She is given the opportunity to exit the new alien system. However, she returns voluntarily, newly valued and self-empowered as a contracted translator in a world that must, for the sake of humanity's survival, communicate and cohabitate with the Communities.

this surprising lack of spatial descriptors.) Perhaps this is because descriptors often come with judgmental weight. If Moreno-Garcia strives for the aliens to present alternatives, they must therefore be open to multiple interpretations. The experiences of the narrator and Leonardo highlight the different positions they held in pre-alien Mexico City. Moreno-Garcia never names the alien space as camp, center, or school. As such, the space is never made concrete. This is a story that wields names, and their powerful connotations, with precision; this absence of naming, along with the connotations that arise whenever identity-marker imprisonment occurs, may invite readers to consider how language may be used to hide abuses of political and human rights.¹¹⁴ Without mitigating evidence that the alien education center is *not* a camp, readers must highlight the discrepancies between Leonardo's descriptors (cell, prison) and the girl's (room, dining hall).

In his work on "Necropolitics," Achille Mbembe considers the extreme form of sovereignty as the power over a citizen's death, arguing that the most centralized form of such power occurs in camps where a physically restricted area erases a citizen's self. By forcing people into a structure in which "its inhabitants are divested of political status and reduced to bare life, the camp is, for Giorgio Agamben, 'the place in which the most absolute *conditio inhumana* ever to appear on Earth was realized'" because deathly power "acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that remains continually outside the normal state of law" (Mbembe 12-13, partially quoting Agamben, *Moyens sans fins. Notes sur la politique*, 1995, pp. 50-51). The physical space of the concentration or internment camp permits the obliteration of social and lived spaces. Leonardo's interpretation illustrates the civic erasure of Mbembe. By being deposited in the alien camp, his financial standing, social relationships, and personal freedom of choice (where to go, what to eat, who to see) are stripped away, causing him to rail against the

¹¹⁴ For other examples of dangerous language, see my section on Namrata, a journalist in Samit Basu's novel *Turbulence*, in chapter three.

alien place seeking to “break our spirits” (27).¹¹⁵ But while such connections are concretely portrayed in Butler’s works, where Lilith and Noah pass through a period of spatial and citizen restraint, Moreno-Garcia offers us *two* versions of the alien space: one as Leonardo’s camp, the other as the narrator’s education center. These competing interpretations allow the alien space to escape simple categorization (much as its lack of a name does) while also highlighting the different treatment of the narrator and Leonardo in pre-alien society (as a heterotopia must do).

The narrator’s perspective of the alien space disturbs most reader assumptions and confidences by refuting the idea that she *is* a prisoner. Her alternative interpretation is also a condemnation: This center is not the worst possible type of political sovereignty. Instead, she relates that the human characters are relatively well treated, provided with: food through a common cafeteria; shelter, since everyone has access to a dormitory room that includes individual desks and beds; clothing in the form of a common uniform outfit; companionship, through the seemingly random system of roommates and through open cafeteria mingling; and even nostalgic ties to their pre-alien existences, since the humans are allowed to keep the personal belongings they were carrying when “abducted.”¹¹⁶ For Leonardo, this is a “reduc[ion] to bare life” and proof that they are located in a prison camp (Mbembe 12). Though the narrator indicates that the systematic aspects of the alien space are reminiscent of such negative community-scapes, she quickly moves past that comparison: “Yeah, maybe it is a bit like a prison, *but*. . . ” the benefits, like a steady supply of food and the possibility for advancement,

¹¹⁵ Indeed, a camp controlled by an extraterrestrial government is distanced from the “normal state of law” to a degree unmatched in human history, though—again—echoed in colonial conquering.

¹¹⁶ The alien center’s organization is certainly *extraterrestrial*—it is merit-based, supposedly motivated by altruism, and does not have distinct economic social classes. Indeed, the education center’s system of meritocracy, indiscriminate and easily available material goods, and red-colored uniforms seem to lean toward an extraterrestrial Marxist society more than, say, the organizational needs of a smaller community-scape, like a concentration camp or a prison.

outweigh the potential hindrances of the center and position it as a helpful space (emphasis mine, Moreno-Garcia 27).

The narrator does not suggest that there are any civic freedoms being suffocated. Then again, unlike Leonardo, she had no rights to strip away. For her, the alien education center is only another forced displacement: “The cops used to do their little ‘operations’ . . . come in and arrest everyone, take everything . . . I don’t see why they would have changed” (Moreno-Garcia 26). More pointedly, she ensures that readers know that the alien-controlled displacement is slightly better than the human ones she had already grown to accept; “it wasn’t super-awesome around here before . . . At least we get three meals every day” (26). Although her standards of preference are low, the reason for her appreciation is the dismal quality of life the narrator experienced when living under the previous human system. The disjuncture between Leonardo’s and the narrator’s interpretations of the camp offers readers another way of openly considering the possibilities of her decision to work with the aliens. If the location of the story is actually a more ominous camp, there may be dire implications in the unwritten aftermath of her decision. It also certainly suggests something even more chilling: that a place able to connote the most inhumane places on earth can still be considered a *better* option than the pre-alien position of the narrator.

By including these competitive interpretations, Moreno-Garcia creates a shockingly minimal description of a heterotopia that still provides readers with an alternative to the human social position more regularly represented in mainstream SF. Again, this is not truly a *first* contact narrative—it is a third-contact story, and therefore it echoes the actual “first contact” communication between Aztecs and Spaniards in the “second contact” of aliens and humans, which allows for the “third contact” of disenfranchised humans and enfranchised humans.

Moreno-Garcia's open description of alien-controlled space purposefully challenges the human-
"imagined communities" strongly beloved by Leonardo. Taking up Benedict Anderson's
description of how calendrical time¹¹⁷ and familiar landscapes¹¹⁸ build ties permitting "fiction
[to] see[p] quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of
community in anonymity," it's clear that a heterotopic interrogation of such systems as in "Them
Ships" can only be written after the aliens remove humans from familiarity. Doing so challenges
the necessarily anonymous structure of human hierarchical communities, especially Leonardo's
assumption that the narrator was ever part of this self-delusional Mexican community (Anderson
25, 32, 36).

While the conceptual and perceived space of the alien camp/center catalyzes and the
lived space (as represented by the music player) controls the direction of societal change, the
narrator's gambit is carried out through revisionary language. Although the aftermath of the
narrator's concluding decision is not shown, one element of this societal reworking *is* thoroughly
asserted: gendered histories of violence and violation are dismantled and rewritten.

¹¹⁷ —not necessarily time in order, but timelines that run in simultaneous orders—

¹¹⁸ Especially those, as noted in chapter two, that use careful, *general* description—the common internet cafes, churches, bands of roving young men, etc.—to stand in for a whole nation's worth of these people/places.

2.5 GENDER AND LANGUAGE: FLUIDITY & RE-INSCRIPTION OF EPIC PROTAGONISTS

2.5.1 What's in a Name?

Since Leonardo is as uninterested in revising his gender as he is his pre-alien lived position, the way he and his like-minded friends utilize gendered language strives to uphold a discriminatory and limited system. Their language precludes the openness of the alien heterotopia that may allow new interpretations and interactions. Meanwhile, the narrator refuses to utilize gendered language in reference to herself in her journal and writes back to the gendered mythology that Leonardo tries to place her within through the act of naming. This creative use of language is a form of opening, positing something that allows the narrator to escape certain types of control suffered by Butler's concretely female protagonists.¹¹⁹ For while Butler's protagonists also creatively re-engage with allusions clouding their namesakes, their female identity is partly concretized by threats of gendered violence. The open-gendered language used by Moreno-Garcia shows the potential productivity of the narrator maintaining a fluid decoding and inscription process. Even though the conclusion remains open and uncertain, such action at *least* shuts down the type of sexualized violence with which Butler's protagonists had to contend.

In order to explore the repositioning of choice through gender and language, we must first examine the connotations of names: Butler's Noah and Lilith, and Moreno-Garcia's la Malinche. Both authors use these evocative names in a way that contradicts negative elements of

¹¹⁹ This is not to say that Butler doesn't tinker with gender or gendered roles—consider the third-sexed ooloi, but also investigations like Gregory Jerome Hampton's *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires* (2010).

the original namesake's story. Much as the quick introduction to alien-controlled spaces invites readers to question whether such spaces may be read optimistically, the quick introduction of these three powerfully imbued names starts the revisionary process by asking readers to reconsider if these figures are saviors, traitors, or something less easy to define and therefore stagnate. In other words, Butler and Moreno-Garcia use names to position their characters and recode the imagined spaces of cultural lineages.

After all, having a female named "Noah" is not only unusual, but also prophetic. The name suggests this woman will help steer humankind through an apocalyptic and world-revising event, and in the story, Noah is a figure working to prevent the complete destruction of her species. The only hope for avoiding the complete devastation of a nuclear war (a world-ending event much like the Biblical flood) is in her efforts to help produce understanding and encourage humankind to uphold alien-human contracts. Noah's name also helps to imbue these contracts with potential, since they liken to the Biblical narrative of how God, after the flood, provides the rainbow-sealed Noahic Covenant promising to avoid repeating such widespread destruction. What is perhaps most interesting for my investigation is that Biblical Noah is not identified as a traitor to the rest of humankind, as Lilith and la Malinche are, but is rather seen as a savior. Thus, when readers see the name "Noah" in Butler's short story, the protagonist is already illuminated in a positive light. This foreshadowing is useful. It helps readers trust that Butler's Noah is not the traitor to humankind as other human characters suggest, but is instead doing what she says early in the story: trying to uphold peace between the Communities and humans to avoid massive human casualties (Butler 600). While Noah is considered a traitor by other human characters because of her pro-alien actions, her historical name absolves her of such a position and helps readers understand that the government agents and new translator recruits calling her a traitor are

dead wrong. The narrative behind the name is not challenged, but reiterated in order to produce a shift in society's hive mind.

The opposite occurs with Butler's protagonist Lilith and the unnamed narrator in "Them Ships." These figures challenge the coding of their mythical names as a way of rewriting their social possibilities. Although Moreno-Garcia's narrator is never named (an element I discuss in detail in the next section), the only identified figure with whom she *is* connected is la Malinche. As soon as she is called by this title, its history shapes the way readers may understand the final actions of the young woman who protects herself, refuses to speak for one of her fellow humans, and maintains her position as translator to alien invaders. In the early versions of their stories, Lilith and la Malinche are archetypes that turn away from their own kind and are degraded and insulted for doing so. As such, the names of these science fictional protagonists resonate with the "betrayals" and hybridism of their mythic counterparts. While the cultural figures of Lilith and la Malinche are traditionally positioned as traitorousness (to the Christian human species in the case of Lilith; to Mexico's indigenous peoples and anti-colonial nationalists in la Malinche's), both Butler and Moreno-Garcia indicate through their characters that these "betrayals" are something much more complex.

Butler's revision of Lilith is difficult to miss.¹²⁰ As Cathy Peppers explains, one aspect of Butler's complex repositioning occurs in the way she keeps Lilith as a figure of the type of false "choice" given to enslaved black women:

the non-choice of being permanently 'available' to the sexual desires of the slave owners
. . . black women's identity must also take into account the fact that a potentially

¹²⁰ For a fuller analysis of Lilith's name as it relates to the Rabbinic figure, see Cathy Peppers' complete work, "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler's *Xenogenesis*" in *Science Fiction Studies*, 1995.

empowering goddess like Lilith was ‘racialized,’ . . . Lilith is still a ‘slave’ to the negative connotations of her name. (50)

Although I agree with Peppers, I also think it is possible to read Lilith if not as a positive, then as a slightly more agential figure. Butler chooses Lilith as the focalizer of *Dawn* mainly to ensure that readers understand her dual placement of agency and constraint. Butler’s *Xenogenesis* is thus one part of a long literary tradition that uses the cultural lineage of Lilith to question the difficult ideas of control, morality, sexuality, desire, and reproduction of the female body, and to interrogate how equality and respect enter into intimate relationships.¹²¹ However, Butler’s contention with the complicated “traitor” Lilith has little to do with Lilith’s original lived position. It is not that Lilith was not invested in the pre-alien social system; it’s that her investments (spouse, child, job, safety) are ripped away from her by the nuclear war.

If Butler can be said to question social controls through her reinvestigation of Lilith’s name, then Moreno-Garcia refutes and escapes social hierarchies by freeing her narrator from that historically gendered “non-choice.” In Moreno-Garcia’s story, it cannot be the actual name of the protagonist that resonates with intertextual weight—as I’ve pointed out, we never learn her name. Her namelessness actually resonates with the woman who worked with the Spanish conquistadors, Malintzin Tenepal, since she was subsumed under the title of her translator (and

¹²¹ Although the details of the mythical Lilith’s narrative are fluid, her association with the demonic and with untamable and threatening female sexuality has remained consistent, making her an excellent figure for villainesses, temptresses, and unruly women in literature spanning from George MacDonald’s *Lilith* (1895) to C. S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56) and Ursula Le Guin’s *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968). More recently, feminists have wielded Lilith as a strong figure capable of overcoming sexism, perhaps most joyously seen in the annual occurrence of the musical, *Lilith Fair*. When searching for the name of this musical occurrence, Buffy Childerhose suggested the potential of Lilith, that “what is important is that Lilith made a difficult and courageous decision;” falling “out of favour with the men in her life” was merely the result of that action (Sarah McLachlan, “Foreward” in Childerhose).

later, traitor) position: la Malinche.¹²² It is this title that the bunkmate of Moreno-Garcia's narrator, Leonardo, uses to vilify her ambition to be an alien translator. It is also the only type of name given to the narrator in the entire story (Moreno-Garcia 28). After being so named, the girl immediately cusses him out—though she's not highly educated, she knows the drastically negative cultural connotations surrounding that figure. The text indicates that this knowledge is something everyone knows, perhaps even something the reader should know, even if it is a figure more specific to one nation. Understanding the association of this historic and maliciously remembered title helps readers navigate the sub-currents of the narrator's questionable act of betrayal.

La Malinche was a young, indigenous woman given to the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés early in his expedition. She served him as concubine—having one son with him—and, most vitally, as translator for his interactions with the native population during the conquering of Mexico. La Malinche was a polyglot who quickly learned Spanish and other native tribal languages in order to serve as translator to Cortés and his men (Harris). Though la Malinche did not go on her own accord but was rather *given* to Cortés, and though Chicana authors and artists have worked to reclaim the powerful historical figure of Malintzin Tenepal, her vital assistance to Cortés' campaign still taints her title—the figure of la Malinche continues to bear the connotations of being a dirtied, “used” woman and betrayer.¹²³ The word *malinchismo* still

¹²² The overwhelming documentation of this woman as la Malinche means that her actual name is difficult to pin down, and it is common to see her referred to as both Malintzin Tenepal and Malinalli Tenepal. According to Volume One of *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia* (2006), “her name” was “Malinalli,” but “after the conquest she began to be called Malintzin, in which the ending ‘tzin’ signified respect . . . The attribution of Tenepal as part of her name or a nickname originated in indigenous historian Domingo de San Antón Muñón . . . Tenepal has been interpreted as a word meaning sharp and cutting or also a person who possesses a lip and speaks a lot” (364). In my own references, I primarily follow Alarcón's choice of Malintzin.

¹²³ As Angie Chabram-Dernersesian writes in her overview of the development of Chicana subjectivity, Chicanas frame la Malinche with a “conscious” renaming, denoting the figure as a “victim of male chauvinist attitudes, which often culminated in holding her almost single-handedly responsible for the conquest of Mexico,” while “Chicanas

refers to a person who—traitorously—prefers foreign goods, people, or culture, and la Malinche is still often used in reference to ideas of globalization (Romero 27-30).¹²⁴

Even contemporary narratives that reframe la Malinche as anything other than a traitoress are still described as a “re”framing, a “re”claiming, and a transformation; the main story and the underlying script continues to be that of the negative portrayal. Indeed, Octavio Paz famously used the negative portrayal of la Malinche in *The Labyrinths of Solitude* for nationalist purposes.¹²⁵ In the “Los hijos de la Malinche” chapter, Paz describes the attributes of la Chingada, or the fucked (feminine): “Her passivity is abject: She does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood and dust . . . This passivity, open to the outside world, causes her to lose her identity: She is the *Chingada*. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she *is* Nothingness” (85-6).¹²⁶ Paz then extends the same attitude to the national mental composition of Mexico.¹²⁷

No wonder the narrator of Moreno-Garcia’s story has a strong visceral response to being named after this historically loaded figure. It is a name that is “called forth to reenact, symbolically, the Conquest or any conquest” (Alarcón, “Chicana’s Feminist Literature”182). It’s

generally offer positive depictions of Malintzín” (“And Yes... The Earth Did Part: On the Splitting of Chicana/o Subjectivity,” 1993).

¹²⁴ Paz notes that her lineage is represented by the politically minded “*malinchistas* . . . who want Mexico to open itself to the outside world: the true sons of la Malinche, who is the *Chingada* in person” (86). By connecting la Malinche with the phrase serving as touchstone and spine for his chapter (“*Viva Mexico, Hijos de la Chingada!*”), Paz claims that la Malinche challenges the Mexican “desire to live closed off from the outside world and, above all, from the past . . . we condemn our origins and deny our hybridism” (86-7).

¹²⁵ There’s plenty to protest in Paz’s *Labyrinth of Solitude*—not the least is its overly general and unflattering portrayal of the Mexican people. However, his work is also one of the most harkened literary uses of la Malinche and thus worth turning toward.

¹²⁶ Very deliberately, the narrator of Moreno-Garcia’s story *is* someone, even if she is an unnamed someone. The narrator does have a past, plans for the future, and is in control (literally) of the story, as we read it from her journal keeping.

¹²⁷ Perhaps this connection is echoed in the description Moreno-Garcia’s narrator shares early in the story about Mexico City—especially her shantytown section of it: “They called my home a ‘lost city’ but they should’ve called it ‘fucked city’” (26).

a name that is still in the process of being successfully revised. If rewritten, it also offers revisionary opportunities for la Malinche's descendants, contemporary Mexicans.

Moreno-Garcia is doing more than installing a multicultural flavor into a science fiction story by placing her protagonist as a space-age Malinche. If she only wanted to align herself with Mexican culture, there would be no need to rewrite la Malinche, but her protagonist specifically refutes the parallel other characters draw between her decisions and those of the earlier translator. This denial and reframing allows the narrator and the reader to re-evaluate the possible limits on boundary-straddling and historically discounted figures. In fact, Moreno-Garcia encourages this re-evaluation. While the narrator doesn't want to own the association, she also notes in her journal that "They sold her off to the Spaniards and she worked for them . . . I don't see why we've got to be all insulted when a woman tries to survive" (28).¹²⁸ Indeed, the socially comfortable "They" puts these translators into a precarious position: without the protections (or even general support) of their own societies, both women are uniquely suited to view their new 'employment' opportunities as viable. With this musing, the protagonist and her author step into the Chicana tradition that reclaims the potential power of la Malinche, power that comes from her liminal position as translator, potential traitor, but also diplomat.

As such, Moreno-Garcia's SF story joins the SF tradition that Butler establishes to question and correct demonized female figures *and* the literary history of la Malinche in the feminist reclamation movement of Chicana literature. This reclamation started in the 1970s to counter the negative popular memory and to reconsider how Malinalli "embodies effective, decisive action in the feminine form" and the implications that "her own actions syncretized two

¹²⁸ And, technically, all humans are supposed to be training in the alien language, making the position of translator eventually irrelevant. Leonardo, had he been less resistant, is also supposed to be learning how to speak to (and thus potentially defend himself from) the aliens.

conflicting worlds causing the emergence of a new one” (Del Castillo 122).¹²⁹ As Norma Alarcón outlines, at times these reclamation efforts emphasized Malinalli’s “historical, sexual, and linguistic agency” to the point of historical inaccuracy as a way of providing increased agency to la Malinche’s (female, racial, and culturally hybridized) descendants (“Traddutora, Traditora”).¹³⁰ At the least, it is accurate to say that Malintzin Tenepal’s skill as a translator was crucial to Cortés’ campaigns, assisting in the conquest of her own people. One of the main attributes shared by Moreno-Garcia’s unnamed narrator and la Malinche is their language skills, and (it is suggested) their demonstrated understanding that the position of translator is a socially powerful space that provides opportunities for mobility. Such power is made evident in the reclaiming of Chicana authors, which focuses on reprioritization. In their works—and in Moreno-Garcia’s—figures positioned as la Malinche “first love the self and then proceed to regenerate and nurture it” as a way of eradicating the continued image of the woman who is Chingada, “open to potential use by men . . . the use of her as a pawn” (Alarcón, “Chicana’s Feminist Literature” 184). This same self-love is what Leonardo demonizes when he calls the narrator a Malinche—she is pursuing her goals, and they oppose his.

¹²⁹ For overviews and investigations into the figure of la Malinche/Malintzin, see Norma Alarcón’s “Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism” (1989); *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* by Sandra Messinger Cypess (1991); Adelaida Del Castillo’s “Malintzin Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective” (1997); the “Myths and Archetypes” section of Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero’s *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* (1993); the decolonial-in-orientation *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche* anthology edited by Rolando Romero and Amanda Nolacea Harris (2005), especially Romero’s chapter on “Foundational Motherhood: Malinche/Guadalupe in Contemporary Mexican and Chicana/Chicano Culture”; Tey Diana Rebolledo’s *Women Singing in the Snow*, especially Chapter Three: From Coatlicue to La Llorona: Literary Myths and Archetypes (1995); and Debra J. Blake’s less usual examination of oral and visual testimony of how non-author Mexicana and Chicana women consider cultural figures in *Chicana Sexuality and Gender: Cultural Refiguring in Literature, Oral History, and Art* (2008).

¹³⁰ Even during rewritings against the traitor/used version of la Malinche, the figure may still retain some of her more negative connotations. Even Gloria Anzaldúa—who ultimately reclaims and rewrites a trio of indigenous feminine figures (Guadalupe, Coatlicue, and Malinche) of Latin American culture as a mode of empowerment—still notes that normally, la Malinche is “the raped mother who we have abandoned,” she that is used “to make us ashamed of our Indian side” (*Borderlands* 30).

If her final refusal to interpret for him is “narcissistic, never has a motive force for it been revealed so tellingly and clearly, never have the possible roots been exposed so well: starvation for self-reflection in the other: man or woman” (Alarcón, “Chicana’s Feminist Literature” 184). Leonardo mistakes her for a translator-tool and continues to deny her as a validated part of humankind.

By taking the Malinche archetype and opening it to an intergalactic stage, Moreno-Garcia thus joins and furthers the interventions of Butler and Chicana feminists. Making her protagonist “condemn” her “origins” (in the impoverished lower class, in the negative history of la Malinche) while deliberately recalling her personal history as she endeavors to open new possibilities suggests that when the narrator revises the figure of la Malinche, she also works to revise her personal lived space. As poet Carmen Tafolla writes in her “La Malinche,” this is an active way to take control of one’s situation, even if:

... history would call *me*

chingada.

But *chingada* I was not.

Not tricked, not screwed, not traitor.

For I was not traitor to myself—

I saw a dream

and I reached it.

*Another world . . . (Sonnets and Salsa 22-24)*¹³¹

If we consider the narrator’s responsibility to herself, and the deliberate way she works to avoid being controlled by oppressive systems, then she is “[n]ot tricked” by Leonardo’s using her for

¹³¹ For a quick contemplation of the entire poem’s connection to Moreno-Garcia’s story, see Appendix E.

information, “not screwed” when he leaves her behind during his (failed) escape attempt, and “not traitor” when she desires to work with the aliens or when she refuses to speak on Leonardo’s behalf. Instead, she is self-invested and thus able to refuse to be used as a tool by Leonardo for his personal gain.

The entire story builds to a moment in which the narrator proves the fallacy of the “male myth” of la Malinche. Thus, it is a myth about Mexican/Chicana woman, as being “highly pawnable, nothing she does is perceived as a choice” because the story ends with the decision of the narrator (Alarcón 184). Her actions throughout the story remind us that she is anything but a pawn, as she is consistently seen strategizing (remaining silent to avoid ruining her record, continuing her usefulness to the aliens by practicing their language, and providing information to Leonardo, who she starts to consider a friend and cross-social-group ally). Her actions are all undertaken to “reach” for her dream of flying in the beautiful alien ships and existing in a different society than that of her pre-alien existence. She sees another world, an improved version of lived space. In trying to obtain that space, she refuses to let Leonardo re-direct her investments for the benefit of his own Earth-centric enfranchised world-dream that has no place for her as anything other than a tool—like the early versions that reduce la Malinche to a megaphone, not a translator. The plot arc of the story, and its narrator’s re-evaluation of the importance of survival versus unearned nationalist passion, indicate that *if there is* a “Malinche” betrayal enacted through the role of alien-oriented translation, it’s a complex betrayal of an often overly simplified system, one in which the betrayer has no benefits from nor investment in the original system.

2.5.2 Escaping Gendered Language and Gendered Violence

I've established that Moreno-Garcia's story links lived space to the medium of language and control in order to defend her narrator's right to make a self-centered decision and attempt to join a beneficial society. One of the primary functions of Moreno-Garcia's first-person narration is to enable readers to encounter a narrator voice that represents—in her diction, syntax, and attitude—the type of people she considers more likely to survive; voices of the often disenfranchised, and voices that compete with traditional creators and consumers of science fiction. In the section “Keeping Earth Close: Lived Space as Resistance and Tangible Memory,” I started to consider how gender is used in the complicated relationship between the narrator and Leonardo, and I more fully explained how Moreno-Garcia's positioning of la Malinche continues the archetypal shifts constructed by Butler in Part I of the “Gender and Language” section above. Throughout this chapter, I've posited that Moreno-Garcia continues the effort of including compelling female SF characters like Noah, Lilith, and the unnamed narrator who act independently and forge alliances based on their own investments. Considering this evolution of gender-dependent lived space is vital for my larger project, which considers the shift in SF.

Yet it is a fact that the gender of the narrator is never *actually* specified in “Them Ships.”

For the sake of my own engagement with the story, I've been forced to pick one interpretation of this narrator. The reality of a written investigation meant that I needed to refer continuously to the narrator in the third person. I did not wish to frustrate my reader by using always using “the narrator” or a (still) clunky he/she gender neutral pronoun.¹³² Reading the

¹³² Although Science Fiction is a genre that has included third-sexed characters for a while, the common English language has not yet caught up, and the third-sex is often portrayed by an alien or a post-human (such as in Ian McDonald's *River of Gods* (2004), which has neutral post-human “nutes” that are referred to in the third-person

narrator as female also increases the productive parallel with the female figure of la Malinche. The lucrative chance to directly apply the narrator's critique about "why we've got to be all insulted when a woman tries to survive" to the ending of the story is too productive for my spatial argument to pass up. Reading the narrator as female heightens the importance of revising Malintzin from the figure of a passively used woman to a woman making choices, including those about her body.

However, it is important that we still consider how Moreno-Garcia's careful gender non-specificity is crucial for this story's extreme dedication to unconstrained openness.¹³³ Ensuring that these gender lines waver is yet another way Moreno-Garcia shows how a liminal position can be a useful one. Much like the alien center/camp, the narrator is unable to be categorized by the reader, defying all expectations by refusing to project what is commonly viewed as an unavoidable element of a person's identity and possibly helping readers move away from a judgment-oriented reading of the story. After all, readers may feel disgusted with the narrator when the narrator refuses to speak on behalf of Leonardo. By refusing to depict a positive or negative aftermath, the story deliberately questions whether it is right to prioritize one person's agenda over another's survival.

pronoun of "yts," or in Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013) where protagonist and starship the Justice of Toren uses female pronouns for everyone because in her Radchaai culture they do not differentiate genders; Butler assigns the third-sex alien ooloi the pronoun "it"). More remarkable is that Moreno-Garcia's narrator does not seek to use a third-sexed pronoun, but can manage to use an un-ascribed gender pronoun by maintaining a first-person perspective and carefully avoiding other indicators of gender.

¹³³ When I taught "Them Ships" during a Summer 2015 class, all but two of my 19 students read the narrator as a man *until* the feminine indicators in "chola," "bitch," and "Malinche" were mentioned. Meanwhile, in an example that proves the ability of readers to reach multiple interpretations, three other students said that they read the narrator as a (potentially gay or bisexual) young man the entire time, partly *because* of those feminine indicators. These students had heard such feminizations used to emasculate men (28). When teaching the story in two science fiction courses in Fall 2016, half of one class and a quarter of the other coded the narrator as male. As such, I do not think this is merely an indication of a reader's gendered assumptions that an unidentified "I" in a literary text is masculine, but that it evidences the careful construction of a narrator that is not specifically gendered.

Likewise, I consider this subversion of gendered language as another example of Moreno-Garcia's insistence on moving beyond the innovations done by Butler. As I've mentioned above, Butler subverts the gender of Noah and challenges the sexist judgment of Lilith—but for her purposes, it is vital that these two protagonists are female, and black women in particular. Other critics have thoroughly explored the ways Butler makes critical interventions in sexual politics, gender identities, and race relations through the experiences of her characters' bodies.¹³⁴ By narrating the story through a first-person intradiegetic narrator and refusing to indicate the name, Moreno-Garcia leaves open the gender of that voice. Implementing such a peculiar narrative strategy is a deliberate choice. The reliance on the gender-neutral pronouns “I” or “me” is a fictional device that supports Moreno-Garcia's mission of rebutting stereotypical categorization and blasting open the SF genre to not only include, but star, voices that are easily discounted. But just as importantly, by making the narrator impossible to define, she makes the narrator impossible to restrict or confine. Her narrator is safe from the specific types of bodily threats that Lilith and Noah must endure.

One way that Moreno-Garcia maintains this openness is by balancing references to female figures (Malinche, chola) with moments that align the narrator to male characters. In the moment when the narrator indicates his/her potential future careers, the gender lines place the narrator alongside the narrator's father, *not* the other women mentioned: “All the women 'round were maids or picked garbage. My dad was a scavenger, I was one too” (28). Ethnic Studies scholar Catherine Ramírez reminds us that “the queer *mestiza* is ‘both male and female’;

¹³⁴ See works such as “Posthuman Bodies and Agency in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*” by Naomi Jacobs (2003), Elyce Rae Helford's “Would You Really Rather Die Than Bear My Young?": The Construction of Gender, Race, and Species in Octavia E. Butler's ‘*Bloodchild*’” (1994) as well as the previously cited Frances Bonner's “Difference and Desire, Slavery and Seduction: Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*” (1990); and Sharon DeGraw's “‘The More Things Change, the More They Remain the Same’: Gender and Sexuality in Octavia Butler's Oeuvre” (2004).

therefore s/he represents a *third* gender—something other than and/or in addition to male and female” (391, citing Anzaldúa 19). Considering that Moreno-Garcia’s narrator is compared to the mother of the mestiza race, the vitality of this third position must be acknowledged and examined. Although the narrator is also not explicitly aligned with a third gender, s/he can be and is still read as “both male and female,” and therefore offers, at the least, an engagement of a non-binary coded gender. Since the narrator’s gender is never explicitly described or revealed, Moreno-Garcia invites us to consider what changes when readers approach the story as being spoken by either a male or female narrator.

If we read the story as though the narrator is male, the cussing that occurs from the first sentence takes on the register of a young man, perhaps a more stereotypical figure for a cuss-heavy speaker.¹³⁵ If we read the story as though the narrator is female, this acceptance may be one of the first things to shift. The cussing may seem a bit cruder if we picture it coming out of a female mouth, and readers are less likely to encounter such a narrator in other texts, perhaps especially in SF texts where female narrators were originally found with less frequency.¹³⁶ As such, coding the narrator as female may allow the diction to have a stronger effect on a reader

¹³⁵ Indeed, this was a point several of my students used when explaining how they assigned the narrator a gender.

¹³⁶ In his section on “Feminist SF and the Breakdown of Patriarchal Assumptions,” Landon Brooks explains that “any overview of the genre during the first 50 or 60 years of the century will reveal few significant and/or significantly developed female characters, fewer still women SF writers, and little or no effort within the genre to speculate about gender or sexual roles” (124). [To illustrate the most dismal status of women in the SF community, even in the 1970s, Brooks includes that in reaction to Joanna Russ’ expressed concern of SF’s treatment of gender, Poul Anderson “dismissed her complaint with the patronizing ‘explanation’ that ‘women have not been relevant’ to SF (123).] Obviously, this imbalance has improved, even if reactionary attitudes at times still target women involved in the genre (see my Introduction for a brief discussion on the “Sad Puppies” debacle.) The original genre imbalance still affects readers today, though, and I suspect it is one reason my class coded the speaker as *male* until seeing the Spanish feminine nouns (*chola*, *malinche*). It is definitely true that in the case of the most common subgenre of flagrantly aggressive, hostile-to-readers, cuss-spitting narrators, the (child) soldier narrative, there is a heavy bias toward male narrators. For examples, consider Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Allah Is Not Obligated*, Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*, Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation*, but also Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People* (since *Animal* is the survivor and witness of a different type of battle).

and make them pay attention to things like the ratio of male-to-female narrators using crude language.

While it may be more traditional to read a female narrator who pays close attention to the way her male roommate looks, coding the narrator male reveals that these observations often arise in the form of potentially rivaling comparisons. The narrator's bitterness may not revolve only around Leonardo's educational and economic opportunities, but also around his physical presence. If read as male, the narrator may be comparing his own smaller physique to that of his fellow male roommate when writing that "Leonardo is pretty tall, probably 'cause he didn't have to eat no garbage when he was growing up" (26). This observation occurs in the text immediately before the narrator refuses to care about his appearance, potentially as a defensive maneuver, even while noting that Leonardo "has nice hair" (27). This is not to suggest that a female narrator could not still position herself in comparison to Leonardo, only that traditionally she would also be positioned as a heterosexual female. Thus, she would be viewed as being the competition of the "pretty girls" with whom Leonardo has sex, while a male narrator would usually be placed in competition with Leonardo himself. I insist that no matter which coding readers use, the narrator seems to be jealous that Leonardo had been able to go around "fucking pretty girls" and *simultaneously* jealous of those girls being selected as fuckable.

Furthermore, the same clues that suggest the narrator's female gender could also indicate a feminine, or even homosexual, male character. The characters insulting the narrator may add to their maliciousness by using the feminine form of words like "chola" and "bitch." Certainly, the kiss shared between Leonardo and the narrator becomes even more interesting if the narrator is male, and the secondhand clothing sharing with the narrator's sisters becomes an even more dramatic example of the family's poverty. In the text, the hand-me-downs are merely listed as

“underwear” and “trousers” whereas “girl underwear” or “skirts” would have a more specific coding as feminine.¹³⁷

Overall, I find that the openness of this gender coding relaxes the assumed gendered appearance, language, manners as well as the narrator’s sexuality. After all, neither coding shuts down the narrator’s eventual attraction to Leonardo, and considering the narrator as a young man does not prohibit the fact that he allows Leonardo to kiss him on the cheek. A male coding also does not rebut a past in which the narrator “didn’t let the other boys” have such intimacies, or that other boys may have sought out such intimacies. Indeed, if we view the narrator as a man, it actually makes this moment an acknowledgement of the homoerotic intimacies that can arise from close living quarters, and perhaps even suggest how men who have girlfriends within one societal system, as Leonardo did pre-alien-landing, can shift into new types of relationships when they assume different systems of control.

Perhaps the biggest difference between these two coded readings is whether the narrator is a feminist man or a feminist woman—if the narrator can personally relate to what happens when “a woman tries to survive” or whether (as someone with three sisters) the narrator has merely considered this secondhand (28). Either coding still generates a drastic difference between Moreno-Garcia’s strategy of revisionary non-gendered language and Butler’s concrete and bodily-specific language. I’ve already discussed in my précis sections that in “Amnesty,” Noah is raped an unspecified number of times and non-consensually impregnated twice while held in a human containment group by the Communities, and that in at the end of *Dawn*, Lilith is

¹³⁷ The students that read the narrator as male felt particularly sad that he had to use secondhand *girl*-underwear, suggesting this indicated a truly bleak level of poverty. Others thought that this detail precluded the narrator from being anything other than a woman. And while the feminine forms of *la Malinche* and *la chola* seem to more strongly indicate a female narrator, the overly familiar seventeen-year-old character “collecting garbage, sorting treasure from trash” who is “[i]ndependent, cautious, resourceful and kind” in *Certain Dark Things* is a male, Domingo (El-Mohtar, “‘Certain Dark Things’ Is A Compelling New Take On Vampires,” 2016).

forcibly impregnated by her ooloi mate, Nikanj. Butler often writes against normalized sexual violence, which she can do only if her protagonists are embodied; her readers need to know and be able to contend with the specifics of the sexual violence done to the female bodies of Noah and Lilith.

This is not to say that Noah and Lilith are not radical figures in their own right. On this element, I agree with the general idea behind Gregory Jerome Hampton's statement that Butler's writing suggests "[b]y being the antithesis of the white male body . . . the furthest away from it in terms of social status . . . the black female body is by nature qualified to evoke the most radical change in a political system of advantage based on race and gender" (108).¹³⁸ Indeed, such radical revisions are why I position Butler as the prime generator of the current turn in science fiction. However, Moreno-Garcia offers us a way to consider if there are other, differently productive, radical individuals. By offering readers a protagonist with a fluid gender identity, Moreno-Garcia protects that protagonist from body-specific violence—not an inconsequential ability. The decision to use ungendered language forces her to avoid gendered violence because it generates a protagonist that is unable to be pinned down and assaulted. Though it wouldn't be amiss to include such details as part of the rough background of the narrator, they are not implemented because the narrator has a specifically fluid non-body. There is a suggestion that physical intimacy could have happened before (e.g., the boys who weren't allowed to kiss the narrator before Leonardo), but what that type of relationship entailed and the potential aftermath is *never* made into fact or even strong suggestion. For Moreno-Garcia's story to fully succeed as a heterotopia, it requires this type of openness, which allows her to revise reader's considerations and challenge assumptions, further opening the ways of thinking cracked by Butler. Removing

¹³⁸ Though I find his idea of qualified bodily rankings problematic. (What of the transgender or queered body?)

the question of this violence is another way the narrator is allowed to break from even Butler's traditional situations of *reactions* and work in a *proactive* manner.¹³⁹

2.6 OUTRO: HOW TO END ON AN OPEN NOTE

By examining the position of Earth-spaces, it becomes clear that Silvia Moreno-Garcia is a literary descendent of Octavia Butler. According to Moreno-Garcia, “postcolonial science fiction is a category that questions and responds to the colonial or Western legacy we have inherited” (personal interview). Butler helped generate an atmosphere that embraces SF works by diverse women and an appreciation for SF works that explore questions of social hierarchies based on race, gender, language, and economic class. In doing so, Butler set up contemporary postcolonial science fiction writers like Moreno-Garcia to push back against dominant literary inscriptions of these arenas of “colonial or Western legacy.”

But while these two authors take up many of the same themes and interventions, Moreno-Garcia does so in a manner that is more radical in possibility because of its foundation in the lived spaces of a diegetically present Earth. The type of generic distance that Moreno-Garcia asks her readers to consider, then, is much closer—focusing only on humans—and yet much harder—focusing on interactions of “third contact” between currently alienated humans, who have already survived the arrival of colonists from other ‘worlds’ and the humans that alienate them. This type of lived-space based positioning is made even more revisionary by Moreno-

¹³⁹ Much as heterotopias may be found to be more productive not as sites of “resistance,” which is still defined by the normal systems since it is an opposition, but of what Westphal identifies in his *Geocriticism* as places of “the swerve, in the new trajectory, the unexpected, the unpredictable” (47, qtd. in Dennis).

Garcia's purposefully open and indeterminate conclusion. This openness is quite different from Butler's detailed, and even potentially judgmental, endings of "Amnesty" and *Lilith's Brood*. Since readers do not know what happens to the narrator, they are unable to praise or condemn her for her 'betrayal' of Leonardo. Much like the revised cultural mythology and ungendered language, what readers are asked to consider instead is the essentialness of the self-motivated choice to shift her lived position and challenge social hierarchies.

And the choice may only be made because of Moreno-Garcia's use of the possibility in lived space on Earth. The indefinable lived space and how it can generate openings is not an easy idea to write about. The very lack of specificity that makes this goal and this process so revolutionary also can be difficult to write about with any sense of specificity. It is important to the rest of my project that readers have experienced the way lived space can be a crucial instigator of change in postcolonial SF; that we can at least understand the way it offers possibilities of social critique and revision in these texts. I've considered the way lived space works in a rather spatially limited story (it only occurs in the center/camp, after all) as a way to get accustomed to thinking of space via Soja. Although these untethered openings are what allow Moreno-Garcia to challenge the cohesive rhetoric of Leonardo and to show the lack of human 'inclusion' in one city, it doesn't actually take place in or strive to transform that particular cityscape.¹⁴⁰ In a maneuver that ultimately reconnects Moreno-Garcia with Butler, the narrator of

¹⁴⁰ And Moreno-Garcia is capable of wielding that type of city-specific space, as shown in *Certain Dark Things*, which Amal El-Mohtar aptly praises in particular for its "great achievement . . . [of] her representation of Mexico City as a real place, a city with history, districts, subways, with beauty and ugliness, with problems. It is not a book that renders Mexico City according to its distance from New York City, or even from the United States; this book's face is turned toward Guatemala, Cuba, Brazil . . . It would have been a simple matter to give in to the gravity well of stories around Mexico City, fetishize it, make it into something to draw tourists . . . but Moreno-Garcia shows us, instead, a lived-in place, a place for her characters to know and navigate completely outside an Anglo gaze." Indeed, a potentially lucrative future comparison would be to work with the fantastical Mexico City of *Certain Dark Things* and the speculative Lagos of *Lagoon*.

“Them Ships” hopes to leave Earth altogether, successfully gaining the type of distance that Butler already provides to her characters.

Such removal does not have to be the only way to imagine alternative futures, however. Nor are undefined alien heterotopias the only settings for lived space’s postcolonial interventions.

In the next chapter, I explore how Nnedi Okorafor’s novel *Lagoon* also uses the arrival of aliens to explore new possibilities in a way dedicated to the contemporary city of Lagos, Nigeria. By anchoring the novel’s focus on the physical spaces of that city, Okorafor reclaims the city from the discriminatory futures industry. This is also a radical step beyond Butler’s works, and Okorafor is another writer that carries the torch lit by Butler. However, the work of the next chapter can only occur after the type of resistant postcolonial thinking urged by Moreno-Garcia’s “Them Ships”: claiming the right of the uncounted and ignored to seek a future at all.

3.0 PIVOTAL CITY: NNEDI OKORAFOR'S *LAGOON*

"Americans are very insular and they think the whole world is America. When you place something in a part of the world that they're not familiar with, they don't quite know how to deal with it. They're willing to learn Elvish and Klingon but if you put any kind of pidgin English from another part of the world, they freak out."

(Nnedi Okorafor, "Science ≠ Fiction" 132)

In the introduction to this project, I explained how science fiction theorists posit that the SF genre invokes specific reading protocols that encourage particularly active reader engagement. My first chapter explored the way such attention to detail, particularly spatial detail, unlocks Silvia Moreno-Garcia's "Them Ships." However, my argument centered on how lived space influences the way characters self-define and group-align; the space of Mexico City is secondary to the (slightly distanced, but still accessible) experience of living there. In this chapter, I explore another subverted alien "invasion" narrative that operates in an opposite way: instead of pulling human characters into a vague heterotopia, Nnedi Okorafor's novel *Lagoon* (2014) invites readers to romp through the multiple lived spaces of the people and place of Lagos, Nigeria.¹⁴¹ By centering on the physical and imagined spaces of Nigeria, *Lagoon* seems to invite and reward repositionings of Nigeria and Nigerians. Consider the novel's prologue, which focuses on an unnamed "She" that readers must try to situate:

¹⁴¹ To oversimplify, we could consider my first chapter to be primarily focused on lived space, while this chapter turns its critical eye toward physical space and the imagined constructions thereof. However, this truly is an oversimplification, since the entwined dependencies of each of Soja's spatial categories necessitates that I explore all three main spatial modes (lived, physical, and imagined) in each case study. Though I discuss this in more detail in the Introduction, this point bears repeating: I do not wish for readers to feel that lived space is used to any *less* effect in *Lagoon*; it is just used in a different balance to the physical space.

She slices through the water, imagining herself a deadly beam of black light. The current parts against her sleek, smooth skin. If any fish gets in her way, she will spear it and keep right on going. She is on a mission. She is angry. She will succeed and then they will leave for good. They . . . made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water's surface . . . The ones who bring the rainbows are burrowing and building creatures from the land and no one can do anything about them. Except her. She's done it before and they stopped for many moons. They went away. She is doing it again.

Even when she migrates, this particular place remains hers. Everyone knows it. She was not born here but . . . she is happiest here.

. . . She stabs into it . . . From the tip of her spear, down her spine, to the ends of all her fins, she experiences re-orange bursts of pain. . . . But there is victory; she feels the giant dead snake deflating. . . . she turns away from the bittersweet tasting poison. *Now* they will leave soon. (3-4)

Discerning readers (those Delany suggests are accustomed to piecing together the *in medias res* worlds of SF texts) discover that “She” is a swordfish combating an underwater oil pipeline to instigate a retreat of oil-drilling humans (3-4).

This is the only novel that I am aware of that starts with a focalizing fish. Beginning in this way warns readers that this science fiction novel will challenge them to reconsider whose voices “count” enough to affect the world. Much like Moreno-Garcia and Octavia Butler, Okorafor is invested in subverting typical societal hierarchies by tinkering with the SF alien first-contact narrative. Okorafor also challenges the historical homogeneity of the SF genre by being an incredibly successful SF writer; her prodigious interviews show that she is certainly of the

new generation of SF writers continuing the work of Butler.¹⁴² However, unlike Butler—and even unlike Moreno-Garcia in “Them Ships”—Okorafor presents all of the citizens of Nigeria (human, animal, spirit, newly naturalized aliens) and of the physical and imagined spaces of Nigeria *itself* (cityscapes, natural ecosystems, spiritscapes, the nation and its pride) as being central to her future imagining. By making the citizens and physical realities of Lagos vital to *Lagoon*’s story of progressive community building, Okorafor challenges the way the diverse population of Nigeria, and indeed of the African continent, are often included only as secondary elements. The text therefore offers multiple critiques and reorientations of Nigeria’s current place as an oil provider in the Futures Industry and Nigeria’s representation in the canons of postcolonial literature (particularly in regard to the lived space of the Road in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* trilogy) and science fiction (especially regarding the cyberspace emphasizing subgenre of cyberpunk). In this chapter, I analyze one example each of *Lagoon*’s revisions of these three representational arenas, though they are engaged in manifold revisions thanks to *Lagoon*’s multifaceted form, highlighted below in my digest of the novel.

3.1 ENTERING THE LAGOON: AN ALIEN SPLASHDOWN

“There’s a horror movie called *Alien*? That’s really offensive. No wonder everyone keeps invading you!”

¹⁴² Nnedi Okorafor is the most celebrated twenty-first century author I use as a case study. Okorafor is a Nigerian-American whose work often draws from a love and awareness of her Nigerian immigrant parents’ original country and culture. She has written seven acclaimed novels (*Zahrah the Windseeker*, 2005; *The Shadow Speaker*, 2007; *Who Fears Death*, 2010; *Akata Witch*, 2011; *Lagoon*, 2014; *The Book of Phoenix*—the prequel to *Who Fears Death*, 2015), one celebrated short story anthology (*Kabu Kabu*, 2013), and one novella trilogy (*Binti*, Part I in 2015, Part II in 2017), along with several published short stories (including “Hello, Moto,” 2011; “Spider the Artist,” 2008; and “Moom!”—the prologue of *Lagoon*, which was first published as a short story in *AfroSF* in 2012). Her works span the genres of science fiction and fantasy and the “fields” of children’s, young adult, and adult literature. Fans and critics praise her fantasy and science fiction works—*Lagoon* was a British Science Fiction Association Award finalist for best novel; part one of her *Binti* trilogy won the Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novella.

(The Twelfth Doctor in *Doctor Who*, created by Paul Wilmshurst and Steven Moffat, “Last Christmas,” 2014)

Lagoon is focalized and narrated by many different Earthling characters, bouncing between the three main human protagonists, supporting human characters, humans only mentioned once, and a variety of marine-, land-, and air-dwelling animals, such as the swordfish in the excerpt above.¹⁴³ Late in the novel, readers discover there’s also an animistic narrative layer; the extradiegetic narrator introduces herself as “Udide, the narrator, the story weaver, the Great Spider” (Okorafor 228).¹⁴⁴ This multi-perspectival narrative style immerses readers into the crowds of Lagos, allowing them to access different individual reactions to the aliens’ arrival and ensuing tumult. The novel is also not written linearly, but jumps back and forth throughout the timeline of events. This adds to the story’s pervading sense of upheaval and change, of not being able to concretely stabilize or associate with one place, time, or social position; it helps the reader engage with the story’s construction of a fluid but also connected way of being, which is ultimately promoted by the aliens and subscribed to by the Earthlings.

¹⁴³ Characters may be the focalizer of a chapter, or even a section of a chapter, without being the narrator. A narrator tells the story and, if a first-person narrator, may also be able to present interior and exterior focalization from their own perspective or even—depending on their narrator-prowess—that of others (either from within the world of the story, intradiegetically, as Legba the Internet fraud artist or Udide the great spider do in *Lagoon*; or from outside the world of the story, extradiegetically). On the other hand, focalization is not restricted to the domain of the narrator, but occurs because of the severability of the narrator and active characters: One is able to process the plot of a story through a focus (perspective or perspectives) of any of the actants in the story, so long as the text utilizes them to share information and move the plot along. Readers are given internal focalization to many of the characters in *Lagoon*, and experience the textual world through the experiences of the swordfish, Adaora, and the President, even when they are not the de facto narrator. These focalizers are able to share emotional states, unspoken thoughts, and different viewpoints of the novel’s occurrences (sometimes of the same event). My point here is that Okorafor utilizes both various focalizers *and* various narrators, which is a bit unusual. Texts prioritizing multiple points of view are more likely to do so through the use of multiple narrators and (in shifting between them) use those narrators as the only focalizers, or to have one narrator figure and multiple focalizers. *Lagoon* is intensely multi-perspectival, at both levels of narration.

¹⁴⁴ This extradiegetic narrator has spoken directly to readers before. Chapter Thirty Eight “Udide Speaks” (194) is the first time Udide is named in a one-page chapter devoted to the spider’s metatextual address to the reader, but she also (identifiable through italics) explains to the reader the existence of “The Bone Collector” in a short paragraph concluding Chapter Twenty-Five (120).

Lagoon begins when aliens land in the waters off the coast of Lagos, Nigeria, and they decide to establish their home alongside the human, animal, and plant inhabitants.¹⁴⁵ The aliens are actually a bio-technological community (each individual being is composed of tiny, shifting, metal ball bearings instead of cells) that are able to rewrite their own selves, environments, and any other living thing at the molecular level; those who decide to live on land take up the form of humans. One of the foundational, often repeated, elements in the novel is the idea of change, and it takes no time for the aliens to help usher in change at every level: The sea creatures near their landed ship are able to communicate wishes for new shapes and abilities, and the first humans that encounter and name Ayodele, the alien diplomat, have their own special talents emphasized by the alien's abilities; Adaora, a marine biologist, can turn into a mermaid; Anthony, a rapper, can unleash a vocal shockwave/echolocative burst of energy; and Agu, a soldier, is a superhumanly strong fighter.¹⁴⁶

When Ayodele announces the aliens' arrival by hijacking technological communications, it sparks off a riotous protest and widespread panic.¹⁴⁷ During the ensuing chaos, mythical

¹⁴⁵ Tade Thompson's 2016 SF novel *Rosewater* is also about aliens who decide to dwell in Nigeria, though the novel came to my attention too late to be included in a meaningful way it also contends with networks, change, and political/societal reform.

¹⁴⁶ Okorafor takes great pains to indicate that these powers were accessible to the human protagonists *before* the arrival of the aliens, and that Ayodele's people only brought them to the surface/exaggerated them. This adamancy indicates that systems of power also exist in Nigerians separately from the aliens, much as Okorafor ensures that readers experience systems of knowledge that are both Nigerian and alien (see my section "Reorienting the SF Generic Intertext and the Non-spaced Internet" below).

¹⁴⁷ The aliens' ability to change molecular codes is also a potential weapon: Ayodele protects herself and punishes the violent Christian zealots and Nigerian soldiers that accidentally shoot her during a mob-induced crossfire: The offenders are turned into palm trees. After Ayodele announces the aliens' arrival, all hell breaks loose: area boys set upon people and property, an illegal LGTBQ group comes out, power-abusing soldiers overreact to amassing crowds; Lagos is described as eating itself. Note: The inclusion of the LGTBQ group is particularly important, since they are not legally counted as being part of Lagos. As of 2017, the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, signed into law in 2013, is still in effect. The act prohibits and punishes by a ten-year prison sentence the marriage between persons other than a man and a woman, demonstrations of "amorous relations" other than between a man and a woman, and the registration of "gay clubs, societies and organizations, their sustenance, processions and meetings" ("Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013"). The legislative discrimination gained attention in the United States, including in news cycles and popular political media shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, which critiqued similar legislation in India and Uganda ("Sochi Homophobic Olympics"); see the African Commission on Human

figures like Papa Legba, Mami Wata, a terrifying Road Monster, and Ijele also come out to revel, defend, and help mold the upcoming changes to their community.¹⁴⁸ After Ayodele, Adaora, Agu, and Anthony facilitate a peaceful talk between the President of Nigeria and the leading council of the aliens, Ayodele and her community are welcomed into Nigeria. However, this diplomatic welcome does not circumvent human fear, and shortly afterward, Ayodele is shot by panicked soldiers uninformed about their leader's overtures. Ayodele turns her death into a martyrdom, dissolving herself into a mist that is inhaled by every Lagosian, making them each "a little bit . . . alien," a little less susceptible to corruption, and much more open to the idea of change and the differences of aliens and their fellow humans (268).¹⁴⁹ The novel ends with the President giving an official welcome to the aliens and announcing great, almost utopian, changes to Nigeria's economy and political system. It is suggested that this change of heart and more peaceful existence will sweep out from Lagos to all of Nigeria, extending beyond the national borders to neighboring countries and eventually to the rest of the world.

In depicting how the aliens interact with the many facets of Lagos (including the surrounding natural environment, man-made cityscape, the inhuman world of spirits, and the technologically enabled virtual realm), *Lagoon* offers Lagos as a complex location capable of a future that can address contemporary issues. The novel's theme is change, and it offers a political shift in the position of African spaces in the SF canon and of SF in African postcolonial canons.

and Peoples' Rights press release "Press Release on the Implication of the Same Sex Marriage [Prohibition] Act 2013 on Human Rights Defenders in Nigeria."

¹⁴⁸ Note the range of these spirits: Igbo, Yoruba, Dogon/Egyptian technology-background. I use Ytasha L. Womack's explanation of Mami Wata as a figure with multiple sources, including "Dogon lore," which "came from Egyptian stories" as well as "the Togo's Densu and Yoruba's Olokun" (*Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* 86).

¹⁴⁹ Corruption (political, economic, and moral) is villainized by Okorafor—a particularly slimy grey priest, a beaten-down Marxist President unwilling to struggle against the machinations of his government, the oil that pollutes the natural ecosystem... Each is given a short but stinging moment of narrative time.

Rarely are Africans depicted in literature as the implementers or beneficiaries of advanced technology, economic booms, or world-altering politics (see my Introduction for how this claim substantiates in early SF); the few moments when Africans are positioned differently in science fiction are thus notable.¹⁵⁰ Instead, Africa is often positioned in what acclaimed Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls “a single story” that

show[s] a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become. It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power . . . Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali [“to be greater than another”]: How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories, are told . . .

to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience . . . The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.

. . . when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise. Adichie, “The danger of a single story”

I quote Adichie’s somewhat romantic talk about the power of stories at length because her beautiful rhetoric helps explain how *Lagoon* reconsiders Lagos. In *Lagoon*, Okorafor sets out to tell many different stories with one underlying message: the pessimistic “single story” that is

¹⁵⁰ Mike Resnick’s *Kirinyaga: A Fable of Utopia* (1998) shows the tensions of traditional Kikuyu world-systems and technological progress; *AfroSF* (2013) and *AfroSFv2* (2015) contain several narratives that explore African countries at the peak of technological and political prowess, and that those may be less than wonderful, as in Chiagozie Fred Nwonwu’s “Masquerade Stories” and Efe Okogu’s “Proposition 23;” the imagined northeast African nation of Wakanda, home of Marvel’s *Black Panther* comics (first appearance in *Fantastic Four* #52, July 1966) recaps the economic, political, and technological benefits of Vibranium deposits; Lauren Beukes’ *Moxyland* (2008) shows a very-near-future Cape Town and how the class and racial politics of South Africa are extrapolated into cyberpunk, corporate-backed technologies; Alastair Reynolds’ *Poseidon’s Children* trilogy (*Blue Remembered Earth*, 2012; *On the Steel Breeze*, 2013; *Poseidon’s Wake*, 2015) draws a deliberate ray from near-future Tanzania/Africa on Earth to and through the limits of space travel, exploration, and colonization; the anthology *LAGOS_2060* (2013), which I speak more on later; etc.

often told about Nigeria is false. In a 2015 interview with *Locus*, Okorafor explained, “I knew I was not going to hold back when I wrote *Lagoon*. That’s part of why I did the multiple points of view. I wanted some non-Nigerians in there. I wanted various types of Christians and non-Christians. There weren’t too many Muslims, but there were some. I wanted to run the gamut of these points of view. There’s a lot of truth in *Lagoon*” (“Magical Futurism”).¹⁵¹ By wielding multiple perspectives of the diverse citizens populating the cityscape, often relating chapters from the perspectives of the under- (and un)narrated view, Okorafor complicates the pessimistic futures that are normally predicted for Nigeria, fighting against the type of “incommensurability” critiqued by Neil Lazarus, a mode of separation crucial for the futures industry.¹⁵² As such, I see *Lagoon* as a political repositioning undertaken as a literary intervention. Okorafor uses the form of an alien-encounter novel to offer a repositioning of Africa’s location in postcolonial studies and science fiction texts by engaging with the dually fictitious concept of “the future.” The idea of the Future bleeds from imaginative literatures into real-world business models and technological inequalities, but it also warps texts leaching ideas and societal “realities” from media and business portrayals that have specific motivations in maintaining restrictive “popular” imaginations. One SF anthology in particular, *LAGOS_2060: Exciting Sci-Fi Stories From Nigeria* (2013) claims science fiction’s ability to manipulate this duality, claiming that “science

¹⁵¹ Okorafor continued, explaining her desire to avoid an idealistic reduction of the city, exclaiming, “What am I going to do, sanitize Lagos? It would be unrecognizable. I don’t mind showing the negatives” (“Magical Futurism”). In this interview, Okorafor also explained a softened version of her relationship to the South African film *District 9*, which I consider in my Conclusion. Okorafor criticizes the film’s lack of nuance, for “In *District 9* they can have corrupt Nigerians—there are corrupt Nigerians—but in *District 9* there was not one single non-corrupt Nigerian. They were all portrayed as criminals, prostitutes, and cannibals, all of them. I think that putting the Nigerians in *District 9* was important. There’s a lot of static between Nigerians and South Africans, so he was hitting on something that’s real. The year before the film came out there were riots between Nigerians and South Africans at a Nigerian market. When I went there, I asked some South Africans what was up, and a lot of them regurgitated the same stereotypes. It’s supposed to be the first science fiction film set in Africa. How come we can’t have a black main character? I gotta say that. South Africa is only 20% white/non-black” (“Magical Futurism”).

¹⁵² I do mean under-narrated, both as ‘less frequently’ and also as the spatially below—the swordfish is “below” sea level, and Udiwe, Okorafor’s giant spider narrator, resides underneath Lagos. Regarding Lazarus’ critique of postcolonial studies’ seeming obsession with incommensurability, see *The Postcolonial Unconscious* 19.

fiction provides an amazing avenue for catharsis, especially in an environment that has suffered stagnation for such a long time. Science fiction unhinges the mind and allows the writer to imagine ordinarily ‘unthinkable’ scenarios. The political stagnation Nigeria suffers can be interpreted within the context of a creative writing process; the nation’s development has been stifled by a lack of imagination . . . writers who dare the future, give courage to others” (Ayodele Arigbabu xi).¹⁵³ It is not unthinkable that Nigeria would be at the forefront of the world’s future, but thinking so does require one to contend with the economic, political, and environmental reasons why Nigeria is almost never considered as being vital to the world’s future. *Lagoon* enacts SF’s ability to challenge deadlocked modes of thinking by prioritizing Nigerian spaces in a future-oriented storyline, using SF estrangement to call out current realities of our world that sideline, silence, and ignore the possibilities happening elsewhere (see my section “Deleted Scenes: What Happens When Readers Don’t Engage in Re-Reading” at the end of this chapter).

3.2 DIVING IN: WRITING BACK TO THE FUTURES INDUSTRY

“It’s tricky because *Africa is a big and curious concept* . . . Millions of people, thousands of cultural groups, languages. And *the future isn’t even a thing. There are too many variables.*”
(emphasis mine, Lebogang Rasethaba, filmmaker quoted in Adam Levin’s “Africa’s space oddities are transformed into fetishes,” 2014)

I’ve stated above that *Lagoon* provides a re-conception of Lagos. This shift is vital—by subverting popular conceptions and predictions for Nigeria, Okorafor challenges the systems that generate those preconceptions, thereby inviting readers to question what alternative engagements

¹⁵³ Tellingly, the anthology features a short conversation with the anthology’s authors and Okorafor: A year before *Lagoon* was published, Okorafor already indicating her dedication to revisionary constructions of Lagos.

may look like.¹⁵⁴ Other readers have explored *Lagoon*'s repositioning of Africa in science fiction by examining Okorafor's animistic diegetic world.¹⁵⁵ I agree that these elements of the novel invite engagement in a reading process that does not prioritize the techno-Western-knowledge of SF more than other forms of local knowledge, but I see Okorafor's focus on the multiplicity of Lagos' lived spaces as an extrication of Nigeria, and Nigerian literature, from the Futures Industry.

The Futures Industry is perhaps most succinctly understood as industries devoted to generating a conception of The Future and predicting who is able to succeed in that Future, capitalizing on the relationships between future-oriented fictions (like SF), technological advances, marketing strategies, and businesses.¹⁵⁶ In 2015, SF scholar Sherryl Vint edited a special issue of the journal *Paradoxa* dedicated to the Futures Industry. The issue emphasized the need for subversion of this system, which can *only* serve "as an intensification of the present . . . a future of global capital and inequity continuing into infinity . . . of more and better shiny, technological products" *or* offer "the site of apocalyptic collapse" (Vint, "Introduction" Issue 27, 2015). If one follows the logic of the Futures Industry, Vint argues, only these two modes of imagining exist because in the Industry, any version of the future must continue trajectories

¹⁵⁴ As I've discussed in my Introduction, science fiction can critique, dream, and inspire possible elements of a future, but as a literary endeavor, it cannot produce that future. Yet, as I've shown in Chapter One, SF helps create openings for possible futures by offering artistic revisions of and alternatives to current realities. Afrofuturist Kodwo Eshun writes, SF "was never concerned with the future, but rather with *engineering feedback between its preferred future* and its becoming past" (emphasis mine, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" 290).

¹⁵⁵ As Esthie Hugo (University of Cape Town) and Nedine Moonsamy (University of Pretoria) pointed out in their presentations at the 2016 Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) conference, *Lagoon* hinges upon the understanding of the "future" as a combination of animism and technology, just as it activates combinational physical (ocean and land) and generic (science fiction and speculative) realms. Indeed, Okorafor herself has pointed out that for *Lagoon*, as "science fiction set in Lagos, that African idea of the mystical and the spiritual is key to the narrative" ("Science ≠ Fiction" 129, 131).

¹⁵⁶ The term 'Futures Markets,' on the other hand, refers to an auction market in which people buy and sell contracts that promise set rates of payment to be delivered in the future on commodities produced (such as coffee, corn, and oil), regardless of changes in market prices. (Thanks to Jun-Lung Moy, Management Consultant, for our conversation about the futures market; for more information, see Investopedia's entry on "Futures Market."

based on globally valued industrial investments, not other factors (specific communities, local systems of belief, environmental health, etc.). The “shiny, technological products” of capitalism need to be fabricated, sold, bought, broken, and replaced, resulting in perpetual economic inequality between and within nations, while the apocalypse is linked to the health of the market and ignores considerations of societies that have already survived—or are currently existing in—an apocalyptic state.¹⁵⁷ Texts adhering to a Futures Industry view are unable to produce futures that deviate from contemporary systems, and thus only re-inscribe current capitalist frameworks.¹⁵⁸ As such, they tilt toward partial-to-absolute negative forecasts and only provide extremely limited opportunities to thrive in their imagined futures (8).¹⁵⁹

The inherent circularity of such a system is a troubling problem for nations like Nigeria that are denied competitive locations within Futures Industry narratives, since within such locked

¹⁵⁷ An idea put forth in Mark Sinker’s *The Wire* article (1992) about Black SF and music “Loving the Alien In Advance of the Landing,” where he argued that “[t]he central fact in Black Science Fiction—self-consciously so named or not—is an acknowledgement that Apocalypse already happened: that (in Public Enemy’s phrase) Armageddon been in effect. Black SF writers—Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler—write about worlds after catastrophic disaster; about the modalities of identity without hope of resolution, where race and nation and neighborhood and family are none of them enough to obviate betrayal (‘Every brother ain’t a brother cause a colour / Just as well could be undercover’ raps Chuck D in ‘Terrordome’).”

¹⁵⁸ Such texts would include: all cyberpunk narratives, which revel in private corporate businesses and capitalist industry prioritization over the good of the individual (see Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*, but also Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968); John Scalzi’s *Lock In: A Novel of the Near Future* (2014), which focuses on the pressures terminating government subsidies for those infected with a lock-in causing virus; Anil Menon’s *The Beast With Nine Billion Feet* (2009) explores the problem of using genetic technology (crops, body alteration) to escape—or ultimately concretize—the Futures Industry; and any other text that depicts the pressures of our contemporary industry-based financial systems, including Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us*. Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* (1992) might be considered as an anti-Futures Industry novel; *Animal’s People* by Indra Sinha (2007) shows the pessimism of fighting the Futures Industry. For more on the idea that adhering to capitalist systems may foreclose other alternative options, see Mark Fisher’s work on “capitalist realism” texts in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009), but also Fisher’s ideas in “Capitalist Realism: An Interview with Mark Fisher”).

¹⁵⁹ In their limited possibilities, the narratives of the Futures Industry echo the type of limited and discounting perspectives of colonialism. Aimé Césaire notes the tensions between the colonial rhetoric of progress that relies upon discrediting the perspective of the colonized, whose “societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated . . . extraordinary possibilities wiped out” (as qtd. in Lazarus, 115; original *Discourse on Colonialism* 21-22). They certainly cannot offer the type of alternative possibilities of Moreno-Garcia’s heterotopia (see Chapter One).

narratives they are never given the opportunity to break out of the disenfranchised position.¹⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, these places are often the same ones contending with postcolonial histories. Afrofuturist Kodwo Eshun notes that

If global scenarios are . . . primarily concerned with making futures safe for the market . . . African social reality is overdetermined by intimidating global scenarios, doomsday economic projections, weather predictions, medical reports on AIDS, and life-expectancy forecasts, all of which predict decades of immiserization.

These powerful descriptions of the future demoralize us; they command us to bury our heads in our hands . . . Commissioned by multinationals and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), these developmental futurisms function as the other side of the corporate utopias that make the future safe for industry. . . . There is always a reliable trade in market projections for Africa's socioeconomic crises.” (291-2)

Not only is the future predicted for African countries pessimistically stagnant, located as the dystopic correlation to “the corporate utopias” of other nations, but the overwhelming dominance of this negative predicted future makes efforts to struggle against the dystopic future script futile, resulting in Africans that are “demoralize[d]” to the point of inaction.¹⁶¹ As a system that claims usefulness through real-world considerations, but that hides its economic and political discriminations, the Futures Industry actually steals The Future from a large portion of the global population.

¹⁶⁰ This element seems to be another version of Edward Said's process of Orientalism. As Said said, “In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (*Orientalism* 7). The Futures Industry maintains the same dynamic where those who are left out of imagined futures (in order to best imagine positive futures for others) can never escape being left behind, entirely out of, or underwhelmed by the futures imagined. They are always dealt the losing hand because it is not cost-effective to consider playing a different game.

¹⁶¹ Eshun only presents one active option—the choice of surrendering to the misery—a sense that echoes post-Independence disillusionment often portrayed in postcolonial writing.

My interpretation of *Lagoon* as being a text that addresses the Futures Industry aligns with that of Hugh Charles O'Connell in his article "'We are change': The Novum as Event in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*." O'Connell argues that Okorafor's aliens function as representations of Alain Badiou's transformative "event" instead of as colonial or neo-imperial allegories.¹⁶² As such, "the aliens of the novel represent the return of Nigerians' alienated, seemingly structurally and historically impossible anticolonial subjectivity to themselves," which thereby challenges Nigeria's location within the Futures Industry and lifts the malaise of Afropessimism (309-310). While O'Connell does an excellent job of exploring the relationship of *Lagoon* to the neoliberal Futures Industry complex (especially as it relates to institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), his article downplays the revolutionary power and anticolonial sentiment Okorafor specifically locates within *pre*-alien Nigeria. While the aliens certainly enhance that power and help mobilize the sentiment into widespread action, both are already operational before the aliens arrive.¹⁶³ My work on *Lagoon* focuses in that direction, towards the productivity of figures like Ijele, the swordfishes' self-motivation to attack the oil complex, and the invocation and termination of the road monster.¹⁶⁴ I believe it is crucial that we explore the way Okorafor addresses these active figures, for that is where we see the present-but-dormant/regulated Nigerian anticolonial subjectivities. *Lagoon* positions Nigeria not as a place

¹⁶² Indeed, I had the pleasure of hearing O'Connell present a version of this article at the University of California, Riverside's 2015 conference, "Revising the Past, Remaking the Future," where we were the two presenters focusing on *Lagoon*. I fully encourage those interested in writing about or teaching *Lagoon* to consider O'Connell's work in its entirety.

¹⁶³ Even the super-human Adaora, Anthony, and Agu can access and use their special abilities *before* the arrival of the aliens.

¹⁶⁴ He does so, I believe, due to the constraints of space, but also in order to more fully emphasize his reading of the aliens. Rather ironically, I think these elements of the story may support O'Connell's argument as long as we consider the aliens' arrival to be the "event" that lights the anticolonial potentiality of the Nigerians I've listed above. The aliens are still needed for the systems underlying the Afropessimism and the Futures Industry to be challenged, since the aliens give Okorafor and readers cause to explore the perspectives of all these various Nigerians.

waiting to be recharged with foreign (even allegorically so) advancement, but as a place of its own potentiality that can unsettle reinforced inscriptions.¹⁶⁵ Readers that are able to successfully employ a blended reading practice attuned to focusing on these spatial and genre-specific elements are thus offered a rejection of negative Futures Industry scripts about Nigeria that depend on “single story” modes of thought and an unchanging status quo.

3.3 THREE CASES OF RE-READING

3.3.1 Revising the Physical and Fiscal: Oil, Oceans, and Alien Landings

“Only a Sith deals in absolutes.”
(Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*, Episode III, *Revenge of the Sith*)

Okorafor’s attack on the Futures Industry begins in her prologue—the swordfish is more than a way to situate readers in an SF-reading practice. The swordfish is “on a mission. She is angry” about the pollution of “*Her* waters,” determined to protect her environment, territory, and home from the humans that are positioned as invaders, disregarding the native inhabitants’ preferences to suit their own needs (3).¹⁶⁶ The science fiction protocol suggests readers will question the type of world that must exist for such a problem to need rectifying. In opening up such a query, the text confronts us with the horrifying truth that the prologue is not set in an imaginary science

¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Mbembe writes that in the world of global finance, “Africa’s future is more and more thought of as full of un-actualised possibilities, of would-be worlds, of potentiality . . . *Africa represents the last frontier of capitalism*” (“Africa in the New Century” 54). Mbembe extends the importance of this future orientation to a global scale, and even that of the Anthropocene, by claiming that “after China, what is going on in Africa will have a huge impact not only on Africa as such, but on our planet . . .” (54).

¹⁶⁶ The swordfish is specifically connected to this space through lived experience and religious social significance, not only environmental adaptation. A home found through “all her migrations, she is happiest here” and “suspects that this is the birthplace of one of those who created her” (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 3).

fictional world at all, but rather our contemporary world viewed from a normally un-narratable perspective.

Nigeria's history of oil, which increasingly became the country's central export in the late 1970s, is as poisonous as the swordfish implies. The industry of oil carves up space in Nigeria. It warps physical space in terms of environmental distress (spills and flares—especially in Ogoniland) and the social spatial element through labor boom/bust cycles and unrest (for visualized oil spill data, see: Nigerian Oil Spill Monitor at <https://oilspillmonitor.ng/#/29182>). Then there are the problems with the monocultural economy of Nigeria's oil, whose upswings increase city populations like Lagos, which at least doubled throughout the "[oil] boom" of the 1970s, and whose downswings are at the mercy of the global petroleum market (Watts 45, Falola 183). The oil business also generated intense political corruption in Nigeria, thanks in part to a system where multinational corporations (Shell, BP, Chevron) paid "rents" on the oil fields, shifting "accountability" only to the "corporations that pay the rents" instead of local government, populations, and environments (Falola 184).¹⁶⁷ Often oil-wealth is still not reflected in the local living conditions surrounding oil fields (Watts 41), as the 2002 peaceful occupational protest of a Chevron Texaco terminal by roughly 150 Nigerian women attests ("Nigerian Women, in Peaceful Protest, Shut Down Oil Plant," *New York Times*).¹⁶⁸ Okorafor removes the possibility of oil drilling in order to revise the current narrative of Nigeria as the largest African oil-producing nation and one of the top twenty oil-producing nations in the world.

¹⁶⁷ Although petroleum "made Nigeria the wealthiest country in Africa during the 1970s . . . this wealth was distributed unequally, benefiting primarily those people who had access to state power and, therefore, to the licenses, contracts, and revenues that accrued to the government" (Falola 181). This partially explains why residents in the Niger Delta oil-rich area are more impoverished than other Nigerians (Onyiri, "The Paradox of Abundant Oil").

¹⁶⁸ The women only relented after the company agreed to help improve their community's living conditions by producing twenty-four additional local jobs and building a town hall, local schools, and electrical and water systems ("Deal reached," *BBC*). Although it did not solve the larger question of economic imbalance, the women offered an act of resistance that generated at least small, fleeting change for one part of the oil-controlled community space.

Fredric Jameson has expressed that in much of SF, the point is to “defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*”; this is certainly the way *Lagoon* engages the oil industry (emphasis as in original, *Archaeologies* 286). Indeed, Okorafor has even explained that her decision to use a swordfish in the opening of the novel was partly to honor the actual swordfish that “punctured part of an oil loading pipe in Angola, causing a three-day delay to tanker shipments” (Kurahone; Okorafor, “Insight into the Lagoon”). This was not the first swordfish to spear crude oil loadings, either—one hit another Angolan field in 2009 (Kurahone). By granting readers access to the interiority of this swordfish, Okorafor emphasizes a little-known “real fact” and, more productively, estranges readers from the foregone fact of our oil-dependent reality. The text presents anew the lived reality of Nigeria as an oil nation and the problems that result from oil production, particularly the environmental cost, as represented by the poisonous oil on the water.

Okorafor addresses that cost by taking us, literally, below the surface of the oil industry. As Siobhan Carroll notes, the ocean is often viewed as a natural atopia—an unclaimable and uninhabitable space that “plays a certain role in a given cultural imagination . . . an extreme space that works to erode the structures of law and society . . . it can serve as a (temporary) refuge for outlaws, monsters, exiles, indigenous peoples and Others who are excluded from the laws and structures of the nation” (222).¹⁶⁹ By opening her novel with the relatively civic-

¹⁶⁹ The importance of the waterscape is also emphasized by *Lagoon*’s original paperback cover. Granted, the space of the city is also present on the paperback cover, a fact worth noting because Okorafor delighted in the artwork, produced by Joey Hi-Fi (a South African illustrator specializing in the mode of SF). She felt it captured her novel quite well. Although Hi-Fi was especially pleased to have an opportunity to work with the many marine creatures mentioned in the book (Okorafor’s “Full jacket for *Lagoon*/A few words from South African illustrator Joey Hi-Fi”), he also presents the cityscape of Lagos.

While I focus in this chapter on both the space of Lagos’ waterscape and city, on the cover the city is almost erased by the “spray” of the water’s teal coloring. The paint evoking waves crashing into the air, disrupting the straight view of the city skyline that would be possible across the entire cover where the chaos of the rest of the cover sedates. Instead, the space is mostly devoted to the sea life, title, and mysterious silhouette of what we assume,

minded swordfish, Okorafor destabilizes assumptions of community and territory, reprioritizing the locals (in this case, the sea life) over foreign investors or Nigerian land-living businessmen and politicians who benefit from the oil contracts.¹⁷⁰ Normally, the slicing open of one pipeline would result in a momentary pause in drilling activity (forcing humans to halt “for many moons” before returning). Though even such a temporary action is still an important act of resistance, Okorafor takes the anti-oil momentum generated by the completely Earthly swordfish and carries it into the arrival of the aliens, who have the capability to permanently end the oil production. Indeed, Okorafor times it so that only *after* a native Lagosian citizen (the swordfish) rebels against the Futures Industry do the aliens arrive to help spread her type of active revision. That revision hinges upon the idea of the ocean as an atopia, one inhabited by beings beyond human

based on her dreadlocks, to be a black woman in the water’s bubble (a woman that informed readers can identify as Ayodele). But the city is also almost blocked by Okorafor’s name and the praise of Ursula Le Guin on the front cover, and the plot description on the back cover (where the water has risen even higher, obstructing any easy view of the city). The city is almost eclipsed by the needs of the publisher (including that of vetting the novel by a renowned author of SF), but also, and more importantly, by the reorganized view of the city, prioritizing Lagos’ marine life. No humans are centered upon, so readers only come to the city through a different perspective. The cover then also makes an argument about the city: for the city skyline *is* on the cover, already attesting to the cityscape’s importance in the story, even if the more ‘active’ and ‘alive’ natural elements (the swordfish, tentacles, sea turtles, rays, sharks, smaller fish, alien woman, and even the moving water) may best capture the eye and help orient the reader into the distancing estrangement of the novel. In a personal interview with Hi-Fi, he described the decision to include the skyline on the cover as follows:

It’s something about the visual hierarchies; the main thing is the title of the book. My idea was you have all these fantastical sea creatures and things, and that’s where a large portion of the story hangs out . . . —part of the story is on land, as well, obviously, and it’s not often that you get to see Lagos in a sci-fi novel, and it’s not a recognizable skyline. I wanted to include it in there so that it wasn’t just all sea. That you felt that there’s a little bit more to the story, and obviously the inclusion of the figure as well is just so that you can read into that: ‘Is the figure causing all these animals to swarm?’ Which is also in the book.

I just went with a striking image and a striking title, combined the two so that it’s nice and bold, as big as I can make it, and then it comes out as big as well. “Oh, it’s type; oh, it’s type that is actually sea creatures.” But it’s not just a book about sea creatures because there’s another layer . . .

I wanted to bring in Lagos at the top and have that sitting in the white space, [which] seemed more interesting than just having the entire cover being blue. I felt that it needed the white being in the type to be anchored somewhere, was my thinking” (see the Dale Halvorsen / Joey Hi-Fi personal interview; in Appendix B.)

¹⁷⁰ Since the ocean historically “provid[ed] a legal framework for the construction of the ‘world’s first wholly global space’ . . . serving as an important touchstone for later conceptions of international society and globalized mobility,” it can be the area without a state apparatus as well as an arena of a larger—pardon the humor—more fluid community (Carroll quoting Christopher L. Connery’s “Ideologies of Land and Sea” in *Boundary 2*).

control; indeed, the swordfish asks Ayodele's people to make her into a ferocious sea monster, which she revels in being (6, 252, 290).

Using the swordfish, a non-human focalizer, solidifies the estrangement of the ocean site, distancing it from the knowable, own-able discourse of the oil industry.¹⁷¹ In the first few pages of her novel, Okorafor offers a dramatic revision of Nigeria's economic relationship to the country's natural spaces. Since Nigeria can no longer exist as an oil-producing economy, it must, and can, offer other exports. The newly naturalized alien citizens provide the boost to local crops, like "palm nuts" and "cocoa" (279).¹⁷² This revision of Nigerian market remedies the environmental problems and helps correct current imbalances of the oil-based national economy by returning Nigeria to a form of diversified export production, better able to stabilize itself and weather marketplace trends. The swordfish instigates one of the novel's primary physical and fiscal repositionings of Nigeria by combating an industry built to support particular types of technological progress, types that benefit the country where the oil is shipped more than where the oil is unleashed. In my next section, I explore how *Lagoon* also offers a way to consider the pitfalls of a more digital mode of technological progress by writing back to the science fiction subgenre of cyberpunk.

3.3.2 Reorienting the SF Generic Intertext and the Non-spaced Internet

While the swordfish functions as gateway into the under-narrated ocean of Lagos, one sacrificed for economic profit, the spirit figures that show up after Ayodele's announcement offer readers a

¹⁷¹ For more about how *Lagoon* operates as a "petrofiction," see Melody Jue's "Intimate Objectivity: On Nnedi Okorafor's Oceanic Afrofuturism" (2017).

¹⁷² Though the technology allowing this agricultural revolution is "foreign," it is also—since they have been naturalized—local.

chance to engage with the real and often intangible (imagined) spaces of Lagos. Each of the animist figures have direct correlations to (or directly embody) the physical spaces that comprise Lagos. They appear in the novel accordingly, thereby inscribing each space with a renewed element of the otherworldly. Readers are asked to read spaces of belief, where Legba heckles people wandering by the crossroads, Mami Wata appears near a beautifully ostentatious bank on the seashore, the living Road shakes itself to life on a pot-holed and death-filled highway (see the next section), and Ijele... Ijele manifests in an Internet café and then goes to the World Wide Web.

This is remarkable.

While Legba and Mami Wata show up in locations associated with their interests and powers, spirit masquerades are *not* associated with the Internet, and they *aren't* seen frequenting cyber cafes.¹⁷³ The masquerade, which allows for people to celebrate their own reality with its entrance into village festivals or more recent masquerade competitions, makes tangible “Igbo pride and mightiness” with its presence—Ijele is the largest of the Igbo masquerades and representative of life itself (“Ijele Masquerade” *UNESCO*). Yet, Okorafor has Ijele show up at an incredibly damaged cyber cafe, startle a scammer, and travel *into* the Internet with an alien.¹⁷⁴ By relocating this particular masquerade to an Internet café and the Internet itself, the text makes a deliberate intervention in science fiction’s prioritization of cyberspace.

¹⁷³ Ijele predates electricity, after all.

¹⁷⁴ There have been recent debates about the capitalization of Internet (see Susan C Herring’s 2015 article “Should you be Capitalizing the Word “Internet”?”), but since this debate has not yet resolved itself, I must err on the side of conservative caution, even though it seems unnecessary, given my contextualization of referring to *the* Internet, not just *an* internet system.

Ijele's traditional location and timing is a village center for festivals or specific masquerade competition sites. His presence outside of these spaces is overwhelming and difficult to grasp for the chapter's narrator:

Its tiers of wooden platforms could have been twelve or fifteen feet in diameter. And it stood over thirty feet high. Bamboo sticks and canes stuck out of the top half and it was covered in ceremonial cloth decorated with colorful geometric shapes and magical designs . . . and the designs were spinning and moving. Alive.

There were forty, maybe fifty brown-skinned human figurines and I could see them running around it . . . I could see the mother, father, the one in police uniform, the horses, the trees, the palm-wine tapper. I knew all the characters because since I was a kid I'd enjoyed the performance . . . never could I have imagined something like this. The upper and lower parts were even divided by the giant yellow serpent, the sign of Igbo pride and mightiness. And it was looking around curiously.

The creature was every color of the rainbow, flowing deep and powerful . . . And it made music. The creature's cloth quivered with the beat it sent into the ground. The sound was impossible, I swear. The sound of life, the beginning.

Holy shit, this was Ijele. (Okorafor 199)

Neatly, the description introduces the unversed reader, one who may not have grown up with the Igbo pantheon of masquerades. However, Okorafor also enlarges and enlivens Ijele so that even those like the chapter's narrator who are familiar with the spirit are still distanced, forced to reconsider what the presence of a masquerade might offer if it's not "some guys dressed up in an elaborate costume to perform Nigerian theatrics to celebrate the spirits and ancestors," but is itself "Alive," inquisitive, able to glow and communicate with its music that connects not only to

“the ground” of Lagos but to “life” (199).¹⁷⁵ A living Ijele breaks the script of a cyber café in “modern” Nigeria. Fittingly, Ijele’s entrance makes it possible to break of one of the more widespread “single story” narratives of Nigerians, that of the 419-scammer by simultaneously reorienting science fiction readers away from the seduction of cyberspace and back to the tangible spaces of Lagos.

On one hand, the Internet is a vital presence in *Lagoon*.¹⁷⁶ While many communicative technologies are utilized to spread Ayodele’s speech (radio, television, phone), the digital sphere (represented by smartphones, Internet cafés, Skype-accessing laptops) is the quickest and most vital way the human characters communicate during the upheaval.¹⁷⁷ The Internet is becoming ever more widely accessible within Africa—as Achille Mbembe points out, “[o]nly 20% of the continent’s one billion people are online, but that share is rising rapidly as mobile networks are rolled out and the cost of Internet-capable devices continues to fall. As a matter of fact, more than 720 million Africans have mobile phones and 1 million were on Facebook by 2014” (“Africa in the New Century”). The digital becomes the space of witnessing, of processing and sharing the change-causing actions of the novel: It is also a space that is available for reading by the rest of the world (see section below on “Deleted Scenes”).

On the other hand, Okorafor rebukes the way our contemporary intimacy with the Internet distracts from the physical realities of our world. The narrator of Ijele’s chapter is so

¹⁷⁵ Okorafor provides another quick background sketch for the uninformed, here.

¹⁷⁶ It may also offer a way for readers who are confident in the simultaneous compound-eye production of the Internet to handle the multi-perspective simultaneous narrative excesses of Okorafor’s text. The Internet is where one event can be covered by thousands on Twitter, Facebook, news outlets around the world, individual or themed blogs, as well as digital cartoonists and YouTube.

¹⁷⁷ It is also through these Internet-spread announcements that the President returns to Lagos, and thus is able to reach a peaceful treaty with the aliens. It is through this broadcasting ability that the President is later able to announce the treaty’s terms to Nigerians everywhere. Likewise, the *Guardian*-associated journalist, odious though he may be, that tags along to document the President’s meeting with the alien council immediately uploads his video footage of Agu, Adaora, and Anthony’s battle with the marine creatures (and, more importantly, Ayodele’s sacrificial act) with his own eyewitness account.

jacked into his 419 email compositions that he is oblivious to Lagos: “The waters of the ocean were rising and the government was trying to figure out who was attacking us. Yet there I was in the cyber café totally unconcerned and up to no good” (195, 197).¹⁷⁸ There is no room for any change or revision as long as his attention is wrapped up in the digital space. I contend Okorafor’s investment is in leveraging physical and lived spaces to propel Nigeria into new positions of literary representation, but the Internet is a mode of escape from physically bound realities. Although it has physical spaces devoted to it, such as the Internet café, the Internet itself is not actually a physical space. Spending time online “permits the subject a utopian and kinetic *liberation* from the very limits of urban existence” (Bukatman, *Terminal Identities* 146). However, users have found it necessary to spend a lot of time spatializing it. Everyday Internet users circumnavigate the digital by utilizing spatially assisting platforms, as users unable to read the binary and coded real construction of the digital are given operating systems and text/image-based layouts and design options.¹⁷⁹ Society has evolved spatial language to contend with the non-spaced, but also instantly global, digital realm: We roam the World Wide Web (Udide would be pleased), save information in the cloud, and troll the information highway. Science fiction authors helped establish these popularly imagined spaces through their fiction by creating and normalizing the idea of cyberspace.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Okorafor explains that this colloquial term, 419, relates to “a highly successful strain of advanced-fee Internet fraud popularized in Nigeria, which appears most often in the form of an emailed letter. The number ‘419’ refers to the article (sectioned into 419, 419A, 419B) that deals with fraud in Chapter Thirty Eight of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act (‘Obtaining Property by False Pretenses: Cheating’)” (*Lagoon*, “Special Bonus Features”).

¹⁷⁹ As Jillana Enteen phrases it, the Internet is technically “a dynamic, shifting network of computers and other electronic signal receptors transmitting and/or receiving bits of digital information,” networks that are often identified through “Uniform Resource Locators (URLs)” that “situate the Internet and the World Wide Web as geographically based systems with corresponding geopolitical reference points in the physical world,” though the network system itself is much more fluid, and the geopolitical points are only there for “reference” purposes, not as part of the actual system (“Spatial conceptions of URLs: Tamil Eelam networks on the world wide web” 2006).

¹⁸⁰ This lineage has become more important as we turn to the digital for ever more daily functions, and as the cyberspace becomes increasingly visually spatialized through widespread Internet gaming and communication platforms.

Though cyberspace entered the genre with William Gibson's 1982 novella "Burning Chrome," the idea of a spatialized cybernetic world became established in popular imagination with Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer*. This novel instigated the SF subgenre of cyberpunk, which compares the digital with the physical, allowing readers access to each author's own evolving spatialized version of the cyberscape as a way to critique capitalism and government systems.¹⁸¹ Current SF readers, then, are accustomed to texts allowing them access to the diegetic digital world. Although the Internet is vitally important to the plot of *Lagoon*, offering a way for the entire city and world to witness and "participate" in the aliens' interactions, the question of cyberspace only enters in a way that allows Okorafor to challenge SF's prioritization of the digital non-space over other types of spaces.

She does this by subverting readers' expectations of being given a rendered cyberspace, partially by writing back to the way the grandfather of cyberspace superficially linked it to the spirit world. Indeed, William Gibson's 1986 novel *Count Zero* (book two of the *Sprawl Trilogy*, which begins with the cyberpunk-founding novel *Neuromancer*) seems to provide a precedent for spirit-world cyber connections since it depicts artificial intelligences (AIs) populating cyberspace in the personas of vodou gods and goddesses.¹⁸² In Gibson's trilogy, the AIs take on the personas of the loa because of "all the signs" humans "have stored against the night, in that

¹⁸¹ Increasingly depicted as more complex virtual reality fictional realms, including Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992), which envisioned cyberspace rather like avatar-inhabited online gaming platforms today; the popular film *Matrix Trilogy* (*The Matrix*, 1999; *The Matrix Reloaded*, 2003; *The Matrix Revolutions*, 2003) also portrays the digital world in a complex manner, realistic enough to fool incorporated humans into thinking they're experiencing the real world. Film and television depictions of the virtual continue to grow, meaning that even SF newcomers are still most likely familiar with some form of digital imagination.

¹⁸² More specifically, the artificial consciousness of Wintermute and Neuromancer are joined into an artificial superconscious at the end of *Neuromancer*, a super-creation that finds another superconscious out in space, and returns to splinter into separate forms that engender a new generation of separate conscious cyberbeings that take up the personas of the loa. The vodou loa are "alive" and well in cyberspace at the start of *Count Zero*, though we learn about their existence slowly and are only fully clarified at the end of the trilogy, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*.

situation the paradigms of *vodou* proved most appropriate” (*Mona Lisa Overdrive* 257).¹⁸³ These are not the gods that “came out of Africa in the first of times,” and there’s no indication in Gibson’s narrative world that Papa Legba, Danbala, Ogou Feray, or Baron Samedi are real outside the personalities that the AIs have chosen to inhabit. Unlike Okorafor,¹⁸⁴ Gibson does not prioritize the cultural foundation of that system, or produce a textual world where vodou spirits operate successfully in reality before the intervention of the AIs. In Gibson’s diegetic space, it doesn’t matter “whether it’s a religion or not. It’s just a *structure*” and a means to an end (*Count Zero* 76).¹⁸⁵ What is prioritized is the cybernetic.

With all of this intertextual background in mind, it makes critical sense that Okorafor establishes Ijele’s living reality before sending it into cyberspace. By doing so, she successfully revises what can be considered “real” in post-cyberpunk SF and prioritizes the realities outside of the digital realm. If we consider narrative access as an indication of a text’s investment, Okorafor prioritizes the local spirit imagination, and the physical and lived spaces of her characters. As a

¹⁸³ The loa are the pantheon of spirits in vodou (especially Haitian); these spirits are the go-betweens for humans with the more distant, and all encompassing, Creator.

¹⁸⁴ Or Jamaican-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson, another SF writer known for her blending of the mystical with the scientific in her novel *Midnight Robber* (2000) and even in her “A Reluctant Ambassador from the Planet of Midnight” keynote address at the 2009 conference of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts. The type of refocusing that Okorafor does through Ijele’s Internet encounter is familiar in postcolonial SF, though this example is unique in the number of lineages (Gibson, 419-scammers, *and* masquerades) it revises.

¹⁸⁵ And it’s a structure convenient for Gibson to filter his AIs through because it allows him to have AIs that can connect through (and control) humans in the world in a parallel of the vodou gods riding their chosen “horses,” because they enjoy making deals, because each AI can be in control of a particular element. And, of course, the most important loa to the cyberspace is, in Gibson’s world, Legba, god of communication and crossroads. While Okorafor turns away from this version of Legba (as AI construct, contained—except via horses—in cyberspace), she does still cash in on Gibson’s connection; the narrator of Ijele’s chapter uses the codename Legba for a reason, drawing the same connections between the loa of communication and the cyberconnective network. Okorafor, however, keeps her non-AI Legba in his more traditional location (the physically accessible crossroads) and doesn’t offer an AI. Instead, she sends Ijele and an alien man into cyberspace for a chat, thereby restricting cyberspace as a *space*, and reaffirming the importance of Ijele (and the alien) as beings. We’re not concerned with the singularity here, though if we were, we’d look at the biotechnical alien community and not at the non-alien, non-“technical” masquerade or god. Gibson’s refusal to fully support the lineage of the loa defuses the potential conjuncture of two traditionally separated systems of knowing: that of Western-derived technology/Afro-Caribbean faith. Indeed, elitist cyber cowboys refuse the notion that a vodou-populated cyberspace would be possible if the AIs didn’t need to manipulate humans to achieve their own goals: “There’s no way in hell there’d be anything out here that you had to talk to in fucking bush Haitian!” (*Count Zero*, 168).

novel that invites readers to form connections that dismantle the easy and the assumed, Okorafor writes back against the presumed hierarchies underlying a literary connection with Gibson and other cyberpunk novels: We're not allowed to escape into cyberspace in *Lagoon*.¹⁸⁶ Okorafor deliberately keeps her characters, and her readers, in Nigeria.¹⁸⁷ Again, we see that the form of the novel requires a reconsideration of how readers interpret the hierarchy of space, especially of alien/technology/non-spaced digital with human belief/lived experience/Lagos-cityscape. Readers are asked to reprioritize the physical and lived spaces of Lagos and other, more traditional, types of imagined spaces.

The (non)space of the internet, then, becomes another location for Okorafor's internal revision of Lagos, and of Nigeria's representation to the world. This is why Ijele complicates the stereotype of the Nigerian email scam artist. Though the aliens disrupt and instigate change in the diegetic-Nigeria's contemporary everyday existence, their presence fails to change the space of the scamming Nigerian "prince."¹⁸⁸ This is the figure of the infamous millennial email frauds,

¹⁸⁶ Okorafor's many focalizers could be considered an extreme evolution of Gibson's own multi-threaded narration. Okorafor and Gibson also offer the theme of connective perspective in more tangible moments of their respective texts. I've already noted Okorafor's swordfish and Ijele, and describe the connecting space of the Road in the next section. In Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Legba is a web-weaver, "still he speaks, Legba, and the tale is one tale, countless strands wound about a common, hidden core" (Gibson 256); in *Count Zero*, Marly, an art gallery manager, views AI-created art boxes containing "bone and circuit-gold, dead lace, and dull white marble rolled from clay" (26-7) and experiences a moment of understanding the humanity of the new AIs when she, before realizing their non-human origin, ponders "How could anyone have arranged this garbage, in such a way that it caught at the heart, snagged in the soul like a fishhook? She nodded. It could be done, she knew; it had been done many years ago by a man named Cornell, who'd also made boxes" (Gibson, *Count Zero* 27).

¹⁸⁷ Indeed, readers are not allowed to escape into outer space in scenes or flashbacks of the aliens' home planet, their journey to Earth, or even their landed alien ship-domain. The scenes set in the landed alien ship are erased from the human protagonists' memories, and Udide does not offer readers access into a site the aliens wish to keep private (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 260)

¹⁸⁸ I'd like to acknowledge that while Okorafor's scammer may seem like a representative of a stereotype (persistent in his hunt for money, ignoring the reality of what's going on around him to interact with a victim on another continent, and enacting his scheme through the intangible space of the Internet instead of contending with the physical upheaval in Lagos), she deflates that stereotype by presenting him as a complex character in the process of change. For while the presence of the aliens require the Nigerian characters to challenge their assumptions about Others, the alien novum also requires the novel's reader to reconsider similar tropes used to generalize different segments of the human population (which must exist in the world in order for humans to be taking the aliens' arrival so badly); it challenges what we might even consider stereotypical reading processes. The construction of one's

one of the more globally recognized embodiments of Nigeria. But, as with her depiction of cyberspace, Okorafor writes *back* to mainstream assumptions. Her scammer introduces himself:

“My code name was ‘Legba.’ It was perfect because Legba is the Yoruba trickster god of language, communication and the crossroads. I am Igbo and I peddle in words. I am American, born and raised. Igbo American, then. Or maybe American Igbo. . . . My major was engineering but my passion was acting. I could imitate *anything*. Any voice. Any personality. . . . I could do it in writing, too. So, that’s what I was doing in that cyber café with my cousins . . . I was up to no fucking good. Who would suspect an Igbo guy who was American using the name of a Yoruba god?” (195-6)

A hybrid and a chameleon¹⁸⁹, this “Legba” is able to mold himself as he wishes almost as easily as Ayodele’s people into “*anything*” that he desires. His 419-scam, much like the Futures Industry, depends upon the limited representation of the real Lagos. The narrator of Ijele’s chapter is uninterested in revising the dynamics of Nigerian global relations; his scam depends on Nigeria’s “single story” place in an uninformed American public’s imagination.¹⁹⁰

identity, after all, is a fluid and constantly changing lived space, a process often mistaken as a position through methods of abbreviation and over-simplification to help others and ourselves navigate their/our own changing social positions. Though all characters engage in stagnated identity politics if we consider that “the very act of representing the ceaseless process of identity formation is based on a moment of *arbitrary closure* which . . . is both true and false simultaneously,” stereotypical or “flat” characters represent an even more frozen, and thus even more limited, type of literary identity politics (Keith and Pile, “The Place of Politics” 28). Indeed, “at times, in order to make sense of a particular movement or a particular place . . . this process is stopped to reveal an identity that is akin to a freeze-frame photograph of a race-horse at full gallop. It may be a ‘true’ representation of a movement but, by the very act of freezing, it denies the presence of movement” (Keith and Pile 28). And while Okorafor’s scammer character takes a couple of pages to reach any type of identity shift, she resists the pre-arranged (pre-frozen) construct of the Nigerian scammer from the start of the section by revealing the scammer as someone able to embrace the notion of change and fluid identity for his own profit.

¹⁸⁹ Capable of blending into his environment for survival purposes, physically adaptable.

¹⁹⁰ Indeed, he himself is a bit discriminatory. Okorafor takes advantage of the multiple-perspective narration to allow her figure of the 419-scam artist to share criticism of his American Internet victims: “She really believed her Caucasian blood and money made her irresistible to one of Nollywood’s top film directors. She’d even told me these things in those exact words. She had no clue that she sounded like a racist, condescending asshole” (196). The scam artist’s character complexity is derived partially on the counter position of the flat, stereotypical, “condescending asshole” of an American, though “Legba’s” framing in itself suggests that she is a perfect victim because she falls into her own discriminatory practices. The imbalance of economic and political power in the relationship between

It's important to note that it is not the revelation of the alien that reorients the attention of the scammers from the digital back to Lagos. Indeed, the scammer later reflects that nothing the aliens did—including hijacking all communications networks for their announcements, which would also have temporarily invaded his computer workspace—stopped his work. He was too wrapped up in “getting what we could get” (200). Even when the destruction literally rips down the walls of his Internet-providing space, destroying the walls and ceiling and crushing other patrons, he is still a cyber-scammer concerned with his in-progress plot—he's just one that will need to find another place to connect to the Internet to get back to the digital world of his scam (a world not challenged or altered just because Lagos is falling apart).

That escape to the archived digital non-space is *only* eliminated with the arrival of a living and breathing Ijele: “This woke me up. The coming of Ijele. I am not being melodramatic and I am not crazy. . . . I will never practice fraud again. Never. I swear. . . . I felt this great swell of pride and love for Nigeria. I felt patriotism” (200). It requires the tangible presence of

America and Nigeria underlies both sets of discriminatory assumptions. Though it works partially because it still locks white people into stereotypical roles, this section works to destabilize a widespread and continuous way of “freezing” Nigerian people into stereotypical boxes. Indeed, Okorafor loathes the prevalence of the stereotype: “Don’t joke to me about Nigerian scammers and princes. This happens to me on Twitter far too often . . . It’s terribly irritating. If all you know about one of Africa’s most powerful and innovative nations is that there is an abundance of 419-scammers from there, that’s on you, not me” (“Insight into the Lagoon,” Sept. 25, 2015). The scammer in *Lagoon* represents a global citizen, using contemporary (but taken-for-granted) technology and the growing knowledge of Nollywood to perform an old trick of swindling money. (Nollywood is the thriving Nigerian film market, so nicknamed for Bollywood and Hollywood. Its name reflects the phenomenon of India’s movie market, Bollywood; both are connected to America’s Hollywood but also—in a much more important way—to the desire of diaspora markets for films from home and the storylines, actors, accents, music, clothing, dancing, and landscapes represented in those films).

“Legba” shares his opinion about the Caucasian woman in the span of two pages before the disruption of the alien-human interaction takes place and works—as do the many other narrative viewpoints—to forcefully highlight that aliens are not upsetting a harmonious human order. Indeed, the 419-scam depends on the uneven hierarchy of the scammer and the scammed: While the scammed think they are in a privileged position, able to help or gain something from the scammer (in this case, an actress position), they are locked into the role of fiscal victim. And, rather like the flip of position during the scam (and the chameleon-like qualities of this scammer), the idea of change that the aliens spout and embody has already been occurring on Earth before their landing. Humans are already consistently in the process of change—they just like to delude themselves and ignore that process in others. “Legba” doesn’t consider the other realities of his victim; she doesn’t consider the realities of Nollywood directors or of her Nigerian correspondent: “There was a *very* pure strain of White Privilege running through her. So why not capitalize” (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 196).

the Chief of all Masquerades to change *him*, not the SF alien. Ijele brings him back to his (destroyed) physical surroundings and to his social and lived spaces (especially that of memory and emotional communal pride). When Ijele and a caftan-dressed alien dissolve into smoke and travel into cyberspace, their path also erases the scammer's emails and victim contacts, forecloses any obsessive hope of returning to the digitalscape (201).¹⁹¹ Ijele redirects current interest in the SF-molded cyberspace in order to critique one worldwide narrative of Nigerians (the scam artist). By re-centering the reader in the *actual* space of Nigeria, Okorafor prepares them to engage with an even more revisionary space: the Road.

3.3.3 Revoking the Postcolonial Pessimism of the Road Monsters

"Let's say you want to make this ludicrous idea not just believable but true, in the way that only good fiction can be, revealing the veins and fibres of the world, cutting to the bone of who we are."

(Lauren Beukes ("The Big Idea: Lauren Beukes," 2011))

"IN THE BEGINNING there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry."

(Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* 3)

"The roads rumble as paths to the future, always hungry for blood."

(Udide Okwanka in *Lagoon* 291)

¹⁹¹ This moment also offers an interesting chance for readers with different backgrounds to expand their reading protocols: Those familiar with the Igbo masquerade hierarchy must decipher the importance of aliens who are able to meet an unanticipated living-Ijele as an *equal*, while those familiar with science fiction must refrain from trying to find an "alien" cause to explain Ijele's presence and accept that there are other powerful forms of knowledge at play in this SF tale (283). Granted, readers familiar with Okorafor's other works will already be familiar with this textual opportunity—her fantastical *Who Fears Death* includes an encounter with an unnamed but definitely living (and not human-operated) masquerade, and her young adult fantasy *Akata Witch* deals extensively with the spirit world and its inhabitants. Okorafor uses enchanted masquerades to make her speculative texts fit the reality of the people and places she depicts—one must suppose that in a novel as place-centric as *Lagoon*, a named and familiar living masquerade of one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria is of particular importance.

It may be that certain readers will try to read Ijele as an alien—they have the power to shape change, after all. Yet, this meeting happens early in the alien's tenure on Earth, and Ayodele has shown readers that although the aliens may mimic what they see instantly, they need time to fully understand what they impersonate. Besides, the alien addresses Ijele by name and later presents his account of their long discussion on the Internet (283). However, I take the time for this aside to note that I think that distinction between mimicry and full embodiment precludes an alien-impersonator reading of any of the other non-alien, non-human characters discussed in this chapter (like Papa Legba and Mami Wata).

Another epic figure in *Lagoon*, the Bone Collector, functions to reorient Afropessimism in the postcolonial canon. Okorafor ensures that her Road Monster is contextualized as a living embodiment of the lived and physical spaces of Lagos, one of the “*greater beings of the earth, soil, sea, lagoon and land. This stretch of highway has named itself the Bone Collector*” (sic, 120).¹⁹² This Road is navigated as both a site of potential destruction and connection. Though very different entities, there is a deep connection to the physical elements of Lagos that gives Ijele and the Bone Collector their power to manifest and instigate challenges to representations of Nigeria.¹⁹³

Okorafor refers to her Road Monster by its “real” roadway name, the Lagos-Benin Expressway, which emphasizes its existence as a byproduct of human engineering, and its more terrifying name, the Bone Collector, which gives the Road a spirit-imbued consciousness and hunger. The human narrating the Bone Collector’s main appearance in the novel describes the Road as an imagined and a real space by the human narrating the Bone Collector’s main appearance. He is

¹⁹² Ben Okri and Okorafor link the Road Monster to a far earlier, non-paved, non-automobile-intended spirits of paths, traveling, and Forest magic. Indeed, in her 2009 short story “On the Road,” which was later republished as part of the *African Monsters* 2015 horror anthology, Okorafor presents an even more clearly formed version of such a hungry road spirit. In the short story, this Nigerian Road spirit heals and empowers people left as part of a sacrificial offering—the rest of the offering, food and cell phones, consumed by the Road that is both modern and ancient: “[C]oncrete road undulated . . . Slabs of road the size of houses arranged themselves into a giant body, tail, legs, short arms, and finally a horrible reptilian head. Vines whipped out of the forests flanking the strange road creature and attached themselves to the slabs . . . Its bitter tar odor stung my nostrils. Beneath the stench there was another scent, something distinctively native. That woody, rich perfume that I always noticed as soon as I got off the airplane. There was life and death in that scent” (*African Monsters* 17-8). I will also note here another monstrous road association in Alan Dean Foster’s *Into the Out of*, an 1985 American SF novel about a Maasai priest combating a dangerous invasion of other-dimension creatures who had been sneaking across the dimensional border and disguising themselves as blown-tire shreds “lining the highways and byways of the developed countries” (174). Polluting and widespread, roads and their vehicles are excellent conductors for death’s knowing assault on human life.

¹⁹³ The “greater beings” have no need for alien permission, though they do interact with the aliens and are easily noticed by the humans only after the alien arrival forces the population to reconsider the possibilities held in Lagos (120).

stuck in the go-slow. The hour was past midnight but the place was like an angry party. The Lagos-Benin Expressway is a shit road. People get robbed there constantly. When I started my job, I would drive to work using that road, but I was robbed so many damn times . . . then there are the horribly maintained roads with potholes that will swallow your vehicle. No, let's not call them potholes; they are closer to craters.

'Didn't that 'luxury-bus-robbery-turned-tragic-accident' happen near here?'

She was right—it *did* . . . I had seen it . . . torn up bodies littering the road, blood, intestines, skid marks of skin, twisted torsos, body parts broken off . . .

. . . that's when the road began shaking like a snake fighting a feisty rat. . . . Not far from where the accident took place last year, the road was undulating. Then it began to stretch like hot plastic. Something beneath it groaned, deep and cavernous, 'OOOOOOMMM.' The air stank of tar . . . it rippled into a concrete wave . . . as it rolled toward the fleeing people. When it got to them—well, you heard nothing but shrieks of agony. . . . 'OOOOOOM,' the road said. This time it sounded almost as if it were in ecstasy . . . smelled like fresh hot tar...and blood. 'I collect bones,' it said. The voice sounded blistering and wet . . . 'I have always collected bones.'" (202-8)

The Road is a physical manifestation of the type of ignored and continued violence perpetuated by and on Lagos citizens in the twenty-first century. Okorafor ensures that readers gather the actual context of the hijackings, robberies, and bloody accidents that occur on the Lagos-Benin Expressway (171).¹⁹⁴ The text specifically offers a connection between past human violence

¹⁹⁴ In her blog post "Insight into the Lagoon," Okorafor answers "What's Up with the Road Monster?" by writing "The roads of Nigeria are unsafe, often scary, and in poor shape in far too many parts of the country. They're monstrous and they've swallowed many lives. I'm not going to lie; I have seen terrible things on Nigeria's roads. I've seen death there multiple times. . . .there was a super graphic photo circulating the Internet back in 2010 of a horrific accident on the Lagos-Benin Expressway . . . The incident caught my writer's eye, and it made it into

(“the accident”) and imaginative retribution (“the road was undulating”). This is why the physical qualities of the Lagos-Benin Expressway are linked to the type of other-worldly spirit it hosts: It doesn’t have the smooth pavement of Ahmadu Bello Way, which is “full of angels,” but is instead the “deathtrap” road “full of ghosts” (189).¹⁹⁵ Once the “imaginary” element of the roadway enters the “real” scene, it becomes impossible to normalize the Road-associated violence. It is no longer just a cause for annoyance (with “craters” and traffic jams) but an inescapable, monstrous, self-inflicted problem.¹⁹⁶

Okorafor’s Road Monster is always viscerally presented as a physical structure and an imaginative space/being. The duality of this space/character is what makes the Bone Collector terrifying. It is also how the Road Monster offers a more intense level of estrangement about an everyday fact: The roads of Nigeria are “monstrous and they’ve swallowed many lives;” Okorafor herself has seen “death there multiple times.”¹⁹⁷ While the aliens may be unpleasant because they’re other-worldly, “that thing that was haunting the road, it was from *here* and had probably been here since these roads were built, maybe even before then” (207). Unlike Ijele, who also predates roads, the Bone Collector pretends to be a purely physical space controlled by

Lagoon.” This blog post was later included in the Saga Press 2016 reprint edition of *Lagoon*, perhaps to help readers who “felt they were missing some things on the cultural/political/societal side” (“Insight into Lagoon”).

¹⁹⁵ One of those angels is a murdered child, who becomes a political martyr figure in the lineage of “South Africa’s Hector Pieterse and Iran’s Neda Agha-Soltan” (Okorafor 193). Pieterse, one of many students protesting recent legal statutes making Afrikaans a main language of educational instruction in South Africa, was shot by police as they attempted to shut down what is now known as the Soweto Uprising in June 1976. The image of his body being carried away from the police-student violence by another student, with his sister screaming alongside the two boys, is one of the most infamous photographs of the apartheid era and did much to solicit global anti-apartheid support. Neda Agha-Soltan was shot and killed, possibly by a paramilitary soldier, on her way to join a protest against the election of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009; the video footage of her death was widely released on social media sites and global news outlets. Even the angels of the smooth road are bloody and used to instigate political change.

¹⁹⁶ At the end of the novel, the alien that ‘sacrifices’ herself to the road questions, “Why did you people allow your roads to be so dangerous?” and interrupts the excuse of a human character when he tries to blame the “government” (Okorafor 283).

¹⁹⁷ Though apparently the scenes with the Road Monster made Okorafor’s daughter laugh, so perhaps the affect differs for various readers.

humankind. Instead, it is an imagined space so haunted by the violence of the past that it manifests as the predator of any Nigerian being.¹⁹⁸

In this way, the living space of the “Bone Collector” connects to Ben Okri’s fantastical *The Famished Road* (1991), another text of the Nigerian-Anglophone literary canon. This intertextual reference generates productive feedback oscillation to readers familiar with the postcolonial canon. I consider Okorafor’s ravenous Living Road Monster to be a critical engagement with Okri’s Famished Road Monster.¹⁹⁹ What connects these two narratives is not simply the idea of a “single predictable ‘real-world’ anchor,” but the “established moves or reading protocols” already instilled in readers familiar with the type of literary world able to host, and utilize, a Road Monster (“megatext,” *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*).²⁰⁰

Okri’s work is a novel of magical realism²⁰¹ often compared to Amos Tutuola’s early Nigerian novel²⁰² *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (published in 1952 and 1954, respectively). *The Famished Road* is the first novel in a trilogy (continuing with the novels *Songs of Enchantment* in 1993 and *Infinite Riches* in 1999) that follows the trials and

¹⁹⁸ When it is not visibly living, it is merely behaving as a sly scavenger, waiting for cars to kill bodies that the Road then claims when its meal “sinks into the road’s sun-warmed surface like fresh palm oil on hot bread” (120). The Road pretends to be under human domain, but humans cannot control it—and do not even realize they feed into its power.

¹⁹⁹ I’d like help suggest the important obviousness of this intertextual link—it’s not stated in the novel, but it is *deliberately clear* for anyone who is familiar with both stories—and the rewarding joy of a reader “in the know” through an anecdote: In her presentation at the 2016 ACLALS, both Esthie Hugo and her audience took pleasure in discussing the figure of the Road and its modernity in visions of an African-city future. Indeed, for listeners unfamiliar with *Lagoon*, Hugo’s brief mention of Okri was reviving, and offered a main way of accessing a genre they seemed less familiar with navigating as critical readers.

²⁰⁰ Indeed, we could consider the extradiegetic narrator, Uhide, to be part of another postcolonial megatext—that of the storytelling spider. Uhide herself acknowledges this connection by quickly mentioning her “cousin” Anansi (292).

²⁰¹ Okorafor herself has argued that Okri’s work is fantasy, but that publishers label it as magical realism to avoid the generic identity). For more, see *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* (2008) by Brenda Cooper and *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism* (2005) by Gerald Gaylard.

²⁰² I disagree with those who prefer to categorize Tutuola’s texts as collections of folktales since both *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1962) are organized by strong frame tales that propel the many smaller adventures of a main, and consistent, protagonist (the Palm-Wine Drinkard and the boy who tumbles through the Bush of Ghosts).

adventures of Azaro, a child with access to the world of spirits, his parents, and the powerful, helpful, greedy, spirit-controlling, bar-owning, eventual politician Madame Koto. Okri is also an author with whom Okorafor is familiar, evidenced through her references to his work in interviews, tweets, blog posts, and editorial pieces (“The Wizard Known as Ben Okri”), although in her short piece that offers explanations for readers less familiar with Nigerian culture (“Insight into the Lagoon”), she does not reference Okri’s earlier depiction of the hungry road.

In *Famished Road*, Azaro is a self-aware spirit child who takes pity on his mother after multiple miscarriages and decides to stay in the human world.²⁰³ As such, Azaro can not only see the spirit world but also remember his time as a spirit (1-6). In order to allow the reader access to Azaro’s particular double-sight, he serves as the homodiegetic narrator, telling of the early economic, romantic, and health trials of his impoverished Mum and Dad, the rise of Madame Koto’s increasingly prestigious bar (attended by human and spirit patrons) and place in politics, and the first struggle between the political parties of the Rich and the Poor—a struggle literally fought by wrestling champions (one of whom, for the party of the Poor, is Azaro’s father). As in Okorafor’s novel, the space of the Road is both physical and conceptual.

Almost halfway through the novel, Azaro’s father tells him a bedtime story about the King of the Road. Azaro’s bedtime stories often involve the theme of hunger, since the family often cannot afford much to eat.²⁰⁴ This story, however, melds the theme of hunger with the lineage of Azaro, whose grandfather served as a priest of the road, someone in charge of offering

²⁰³ In Nigerian culture, a spirit child is one who must be tied to the human plane of existence in order to prevent repeated retreats to the spirit plane where the child’s spirit prefers to live; often this is done by physically marking the baby (Okri 4).

²⁰⁴ By this time in the novel, his mother has already told him stories of how humans picked up a stomach and how it’s possible to fly to the moon on an empty stomach to help neutralize his hunger (80).

sacrifices for people's safe journeys. Although Azaro's Dad did not take up the grandfather's role, his familiarity with the appetites of the road's spirit is evident in the story:

Once upon a time . . . there was a giant whom they called the King of the Road . . . one of the terrible monsters of the Forest and there were many like him, competing for strange things to eat. When the Forest started to get smaller because of Man, when the giant couldn't find enough animals to eat, he changed from the forest to the roads that men travel . . . Anyone who wanted to travel on the road had to leave him a sacrifice or he would not allow them to pass. Sometimes he would even eat them up. (258)

The humans' attempt to defeat this tyrannical hunger by poisoning the King of the Road, as recalled by Azaro's ancestor who could turn invisible and thus escape. Thanks to the poison, the

King of the Road . . . began to eat himself . . . he ate himself till only his stomach remained. That night a terrible rain fell and the rain melted the stomach of the King of the Road . . . What had happened was that the King of the Road had become part of all the roads in this world. He is still hungry, and he will always be hungry. That is why there are so many accidents in the world. . . . some say people make sacrifices to the road to remember that the monster is still there and that he can rise at any time and start to eat up human beings again. (260-1)

Azaro's Dad's story allows us to better understand how a road that is a technological, lived, and spirit space also becomes a *living* and monstrous imagined (but still real) space in Okri's and Okorafor's texts. By reading the Road as an intertextual character, Okri's novel provides a potential origin story for this terrible monster, an origin that is missing from Okorafor's novel. Okri puts no limits on his Road—it is locally based and able to travel wherever it wishes, and it

is impossible to satiate, which makes it unsurprising when the monster awakens in *Lagoon* as the Bone Collector, eating the humans fleeing the turmoil of the alien-human interaction.

Okri's monstrous road is a formation of the time before human technology wreaked havoc on the local ecosystem (a time before the current ideology of the Anthropocene), far before Nigerian Independence, but not entirely blamable on colonial interruptions.²⁰⁵ The Road, after all, is "one of the terrible monsters in the Forest" long before human deforestation encourages it to "change . . . to the roads men travel" (258). While postmodern and magical realism critic Gerald Gaylard proposes that the "image of the road for traveling and journeying" is a metaphor that allows the effect of defamiliarization of Nigeria to be achieved (76), I think it's important to note how both Okri's and Okorafor's Roads function as anchors. Okri's and Okorafor's monsters have always been part of Nigeria and thus, like Okorafor's depiction of Ijele, they return the focus *to* their respective cityscapes instead of distracting or moving away from them. Although critics have critiqued Okri for generating a fantastical city that supposedly

²⁰⁵ The Anthropocene era refers to the period of time after humankind's effects on the natural environment became significant—often significantly problematic, referring to the human-caused mass extinctions and pollutions—although at this time, it is not yet approved as an official separation from the Holocene epoch ("What is the Anthropocene and are we in it"). For literary considerations of this period, see Timothy Clark's *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (2015); for ecocritical engagements with Okri's *Famished Road*, see chapter five in Erin James' *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (2015). I also find it important to note that at the same 2016 ACLALS conference, keynote speaker Sarah Nuttall included *Lagoon* in her address on Anthropocene literature as the future of postcolonial literary studies; although her talk utilized the shapeshifting elements of the aliens as a way to focus on the questions of subjectivity and Others, she also discussed the novel's approach as offering an important alternative to purely "rational" positioning, since "disenchantment of the world is not the only way in which we wield the Earth" ("The Earth as a Prison?").

Although the trilogy is not clearly geographically or temporally located, it becomes more obvious, and has been generally agreed upon by critics, that the narrative is set during the 1960s in Nigeria. In her book, James provides an outline of the critical conversations surrounding the potentially identifiable spaces of the novel and outlines her own interpretation that the trilogy depicts a representation of "Lagos' duality and unbalanced development" (170). Although I agree with James' maneuver to rejoin the often-separated spirit and 'real' worlds of Azaro, as already mentioned, I do not find it overly important to reiterate nor focus on her argument rejoining the way Lagos as a city "intermeshes modern and non-modern worlds in one site." However, I applaud her refocusing of the critical attention on "moments of 'we' narration, which highlight a collective identity outside of those privileged by homogenizing national myths" (171). I find Okorafor's novel to be making similar maneuvers, although by locating her novel in specific geographic and temporal locations, she makes the use of her fantastical/spirit and genre worlds even more specific, and into even more of a honed argument—impossible for any critic to try and separate or ignore. And that is an escalation that I think is *most* intriguing.

distances itself from reality, I agree with Sara Upstone and Erin James' counterargument: Okri inevitably presents quite damning economic realities of the city, utilizing the fantastical element to re-inscribe and complicate the problematic realities faced by Azaro and his family (102-3).²⁰⁶ Nigeria is a very "real" place in Okri's novels, and what allows readers to gain access to that reality is the combination of Okri's spirit world and realistic-to-the-point-of-naturalism spaces. I see Okorafor using her sprits and aliens in similar ways.

The Road is a space that showcases the harsh realities of a community preying upon itself and opportunities for community building. Okorafor's 'no-go' is not only a hunting grounds, but also a successful market; an "angry party;" the social, economic, and technological advances are cause for both celebration and frustration (203).²⁰⁷ In Okri's novel, the Road is full of opportunities and threats.²⁰⁸ While escaping from spirits and trying to return to his parents (an event that happens often), Azaro runs through a road that

was endless. One road led to a thousand others, which in turn fed into paths, which fed into dirt tracks, which became streets, which ended in avenues and cul-de-sacs. All

²⁰⁶ In her project to map postcolonial "spaces" (the home, the body, the nation, the space of the journey, and the urban city space), Upstone considers postcolonial novelists to view the city mostly as a landscape connected to the power struggles of history, a "depressing and dystopian" landscape that is often mistaken for offering (false) utopian potential, potential for a fluid existence of identity and historical location that is better found—so Upstone argues—at spaces of smaller scale, like the postcolonial home and even the postcolonial body (*Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* 103). I would suggest that another way of considering this more intimate scale would be to return to the potential in lived spaces.

²⁰⁷ Indeed, experienced science fiction readers may dwell on the technological attributes of the Bone Collector: how the introduction of a potentially deadly vehicle system has affected the ecosystem, the practice of childrearing, the display of economic wealth, and the crucial ability of traveling around a traffic-choked megacity like Lagos that is not only coastal, but partially located on an island, with one of the largest (currently) estimated city populations in the African continent. As a living presence of transportation technology, the Road is uniquely positioned to oscillate readers' attentions back to such ideas. Though the novel touches on all of these elements, they're not the main concerns of *Lagoon*, which is more enraptured by the Road *Monster*.

²⁰⁸ The builders in *Famished Road* also bring electricity, connecting Azaro's world to the larger one, a world of technological advances and larger systems of (historical) power. At the moment when the crew works to "connec[t] electricity," Azaro sees a man go into a lightbulb-lit tent and emerge a different color, a "curious cream colour with blotches of pink. . . . hair was like straw, like bright tassels of corn. He walked unsteadily" (Okri 277). The new technology brings white men and imperial, outside views of the local space. It is an uneasy connection; the man kills multiple lizards, is attacked by red ants, and chases away Azaro and his friends (278).

around, a new world was being erected amidst the old. Skyscrapers stood high and inscrutable beside huts and zinc abodes. Bridges were being built; flyovers, half-finished, were like passageways into the air, or like future visions of a time when cars would be able to fly. Roads, half-constructed, were crowded with heavy machinery . . . women of the new African churches, who wore white smocks . . . I passed prophets emerging from the forest . . . sorcerers with machetes that crackled with flames . . . workers who had woken early . . . made their ways . . . to the garages and bus-stops. . . . News-vendors . . . announcing to the awakening world the scandals of the latest political violence . . . industrious women of the city, who carried basins of peppered aromatic foods on their heads . . . the muezzin roused the Muslim world to prayer . . . while running through the forest paths I stepped on an enamel plate of sacrifices to the road. . . . I ate what I could.

(115)

The list generated by Azaro's road running is almost as multitudinous as the characters that cumulatively narrate Okorafor's *Lagoon*, and for good reason: The Road is a connector of lived spaces. While it may seem like a space that forecloses possibilities when it manages to "eat" lives and forestscapes,²⁰⁹ the road is also the space of "colonial degradation, the African past, . . . an opening up of the possibility of change and 'newness entering the world'" (Brenda Cooper, "Out of the Centre"). The Road, then, is clearly more than just a technological progression from dirt forest paths, to local home streets, to main (and paved) roads (115).²¹⁰ It's also more than just an ongoing project, one that Azaro sees extending into an SF "future . . . when cars would be able to fly" (115). The Road is also where life happens. In Okri's work, change is magical but

²⁰⁹ Scenes of deforestation are brutal in Okri; see pages 104 and 113.

²¹⁰ Though that evolution in vocabulary should be noted, for Azaro will sometimes flee from forest path and paved road to the relative safety of his home street.

also full of nostalgia and inertia. The “new world” erodes and overlays the “old,” but the underlying systems remain the same: There is still “political violence,” and even the progress of this “newness” bringing roads from “paths” to “dirt tracks” to “streets” ultimately terminate in infertile “cul-de-sacs.” The hunger of the Road is connected to restricted narratives, ones that require Nigeria to be located in a subordinate position for financial stability. While Okorafor writes back against the Futures Industry, Okri traces the foundation of such economic hierarchies back to the industrial controls of colonialism:

‘The *white people* turned our children into slaves.’

‘In broad daylight.’

‘And made our people work to make their coffee sweeter.’

‘*So they could build roads that are never hungry.*’

‘We didn’t even threaten them with death.’

‘And *they haven’t been taken to any court* on earth or in heaven.’

‘To answer their crimes to God.’

‘*So now we suffer.*’

‘In broad daylight.’

‘*With our roads that are hungry.*’

‘And our history weeping.’ (emphasis mine, *Infinite Riches* 266)

History weeps because the future, in Okri’s novels, is chaotic and chained; the endings of all three novels indicate that although much changes, Azaro’s quality of life and Nigeria’s political and financial stability will not improve. This type of stagnant-change is noticeably revised in Okorafor’s *Lagoon* when she shuts down the hunger of the Road.

For unlike Okri's Road Monster, which is only temporarily tricked into hibernation, Okorafor fulfills the Bone Collector. An alien woman sacrifices herself in order to spare fleeing humans, satisfying the Bone Collector by feeding it bones made of "everything" and "nothing," which will allow it to "be free of [its] appetite" for the lives of the Lagos inhabitants. Okorafor puts the history that Okri explores through his Road Monster to peace; after she deactivates the Bone Collector, there is a "relieved sigh of millions of ghosts" (Okorafor 208).²¹¹ By paying homage to Okri's creation while also ensuring the systems it represents come to a "satisfied" finish (something unthinkable in Okri's novel), *Lagoon* offers readers a literary version of Nigeria that harnesses a self-defined version of progressive spaces that are separable from the nation's haunting past.

3.4 DELETED SCENES: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN READERS *DON'T* ENGAGE IN RE-READING

Rem Koolhaas: We also needed to look deeper than just the surface because we wanted to be incredibly responsible and not present a caricature to the world but we wanted to present Nigeria in all its layers and all its aspects.

Local Speaker: That is a very important point you made, because you know that is what we say about international media here—you stand on the bridge, you take a few photographs, and that's—

RK: —and you say it's a disaster, or it's hell—

LS: —exactly. Is there any way in which this project is going to change the way the world at large sees Nigeria in particular? Because Nigeria is a very important part of Africa and also the world—

RK: —and the world, yes.

LS: What impression will I be left with at the end of the day?

²¹¹ This act of self-sacrifice also foreshadows the novel's concluding martyrdom of Ayodele and her consumption by the human population of Lagos.

(Transcribed from *Lagos: Wide & Close—An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, 2014)²¹²

In its epilogue, the novel itself offers a glimpse of a collection of readers that refuse to open themselves up to the alternative positioning of Nigeria offered in the text. This is not positioned as a traditional epilogue—it's titled a "Deleted Scene," placed after *everything else* in the novel, including the post-narrative materials like the glossary-replacing "Bonus Features" and the author's acknowledgements. Such distance from the body of the text parallels the distanced location of the chapter, which occurs in Chicago.²¹³ As such, the "affected" characters are not only physically but emotionally removed from the changes that Ayodele and her people unleash and the cityscape of Lagos that hosts and helps with the unleashing.

The "scene" portrays "three pre-med sophomores Shaquille, Jordan and Nature" at the University of Illinois, Chicago, who have their study date "changed" when "the whole world's plans had changed" (304). As the students watch the coverage of the alien event on YouTube, they contemplate the main question posed by *Lagoon*: What does it mean when aliens land in

²¹² The documentary separately and simultaneously plays the "distant—*wide*—and the intimate—*close*—shots of the city, enabling the viewer to switch between these perspectives interactively. Rather than following a dramatic storyline, it aims to bring the viewer close to the reality of what it means to live and work in Lagos, to move alongside bus driver Olawole Busayo and other Lagosians, and to delve into the city's layer fabric, slowly making sense of the rules, the possibilities, and lifestyles of Lagos" (*Lagos: Wide & Close*, "About"). Viewers are also able to switch between "close" and "wide" aural experiences, as there are three simultaneous soundtracks they can change between: (1) that of Koolhaas' mediation on his project, (2) that of "Nigerian Citizens" answering questions about their daily lives, and (3) that of "City Sounds" soundtrack (*Lagos: Wide & Close*). An intended corresponding book project fell through because of accusations of ethnographic mining (Chris Michael, "Lagos shows," *The Guardian*, Feb. 26, 2016]. Ayodele Arigbabu, who authors the *LAGOS_2060* anthology's prelude, posits that Koolhaas' work made him conclude that "all other cities are aspiring towards Lagos' self-correcting, chaos-driven urbanization patterns" (xi). What I find interesting, considering the way I and other critics read Okorafor's multiple perspectives, is the way Koolhaas attempted to capture all three spatial elements of Lagos in his visual text: the physical (the visuals and soundtrack), the imagined (his and citizens' soundtrack), and the lived (citizens' soundtrack).

²¹³ Indeed, it's happening simultaneously with portions of the main narrative, and as its chapter heading designates: "Meanwhile, Back in Chicago..." (303-6). I would like to note here that later versions of *Lagoon* have altered the format: The 2016 reprint offers a well-marked map of Lagos in the beginning of the novel, right before the start of "Act 1" to help orient readers unfamiliar with the layout of Lagos. As I've mentioned previously, this version of the novel also offers a version of Okorafor's blog post "Insight into the Lagoon," which provides information about the real swordfish, the Road Monster, the dialect, etc. Both the "Bonus Features" and the "Deleted Scene" sections of the original printing lose their evocative headings and become far more normalized.

Nigeria?²¹⁴ They consider the clip to be suspicious because in it, “Even the heroes are black. You think they gon’ spend they money to put somethin’ together that looks this *real* and actually allow black folks to star in it? Real *Africans*? And then set it *in* Africa?” (305). During their conversation about the coverage, Shaquille, Jordan, and Nature reiterate African/African-American tensions that Okorafor has experienced personally (“don’t care about no uppity Africans . . . Africa ain’t done nothing for us but enslave our ancestors”) (304).²¹⁵ They *seem* to be engaging in the type of feedback oscillation that SF strives to achieve—taking the unfamiliar and strange and using it to review and analyze their own society and societal positions.

However, these fictional decoders are stilted. Within the space of a page, the potential decipherers stop their attempt to engage in a text that requires the labor-intensive hybrid protocols. They refuse to allow their cognitive estrangement to propel them into a reconsideration of societal systems (Pan-African community relations, the position and potential responsibilities of college students to the world off campus, whitewashed Hollywood casting decisions, the devaluation of “Nollywood” films in America, etc.). Instead, they retreat back *into* these systems, ignoring the uncomfortable YouTube text and returning their attention to their

²¹⁴ It is made clear that what they watch is the YouTube footage that readers of the novel have already seen occurring “live” in Chapter Forty Seven.

²¹⁵ Okorafor has addressed this in some length: “As a person, I have always had a very active relationship with Nigeria, Nigerian culture, my ‘Nigerian-ness.’ I have always felt like I was both Nigerian and America and neither. I find myself often in groups of African Americans defending Nigerians. I hear African Americans referring to Africans as primitive, dirty, and poverty-stricken. This year I had an African American man look me in the eye and say he was glad slavery happened because otherwise he’d have been born in Africa. I find myself in groups of Nigerians defending African Americans. I’ve listened to Nigerians say that African Americans are lazy, uneducated, whiny, and lost. When I visit Nigeria, I confuse people. I sound fully American, I have dreadlocks that reach past my behind, I don’t speak Igbo (though I understand some), but I am deeply connected to Nigeria and fully invested in it. Most of my family is there. My parents have been bringing me to visit since I was very young. I was never allowed to just blend into the United States and sever my connection to Nigeria. My father is buried in Arondizuogu. It’s a strange existence. An “other-ing” existence. I constantly feel like I exist in two places and in neither place. It makes for good writing” (Okorafor, “Interview” *Sentinel Nigeria*).

now familiar textbooks.²¹⁶ They literally fall back on the excuse that “it’s all happening *over there*,” enacting a reprioritization of the “normal,” the unchallenged and unchanged, the familiar and easily understood, minimizing what occurs elsewhere because, after all, the continent of Africa is half a world away (emphasis mine, 305). By opting out of the effort that a revisionary reading protocol requires, these readers fail to decode and challenge their considerations of space and politics.

As I’ve explained, this is the last opportunity for the novel to offer a critique, and it points at the problem of having a potentially world-revising text like *Lagoon* misinterpreted and mislaid. Okorafor suggests that if there is to be any hope of changing the types of narratives constructed around and in Nigeria, such a hope comes from readers that are able to engage with complex space in a drastically new way.

This is a bigger threat than it appears; one of the most quoted reviews of *Lagoon* stumbles in its engagement with the novel’s revisionary offerings. In her review for National Public Radio, speculative author and critic Amal El-Mohtar wrote,

“If ever a book set out to mirror the vibrant, brimming city for which it was almost titled, *Lagoon* has certainly done it. But, consequently—and perhaps appropriately—it’s as choppy a read as the ocean on a stormy day. ...The experience of reading it, though, was sometimes necessarily jarring, as the shape of the text shifted from one mode to the next like aliens themselves. It was sometimes difficult to match my expectations to my reading: I want different things, after all, from characters in a folk tale than I do from

²¹⁶ In my Chapter One reading of Moreno-Garcia, I present a reading of how textbooks foreclose systemic revision. I think Okorafor’s scene may go so far as to suggest that trying to achieve social change by circumventing systems like academia from within, without altering the systems of understanding, will not be productive.

characters in a novel—and *Lagoon* is sometimes neither, sometimes both.” (“The Waters of *Lagoon*”)

Although El-Mohtar underlines the necessity of Okorafor’s style, she finds it uncomfortable. It is not what she expects. As a reader, she is unsure of how to approach the text because it was deliberately constructed to challenge her ideas of what certain types of texts should do, and how different types of readers should engage with a text. Most of the disruption El-Mohtar encounters arises from Okorafor’s use of multiple narrative perspectives, the interaction of mythical figures and extraterrestrial aliens, and the central use of a living and lived²¹⁷ Lagos city space; formal elements of excess are vital to the success of the novel for they are the elements that reposition Nigeria and Nigerians in various discourses (Futures Industry, science fiction, postcolonial studies, etc.). It must be “necessarily jarring” specifically in order to frustrate “expectations;” it invites readers to employ reorienting reading engagements. Having challenged the complacency that El-Mohtar and the Chicago students fall back upon, *Lagoon* is able, via feedback oscillation, to offer readers a new way to consider its story and Nigeria.

3.5 CONCLUSION

*“Other people in other parts of the world—they see what is happening here. And they fear it. They are agreed. Lagos is a cancer. They wish to cut the cancer out before it spreads. I will not let them. . . .
They will burn it away before it spreads.
I will not let them.”*
(Udide Okwanka in *Lagoon* 293)

²¹⁷ I’m referring again to Soja’s conception of lived space as being that of personal experience, a combination of the physically real and the imagined elements of space. It is this last element that most reviewers focus on, though they seem to laud it without fully exploring the importance of how Okorafor presents city *spaces*.

By anchoring *Lagoon* in the spaces of Lagos, Okorafor reprioritizes the future of a place often discounted and ignored. By poking fun at characters that try to continue this practice of belittlement and ignorance (such as the Chicago students, but also the guests at the Eko Hotel), she challenges readers to behave differently and become invested in the spaces she dramatizes in her novel. Readers already engaged with the spaces of Lagos are rewarded with intertextual references, jokes, subversions, and sly contexts.

Snarkily, *Lagoon*'s very last statement dedicated to challenging Nigeria's place in social, financial, and political hierarchies is that "the world would take care of itself" (306). At the end of the novel, the change encouraged by Ayodele's people is in the process of spreading across the Gulf of Guinea to Accra, Ghana, and the President of Nigeria has plans to reach out to other possible African collaborators interested in Nigeria's new alien-human mode of living. This hazy beginning of networks and change is not entirely defined as a Pan-African venture (and as the Chicago students make clear, ties between Africans and African-Americans would have a lot of work ahead of them), but it is a budding indicator of a closer, potentially more productive, possibly even utopian system of African nations all lying together to escape their current narratives. As such, the novel's end indicates a shift not only in the way in which Nigeria and Nigerians are represented in the Futures Industry and literature canons, but in how challenging the "single stories" told of one African nation may help reorient relationships to Africa and Africans.

In my next chapter, I present Samit Basu's *Turbulence*, a work that challenges the type of distancing exclusions that the Chicago students fall back into by presenting a mode of global citizenship. While Okorafor focuses on the conception of specific cities and nations, Basu offers the possibility of a postcolonial empowering globalized space. Seeing the potential for structures

like the Futures Industry and essentialist nationalism to concretize current representations of particular places, science fiction writers like Okorafor and Basu capitalize on SF's ability to dynamically reroute the script of the 'Future.'

4.0 WE NEED A HERO: SUPERPOWERED SHIFTS IN CITIZENSHIP

“The other day when you were holding your cup of tea and you told me about what the tea was made of, atoms and molecules, remember? You said if we could understand the smallest constituents of matter we would be able to know everything there is to know about tea.”

“Well?”

“You forgot to drink it. Your theories can tell you a lot about tea, but not about the experience of drinking it.”

(Vandana Singh, “The Tetrahedron,” *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet* 159)

In the preceding chapter about *Lagoon*, I considered how spatially based SF innovations can oppose the Futures Industry by generating new models of “the Future” that break from current business, academic, and even artistic iterations of a positional relationship unfavorable to postcolonial countries and populations. In this chapter, I move to a more specific element of future envisioning, that of scaled citizenship, in order to show how moving beyond the national and into the ever-more-recognizable realm of the global may offer ways to restrain/minimize the problematic essentialism that supports positional relationships. Shifting toward a global citizenship thus requires combating postcolonial problems I’ve explored throughout this project (sexism, systemic economic inequality, self-inscription versus stereotypical categorization, racism, and religious discrimination, to name a few).

I explore this idea through Samit Basu's novel *Turbulence* (2012) and its sequel, *Resistance* (2013), which are Basu's most successful international works.²¹⁸ *Wired* awarded *Turbulence* a Goldenbot Award in 2012.²¹⁹ The premise of *Turbulence* is that passengers on British Airways Flight 142 from London to New Delhi fall asleep at the same time and dream of their deepest desires.²²⁰ When they land, those dreams manifest in a variety of superpowers (super strength, flight, manipulation of digital communications, mob control, etc.). These powers develop in strength and detail as the story progresses. The newly empowered characters spend most of the novel trying to comprehend how their powers affect their individual desires, national loyalties, and global responsibilities; superhumans with competing ideologies battle each other in rambunctious fight scenes. The end of the novel positions all surviving superpowered characters as "good" global heroes.

Though the idea has existed at least since the nineteenth century, a global mode of existence continues to increase in viability and acceptability through technological advances (GPS, Google Earth, worldwide video calling mobile apps, the internet) and important topics that help form one rhetorical community (global warming, the Anthropocene) (Andrade "Global/International"). Indeed, if we agree with Benedict Anderson that the legibility of textual

²¹⁸ He is very accomplished as a speculative writer; Basu's *Gameworld Trilogy* (published in 2004-2007) is considered to be India's first fantasy series. It should be noted that *Turbulence* and *Resistance* are more easily accessible in places like the U.S., although the *Gameworld Trilogy* is available to American readers as e-books.

²¹⁹ Interestingly the *Wired* review of *Turbulence* echoes the disjunction of NPR reviewer El-Mohtar in regard to Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (see Chapter Two). James Floyd Kelly noted that "Much of the story takes place in India with references to Indian television shows, celebrities, and sports teams, but despite these locale-related details, the story is outstanding" ("New Superhero Novel Lets You Experience Turbulence"). This is a disheartening take on the text, to say the least, as Kelly seems unaware of the implicit geo-discrimination in this statement, one that suggests a previously fulfilled expectation that all literature will cater to his immediate, American, experience. His note that "reading a fiction story set in India with its culture that is unique to me is just as enjoyable" as engaging in British television is hardly better ("New Superhero Novel"). I share these comments to illustrate just a bit of the biases that non-American/non-European speculative fiction writers face in the major book markets of the United States and Europe.

²²⁰ The action ranges across different locations in India (New Delhi, Mumbai, Goa), but the final battle occurs in London, a city well known for being the new home for a large portion of the Indian diaspora.

circulation helps generate the imagined community of the nation, then our technological ability to “observe exact replicas of [our] own paper being consumed,” not only by our immediate “barbershop, or residential neighbors,” but also by citizens in other nations around the world through Twitter posts, blog articles, and YouTube clips, must indicate an expanded, networked, imagined community. While still “visibly rooted in everyday life,” such a global community encompasses more lives, with longer-reaching roots (Anderson 35). Through close spatial readings of the superheroes populating Basu’s *Turbulence*, I argue that in the twenty-first century, it becomes increasingly possible to start imagining a move beyond the national.²²¹

Such a transition is ambitious. However, it is not unanticipated, considering one of the most recognized contemporary Anglophone Indian novels, Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* (1981), is dedicated to the imaginative interrogation of what Anderson calls the “elastic” boundaries of the nation.²²² Certainly, Rushdie’s novum, that one thousand and one children born at the hour of India’s independence are gifted with a variety of superhuman

²²¹ While the framing of this chapter, and of the novel, takes a somewhat oppositional position to the nation in order to gain traction and imagine alternative modes of citizenship, I do not mean to imply that the national is an entirely negative construct. Considering it as such is overly simplistic, especially since the independence movements of many previously colonized countries, including India, depended upon nationalist sentiments to spur political action and, eventually, separation from their colonizing powers. However, it is also true that in the period since Independence, the nation is the political system in place that can either support or squash the citizens, and that imagining alternative systems and hierarchies may be generative, a point Neil Lazarus makes in *Postcolonial Unconscious*. But while Lazarus urges us to consider how “some of the most adamant and far-reaching resistance to the violence and repressiveness of the postcolonial state has been undertaken precisely in the name of alternative nationalisms, of different imaginings,” in this chapter, I ask us to consider Basu’s response that is generated in the name of alternative citizenships, a different imagining that borrows from but minimizes the national construct (70). The identity of the superheroes never flags from being nationally coded (Indian, British-Pakistani); it just is not the main, nor the most productive, identity element.

I also understand that a global orientation is not without its pitfalls—see my quick consideration of the world wars at the end of this chapter; Timothy Brennan’s engagement with the cosmopolitan in *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (1997), specific critiques of the Anthropocene like Alan Mikhail’s “Enlightenment Anthropocene” (2016) or Mark Jackson’s “Composing postcolonial geographies: Postconstructivism, ecology and overcoming ontologies of critique” (2014); and interrogations of other issues of the global, such as linguistic imperialism in pieces like Ross Smith’s “Global English: gift or curse? The case against English as the world’s lingua franca” (2005).

²²² *Midnight’s Children* portrays Indian history from the moments just prior to India’s independence in 1947 through the Indian Emergency of 1975-77.

abilities, is similar to the superpowers Basu suddenly gifts to international flight passengers (Rushdie 224-229).²²³ Like Rushdie, Basu has his powered characters consider different uses for their abilities and what responsibilities, if any, they have to their nation.²²⁴ Even the powers of Rushdie's and Basu's protagonists focus on the dichotomy between communication skills and brute strength.²²⁵ However, Rushdie's Magical Children (MC) are irremovable from the nation of India; Narrator Saleem knows he and his fellow MCs are only ever allegories for the nation, whose lives will "mirror" that of India (Rushdie 139). Through his inexhaustible impressionist details, overlaid allusions, and multi-framed narrative levels, Rushdie demonstrates how much can be addressed within the nation, artfully stretching Anderson's concept that "the nation is imagined as *limited* . . . finite, if elastic, boundaries" to its breaking point. Basu writes with an expanded intent—not to re-inscribe the past of India (thereby repeating the same types of communal fighting and political maneuvering), but to shift, if not quite into a post-national, then into a supra-national, global arena.

Approaching Basu via Rushdie suggests that Basu sees the limits of Rushdie's novel and the perspective that "To understand just one life [which is a national allegory] you have to

²²³ It may be that Basu's indulgent asides and incessant pop-culture allusions are also indebted to pop-culture fandom's sprawling knowledge and encouraged by Rushdie's successful exuberant language and palimpsest narration. For an Indian science fiction novel more directly aligned with Rushdie's style (and the specific histories of the Indian nation), consider *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* by Ruchir Joshi (2001).

²²⁴ Rushdie and Basu use the novum's ability to re-present reality through a distanced lens, though Rushdie notes that the effectiveness of imaginative novums depends on the location of the reader: "In the West people tended to read *Midnight's Children* as a fantasy, while in India people thought of it as pretty realistic, almost a history book. ('I could have written your book,' one reader told me when I was lecturing in India in 1982. 'I know all that stuff!')" (Rushdie, "Introduction to the 25th Anniversary Edition" xiii).

²²⁵ More specifically, the superpowers of Rushdie's protagonist Saleem (a telepathic and empathetic "All India Radio"-styled communicator) and Saleem's mirror and antagonist Shiva (blessed with "the gifts of war . . . unstoppable") resurface in Basu's novel, respectively, through the protagonist Aman and his foil, Jai (Rushdie 229). As I'll discuss, for most of the novel, Jai is falsely positioned as the antagonist/mirror to Aman, but it is revealed that Aman's true mirror and opponent is Namrata. It is also possible to consider Rushdie's horrific widow (Indira Gandhi) as the main antagonist, though Shiva is aligned with her cause and still serves more as a mirror to Saleem than Jai (who also opposed Namrata) does for Aman. Aman and Jai are interested in similar ends but with different means; Shiva and Saleem are purposefully opposite. There could also be much done with the connections of transformative flights between London and India in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

swallow the world” (121). Basu springboards from the type of imaginative allegorical work that Rushdie successfully circulated in order to suggest how and why we might now need to understand the ways in which one person can stretch the elastic boundaries of an imagined community beyond the finite limits of a nation to encompass the global. I contend that the generic alliances of Rushdie and Basu assist this shift. Rushdie is interested in relatively national, essential, and (I hesitate, but he himself suggests) indigenous modes of fantastical imagination—the Hindu pantheon, the *Arabian Nights*, etc. Basu mobilizes the science fictional mode of the superhero, which quickly became international and remains a global subgenre. While both writers are playful in their tone, Basu capitalizes on the pop-culture fandom of science fiction and superheroes in many flippant asides, outright jokes, and thinly veiled references (particularly to *Star Trek*); he uses this flippancy for political leverage and engagement.²²⁶

By creating superheroes that double as allegories for different modes of national *and* global engagement, Basu offers readers the chance to consider alternative modes of citizenship that turn away from reiterative nationalism and toward what Basu suggests is a more optimistic

²²⁶ This flippancy is also partially a trademark of Basu’s personal writing style, as is evident in his fantasy trilogy. Such a tone strongly differs from eminently more reserved, but no less deliberate, writers such as Margaret Atwood, Ursula K. Le Guin, or Octavia Butler. Indeed, canonical science fiction writers have certainly gone for that type of screamingly outrageous/over-the-top palimpsest style, perhaps most notably in cyberpunk, where collage, caricature, and pastiche is central to the subgenre’s critique of capitalist systems, products, and sheeple. (Just consider the productive aesthetic of Lauren Beukes’ *Moxyland* or Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*). An earlier SF writer would include the cuttingly straight-faced Jonathan Swift, with his utopian *Gulliver’s Travels* or even his satirically dystopian *A Modest Proposal*. In *Turbulence*, this rabidity also pays homage to the novum Basu employs: the superhero. Superheroes often battle the horrors of the world armed with terrible/terribly humorous insights (Spider-Man’s infamous quips, Deadpool’s metaumor, etc.). This observation is not meant to suggest Basu is the only Indian SF writer wielding humor, although he currently resides as one of the most extreme examples. Early Indian SF writer Shubhada Gogate mingled with hyperexaggeration, while contemporary writer Vandana Singh mixes science with wry smiles (“The Woman who Thought She was a Planet” being urged to consider her sari as an atmosphere by her husband in an effort to keep her from disrobing). The aforementioned Ruchir Joshi’s *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* evokes the flavor of narrative humor instilled by Rushdie’s Saleem. However, no one is as manically devoted to the insatiable Joker-esque manners of Basu. Compared to his contemporaries from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Basu is the Indian SF writer that incessantly uses sarcasm and ridicule to pick away at the sore topics of India, dislodging pus, blood, and past scar tissue in the effort to expose and rework. Basu is no sweating surgeon with a scalpel; he is the child furiously scratching at a mosquito bite. And he often elicits the same sense of relief and bliss.

global engagement. Although I am more wary than Basu in considering the opportunities of the global, I find that his novel's use of the superpower novum to highlight the problems of essentialist nationalism offers a timely and important proposition of what it may mean for us to become "fellow citizens of Earth" (Basu 272) during a moment of revived conservative nationalist movements.²²⁷ Of course, space is vital to any discussions shifting from a national to global scale of citizenship, since global relationships rely upon increasingly rapid communication technologies and the relative ease of travel across ever-widening spaces. Social geographers refer to this dynamic as "time-space compression."²²⁸ In his novel, Basu reverses the hierarchical relationship of current mobility-powered politics, providing mobility and access to postcolonial individuals who are often penalized by the time-space compression. By assigning his postcolonial characters powers that reverse the typical flow of weakening "differential mobility" and access controls, Basu breaks away from the systems of current globalized states of being. My argument in this chapter investigates the process of this reversal, relying in part upon an examination of a type of shifting *citizenship scale*: an active individual's concept of their place in the world, as it expands from a limited nationalist view to that of the global.²²⁹

²²⁷ Consider recent conservative retrograde movements like those listed in the BBC news article "Guide to nationalist parties challenging Europe" (2016).

²²⁸ As Doreen Massey points out, such technological developments do not automatically offer an equalizing effect: If time-space compression can be imagined in that more socially formed, socially evaluative and differentiated way, then there may be here the possibility of developing a politics of mobility and access. For it does seem that mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power. It is not simply a question of unequal distribution, that some people move more than others, and that some have more control than others. It is that the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people. Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak . . . [as] is well established and often noted in the relationship between capital and labour. (*Space, Place, and Gender* 150)

²²⁹ I love Hsu's definition of scale, and so I quote it in some length for those less familiar with the concept, as it can apply to literary studies:

Scale is a slippery term that blends horizontal aspects of size and extent with the vertical concept of hierarchy ("scale" is etymologically related to the Latin *scandere*, "to climb"). From homes and regions to the nation and the globe, scales organize our place-based identifications, economic activities, and access to mobility across space. If privileged scales and representations of scale—such as the autonomous individual, the hetero-normative household, the securely bounded nation, and the endangered planetary environment—

There are also pressing formal reasons for a superhero narrative to make its innovations through the spatial register. As a superhero novel, *Turbulence* is a hybrid form, one that knowingly draws upon the traditional visual form of superhero narratives (film, television, and comic). To help guide readers through my interpretations of Basu's main superheroes, I first contextualize the reasoning of my spatial engagement by establishing how spatial modes of reading arose from the original superhero medium of the comic and continued as the comics industry gained ground in India. I also demonstrate the utility of the superhero novum to make critical interventions in the imagined nation by clarifying the traditional connection between superhero and national narratives.

After examining the potentiality of these elements of the superhero, I examine how Basu's superheroes are literally empowered to spatially engage with their world. I find that the superheroes with more spatially radical powers offer the most globalized mode of citizenship, positing that such powered perspective-shifts within the novel mimic our current transition into technologically enabled global considerations. I end this chapter by considering how a now-ordinary opportunity to step outside of national borders via international flights instigates these fantastical histories and more radical post-national perspectives, anchoring my argument in the same contemporary realities as Basu.

play important roles in supporting liberal ideology, bourgeois social reproduction, anti-immigrant policies, or a mainstream environmentalism far removed from local environmental justice struggles, these common-sense scales are also spatial fictions produced through imaginary narratives. At once an epistemological framework, an imaginative construct, and an idea materialized in real spaces and activities, scale can only be understood through interdisciplinary analysis that attends to its fictive, geographical, and political economic properties. (175)

For this project, we should note that Hsu divides scale by similar categories as Soja does, recognizing that space is "an imaginative" and a "real" arena that is also experiential,

4.1 SUPERHERO LINEAGES

“Superhero comics, born in the time of the American depression and tempered in the fires of World War Two, fueled by nuclear nightmares, political upheavals and the struggles of social change, are essentially user manuals humankind has created for the benefit of the superpowered—to acclimatize ordinary people . . .

If Sundar’s theory were true . . . the world would get the heroes it really needed. Not random travelers, mostly well-off people on an intercontinental flight complaining about the in-flight entertainment, but people from the darkest corners of the world, oppressed, forgotten, left-to-rot, hopeless places; people who would have torn the world down and rebuilt it from scratch if given a choice. Superhero comics, he argues, are status-quo-ist, adolescent power fantasies from evolved countries.”

(Basu, *Turbulence* 90-91)

By using the idea of the superhero to estrange the world of the novel, Samit Basu is able to engage readers that are familiar with the figure of the superhero and bring them into and through a text that questions Hindutva nationalism, cosmopolitanism, the barriers of identity politics, global citizenship, and the idea of what contemporary superhuman powers might look like.²³⁰ From its formation, the superhero narrative has been inherently connected to nationalist and global politics as well as technological modernity. As Basu obviously references in *Turbulence* (see epigraph above), the superhero arose during the Golden Age of comics, during the late 1930s through the early 1950s.

The first superhero narrative, Superman, was published in *Action Comics* in 1938 after Detective Comics (DC Comics) purchased the hero from Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. As Glen Weldon points out, the New Deal-supporting Superman was generated as a political figure,

²³⁰ Hindutva is an ideological movement that unconditionally entwines Hinduism and the physical space of India: since only Hindus view India as both their holy land and their country, it purifies their citizenship to such a degree that “non-Hindus cannot be real Indians” (Spodek 372). One of the more famous examples of this hardliner position is that of Nathuram Vinayak Godse, a member of the RSS who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. Godse claimed the assassination was instigated by Gandhi’s political work on the formation of an independent *and partitioned* India, which “had brought rack and ruin and destruction to millions of Hindus . . . their policy . . . was unfairly favourable towards the Muslims” (Saha, “The politics of an assassination: Who killed Gandhi and why?”). This example also illustrates the fact that the Hindutva version of Indian nationalism predates the creation of the modern Indian nation. That such essentialist and repeatedly violent rhetoric is impossible to fully separate from the self-imagined Indian nation is perhaps one of the reasons Basu seeks the alternative community of the global.

fighting for the “American Way” against societal abuses during the Great Depression, then fighting Nazis abroad and working to encourage Victory Gardens and bonds-buyers at home during World War II, and more recently serving as a first responder to the September 11 attacks (Weldon).²³¹ Superheroes have continued this original alignment with national politics, even those less obvious than Captain America, with his glaringly nationalist name, American-flag-themed costume, and World War II soldier backstory. Superman also ensured that superheroes became future-oriented. The “Man of Tomorrow” created a standard for a superhero that not only dealt with tropes of modernity, but were also literally representative of modern technology. Such a combination of technology and national politics was incredibly popular. Quickly, more caped crusaders were created until there was a wide selection of superheroes, ranging from the loosely mythology-informed power of Wonder Woman to the non-superpowered superhero, Batman, who relies on gadgetry and physical training to keep Gotham City safe.²³² The booming Golden Age receded until the revival of comics in the “Silver Age” (mid-1950s through 1970), when the comic series revamped Golden Age heroes and introduced the idea of the superhero team: DC’s *Justice League of America* and Marvel’s *Fantastic Four*, which presented slightly

²³¹ As an alien refugee, Superman defended Americans by challenging those who abused their positions and held back fellow citizens as they worked to move on from the Great Depression. Early Superman was capable of causing “a cave-in at a coal mine that trapped its wealthy owner underground, exposing unsafe working conditions . . . terroriz[ing] a corrupt Washington power broker by tossing him around the Capitol dome like a rag doll . . . torch[ing] an oil well, bankrupting its crooked stockholders” (Weldon, “Superman’s real kryptonite”).

²³² In his study of American Hollywood cinema, Robert B. Ray considered a “Thematic Paradigm” of the hero and the antihero; if Superman fits the model of the official hero by fulfilling the role of the civilized man, the legal process of right and wrong, and holding society’s benefit as a journalist, then Batman is more of an “outlaw hero,” a loner, a man of action free from entanglement and self-determined (*A Certain Tendency in the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*). According to Ray, what is vital for American heroism is to be able to be both contradictory heroes at the same time, perhaps through a reconciliation that includes having a group that spans from outlaw to official hero. This is seen in superhero teams like *DC Comics’ Justice League*, which brought together Superman and Batman as two ends of one superhero squad. Ray’s paradigm gives us yet another reason to consider the eventual submission of Jai to Uzma, Aman, and Tia’s version of global citizenship as an offering and revaluation made by Basu; a way of combining both types of heroes for the good of the global mode. It also allows us to consider why Aman and Tia become the “outlaw” heroes during the years between *Turbulence* and *Resistance*—they work for society’s benefit while insisting on remaining free from national, and eventually international corporate, entanglements.

more “human” heroes. Followed by the Bronze Age (1970 through mid-1980s) and the Modern Age (mid-1980s through the present) of comics.

Interestingly, the moment of the superhero team also introduced the realistic and therefore flawed superhero—two elements of the subgenre upon which Basu draws heavily. Jim Casey explains that the Fantastic Four were representative of a new mode of heroes that “live in real U.S. cities and interact with real people . . . they also faced real problems and dealt with real issues” (126). While Superman fighting Hitler certainly was a “real issue,” the idea that superpowers may be dangerous or that superheroes may be outcasts (as with the Thing and the Hulk) was radically new (126-127). Basu draws from these flawed, earthly types of heroes as well as the combinational possibilities of the superhero team, which permits to craft revealing interplays between heroes with dissenting types of allegorical citizenships.

Although publishers thought “superheroes, like the acidic paper they were printed on, were swiftly dissipating cultural artifacts,” superhero narratives turned out to be an enduring way to re-present current social concerns.²³³ If the Golden Age proved that the superheroes of the comics were inherently linked to their contemporary political moments and promising technological innovations, then Silver Age superheroes continued that connection by presenting

²³³ There was a bit of hopeful insistence to the estimated longevity. In the U.S., the superhero genre was so prevalent, and the effects on young readers so feared, that in 1954, the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency instigated the comics industry to adopt the Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America. Comics upholding the Code showed a badge on their covers, making evident their adherence to code standards, which generally enforced pro-establishment and morally conservative attitudes on comic content. For example, the third general standard was that “Policemen, Judges, Government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for an established authority,” while the third standard of the “Marriage and sex” subsection noted that “Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honorable behavior shall be fostered” (“Good Shall Triumph Over Evil”: The Comic Book Code of 1954”). Of course, there are always routes around such hindrances, including publishing without the badge or even (as in the case of *MAD Magazine*) changing formats from a comic to a magazine. The genre of the comic, and especially the superhero comic, has always been capable of falling on both sides of the pro- and questioning-nationalist line, and as this historic example shows, politicians have worked to ensure their pro-national leanings. Of course, texts consumed by children have long been controlled by adults fearing the potential influences on young readers (consider the tightly controlled *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb or the forbidden sensational dime novel), but comics were viewed with particularly hostile suspicions.

the more threatening versions of technological progress.²³⁴ The lineage of the superhero genre, as well as the enforcement of conservative values in texts for young readers, have long marked the genre. I turn now to the specifics of Indian superhero comics, which tend to “exal[t] the benefits of science and ideas to do with ‘good citizenship’” (Kaur 333). The history of Indian superhero comics demonstrates how this national literature operated in a postcolonial location, where comics had to balance the form’s foreign roots with its affiliation to national-centered content.

4.2 INDIAN COMICS: MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL MOTIVATIONS OF *AMAR*

CHITRA KATHA

“We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today—the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjection.”
(qtd. in Malik Hafeez, “The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan” 651)

“He’ll have told them about you, but without pictures everyone will assume flying men are American.”
(Basu, *Turbulence* 17)

The foreign origin of the superhero comic form required all Indian comic publishers to negotiate their own position as providers of local versus foreign literary texts, deciding to import and reprint, to take the textual medium and create local content, or to operate at the intersection of local and international comics by hybridizing characters. As one of the most recent writers in the Indian comics/superhero industry, Basu inverts the circulation route of superhero texts, spreading superpowers from India to Great Britain and then (in the sequel) to America. By doing so, Basu

²³⁴ This split also occurs by publisher. Compare the two main superhero publishing houses: Marvel, which “spoke to the anxieties of the atomic age” and DC, which “used sci-fi to exalt the virtues of scientific progress and the certainty of peace through technology” (223, B.W. Wight, *Comic Book Nation*, qtd. in Casey 129).

deliberately places himself at the intersection: referencing Western comic figures and traditions while subverting the nationalist drive. We should consider this a type of “writing back” to the power hierarchies traditionally replicated in superhero literature, since Basu defines specifically South Asian superheroes and sends them out as powerful revisionary figures into the “first world.”²³⁵

In order to understand the importance of my point about Basu’s moving *away* from superheroes’ national orientation, we need to consider how the comic form began as a way to reflect and reinforce an essentialist mode of Indian nationalism. The earliest Indian comic press became established with the goal of providing purely Indian content. Indeed, early Indian comics owed their production to the form’s ability to exalt society and instill good moral and civic values in young readers.

Colloquially known as the “Father of Indian Comics,” Anant Pai founded the first widespread comic book “created in India and featuring an Indian hero and an Indian storyline” (McLain 25). While working for the *Times of India*, Pai’s “boss forwarded several imported *Superman* comic books” and asked him to consider the idea of republishing them. Pai proposed a compromise: The *Times* would print comic books that melded local and global stories, with half of each book showing imported comics (like the *Phantom*, *Flash Gordon*, and *Mandrake the Magician*) and the remaining half reserved for local Indian comics (McLain 24-25). Unfortunately, searches for local comics turned up nothing. Instead the proposed local portion of *Indrajal* comics instead presented quizzes, historical stories, and general facts. However, this did not accomplish Pai’s true interest to showcase Indian culture to the young comic book audience as a way of molding future Indian citizens.

²³⁵ Responding to colonial and neo-colonial built “first world” in the mode of the responses to colonial empires that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explore in their critical work, *The Empire Writes Back*.

He decided to capitalize on the popularity of comic superheroes he'd seen firsthand while developing *Indrajit* comics as a way of teaching the youth of 1967, who, thanks to being “educated in English-medium schools . . . were learning western history, mythology, and values at the expense of their own” (McLain 25). Although the first issues of *Amar Chitra Katha* (ACK) (immortal picture stories) were translations of European fairy tales into Hindi, Pai's idea began paying off only when he was allowed to publish a *Krishna* comic (1969) in English, the language of the middle class (McLain 25). ACK went on to become one of India's bestselling and longest-running comic publications, with a focus on mythology, epic, and historical heroes and stories. Although not secular narratives, the comics often focus on divinely superpowered figures and rather quickly shifted toward more overtly religious topics and artwork.²³⁶

According to Karline McLain's study of *Amar Chitra Katha* comics, ACK pieces are viewed by readers as doing more than installing traditional beliefs into the younger generations; they're also a way for “Indians to embrace globalization without submitting to homogenization . . . helping them develop an ‘Indian sensibility’; that is, helping them to articulate what it means to be Indian in the modern world” (7-8). In a manner similar to how postcolonial scholar Partha Chatterjee proposes Indians looked toward the local spiritual instead of the Western material arena as a way of locating their independent nationalism, the mythology depicting ACK comics were and are viewed as being inherently of and for India; they are a way to construct one's Indian identity, even if one leaves the nation's borders (Chatterjee 6). However, this definition of Indian-ness is only elastic in publication circulation, not in its citizen identification. Since most

²³⁶ Even the original artwork Pai insisted upon in *Krishna*, which portrayed events so that readers could option scientifically explainable interpretations of important events (i.e., a river residing after heavy rain; a landslide) changed in later editions to definite miraculous actions (i.e., parting a rushing river; lifting a mountain by hand) (McLain 27-35). Reflecting upon this shift, Pai acknowledged that “Now *Krishna* shows him lifting the mountain. And it is the most popular issue, too. People want to see Krishna lifting the mountain. This I have learned” (McLain 31). This shift, and Pai's concession to popular demand, proves that readers and superhero movie attendees desire the glorious action sequences of the superhuman. Basu, then, caters to both versions of superpower appeal.

of the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics depict Hindu narratives, they are biased toward a Hindu-centered Indian identity and have been read as being in line with the creation of the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party and re-energized Hindutva nationalism in the 1980s (McLain 10-11). McClain points out how comics, as a textual “medium that is renowned for pitting righteous superheroes against evil villains,” can be particularly explosive when conflating Indians with Hindus, thereby excluding non-Hindus from belonging to the nation (20).²³⁷ When Basu deliberately subverts this slant, he makes an inclusive move.

Essentialism aside, *ACK* popularized Indian comics and superhuman storylines, paving the way for Indian superheroes. When discussing comics produced in the 1980s, Basu suggests that there was a combination of the spiritual and the material, where the divine appeal of *ACK* became “completely mashed up with some very sketchy direct copies of popular America super heroes,” producing protagonists like the divinely born Nagraj, who is hailed as India’s Spiderman (McClintock, “Whiz! Bang!”). Snake-man Nagraj was the creation of Raj Comics, which began near New Delhi in 1986. One of two main superhero comic publishers, Raj Comics mainly produced narratives in Hindi and distributed them primarily to a northern Indian market, where they offered stories about characters like the Batman-esque skilled and intelligent Super Commando Dhruva, the bloody punisher Doga, and the cyborg Inspector Steel (Kaur 335; “Why did Raj Comics of India not become a powerful brand Like Marvel”).²³⁸ Although not created with the mission of installing traditional values, as with *ACK* comics, or forced to operate under

²³⁷ Of course, the danger of having a superhero conflated with one subgroup of people is also a topic that is dealt with internationally. In American comic history, it was only in 2011 that “Superman decided that his responsibility to mankind required him to renounce his U.S. citizenship. ‘I’m tired of having my actions construed as instruments of U.S. policy,’ he said. ‘The world’s too small. Too connected’” (Weldon, “Superman’s real kryptonite:”). In Superman’s weariness, we can see some of the tension between national and global heroism, and a figure that can be appropriated for the goals of both scales.

²³⁸ My comparison with American comic book heroes is not a maneuver to downplay the creativity or to present an opinion about the originality of these Indian comic book heroes. It is instead offered as the most efficient way to gloss the general tenor of the Raj heroes for my American-situated audience.

a specific comics code, Raj storylines still depicted spiritually empowered heroes working with the government and celebrating the Indian military and flag (see Figure 1). They followed the traditional model of a nationalist literature.

Some fans insist that it was inevitable that Raj comics’ “beloved desi heroes, who entertained us over one and half decades, . . . [became] abandoned, forsaken, forgotten” since most of them were published in Hindi, and Marvel heroes were available through other presses (Satyarth Routroy in “Why did Raj Comics”). One of the competitors publishing foreign comics was Diamond Comics Private Limited. Diamond Comics transitioned from their parent company (Bhartiya Bhandar Pustakalaya) in Pakistan to India after Partition (1950) and gained traction in 1978 by combining with the Diamond book publisher (Delhi). Unlike Raj Comics, which focused exclusively on Indian heroes, Diamond printed both American heroes (Batman, Spider-Man, and Superman) and Indian protagonists like the funny and wise old man, Chacha Chaudhary (Diamond Comics, “About Us”).²³⁹

²³⁹ At this time, there also exist even more hybridized versions of comic publishing, like the issue “Nagraj Vs. Shakoor The Magician” (edited by Manish Gupta, story by Raja, art director Pratap Mullick and illustrators Chandu and Viney), which depicted Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man working with Nagraj to fight the evil Magician Shakoor from another planet. In this copyright-bending issue, Nagraj is portrayed as being slightly more effective than his American counterparts, though all of the heroes ultimately require saving by the incredibly powerful saint Guru Gorakhnath (Lamar, “Remember when Spider-Man, Superman and Batman Teamed Up to Fight an Alien Wizard in India?”).



Figure 1. Panels from Raj Comics.

On top left: Nagraj asks policemen to beat answers about a crime lord from an underling. On bottom left: Indicative of his spiritual backstory, the three-in-one snake spirit gives Nagraj advice. (“Crime King, Nagraj.” *Raj comics Special Issue*, Cost Rs. 16, Number 65, 1997.) Top right: A former policeman-turned-outlaw-hero (Tiranga) saves the Indian flag from being used to honor a corrupt politician. On bottom right: The pages of the Tiranga & Doga

comic, which mimic the tri-color Indian flag. (“Tri-color.” *Raj, Comics Special Issue*, Cost: Rs. 16, Number 40.)

Translation credit, and my great thanks, to Sagnika Chanda and Kuhu Tanvir.

Although comics became more widely consumed during the 1980s and 1990s, from the very beginning of the introduction of the medium to India, the intention was simultaneously to blend Western and local characters, values, and plotlines as well as to distribute stories of both imported and locally generated protagonists. The form of the comic and the subgenre of the superhero obviously have international appeal. As this brief history of Superhero comics demonstrates, the subgenre always engages how individuals maneuver through simultaneous global and national (and real and imagined/fictional) spaces, even as the viability of those maneuvers depend on shifting economic trends, political tides, and technological advancements.

4.3 SUPERHERO COMICS AND LOCAL SPATIAL CONNECTIONS

“[A]re superpowers the only ones who have superheroes? Let me explain: In the six and a half decades since the birth of the superhero comic-book genre, a disproportionate number of superpowered men and women have—surprise, surprise—turned out to be American citizens.”

(David Adesnik, “Marvel Comics and Manifest Destiny,” 2005)

“All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines customs and institutions in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive.”

(The 1935 *Manifesto* of the Progressive Writers Association, qtd. in Malik Hafeez, “The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan” 651)

Part of the global circulation of the superhero narrative mode is for superheroes to work in a ‘local’ context in order to succeed within the diegetic world and at the level of publishing

markets. Although Western superheroes continue to sell well worldwide, the modern globalized superhero market also depends on successful localization. Such stories do more than sell imported superheroes; they strive to introduce foreign superheroes as *local* figures, imbuing the heroes with a type of Indian-ness that apparently hinges upon their spatial arenas. For a superhero is more than just a representation of the national imagination (as outlined in the American/Indian literary histories above); they are also defenders of specific communities. Superheroes tend to work as spatialized protectors of cities, nationwide heroes, or global saviors. Superman shelters Metropolis while Spider-Man prowls New York, and, well, Captain America's interests are self-evident. Even the most city-oriented heroes involve themselves in struggles of a larger scale when the moment calls for it, but typically, superheroes fight villains that spring up within a particular range.²⁴⁰ It is astounding how often thwarting nefarious deeds within one's home territory manages to stop plots of *global* domination.

It is a common element of the superhero narrative for the superhero's city/nation to become the heart of the storyworld. Indeed, the importance of a superhero's home space was key to the successful "localizing" ventures of Marvel and Gotham Entertainment Group's *Spider-Man India* (2004) and Stan Lee and Graphic India's *Chakra the Invincible* (2013). *Spider-Man: India* became "one of the most successful stories of localizing a global property for the Indian teen market" ("Spider-Man: India"). In a move dubbed "transcreation," the Indian Spider-Man was not merely an American hero relocated to India, but a local figure. *Spider-Man: India* "deal[s] with local problems and challenges" of Mumbai through powers gifted by a yogi (Gotham CEO Sharad Devarajan quoted in Adesnik). Likewise, *Chakra the Invincible* is a Mumbai teenager empowered through a supersuit that enables him to fight crime by harnessing

²⁴⁰ Such as the depictions of Superman and Captain Marvel battling Hitler during World War Two (*Superman* no. 17.; *Captain Marvel Adventures* no. 21, crossover.bureau42.com/zaxissuper.html).

the power of the chakras.²⁴¹ Lee and his co-creator, Sharad Devarajan, marketed Chakra as the first internationally popular Indian superhero, though he is obviously a product of American and Indian cooperation.²⁴² Both of these ventures indicate the lucrative approach of having non-American heroes that (clearly) earn some of their appeal from American characters and famous comic writers and the rest from their ‘local’ settings. The vital home spaces are almost impossible to dismiss in superhero narratives for larger, alternative communities.

However, Basu functions in an entirely different manner by presenting heroes focused on operating on the global level instead of in local or national arenas. In doing so, I contend Basu reverses the ways a superhero’s patrol traditionally complements the imaginary communities we subscribe to and are ruled by in our reality. Of particular interest for my Earth-space-oriented project is the connection of these superhero home-spaces to tangibly real locations. Both of the localized, hybrid-created heroes mentioned above (Spider-Man: India and Chakra the Invincible) specifically defend real Indian cities, while entirely Indian-generated heroes were assigned fictional cities. For instance, the fake Indian city, Rajnagar, is protected by *Raj Comics*’ Super Commando Dhruva (who debuted in 1987 and was created by Anupam Sinha). Super Commando Dhruva was written *for* and *by* Indians, yet the local hero Dhruva protects an imaginary Indian city.²⁴³ Certainly, fictional cities like Gotham or Metropolis are easily connected to real cities like Chicago or New York, but they are simultaneously able to be loosely

²⁴¹ This in itself is perhaps suspiciously reminiscent of the Shaktimaan hero from the *Shaktimaan* television series from 1997 through 2005, though Shaktimaan’s chakra powers are gifted to him through yogis, not science. The whole “chakra” aspect is an obvious example of how a superhero’s new location presents new culturally based superpower options.

²⁴² Chakra premiered as an animated superhero on *Cartoon Network* and then starred in comics and film shorts on the *Angry Birds* streaming channel before supposedly becoming a potential live-action Bollywood movie directed by Vikramaditya Motwane and produced by Graphic India, Lee’s POW! Entertainment and Phantom Films.

²⁴³ To the best of my knowledge, the live-action web series being produced by WC Studios for a 2017 release upholds this imagined location (see youtu.be/objIDT96qSE and youtu.be/ukuYtxDBonQ for the teaser and pitch-trailer).

located as ‘anywhere’ in their respective countries because of their fictional names. Since, as I have already contended, the superhero comic is a nationalist form, this naming function might be related to the mode of reality inscription crucial to Benedict Anderson’s consideration of the national novel. If so, such superheroes exist in a “socioscape described in careful, *general* detail” in order to resonate with local fellow citizen readers (32).²⁴⁴ So it seems almost as though part of the potential appeal of postcolonial superheroes for a global audience is that they operate in an ‘authentic’ Indian space. Perhaps this is because Indian cities may still appear as semi-fictional landscapes to international readers, allowing these hybridized texts to capitalize upon ‘local’ reliability and ‘distant’ inexperienced interest.²⁴⁵ Regardless, it is certainly important to consider whether a text portrays sharply defined or deliberately hazy home-spaces for superheroes, especially since other heroes written for audiences within India’s borders are allowed to be the protectors of what I think we could consider “multitopian” fictional cities that more widely represent applicable national landscapes.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Such as how Anderson saw the “‘national imagination’ at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside . . . as in *El Periquillo Sarniento*, we are in a world of plurals: shops, offices, carriages, kampungs, and gas lamps. As in the case of *Noli*, we-the-[local]-readers are plunged immediately into calendrical time and a familiar landscape; some of us may well have walked those ‘sticky’ Semarang roads. Once again, a solitary hero is juxtaposed to a socioscape described in careful, *general* detail” (30; 32).

²⁴⁵ This appeal could arise as generations become increasingly digitally ‘closer’ to various countries around the world, but it could also indicate the echo of the appeal, and political use, of early adventure tales and SF, such as those of Jules Verne set in Africa. As mentioned in the Introduction, interested readers should review John Rieder’s *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) and Patricia Kerslake’s *Science Fiction and Empire* (2007).

²⁴⁶ The fictional cities of heroes (Gotham, Metropolis, etc.) are thus closest to being heterotopias, though I wonder if the openness of their boundaries necessitates a slightly different concept than that of Foucault’s heterotopia. Perhaps they are multitopias. This term suggests a possible new consideration of texts that present spaces that are multiple in reality-referent and layered in specificity, space, or time, such as China Miéville’s Beszel and Ul Qoma in *The City and the City*. Heterotopias, it is true, combine and play with the false boundaries of the real and the imaginary, but I wonder if something about the lack of specificity in the fictional superhero city space makes it something beyond a heterotopia. . . I posit this since utopias and dystopias are not able to be “actually” located in reality, while atopias are inhabitable locations (see Siobhan Carroll’s “Atopia/Non-Place” in the *Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, 2017; also see my consideration of the oceanic atopias of *Lagoon* in Chapter Two). Consider Benedict Anderson’s point that Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, and Sir Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* are all mappable locations in fiction that show up in the shifting “peculiar geographies of the imaginary

Generalized, fictitious territories operate differently from real cities placed within fictional storylines, offering two modes of superheroes acting in and on behalf of a community space. Basu is concrete and specific about where his heroes hide, fight, and flee (Mumbai, Lucknow, Goa, Delhi, Chennai, Kashmir) as a way of refocusing on India and on one of the main locations of the Indian diaspora (London). Such a process is importantly different from a localizing endeavor like *Spider-Man: India* or *Chakra* because Basu brings in specific locations as instigation for his heroes' eventual global views.

Examining the inverse relationships between the local and the global hero illuminates potentially explosive contentions of Basu's text, which—with great angst—ultimately argues that heroes must be less beholden to the nation than to the world. Even though national-division and global-unity are themselves fictions upheld by counter imaginations, Basu proposes that we surrender our devotion to national citizenship in order to function as global citizens.

I contend that this is why *Turbulence* empowers international travelers, both those returning from and traveling to India, for international travel is one common mode of scale-jumping. I agree with Hsuan L. Hsu that anytime we use a framework dealing with scaled spaces, we must contend with “how scales *shift and interpenetrate*, how they are *experienced differently by differently situated subjects*, and how they may obstruct as well as *illuminate our understanding of activities and narrative possibilities* that cross scales in unexpected ways” (emphasis mine, Hsu 177).²⁴⁷ As such, when I present my close readings of Basu's allegorical superheroes, I demonstrate how my interpretation of the spatial-citizen allegories (representing one particular version of a scaled-citizenship, whether national, international, or global) are complicated by the

politics of the age” (Anderson 71). For our age, such mappable imaginations include cyberpunk, digital networks, and superheroes that can replicate techno-travel/communications/experiences.

²⁴⁷ For fictional works that function on a global scale in different ways, consider Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*, Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, N. K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season*, and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*.

shifts of citizen-affiliations that each character experiences as they test their powers and interact with other superpowered characters/different allegorically scaled modes. While I focus less on the home terrain of Basu's heroes (the place of India) and more on perspectives of citizenship, the different models of space (physical, imagined, and lived) I've been investigating throughout this project are vital ways for me to explore the impact of Basu's spatially revisionary work.

Understanding the history of superhero conventions allows readers to see why the superhero novum offers a productive way to question the effects that lived spaces have on a globalized future. This history also illuminates why the shifting from one type of location on the ranged scale of patriotic investment to another might offer a hopeful move away from the national novel into a critically aware global future—one where an *inclusive* version of Indian-ness and a citizenship on a global scale leads the way forward.

4.4 BASU AND COMICS: SHIFTING FROM VISUAL TO WRITTEN FORMS OF SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE

“The art form of comics might not be just an object of academic analysis, but might itself become a powerful part of our intellectual tool kit, a way of organizing research and producing scholarship. Cartooning might be a ‘way of thinking,’ as Chris Ware has put it. The art form has a powerful capacity to explain ideas, make arguments, and visualize research.”

(Lee Konstantinou, “Comics Studies Comes of Age,” 2017)

The mobile circulation of superhero comics into and throughout India and the traditional spatial relationship of superheroes to particular territories vitally informs my interpretation of the competing spatial loyalties engaged by *Turbulence*'s characters. Are they heroes of the world or India's best chance to become a global power? These different citizenship modes depend on the spatialized components of their superpowers—a crucial point of interpretation, since Basu knows

the impact of a superhero's spatial relationship because he has experience with writing comics, the traditional superhero medium.²⁴⁸

Before writing *Turbulence*, Basu worked with Graphic India/Virgin Comics on their “Shakti” (or “Power”) line, writing with Shekhar Kapur for the *Devi* comic series in issues three through ten. During this time, Basu learned that writing content for a comic depends on the visual layout of space, such as the shape and size of the panels, the solidity of gutters, and the types of action-based or focus-based transitions between panels.²⁴⁹ Any message or intervention being imparted to the reader in a superhero comic depends at least partially upon the interaction of the character with the frame of the panels—the location of the superhero's body and the way time is depicted through the physical space of a comic page is crucial to the comic's story. Likewise, comic superheroes are dependent upon the ability to emotionally engage with their readers not only through dialogue, frame narration, or “spoken” thoughts, but through the visuals of panels backgrounds, lettering, and symbols indicating internal feelings and sensory information. (For an example, see the positioning and lettering of “Interface,” one of the gods that bless the Devi in Figure 2.) In his *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud details that “in learning to read comics we all learned to perceive time [and emotion] spatially, for in the world of comics, time and space are one and the same” (100). Through the necessary jump between comic panels, readers consistently perform the active feat of closure, “*observing the parts* but *perceiving the whole*” as they maneuver across gutters and panel borders (emphasis as in

²⁴⁸ Since my main text of inquiry in this chapter deals with superheroes that are not directly affiliated with Indian mythology, I won't be addressing superheroes or comic works that wonderfully, smartly, critically engage with various aspects of the Ramayana (*Ramayan 3392 A.D.*) and the Mahabharata (Grant Morrison's *18 Days*). Graphic India is doing an innovative series, including, of course, *Devi* (Volume 1, July 2006).

²⁴⁹ It could also be that Basu tested out some of the personalities and powers of *Turbulence* in *Devi*, if one considers that the deity “Interface” (who assists the Devi by gifting her with powers of attractiveness and communication manipulation) could even be interpreted as a combination of Uzma and Aman (see Fig. 2).

original, McCloud 62). This unavoidable comic reading protocol requires comic authors to world-build in particularly spatialized ways (see Figure 3).



Figure 2: Interface from *Devi*

Here we see “Interface—messenger of the gods and all that” who works in “communications” and grants the heroine of *Devi* the powers of being adored, so attractive to others that they “won’t know what hit ’em.” Interface is also, however, the manipulator of “sound bites,” “internets,” “media and messaging.” Notice how the dialogue boxes and lettering reflect the industry/agent-like patter of this “digitized” and “sound bite” being, as the wires, screens, and coils of the background form a “feed” into the Android-like, blue skinned interface, complete with circuit-accented makeup (the androgynous and stylized brows and lips) and body-suited fingers that turn into electric/electronic

lights swirling around the page. The page itself, and therefore Interface, is only contained by the permeable border-like coils. If *Devi* allows Basu to learn about spatialized storytelling, it also allows him to practice writing in the voice of this character, whose powers function as a combination of Aman and Uzma, two of *Turbulence*'s three most powerful figures, and the ones who (perhaps not so surprisingly) are attracted to each other.



Figure 3: Superheroes in action

On the left: Primarily an action sequence. Super Commando Dhruva dives through the thin gutter of two panels at the top left of the page before swinging under an elephant trunk and turning to talk to Black Cat, whose tail breaks the line of the last panel on the page but extends the motion of the arc begun by Dhruva's acrobatics. ("Circus: Super Commando Dhruv", *Raj comics Special Issue*, Cost: Rs. 16, Number 47.) On the right: Nagraj reflects on his attempts to clean up the city by holding the foreground position, spanning over three panels, where the actions he muses over play out as three individual scenarios. His dominating pose of consideration anchors the page—notice his body overflows the bottom and side margins—orienting the reader's interpretation to the three individual fight

sequences, and the untidiness of his thoughts is reflected in the many transgressions across panel borders (hands, playing cards, thugs, and shadows). (“Crime King: Nagraj.” *Raj Comics Special Issue. Cost: Rs. 16, Number 65.*)

Translation credit to Sagnika Chanda and Kuku Tanvir

Working with the *Devi* team allowed Basu to *see* his writing in the narrative space of a comic. In the author afterword of *Devi*, volume 1, Basu details how transforming a portion of the “plotted” *Devi* story into the actual comic relied upon spatial elements to transmit the meaningful emotions surrounding the reincarnation of the Devi (“Get Inside Writer Samit Basu’s Mind”). By collaborating with the illustrators, Basu moved certain characters to the foreground, arranged panels in a non-linear fashion, and used gutters that were “wispy, drifting” in order to express that in this dreamworld, “physical continuity yields to vision, expression, surprise” (“Get Inside”; see Figure 4. Basu’s reflection shows how spatialized elements altered his creative process, explaining that his original goals were achieved only by “constantly shifting scale, perspective, and background” during this initial education in comic writing. According to Basu, *Devi* was “the first time I’d seen my writing visualized; and I was thrilled;” in examining *Turbulence*, we see that the excitement and understanding of how space can express certain types of meaning stayed with Basu after this experience (“Get Inside”).²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ This experience also gave Basu the opportunity to write a superhuman character, one starring a literally divided superheroine: The Devi is a two-in-one, a human woman and a goddess inhabiting the same super-mortal form. This is Basu’s first superhero, and the Devi’s conflicting desires and loyalties (between the mortal world of her human avatar and the divine realm of the human-inhabiting goddess) are echoed in the constant re-evaluation of *Turbulence*’s heroes, though in his own novel, Basu avoids divine-centered storylines. I will also note that the divine-superhero blend is found with a bit more regularity, perhaps most recently in *Devi* but also in Pixar Animation Studios’ 2016 short film *Sanjay’s Super Team*. Created by Sanjay Patel to reflect his conflicting experiences growing up as an Indian-American, the cartoon short shows the tensions between the practices of Little Sanjay, a superhero fan, and his father, a devout Hindu. As Patel says, “Every morning my dad worshiped his gods, which were the Hindu gods, in his shrine, and every morning I worshiped my gods, which were superheroes . . . My shrine was the TV. And every morning, we would clash because [we] were jammed together in the same room” (qtd. in Solomon). After an imagined battle between Ravana and the combined forces of Vishnu, Durga, and Hanuman, the father and son compromise, with Little Sanjay drawing his new, deity-inclusive superhero team.



Figure 4: Learning Spatial Writing for Comics

On the left, the “Script Excerpt of *Devi* #3—Dream Sequence” close-reading of these scenes with Basu’s commentary (top) and his original scrip/design ideas.

On the right, the two panels of *Debi* that Bau uses to illustrate the learning curve of panel layout. Notice the different shapes of the panels (wide and thin rectangles placed vertically and horizontally, as well as the triangle/quadrilateral split on the right page) and the wavering gutters. Also notice the close-up and unanchored position of Tara in the middle panel on the left, and then on the top right as she considers the different incarnations of herself (Tara as she could have been, was, is not, dreams of being, and will never be) listed on the bottom left panel.

If one knows to look for such superhero spatial communicative modes in *Turbulence*, it quickly becomes apparent that Basu considers how such visual elements can successfully represent complicated emotions and ideas. I'm not making a claim of artistic hierarchy, only of important connection: Customer reviews are *very* divided about loving/loathing the descriptions and action sequences of the novel, claiming at times that the novel reads like a movie script—or more accurately, the layout of panels from a comic book.²⁵¹ Such reactions indicate that Basu continued contemplating the relationship of superhumans to space and deliberately drew from his previous authorial experience to achieve particular effects in *Turbulence*. He allows readers to experience the same type of spatial epiphany in his novel form, whether they enjoy it or not, by aligning the modes his heroes spatial movement with different models of citizenship.

In the close readings that follow, I analyze Basu's main superheroes with the awareness of superhero comic book history, the spatial decoding categories of Soja, and the spatial attentiveness prescribed by McCloud. My method reveals that in *Turbulence*, citizen loyalties are dependent on the spatialized components of their superpowers: The more traditionally powered, non-spatially focused characters, Jai and Vir, have more limited perspectives than the international and influential Uzma or the boundary-erasing, and thus post-national, powered characters, Tia and Aman. As we read, the following characters represent incrementally increasing spatial movement-powers (see Figure 5).

Jai ≤ Vir ≤ Uzma ≤ Tia ≤ Aman

Narrow nationalism, grounded, spatially restricted, state → alterable nationalism, global, spatially unfettered

Figure 5: A Range of Spatial Powers

²⁵¹ Indeed, Hollywood has been quite interested in Graphic India's comics as storyboards for films.

There are two additional superheroes that warrant mentioning, though they do *not* operate to suggest citizenship modes, and as such do not appear in the schematic above nor in my analyses in the next section. One, Kalki, is born as an empowered avatar of Vishnu, but this seemingly ultimate figure is quickly relegated to the sidelines of the narrative. Even though Basu has experience modernizing and productively capitalizing on Hindu religious figures for contemporary comic book consumers, he does not choose to make Kalki a natural, nor a crucial, fit into the novel's main questions of citizenship and identity.²⁵² By including a Hindu avatar only in order to dismantle a BJP-styled government movement, Basu removes the mythology that supports Hindutva politics, separating religious belief from national homeland.²⁵³ If there is any hope for the different modes of national/global engagement that Basu explores through his other superhero characters, the emotional vitriol of essentialist logic underlying movements like Hindutva *must* be pinned down. In order to make this type of logic vulnerable to such defeat, Basu avails himself of the formal practices of the superhero genre, allegorizing it as the narrative's *supervillain* and the other figure I need to briefly mention: Namrata. She is a journalist who abuses her power to incite, control, and memory-wipe mobs. (The memory loss element of Namrata's increased power is particularly poignant: As a journalist, Namrata should work to *establish* a record of violent outbreaks so that posterity cannot forget.²⁵⁴) She gets away

²⁵² See my explanation of on Basu's work with the Durga-associated *Devi* comic above.

²⁵³ Kalki's would-be-followers plan on eradicating "terrorism, Communism, the internet, the English language, Pakistan, bikinis, China, Hollywood, the entire Arab world, and women's jeans" (95). This list of repeals is angled to revise India's position as a nation that is globally located and dependent on international business relationships. Basu published his novel two years before the BJP came to a majority in Parliament, and Modi became Prime Minister in India's 2014 election. Yet, while *Turbulence* cannot be a response to the aftermath of the BJP's most sweeping election, I contend that Basu writes back against the BJP's growing empowerment by addressing the events that helped put them into office—events like the Gujarat pogrom. Reading *Turbulence* in this context as a work that challenges the political pendulum swinging over to the BJP's side of the ideological arena allows us to understand what, to Basu, is dangerous and cyclic about certain modes of nationalism.

²⁵⁴ Likewise, this element of her power connects Namrata's particularly fictional violence to actual violence, such as that which erupted in Gujarat. As Ghassem-Fachandi states, "Participants who partake in the emotional rage that is mobilized by key actors and organizations often share a profound belief in their own innocence during the events

with her evil actions for so long by hiding behind the alibi of investigative journalism—as a reporter, she is perceived by the other heroes to be “one of the good guys, hopefully” (254).²⁵⁵ However, as is shown in the reality of the Gujarat riots where local coverage was used to incite violence, essentialist measures are often couched in the positive light of faith, and media coverage can demystify and inflame, witness, and silence events.²⁵⁶ Intentionally, I think, Basu indicates the resilience of such divisionary rhetoric by allowing Namrata to slip through to the end of the novel, but also highlights the inherent weakness of Othering ideologies in the way he has the superheroes defeat her: Jai “picks up a police car one-handed, and . . . swings the car down and squashes her like a bug” (323). By the novel’s conclusion, Kalki and Namrata are safely sequestered/eradicated, making way for the only “available” options of superpower citizenship that range from Jai to Aman.

In my close readings, I began with Jai, the hero located at traditional end of my scale, working through the spatial limitations and more nationalist ideological modes of citizenship of Jai, Vir, and even Uzma in order to showcase the radical allegorical offerings of Tia and Aman. For while Jai and Vir prioritize the scale of the national, and while Uzma is able to zoom out and

and are therefore later incapable or unwilling to support legal retribution and redress, resulting in moral impunity for the perpetrators” (9). Namrata’s ability to force people to enact violence makes them innocent while guilty, and her ability to make those conducting violence in her mobs forget that their actions place them in a position where they are “incapable” of participating in any type of legal or moral redress. Such fictional rewriting or censorship of history is tragically familiar, no matter the national context. Since this chapter is an Indian case study, readers interested in alternative accounts of public national narratives could consider works like Emma Tarlo’s *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (2003), T. R. Chouhan’s *Bhopal: The Inside Story* (1994), Tarun K. Saint’s *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, Fiction* (2010), and Jill Didur’s *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* (2006). For one of many articles on how fictional novels can also work as investigative counter-myths, consider Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s “Handcuffed to History: Partition and the Indian Novel in English” in *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (2015).

²⁵⁵ When Tia posits that Namrata is culpable for the cricket riot (“She knew this was going to happen. . . . she could have warned the police or something”), both Aman and Uzma defend Namrata since, after all, “She’s a reporter, her job is to report . . . She just has a leg up on the competition” (Basu 153).

²⁵⁶ Although I continue to explore a couple of choice Indian examples above, the media’s ability to provoke and organize violence is seen in many recorded pogroms, including the blatant dehumanizing radio broadcasts of the Rwandan genocide that called for Hutu citizens to eradicate Tutsi citizens, who were described as (among other things) “cockroaches” (Mahmood, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*).

engage at the scale of the international, Aman and Tia have unique powers that allow them to access a relatively new scale of the global, and (I argue) a new scale of citizenship.²⁵⁷

4.5 SPECIFIC POWER SETS AND SPACE: FIVE CASES OF SUPERPOWERED CITIZENSHIP REVISION

“Can you imagine what we could achieve together? . . . We could stop global warming, make the Sahara a rice bowl, save endangered animals, stop genocide, find alternatives to oil, stop the damned recession. The kind of things superheroes would do in comics, except that *Rural Infrastructure Development League* comics wouldn’t really sell well next to *Bondage Wonder Woman*.”
(Basu, *Turbulence* 82)

4.5.1 Jai

“Squadron Leader Jai Mathur is the Air Force man of every Indian woman’s dreams; the kind of man you’d imagine sacrificing his life for the nation in a thrilling Bollywood movie, leaving behind a beautiful, dignified wife and a sobbing, impossibly cute daughter.”
(Basu, *Turbulence* 106)

²⁵⁷ Consider that we may have *just* witnessed the creation of the most accurate rectangular map of the world with the AuthaGraph World Map by Hajime Narukawa. Narukawa used a method of gnomonic projection to maintain the area and relative relationship of the surface area of the globe, transferring the world into a map that “maintains a geographical relation between adjacent world maps,” eliminating one prescriptive focus of the map (Doré, “This map of each is the most accurate ever produced”). So while a relatively new world “map” like Google Earth digitizes the globe, Narukawa’s process brings the planet into the more recognizable rectangle of a map. As he explains, he wanted his more accurate and fluid map to have the same user-interface capabilities as the previous and familiar world map: the “Mercator projection [has] the whole world . . . neatly expressed in a rectangle. As you notice, . . . computer screens are rectangular . . . Most information is formatted to fit in a rectangle. So, fitting the whole world into a rectangle like this is a great idea. However, this rectangle shape has its disadvantages...” (Narukawa, as captioned in English on YouTube). One such disadvantage, the skewing of our spherical Earth, is corrected in Narukawa’s map. Other disadvantages of the skewed Mercator map were actually advantageous to select populations, as pointed out by the fictional Organization of Cartographers for Social Equality in Aaron Sorkin’s 1999-2006 television series, *The West Wing*:

“The Mercator projection has fostered European imperialist attitudes for centuries and created an ethnic bias against the Third World.”

[A more accurate map is projected, noticeably resizing the African continent, Alaska, and South Africa, and reorienting Europe]

“What the hell is that?”

“It’s where you’ve been living, this whole time.” (“Somebody’s Going to Emergency, Somebody’s Going to Jail,” 2000)

Jai is a superhuman of incredible strength and resilience who nevertheless must rely on the technology or powers of others in order to maneuver. He has no power that allows him to easily move beyond the borders of the nation. Jai is the least likely to turn into a global hero because his powers do nothing to challenge his narrow conception that all spaces must remain territorialized, inherently available for the taking by the strongest force: him. Since he views himself as a god, Jai is not interested in becoming a global citizen; his investment is in amassing territory, not managing it (199). Jai's powers only encourage him to echo imperialist desires:

Jai has decided to bring back into fashion an aspiration that died out in the middle of the twentieth century: military conquest of the world. . . . He wants to accomplish what Genghis Khan, Alexander and Julius Caesar could not. . . . He obsessively studies great world leaders, trying to understand how to fake benevolence, compassion, divinity. (195)

. . . Jai has told Aman, the world will be much better off under his rule. And not just because the nation-state is a failed concept based on artificial barriers and all will be as one under Jai, but because millions of people, mostly the poorest and weakest and hence the greatest burdens on society, will be dead. (199)

Jai does not forgo his Indian loyalty, but, as a nationalist cynic, he is able to attach his Indian loyalty to a new version of global-dominating Indian-ness.²⁵⁸ While Jai is a strategist who understands the importance of generating and controlling physical and social spaces, he is limited by his power set and by the predilections that influenced the specifics of his powers.

²⁵⁸ India's history as a conquered country prevents Jai from conquering the world for India; Jai's "chief regret is that he cannot conquer the world in India's name, that the world will never quake in fear of the Indian Air Force. As a student of Indian history, Jai is deeply chagrined by the fact that India has proven to be a warm, welcoming and exotic destination of choice for every possible invading party . . . the Indian armed forces . . . continued to remain spineless even with Jai's supreme might at their command" (199). Besides, Jai does not have to worry about competing loyalties between India and his own global empire for a long time because his sequence of domination is routed through the wealth rankings of the International Monetary Fund, and India is rather far down the list (198).

This is a man who grew up from his love of He-Man, G. I. Joe, and toy guns into a zealous and effective military patriot, who now has plans to rule the world in a manner that involves “ceremonial handshakes,” a new flag of “Jai’s emblem, a saffron sun on black,” and a “new national anthem” (192, 194). He is uninterested in envisioning another way of engaging with the world, and his powers do not present an opportunity for re-vision. Jai is the embodiment of the “betrayal” at the heart of nationalism, a model that Chatterjee asserts can “confer freedom only by imposing at the same time a whole set of new controls,” setting restrictions that “define a cultural identity for the nation only by excluding many from its fold” (154). The irony of Jai’s plan for a united planetary empire is that it depends on the death of millions of people unimportant to his plan (194, 196). Much like any essentialist mode that disparages “Others,” Jai’s unified nationalized planet has no room for those that Jai determines are a “burden.”²⁵⁹ Readers who may celebrate such exclusions when they are presented as acts of national identity inscription still know to label Jai as a villain because of this massive genocidal exclusion.

Indeed, for most of *Turbulence*, Jai is a force restricting the movement and accessibility of others, establishing new borders based on terribly exclusive policies of belonging (Basu 63-4). He even assassinates British citizens from the plane who may have been gifted with superpowers (Basu 110). Ironically, Jai’s beloved parents are part of the Indian diaspora residing in London. Their international identity, reminiscent of Uzma’s, is his only tentative connection to and opportunity for personal motivation toward a cooperative global mode. It is an opportunity that is violently extinguished when he suffers at the hands of the same type of xenophobia he previously practiced: On his way to save his family from one of Namrata’s mobs, he is detained by targeted airport security profiling at Heathrow Airport (165). As Massey would point out, the

²⁵⁹ Perhaps protesting students, disenfranchised castes, and those of a minority faith.

powerful Jai remains one of those spatial inhabitants without control over the time-space compression, one of the postcolonial citizens “who come[s] half way round the world only to get held up in an interrogation room at Heathrow” (150). The fear of the international Other, of people with brown skin, and of the uncontrollable threat of terrorism, turns out to be more detrimentally powerful than even Jai’s strength:

“[T]he crowd standing outside the Mathur home in Harrow, chanting, shaking fists and placards . . . Jai’s walk had quickened to a run, and then, when the front door broke, he had plunged into a howling mass, a blur of pure anger, sending bodies flying, cutting a way through. But by the time he entered the house—leaping in through a first-floor window—his family had been torn apart.” (253)

While the emphasis of Jai’s physical abilities failing him (not allowing him to cover enough space rapidly enough) shows the limits of his seemingly god-like state, Basu’s initial description of *this* mob emphasizes twenty-first century identity tensions, reminding readers that Jai is betrayed by the very version of discriminatory hierarchies he practiced, a betrayal that costs him his family.

Jai’s subsuming of nationalism for a global cause is *also* seen on the opposite end of the superhero spectrum. Indeed, during a dark moment of introspective, Aman ponders how “the scariest realization . . . is that he and Jai have a lot in common” (201). The crucial difference is presented through their opposing power sets: Jai is an operator of might (like Rushdie’s Shiva)

while Aman embodies communication and networking (like Rushdie's Saleem).²⁶⁰ As such, Jai is necessarily reined in at the end of the novel, while Aman is allowed to go meddling freely.²⁶¹

4.5.2 Vir

"Vir is fine," Aman says. "Short, means brave, which fits, good strong name."
... "I wouldn't mind a superhero name ..."
"Yes, but all the good ones are taken. Trust me—I've looked," Aman says.
"All the good *English* names are taken, you mean," Vir says. "I could have a Hindi name."
"You already do, Vir. And I look forward to watching the world's interviewers mangle it in the years to come. Look, your name is easy—thank the gods you're not Chinese or Sri Lankan. People around the world will be able to say 'Vir' without much trouble."
(Basu, *Turbulence* 263)

While Jai wants to build a worldwide empire around *himself*, Flight Lieutenant Vir Singh wants to elevate India—he does not see the nation as a flawed construct, but as something to be worshiped. Yet, I locate Vir on my scale as being closer in superpowered-spatial-perspective, and thus citizenship ideology, to the global modes of Aman and Tia. Vir is eventually able to become a more global citizen because of his power set, for while Vir also possesses some super strength and resilience, he also has one crucial additional power: flying. Eventually, the ability of unaided flight gives Vir the perspective he needs to begin shifting from the position of a devoted nationalist to a loyal global citizen.

This does not happen easily. In fact, we first meet Vir as he prepares to use his powers to single-man-bomb a Pakistani nuclear research facility. Aman contacts Vir to halt the attack:

²⁶⁰ For more detail, refer back to my comparison of *Midnight's Children* and *Turbulence* at the beginning of this chapter.

²⁶¹ Basu ends the novel by harnessing Jai's destructive capabilities by placing him literally under the command of the British-Pakistani mandate-powered Uzma, making him a masked asset (The Faceless) for an upcoming international superhero justice team. Such enforced servitude toward a global community is both Jai's personal hell and an effective taming of rampant essentialism.

You're the finest, most powerful human being India's ever produced. . . . You're a— and I can't believe I'm saying this out loud—a superhero. . . . Someone who should be setting an example. Who's the greatest Indian leader ever?

'Gandhi?'

'Our survey says... Gandhi. Ask yourself this. If Gandhi had your powers, would he be flying around above a Pakistani nuclear site wiping his foggy glasses and trying to start World War Three, or would he be doing something slightly more productive? . . .

What did you dream about on the plane from London, Vir? I dreamt of big shiny spaceships and aliens. Maybe that's what you should be thinking of, not pig-headed local missions. . . . The world needs you for more than this, Vir. I could use your help, this is bigger than India or Pakistan.' (Basu 12-3)²⁶²

This opening scene feints that flying, and the ability to see the false lines of maps, is only another way to enforce the nation's imagined borders. Vir is prompted by a fearful version of global community and border-eradicating technologies: the ever-present threat of nuclear war.

²⁶² Perhaps ironically, one of the main examples of the Mahatma in Indian SF is Manjula Padmanabhan's "Gandhi Toxin" (*Kleptomania*, 2004). In it, Gandhi's blood descendent Gamma clones the Mahatma's DNA, which is then weaponized by an all-powerful, multinational corporation and disseminated across the world by mosquitoes. One of the main points of the story is the corporation's dangerous misidentification of nonviolent revolution for complacent passivity; the corporate heads assume the "Gandhi Toxin" will give them world dominion over easily led populations, but ultimately, it radically reorients global hierarchies and "poisons" the corporate leaders. For further reading on Padmanabhan's story, see Eric D. Smith's chapter "Claiming the Futures That Are, or, The Cunning of History in Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* and Manjula Padmanabhan's 'Gandhi-Toxin'" in his *Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction* (2012).

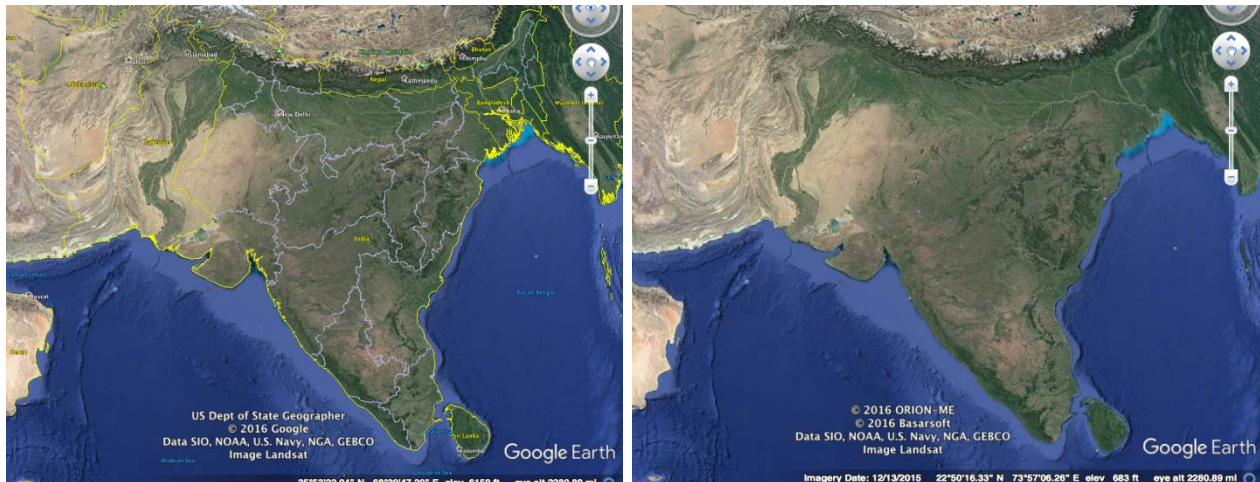


Figure 6: Google Earth. Removable Borders.

Google Earth image of India with (on the left) and without (on the right) national borders visual overlay. On this platform, national borders are as easy to remove as toggling a button.

But in a move emblematic of Vir’s ultimate arc, this version of the global war community is challenged and diffused for the possibility of a new global mode (one that I have replicated for readers in Figure 6 via Google Maps). Aman uses Vir’s patriotism—evidenced by his naming of the renowned peaceful protestor and pro-United India icon of Gandhi—to prompt him to look *beyond* the national.²⁶³ (As I’ll show, Aman is often the figure disrupting less global viewpoints of his teammates.) Basu does something smart in the first fifteen pages of his novel by indicating to the reader that the characters refusing to gain a sense of the larger picture will nevertheless be persuaded toward that perspective. This vision is far “bigger” than the nation, especially if we

²⁶³ Interestingly, although *Amar Chitra Katha* comics ran two episodes devoted to Gandhi’s life (*Mahatma Gandhi I: The Early Days*, no. 414, 1989; and *Mahatma Gandhi II: The Father of the Nation*, no. 416, 1989), McLain points out that *ACK* comics were prone to linking Gandhi’s path of nonviolence to incredibly violent retributions like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (1917-19). Although *ACK* gave Gandhi the title of “Father of the Nation,” his physical presence in the comics was never as deified, as they did for more extreme and militarized nationalist figures like Subhas Chandra Bose (*Subhas Chandra Bose*, no. 77, 1975), whose cover depicted him as a figure whose glory and importance to the national movement couldn’t be contained by the medium of his narrative (for he “looms so large that he breaks out of the frame”) (McLain 171).

consider the counter of “spaceships and aliens” that Aman offers as conceivable goals (see Fig. 6) (Basu 13). Looking outside of one’s patriotic loyalties is not only “what you *should* be thinking of” in this novel, but what you *can*, thanks to the novum challenging readers to consider what may be “bigger than India or Pakistan” (Basu 13). No matter how difficult it is to move beyond the scarred history of Pakistan and India, or fear rising from other modes of world networks, like nuclear war or terrorism, Basu keeps returning to the possibilities of a larger perspective.

Each time Vir tries to stake an exclusively Indian position, the other superheroes, especially Aman, dissuade him or even rewrite the patriotic symbolism Vir is so adamant about.²⁶⁴ This type of hardline-nationalism revision is most evident during Vir’s coming-out-as-a-superhero speech, which he decides should occur at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the India Gate in New Delhi.²⁶⁵ This location is strategically chosen by the heroes as being an easily exited location, but it is also representative of their potential in history: Both the memorialized soldiers and the novel’s superheroes simultaneously are and are not the warriors of India. The

²⁶⁴ Another instance of Vir attempting to (re)nationalize his superhero persona is the creation of his superhero costume. Aman demands that Vir’s costume “shouldn’t be anything definitely ethnic either—no kurtas, no turban” (260). His non-flag and non-ethnic superhero outfit is repurposed and re-coded with Indian—and specifically Hindu—markers by the two other superheroes, packaging it to be attractive to a devotee of the nation, even as they insist on its fluid inscription:

The blue stands for the *night sky* and the blue bit in the *middle of the Indian flag* and the *skin of Krishna* . . . The black is for *coolness* and the *evil he will spend his life fighting*. We’ll cover the brand logo with . . . a wheel . . . We’ll tell him it stands for the *wheel in the Indian flag*, the *wheel of time, justice, speed, the Earth, anything*. He’ll like it. (emphasis mine, 265)

And Vir does. He keeps trying to position himself as an all-Indian hero, but the “Indian way” includes more than just national martyrs like Gandhi, religious deities like Krishna, or even the Tiranga wheel. Even when deciding what he should be called, Vir wants to be a personified image of the imagined—symbolically constructed, self-inscribed—Indian nation, trying to go by the name “Paramvir” as a reflection of the Param Vir Chakra, an Indian military award for bravery, even though he already has a less militarized name with the same associations (263). This is also why Vir is ultimately able to be reoriented away from the merely national and into the global. While the spinning wheel on Vir’s costume can be related to the Indian flag, it can also, as Uzma points out, be interpreted in many other ways. It’s not a complete separation from the nation, but a lessening of nationalism’s need to limit community.

²⁶⁵ The India Gate is a national memorial to 82,000 soldiers that died fighting on behalf of the British Empire in World War One. After the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, there was an additional memorial created at the base of the gate.

World War One veterans honored by the Gate were not yet citizens of an independent India; the superheroes will fight on a global scale, but not as part of the military for the nation of India. Rather, they will be working for the benefit of humankind and protection of humans from superhumankind, though this is something Vir is not entirely convinced of yet.²⁶⁶

Delhi has stopped moving. This is because Rajpath, right in the centre of the city, is flooded with people . . . It's a bigger crowd than any that's ever been seen on a Republic Day parade, when tanks and troops and ugly floats from all the Indian states display their skills . . . The crowd bursts into applause as Vir appears, a speck of black zipping effortlessly through the sky. He's carrying an Indian flag . . . it flutters bravely as he swoops towards India Gate. There's a collective gasp as . . . thousands of Delhiites struggle to believe the spectacle before them—they've seen it on screen before dozens of times, but here it is, right here in the real world, and it's too much to take. A flying man. A superhero . . . the silence is deafening . . . the whole crowd takes a step back." (284)

The moment Vir arrives on the scene by *flying*, he changes the space; the fantastic breakthrough of one type of previously purely imaginative population (superheroes from films and television shows) momentarily diminishes the agreed-upon reality of another imagined population—the imagined nation (as supported by city-central memorials and Republic Day parades).²⁶⁷ Aman further ensures the imaginative shift by re-coding Vir's patriotic use of the Indian flag through an "official website . . . about how [Vir] essentially handed his Indian-ness back to the spirits of the

²⁶⁶ Vir, after all, *has* flown around the world helping people (we're given specific examples from New Mexico, Mongolia, the Himalayas, Vladivostok) and decided that "Deserting the Indian Air Force, betraying his family's traditions—these were things he had found he could do—but abandoning the entire world in its hour of need? Not Vir Singh" (250). And yet, he refuses to surrender his dedication to his nation's flag, memorials, or military. I think this is more likely to be a symptom of Basu acknowledging the complexity of national appeal and structure than any untidiness in writing.

²⁶⁷ "Thousands of Delhiites struggle to believe the spectacle . . . they've seen it on screen before . . . but here it is, right here in the real world" (281).

soldiers who died for his country before him. He's a citizen of the world now" (283). The interactions surrounding Vir's nationalist drive allow Basu to argue that such national infatuation is dated, lessened by connective technologies and obliterated by superpowers. While the ideas, collectives, and loyalties that allow for the national landscape to survive do not cease to exist, they are minimized because everything in this novel pivots toward a globalized citizenship, one supported by new hierarchies of *superpowers*.

Vir only understands this after taking a revitalizing flight around the world, doing anonymous good acts in various countries. His superpower of flight enables him to travel without borders or national documentation. From this untethered experience, he learns a cosmopolitan mode of being dedicated to a larger arena of civic investment. Vir does not turn his back on the nation of India, but looks at a larger context of the Indian nation, one that includes the Indian diaspora and the other ties that India has with the rest of the world (see Figure 6 for a sense of a similarly expanded national scale).



Figure 7: Image from NASA. Zoomed-out Citizenship.

Obviously, Vir's propensity to nationally inscribe arenas capable of acting as larger systems is also historically supported. "Claiming" the moon for mankind while marking it with a U.S. flag, for instance, serves a similar function as Vir's flag-holding introduction of superpowers.

Photo by National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Apollo 12 Image Library.

Comparing Vir and Jai with Uzma, Tia, and Aman, you can see Basu's positing of more than simply nationalist loyalties lie with the powers that refuse the restrictions of physical space and allow an even more globally immersive perspective. It's with them that the real opportunity for a new experience of citizen-space resides *because* they are powerful in the realm of lived and social space, not only physical space. Instead, they revise more slippery and deeply entrenched spaces, ones I've explored in my earlier chapters, underlying our imagined community structures.

4.5.3 Uzma

"They wander up and down Mumbai and find that all available housing is a) too expensive b) too small c) too remote d) simply not available because Uzma is female, Uzma is Muslim, Uzma is single, Uzma is foreign, Uzma is alone, Uzma is an actress, and you know what they say about struggling actresses."
(Basu, *Turbulence* 28)

Although most characters in the novel are Indian, Uzma is a Muslim British-Pakistani. Her presence disturbs the idea that Indian nationalism (or a novel about Indian superheroes) could ever restrict its focus to Indian Hindus. Uzma's specific identity reminds readers of the complicated Indian history; the only reason she is a British-*Pakistani* instead of a British-Indian citizen is because Uzma's grandparents were directly affected by Partition (Basu 24). Although her grandmother was restrained—and renationalized—by Partition, Uzma's actions are not restricted by national borders. Instead, she is a willing and comfortable inhabitant of the spaces between national loci: She is raised in London, has dated Irish and British-Pakistani men, and travels to India in order to break into the globalized market of Bollywood (Basu 24-9). Uzma's international context is shown each time she contradicts people who gloss over her identity. She

reminds us that narrowly defined understandings of citizenship overlook the diasporic population:

“We want to form a real-world Justice League—of India,” Aman says.

“I’m British. My parents are Pakistani,” Uzma replies.

“I know. I was kidding.”

“Well, stop.” (Basu 61)

Readers only need to consider the long list of prejudiced disqualifications given by Uzma’s prospective Indian landlords early in the novel (epigraph above) to understand that her budding superpowers of being adored and being able to command are a critique of categorization. Uzma becomes the heroine who challenges the harsh silencing and control of various “Others” in India. According to the novel, these include people who are female, non-Hindu, foreign, and without a male relative or relation to stand for one’s decency (Basu 28). While the other heroes, such as Jai and Vir, could successfully function in a Hindutva nation, Uzma could never support such a nationalist endeavor. She herself is Muslim, of course, but more importantly for Basu’s novel, she never practices her faith. Uzma is an unapologetic internationalist who can (and does) command all types of individuals in India, Great Britain, and America (*Resistance* and *Turbulence*). As a cosmopolitan, Uzma is not interested in a conquering global perspective, but rather works on behalf of a productive, co-operative one. She cannot “order” the death of Jai’s imperialism, but as the representative of internationalism’s business and bonds, she can restrain (and eventually re-train) Jai, using his might to enforce beneficial systems (Basu 345). Though Uzma could *literally* take over the world with her

superpower ability to command others to follow her will, she does not give in to the temptation.²⁶⁸

I locate Uzma as the mid-point of my scale because in one sense, her powers are revisionary—they allow the “subaltern” woman to speak in a way that forces others to listen. Indeed, Uzma becomes the public figurehead of the new superhero team. When we contrast her powerful position at the end of the novel with the purposeful rejection of her early prospective landlords, Uzma represents the potential in the often shunned individual and in the international figure of a dual-citizen child of the diaspora (345).²⁶⁹ As a figure that is uniquely positioned between nations, with the spatially unbound power of vocalized speeches, Uzma also acts as a liminal spatial power between the more conservative, national, and traditionally spatialized Jai and Vir, and the more radical, global, and futuristically spatialized Tia and Aman. She is positioned as the viable leader of an alternative—but not quite alternative enough—version of global community. I believe this is why, at the end of *Resistance*, Aman warns that her team will be “the pawns of large companies and other people who want to keep things exactly the way they are” (353; played out in *Resistance*). Although Uzma is one of the main protagonists and her power to alter modes of national conduct and international hierarchies through *words* is celebrated, Basu still suggests that Uzma is not quite radical enough. She works internationally but cannot fully operate in the mode of global citizenship. I think this limit is partially because of her powers, which allow her to tinker with national borders without allowing her intimate access to the lived perspective that seems so crucial for a global understanding. Tia and Aman,

²⁶⁸ One symbolic example of this turn away from a global mode of conquest is when Uzma decides against keeping the Koh-i-Noor after Jai’s defeat (Basu 353).

²⁶⁹ This reasoning may also be coded as problematic, since this awesome power arises from the diaspora and not the “third world.” However, it makes sense that someone with an international identity would be capable of imagining a power that functions for the benefit of international systems.

however, have powers that permit them such perspectives, which is why I consider them to be the most promising of Basu's characters: They do the most interesting spatial revisions to citizenship.

4.5.4 Tia

“‘Aman dreamt of aliens,’ a Tia said, ‘I dreamt of photo albums, all with me in them, but different lives.’”
(Basu, *Turbulence* 54-5)

Tia is described as an “adorable” Bengali woman who spends the flight dreaming of lives other than the one she lives in Darjeeling, where her in-laws are verbally abusive and her husband is involved in an affair (60). Though she wishes to leave, Tia remains because she is devoted to raising her son (60). She walks off the plane with the ability to multiply—to divide herself into infinite Tias and go live the various lives she dreamed of with little fear of reprisal: If one Tia dies, only that Tia turns to dust. Although able to function (and even die) separately, if the different Tias merge, they gain first-hand knowledge and the physical aftermath from their respective experiences. Therefore, Tia is capable of experiencing an infinite number of lived spaces. This complex relationship is illustrated in a simple scene I deeply love, where five Tias do intense exercises to keep a negative weight balance for every two Tias “consuming slabs of dark chocolate like a tractor beam” (95). My point about these abilities, other than my envy, is that Tia cannot fly, but her powers still allow her to go everywhere on Earth. If Uzma is positioned as an international figure because of her family history, Tia becomes the ultimate cosmopolitan through powers, which enable her to practice every skill, experience every physical space, and live every type of life.

This is very different from the magnificent but limited traditional superhero that can only exist in one place at one time, a limit that also affects Jai, Vir, and Uzma.²⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Tia is always Tia, but she is vast and contains multitudes. As the only character that is both a mother and a superhero in the novel, Tia's power also alters her relationship to gendered space. She's able to uphold her location in the private domain, "sleeping next to her son in New Delhi," while immersed in the public domain, "learning the tango in Madrid," working as a costume designer in Bollywood, "meditating in Tibet," and fighting to end the conflict in the Congo (82).²⁷¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, this multitasking power that allows Tia to be a present mom to her son is also what enables her to be one of the most powerful superheroes.²⁷² This power that allows her "[d]ifferent choices, different paths" is one that allows her to also keep up with the even less

²⁷⁰ Superman can fly, is bulletproof, is strong, and has X-ray and laser vision, but he can only hold one job at a time and can only *be* in one place at a time. Thus, Superman necessitates quick phone-booth costume changes and his glasses-wearing alias, Clark Kent. Even the Flash can technically only be in one location at a time, though that time is impossible to separate by the human eye. To my knowledge, the only superhero comparable to Tia is *Marvel's* Multiple Man, who is referenced by Tia when conversing about superhero names ("Multiple Man"). Yet, Multiple Man deliberately tries to curtail the number of duplicates he makes and is often located in isolated farms, islands, and small superhero teams in his narrative arc. This is the opposite of Tia, who relishes her ability to multiply and exist in many spaces and capacities. It is also important to notice the difference between the young mutant man James Arthur Madrox, who was born with his powers, and Tia, who gains her superpower *because* she is an adult and mother. Tia, then, is given the power to live like the ultimate superpowered, globalized motherhood. She is a supermom, able to have (multiple) careers, raise her child, uphold the demands of her in-laws, save her marriage, travel the world, and defeat evil villains simultaneously.

²⁷¹ Tia's powers thus also manifest the idea of the woman who can "do it all." Interestingly, for this chapter, this concept was depicted on the first cover of *Ms.* magazine in the spring of 1972 as the Hindu goddess Kali, her many arms holding objects such as a frying pan, typewriter, clock, mirror, steering wheel, iron, and telephone, with a baby glowing in her womb, while the second *Ms.* cover showed the American hero Wonder Woman running "for President," striding over a dys/u-topian landscape (Pollitt, "Wonder Woman's Kinky Feminist Roots").

²⁷² There is one other potential mother, Premalata. Although she frequently references a deceased husband, if she has any children, they are not detailed. She is, however, a maternal figure, and the rest of the characters respectfully refer to her as "aunty" or "Premalata ji" (295). Premalata is only seen using her superpower a couple of times in the novel—it haunts her, and haunts India; there's no place for her Mother-India abilities to fit in the global structure of the UNIT team created at the end of *Turbulence*. For Premalata, a "plump, anxious-looking middle-aged woman in a sari" can raise the dead and control them—even urge them to fight for her—by singing: "Her voice is sweet, sad, incredibly high-pitched and melodious. She sings an old Hindi song, the song of a mother sending her sons to war. Near the door, ten corpses rise and heft their guns" (237). Playing off the power of music, of nostalgia, of a mother's love for her duty-bound children, and of the figure of a traditional wife, in a novel with the goal of reinforcing the national construct, Premalata would be the most powerful, and dangerous, character. As I've shown, *Turbulence* is a novel with an inverse goal; instead, Premalata is *too* akin to Mother India, and *too* disturbed by her powers to continue using them. She remains a minor character in the background, one who faints during the final battle and quits immediately after, clearing the way for the other superpowers that do not rely upon the dead, memories, or nostalgia (345).

physically fettered Aman: Tia can be *everywhere*. This ability allows her to have an inclusive and global experience of many lived spaces without requiring her to surrender or eliminate any particular lived space. Limitations and boundaries, especially those that are socially imagined, are easily surmounted by such a power.

Such a multiple perspective allows Tia to think differently about her familial, national, and global loyalties. She can go wherever she wants and exists both within and outside the constraints of tradition and the nation. When Namrata causes a riot at a cricket match, Tia is capable of surviving because she divides herself: “[Aman] sees another Tia emerge. Her face contorted in fury, she runs out with the mob of journalists, unnoticed in the chaos, leaving a confused, worried Tia behind, looking around her at the rapidly emptying press box” (155). It is because of her multitudinous self that Tia is only one of two characters considered “immune” to Namrata’s divisive rhetoric. Tia can never fully be controlled by such maneuvers because she, like the actual nation, is not a single type of citizen/audience. Tia shows that it may be less productive to blame those who get wrapped up in divisionary rhetoric than to *respect* the ability to empathize and consider alternative positions—after all, she literally experiences both sides of the conflict when one Tia joins the essentialized rampage (152).

Tia represents a diverse but united nation; such a multi-perspective is also more globally oriented. Tia wields a stronger power for dismantling current national frameworks. She is one of two superpowered heroes who attempt to disrupt preconditioned nationalist patterns because she moves through and draws power from multiple lived spaces. She is able to fully exist as an Indian citizen *and* as a fluid citizen of the world, and each experience informs the other.²⁷³ I

²⁷³ Her type of multidirectional movement is not only more encompassing, it is non-invasive: She does not appropriate the lived spaces of others in order to use space as a generative power. Indeed, one of Jai’s henchmen can do such superpowered appropriation—or, as he calls it, method acting—by ‘becoming’ various individuals. (Basu

believe this is why Basu makes her such a central figure. Tia is portrayed as an unstoppable force, and her spatial abilities win her respect. In *Resistance*, Tia is infamous, and the general population holds her and Aman (with whom she works closely) aloft as the ultimate global heroes.²⁷⁴ It's not just Tia's ability to multiply and fight that is intimidating; it is her ability to multiply and exist in infinite roles, thereby causing the boundaries of those societal positions and affiliations to become infinitely flexible, which offers inconceivable benefits to a text considering alternative modes of citizenship.

4.5.5 Aman

"The world is inside his head; Aman is everywhere. . . .
Aman is online."
(Basu, *Turbulence* 129)

Although Uzma obtains a power that allows her to *insist* on her importance (overcoming minimizing categorizations), the relatively awkward Aman is empowered with the access needed to manipulate networks and reframe society.²⁷⁵ When explaining his powers to Uzma, Aman

allows this henchman to impersonate figures of national status, including President Obama, Vir, and Jai, before jailing him, effectively sidelining him from most of the action in the novel.) Unlike the awesome Tia, this more limited and capitalist engagement with lived space, where a nationalist-supported consumption occurs, is portrayed with disdain. Compared to Tia's spatial reconsideration, this version of lived-space engagement is weak, for the shapeshifter can never actually fully inhabit another's lived space. His potential for revisionary action is minimal.

²⁷⁴ When the villain of *Resistance* encounters Tia, he thinks back to how he has seen "news footage of Tias in action, taking on a militant base in Zimbabwe: a platoon of beautiful, rifle-toting women in combat fatigues storming a base under heavy fire . . . clusters of Tias turned to dust by RPG fire, replicating and reforming from survivors without falling out of step. He knows what she is capable of, and spares himself the effort of trying to overpower her" (280). If the villain had thought a bit harder about what it meant that those combat Tias were *also* simultaneously working with Aman to solve political corruption while raising a teenage boy, then he would know how much she was capable of. Readers, however, learned this in *Turbulence*.

²⁷⁵ Interestingly, Basu helped generate the voice of a divine character that blends these two facets. Interface, Messenger of the Gods, is one of the powerful figures that bless Tara the Devi with her new abilities. As the "Sultan of style and soundbites, the badshah of broadband and blab, the impresario of image-building and internets, the messiah of media and messaging," Interface ensures that Tara will "look, sound and smell so good they won't know what hit 'em" and guaranteeing "Perfect PR, killer charisma, terrific catchphrases" (*Devi*, Volume 1).

attempts to explain what he knows of his current power set and explicate the desire that may have led to the particularly unfettered form of his powers. He says:

“My powers let me hook up to anything on a network—computers, phones, satellites, all sorts of stuff . . . All our powers grow the more we use them, and I’m not sure there are lots of applications I haven’t even thought up yet. . . . Growing up in Delhi—and Delhi’s a city of networks, the social kind, and contacts and families—I’ve always felt left out of things . . . I’ve never had the connections I needed to make a difference, to be relevant in any way. I don’t know how it was for you growing up in the UK, but here nearly all of us have this huge sense of irrelevance. We’ll never change anything. The world will never know us.” (Basu 58-60)

Aman is given a power capable of bypassing the national borders and international positioning of India because of a postcolonial desire. The emotional weight of postcolonial “irrelevance” is what prompts him to reconsider global systems. Namrata’s and Aman’s powers originate from the same sense of futility and underlying anger at the self-centered feedback bubbles afforded by twenty-first century communications. Namrata laments that “no one got angry about the things going on around us any more, no one cared about anything even when it was in the news” (305), but her power just institutes an alternative manipulative bubble. Aman is able to work around Namrata’s power by “popping” such insulated modes of engagement, neutralizing himself by going online. If Tia’s evasion tactic is capable of being read as the continual fracturing of the Indian citizenship from—but also its inability to be fully dominated by—the forceful application of exclusionary rhetoric, we must consider Aman’s maneuver to illustrate the benefits of expanding one’s own news “bubble” by searching for valid, non-inflammatory news sources, and

also the potential stabilizing effects of maintaining connections with others who are different through global media communications.

Aman is a jumper of citizenship scales, capable of instantly moving from “the local to the transnational” (Hsu 177). Though scale-jumping often describes shady business practices whereby shifting production “capitalists . . . sidestep labor struggles, and evade regulation,” I contend that Aman offers a positive and activist reclaiming of this spatial shift. In making Aman a digital scale-jumper, Basu enacts the equalizing thinking of Neil Smith that to combat negative modes of globalization, “it is essential to build capacities for vulnerable populations—such as laborers, evictees, the unemployed—to jump scales” (Hsu 177). If there is any hope of challenging continued imperial hierarchies, then it is essential for the ignored, discounted, postcolonial individual to jump scales and have a dramatic impact upon events and systems at local and the global registers. Aman seizes such power through the digital, which has been home to “scale-jumping ...[of] twenty-first century movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring, and Black Lives Matter, which have deployed social media to facilitate organizing across local, national, and transnational scales” (Hsu 177).

Aman’s ability means he is in one of the best positions to create effective change and that he will remain one of the most globally minded heroes in the novel. For Aman can go everywhere by going nowhere. He is capable of experiencing the worldwide version of digital technology, and thus is the superhero that is more like our current, real cosmopolitan opportunities than Tia. Interestingly, while Tia is capable of moving through multiple tangible lived spaces, Aman moves and manipulates our twenty-first century *digitally hosted* lived spaces.

This does not mean the digitalscape is located outside the narrative or portrayed intangibly. Unlike Okorafor’s *Lagoon*, which turned the focus away from cyberspace to the

physical and lived spaces of Lagos, Basu *is* invested in the ways in which digital networks control and create communities. His power is unbound, but in order to process it, Aman must understand his power in a spatialized manner. Thus, Aman navigates the internet intimately and as its own valid space in a rather cyberpunk manner. Basu's digitalscape is represented by tangible spatial metaphors; where Neal Stephenson had the street in *Snow Crash*, Basu uses ocean imagery. Unlike the manmade "streets," Basu's digital arena is naturalized and is thus beyond human regulation. The ocean is the most connected, uncontrollable, and live metaphor that Aman seems able to understand.²⁷⁶ Sinking into his power, Aman enters

a swirling pool of liquids, billions of coloured strands coalescing, blending, bubbling. . . . his awareness explodes, as networks expand and intersect through satellites, under-sea cables, phones, and it feels as if he's sinking into the pool, drowning in an ocean of information as the pool swells around him filling his senses, melting and reshaping him into a tiny piece of plankton drifting in the cyber-ocean. . . . Aman is everywhere. (129)

He doesn't even have to "jack in"—he's more thoroughly connected than William Gibson's cyber-cowboys or the goggle-touting gargoyles of Stephenson: There's no need for hardware to enable Aman to "connect." While "surfing" this digital ocean, Aman generates bubble-shaped Aman bots, reflecting that "he has just impregnated the internet" (135). Aman is part of the space he manipulates and exists in; the files and web data he hacks are as much a part of him as the various Tias are of one another. This is a bonded environment. Indeed, at times the conscious internet converses with Aman, proving his power is not that of a digital "conqueror" but that of a collaborator.

²⁷⁶ Much as in *Lagoon*, here the water forms a means of connection, of life, and of change.

Although Aman's postcolonial desire to control and implement effective change is what allows him such power, this desire is also positioned as problematic. At one point, Aman manipulates the most global element of contemporary existence: capitalism and fiscal patterns. He sends out currents of his power, Aman-bubble bots, to seek and re-distribute wealth, shut down crime, halt sweatshop labor, and end political kickbacks.²⁷⁷ Much later in the novel, Uzma challenges him to follow up on his meddling, and the results are not kind. Aman has messed up so many things (thousands of sweatshop laborers are shelter-less, starving, and dying; politicians start to hoard even more public funds) in so many places (Angola, Asia, Botswana, Brazil, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, Texas) that he spirals into despair and shock, and the internet takes control of his "flesh" while Aman reboots (215-8). Thus Aman is an embodiment of global connectivity that is harshly forced to consider how even unbound powers like his, free from physical constraint, may still need to take into account the productive uses of the imagined divisions of humankind.²⁷⁸ In doing so, I believe Basu avoids generating a superpowered utopia, instead uncovering some of the problems that make considering any increased mode of global citizenship fraught.

My scale illustrates that I consider Aman to be the most post-national superhero in the novel. While Tia can be everywhere, only Aman is capable of being everywhere *and* nowhere at once. As a superhero that constantly spans the globe in a method appropriate to today's discussions and online opportunities, Aman's even more boundary-free than the Tias because he

²⁷⁷ Note how the same types of societal revisions appear in all of the texts I use as examples of postcolonial SF: political corruption, capitalism-caused inequality, discrimination vis-a-vis Othering, and violence.

²⁷⁸ Again, the nation is never fully eliminated in this duology, and the homogenizing villain of *Resistance* is sarcastically named the Utopic Corporation.

does not need to leave the country in order to move beyond its borders.²⁷⁹ Instead, Aman is the globalized superhero, fighting crime with fiscal and communication manipulation in the turf of the World Wide Web.

I believe this is why it is Aman, supported by Tia, who decides to be the type of superhero that attempts to walk away at the end of the novel, opting for greater mobility, a more fluid sense of civic loyalty, and the chance to instigate change.²⁸⁰ They're the only ones who are positioned spatially to do so effectively. By reading Basu with a comics-inspired level of attention to space, one thing becomes clear: Our understanding of the world, and of the superhero genre, needs to question why only villains or shadowy antiheroes can leave the nation. *Turbulence* exaggerates the pressures and opportunities, but not the foundational realities, of contemporary Indian existence by questioning how to live in a position of multiple loyalties (national, diasporic, and global). Basu leverages superpowers as a way to re-orient readers to the space of the Indian nation, critically grappling with different modes of nationalism, but ultimately leaving modes unsettled. As in my first chapter on Silvia-Moreno Garcia, I would like to code this unsettledness as hopeful possibility. After all, the end of *Resistance* finds Aman and Uzma combining as co-leaders of a new superhero UNIT featuring Tia, a team unfettered from national ties or corporate control. Aman calls "everyone . . . Every screen in the world lights up" and gives a terrible speech about how "We're going to make the world better" (289). Realizing how horribly he has messed up in communicating to Everyone in the World (we're *really* no longer addressing just the Indian nation), the ultimate ending of the duology is Aman saying "I'll

²⁷⁹ Consider approaches like Jason W. Ellis' "Engineering a Cosmopolitan Future: Race, Nation, and World of Warcraft."

²⁸⁰ Aman is not the first superhero to walk away from his nation. Superman decided to walk away from U.S. citizenship in 2011 (Hudson, "Superman Renounces U.S. Citizenship in 'Action Comics' #900"), and Captain America took a brief respite as the non-national-specific hero Nomad (Cavna, "The bizarre story of when Captain America battled Nixon").

try again” (*Resistance* 289). This ending suggests that new modes of citizen engagement and the ability to correct past mistakes are the whole point of resistance.

In general, Aman’s powers encourage readers to consider how our current connective technologies may enable global citizenship. After all, the novel starts with one of the more accessible spatial revisions, with nothing more miraculous than an everyday international flight.

4.6 BACK TO THE SKY: THE PLANE AS NOVUM INSTIGATOR

“We must search out totally *new ways to anchor ourselves*, for all the old roots—religion, *nation*, community, family, or profession—are now *shaking under* the hurricane impact of *the accelerative thrust*.”
(emphasis mine, Alvin Toffler, as quoted by Hillel Italie in “Alvin Toffler, author of ‘Future Shock,’ dead at 87,” 2016)

“*He’s walked its streets many times, but from the sky it’s a labyrinth of wonders, a place of power and mystery, an alien paradise. He’s never seen it as clearly as he does now*, sitting in the cockpit of a jet stolen from a billionaire. He turns to Vir and grins. The plane dips and banks, and the city sways beneath them, the horizon tilting crazily . . . Vir grabs his microphone.

‘You are now experiencing *turbulence*,’ he says.

Aman can hear Tia giggling through the cockpit door.”

(emphasis mine, Basu, *Turbulence* 290)

When Basu pitched the idea of adapting *Turbulence* into a Bollywood movie, the potential directors gushed about how they loved the “bit with the plane.” Basu was understandably peeved: The plane scenes aren’t actually *in* the novel. We don’t *see* the characters receive their superpowers, and all plane and airport scenes are memories or reported secondhand through news outlets.

However upsetting those misguided directors must have been, I’m afraid I have to agree with them: I, too, love the bit about the plane. I find it fantastic (in both ways) that to obtain superpowers in this novel, characters must use existing technology to *fly* over imagined borders. That their flight is the real-world plane number BA142, which actually comes from the British

Airways Boeing from London to New Delhi, suggests something about our current state of technology and that increasing international codependence may lead to national revision. These superhumans are created in the air, after all. While air space is diligently patrolled and parceled by the various countries of Earth, and airplanes can obviously be used as weapons of horrific slaughter, it is nevertheless also true that the physical experience of world space from a plane is as close as publically accessible non-atmosphere-breaking travel can bring us to a citizenship scale-shattering “blue marble” outer space perspective.

Unlike the popular national imagination expressed by theorists like Benedict Anderson, constructions of a global citizenship have been projected most persistently by science narratives like Carl Sagan’s extreme “pale blue dot” Earth photograph (as mentioned in my project’s Introduction). When it becomes capable through technology or superpowers to gain a previously inaccessible perspective on one’s relative location, it is possible to reconsider what realities one wishes to ascribe to and support. One day after the November 2016 U.S. presidential election, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson went on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. He offered, partially in commiseration of the results, a re-summary of the idea of the “cosmic perspective,” noting that it is

what the world looks like after you’ve studied the vastness of the universe, and you come back to Earth, and there’s this little speck, and people worrying and fighting. And in fact, the best account of the cosmic perspective I have is... ‘You develop *an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world and a compulsion to do something about it*. From out there on the moon, international politics looks so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter million miles away and say, “Look at that, you son of a bitch.”’ That

[quote] is Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 Astronaut. That is the cosmic perspective. (emphasis mine, “From the Moon, Our Politics Seem Petty”)

deGrasse Tyson, through the words of Mitchell, suggests that by physically rising above the nationally coded Earth, individuals are able to more productively consider the implications of maintaining current systems. From a cosmic perspective, astronauts are unable to see the physical boundaries of the imaginary nationscape. Earthbound humans are able to virtually attempt this perspective through NASA photographs and technologies like Google Earth, where you can de-toggle the “Borders and Labels” feature to experience an Earth where the only visible divides are those of oceans and planetary limits (see Figure 7).

Sagan, deGrasse Tyson, and Mitchell all endeavor to generate political change by telling a story of scale-jumping and differently spatialized citizenship/belonging to their fellow humans through the use of an anecdote or a narrated image. Indeed, the possibility of such a supra-human perspective was introduced far earlier than the space-going technologies of satellites or spaceships by a fantastical story.²⁸¹ Mitchell and Sagan offer a technologically enabled perspective that offers new ways of thinking about the space of individual humans in different systems of connection, while SF writers like H. G. Wells and Basu offer imagination-enabled perspectives about the spaces of human connection.

²⁸¹ H. G. Wells combines the type of estranging, outlandish global-imagination of early SF with the scientifically enabled cosmic perspective of Sagan when he wrote of the difference in perspective of when humans look out to space while others look *back*. In his apocalyptic short story, “The Star,” Wells describes in great detail the calamity of a star narrowly passing by Earth. Human astronomers note, at the beginning of the story, the interesting astrological event of a star colliding with Neptune. No one cares until the star heads for Earth. Massive flooding, tsunamis, temperature changes, and earthquakes occur in the star’s passing, and millions of people die. However, the story ends with Martian astronomers noting how “‘little damage the earth . . . sustained,’ . . . Which only shows how small the vastest of human catastrophes may seem, at a distance of a few million miles” (Wells). In *War of the Worlds*, a more postcolonial piece, the cosmic perspective is brought onto Earth in another way, when the arriving warring Martians make all Humans technologically barbaric: “We must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians . . . were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?” (Wells).

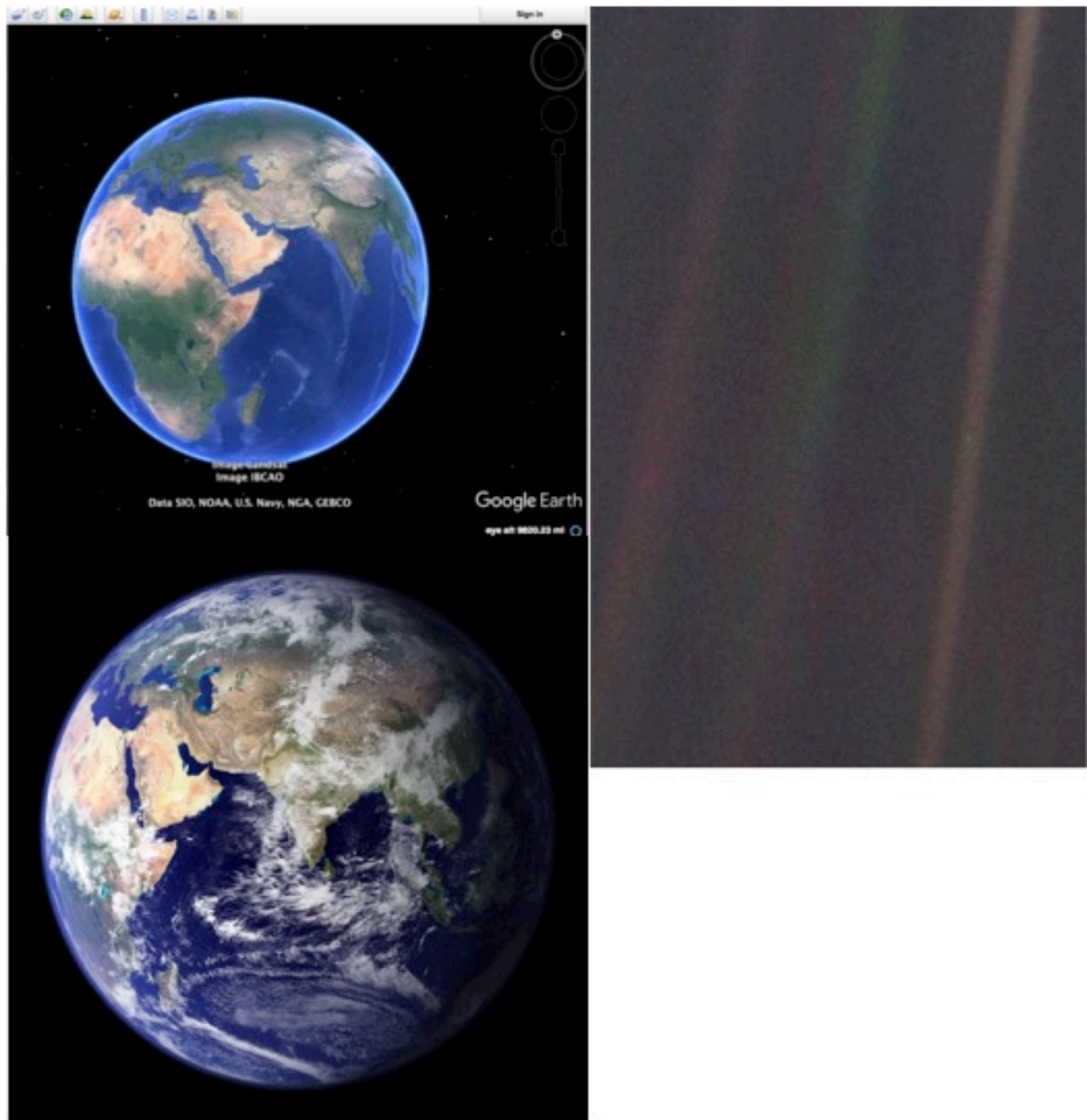


Figure 8: Google Earth, NASA Blue Marble, NASA Pale Blue Dot

Top left: Google Earth brings the blue marble perspective to a home laptop.

Bottom: A “Blue Marble” image from NASA, the “most detailed true-color image of the entire Earth to date” which, in this case, centers on India [NASA Goddard Space Flight Center Image by Reto Stockli (land surface, shallow water, clouds). Enhancements by Robert Simmon (ocean color, compositing, 3-D globes, animation). Data and technical support: MODIS and Group; MODIS Science Data Support team; Terrestrial Remote Sensing Flagstaff Field Center (Antarctica); Defense Meteorological Satellite Program (city lights)].

Top left: The “Pale Blue Dot” image from NASA, “part of the first ever ‘portrait of the solar system taken by Voyager 1’ at the insistence of Carl Sagan, author of *Pale Blue Dot*. The image was taken more than four billion miles from Earth, which is *just* visible in the middle (horizontally and vertically) of the rightmost “light ray” indicating the nearby sun (NASA, Visible Earth).

What’s truly exciting about Basu’s novel is how it joins these types of worldview-altering narratives in a way that is less idealistic. By establishing the importance of moving toward a different type of social organization, and then showing the messes that result from that endeavor, Basu is not distancing himself from history or proposing an idealized and unattainable revision of humanity. Instead, Basu suggests that attempting a new system may be worthwhile, since the traditional nationalist form is unable to exist in a future where (via space technology, map-developments, or imagination) people are able to fluidly transcend the restrictive criteria that form a nation.

Spatial perspectives are inevitably and dynamically linked to how we understand identity affiliations and possible modes of community construction. By implementing the figure of the superhero, Basu is able to generate a superhero perspective where the ability to unfetter the individual from the political system occurs by moving through space in a way that is inaccessible to humans outside of these superhuman fictions. This inaccessibility does not mean that Basu has trivial imaginings to offer readers. In fact, I consider the opposite to be true: He proffers an advanced mode of contemplation. After all, it will take a while before it is feasible for most humans to experience that “instant global consciousness” deGrasse Tyson references first-hand—supra-atmospheric travel will have to become cheap and widespread before that can

occur. We've *just* managed to translate the spatial relationships of our spherical planet into a more accurate rectangular map. Our global perspective is only beginning to be operable.²⁸² In the meantime, the literary representation of that type of spatialized understanding can still be a useful tool of political engagement and understanding.

From a plane, a Google-Earth-non-border-checked view, and certainly from outer space, man-made boundaries recede and lose significance. The nation is revealed as Benedict Anderson's gloriously *imagined* community. Such global perspectives might open the opportunity for new forms of global engagements and communities. This experience of space is precisely the shift that Basu's passengers undergo once they realize they are superhuman, though it is a change that takes far longer than a plane's ascent. The origin story of Basu's heroes is an everyday occurrence of re-scaled belonging.²⁸³ *Turbulence's* heroes get their powers while traveling on a commonplace, if very symbolically cosmopolitan, plane in the air. They're literally unrooted world-travelers. It is only by venturing outside of one's national boundaries that we even have the chance of getting superpowers (Basu, *Turbulence* 353, and all of *Resistance*, where different international flights have resulted in superpowers). It is a global gift of a new perspective capable of challenging existing international hierarchies. The superhero perspective is capable of eradicating the narcissistic nationalist adoration because the superhero's spatial relationship begins with people traveling beyond, and above, national borders.

²⁸² Again, the AuthaGraph World Map created by Hajime Narukawa (to experience it, see "This map of Earth is the most accurate ever produced").

²⁸³ Compare an international flight to the other Indian superheroes mentioned in this chapter: Chakra the Invincible ends up swearing to protect his hometown, and his powers originate from a Mumbai-based blend of science and the seven Sanskrit centers of energy in the human body. The *Devi* receives her powers from a distinctly Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses, generating a modern, but also timeless, battle against epic forces of evil for the fate of the entire world and placing the resulting heroine in a contemporary fake Indian city (as Lindsay Heather Gordon describes her in "Virgin Comics' Devi: Creating a New Goddess"). Nagraj is gifted his powers through the protection of the god Deva Kaljayi. However, Basu is slightly more firmly rooted in scientific and political speculation.

4.7 YOU HAVE ARRIVED AT THE CHAPTER CONCLUSION. YOUR FINAL DESTINATION IS AHEAD.

“Life in the world outside has moved on, as it does . . . But then the subcontinent has never had any illusions of safety or prosperity; people know that disaster is just a heartbeat away, and simply cannot afford to panic when something terrible happens. They do not have the luxury of worrying about the collapse of their safe world—their world has never been safe, and lives have to be lived and rising petrol prices gawked at. The usual protocol . . . has been followed—Pakistani terrorists have been blamed, the Indian opposition has called the government spineless, . . . and lots of Facebook groups have been started.”
(Basu, *Turbulence* 189)

Jameson wrote that the “formal stereotyping” found in SF allows it to exceed modernist literature in certain aims because the “latter can show us everything about the individual psyche and its subjective experience and alienation, save the essential—the logic of stereotypes, reproductions, and depersonalization in which the individual is held in our own time” (*Archaeologies of the Future* 348). Superheroes, perhaps more than other novums of SF, are built by encapsulating elements of individuals and fitting everything else, from costumes to customs to customers, around it. Even the way I’ve addressed Jai, Vir, Uzma, Tia, and Aman has shifted them further away from their individual quirks, personalities, and backgrounds and into the schematics of their powers. But it is that stereotypical centering, built from their pre-power lived spaces, that allows them the potential to challenge some of the borders that contain and circumvent the direction of loyalties.

In this chapter, I have discussed that the superhero novum expressed in Basu’s *Turbulence* argues for a reconsideration of nationalism and a shift toward a global citizenship. By crafting a superhero novel, Basu combines two forms that have always been linked to the creation of the imagined nation—the novel and the superhero narrative. Through four very different spatialized superpower perspectives, Basu resolves the tensions between conflicting loyalties of the national and global citizen. By reading this fictional working-through of these

competing tensions, the novel reminds us of the potential essentialism of the nation, which has become doubly important to revisit because of recent political trends. Although they investigate different levels of political and social affiliations (from the personal to the cityscape to the national, and then the international and even intergalactic), Moreno-Garcia, Okorafor, and Basu conduct their imaginative reconsiderations by drawing upon the genre-specific possibilities of science fiction to interrogate spatial fluxes and boundaries.

I finish with just one thought that will propel us toward the final chapter: In addition to his surprisingly subtle examination of different national engagements, Basu never attempts to depict a utopia. All of his heroes are fallible—even the Tias and Aman wreak havoc on the world. He does not attempt to imagine a utopian post-national perspective and, indeed, in *Resistance*, his most unbound heroes fight against a global capitalist business named Utopic. Basu, then, never tries to depict a non-place but instead—as do all of the texts with which I’ve selected to engage—works within a realistic and recognizable, fallible, setting.

In my concluding chapter, I briefly consider the dangerous appeal of utopia to postcolonial critics. For, as I will show, when postcolonialists have managed to expand their own considerations of what constitutes ‘L’iterature and engage with science fiction, they often inscribe new limitations on the capabilities of postcolonial SF by organizing their involvements around the idea of the “utopia.” Such a form of investigation is problematically founded on spatial erasure, as I’ll illustrate in a brief engagement with South African SF.

5.0 CODA

Fact: In South Africa, traffic lights are casually referred to as Robots.

“That’s some serious sci-fi shit right there.”
(Charlie Human, *Apocalypse Now Now* 249)

My project joins the growing academic interest in postcolonial SF literature and offers a new, spatially driven way to engage with what I consider to be one of the more exciting literary subfields being produced in the twenty-first century. I hope my chapters have illustrated the opportunities of postcolonial studies reinvigoration, science fiction studies diversification, and reading protocol reconsideration that were suggested in my introduction. There are many possibilities for future spatial-driven, genre-specific postcolonial projects, not only in the speculative fiction fields, but also in the genres of detective/crime/thrillers, as well as in the field of comics. However, there are two main questions that we should contend with as we launch ourselves into these exciting studies.

First, we must keep considering the question of why and how certain types of spaces are frequently used as generative crucibles. For example, the idea of the blueprint utopia, or the “no-place” utopia, is not a mode often employed by postcolonial SF writers. It seems to offer little in terms of spatial traction for those writing in postcolonial contexts. Yet, as I explore a bit below, the Earth-spaces that are employed may still resonate with utopian impulse. Secondly, we must not become so enamored with the opportunities of genre fiction that we ignore its encumbrances,

especially regarding the process of publication. To help spur our considerations, in this coda I engage with these questions through the SF arena of South Africa, extending my work into literary and literature-producing worlds I've not been able to examine fully in this project.

5.1 A FEW MORE SPECULATIONS

“When you get elevated
they love it or they hate it.
You dance up on them haters
keep getting funky on the scene
while they jumpin’ round ya
they trying to take all of your dreams
but you can’t allow it”
(Janelle Monáe, “Tightrope”²⁸⁴)

Postcolonial SF is literary activism.

Through their spatial re-visions, postcolonial SF challenges Othering ideologies, First-versus-Third World hierarchies, and capitalist degradations. The eruption of postcolonial novels, short stories, special critical issues, themed collections, films, comics, songs, and visual art in the twenty-first century redirects the SF genre and its dedicated community into a more inclusive state. In the preceding chapters, I contend with shifting diegetic spaces. Spatial theorists like Bertrand Westphal, Doreen Massey, and Edward Soja insist that narratives have the power to affect real people and places. (Nnedi Okorafor said the same at the 2017 Science Fiction

²⁸⁴ Janelle Monáe is an American singer, songwriter, and actress. Her albums have a long-arching concept narrative about the rebellious, love-inspired android named Cindi Mayweather, who lives in an oppressive future city *Metropolis* (harkening deliberately back to Fritz Lang’s film of the same name). Fans who stitch together the narrative come to learn that Mayweather is partially fabricated from Monáe’s stolen DNA, and that the two are fused together through time and space. Often identified as an Afrofuturist musician, Monáe’s work extends beyond the soundscapes of her songs into their music videos (see videos for “Many Moons,” which depicts a future android-slave sale, and “Q.U.E.E.N.” which shows Cindi being reanimated from the hold of a museum exhibit/cell full of time-traveling rebels).

Research Association keynote address.) However, my research also indicates that postcolonial SF texts operate materially as catalysts to challenge nonfictional discriminatory structures.

As a brief exploration of this important postcolonial SF function, I turn to the SF publishing industry in South Africa, a country complicated by a multi-layered past of control and domination among the indigenous San and Khoikhoi people, multiple early localized Bantu tribes (e.g., Zulu, Xhosa), Afrikaner settlers, imported Asian slaves and laborers, and British colonialists. The interaction that most directly relates to my example is that of apartheid, a political systemization of the discrimination against non-Afrikaners in South Africa by the Afrikaner government of 1948-1994.²⁸⁵ In his *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja reminds us that the apartheid system in South Africa was a “sophisticated strategy specifically designed to produce beneficial geographies for the hegemonic few while creating spatial structures of disadvantage for the rest” (40). Part of apartheid’s enforcement was the manipulation of the conceptual space of citizens, who were at times prescribed racial identities by the government that did not match their personal identification. (At other times, the prescribed racial identity changed alongside newly implemented, narrower, categories.) The physical spaces of citizens were also specifically controlled through designated racial residential zones and townships designed to keep those determined to be non-white outside of city centers unless performing labor.²⁸⁶ With such oppressive restrictions on conceptual and perceived spaces, lived space under apartheid was suffocating, and included legally bound times and types of human-to-human

²⁸⁵ Though that tension results from the historical interactions among all South African groups.

²⁸⁶ In the words of one apartheid official, “We consider that the history of the races, especially having regard to South African History, shows that the co-mingling of black and white is undesirable. The native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man’s creation, when he is willing to enter and to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases to so minister” (Transvaal Local Government Commission (the Stallard Commission), TP 1/1922, qtd. in Dorsett, “Restitution of Urban Land in South Africa: The Story of District Six,” 180). In a 2016 interview, Lauren Beukes recalled how “apartheid government went to Chicago [U.S.] to learn how to do segregation better, which is that you drive a highway straight through the slums . . . to stop people from organizing and create divides” (personal interview).

interaction through acts like racially targeted curfews, forcible relocations that separated neighborhoods—such as in the famous case of District Six—and racially segregated marriage and cohabitation laws.

Apartheid ended in 1994. Measures like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were taken to help heal the conceptual divides. Apartheid's deliberate physical fragmentation into city centers and townships is a slower reorganization, but railway system extensions and events like "Open Streets Cape Town" address the possibility of overcoming segregating city design and infrastructure.²⁸⁷ The stitching of lived space is harder to pinpoint.²⁸⁸ For all its progress, today South Africa is still terribly, bluntly divided. As Soja claims, "these concretely embedded and imaginatively maintained unjust geographies of underdevelopment and colonial control linger on as stubborn continuities, almost impossible to erase entirely, virtually defining what has come to be called the postcolonial condition" (40). The economic divisions follow inscribed divisions of the apartheid past—racially and spatially, with some development occurring in townships that still have a problematic lack of structural necessities.²⁸⁹ This coda does not allow me to examine these re-inscribed spaces thoroughly, but it does allow me to point toward how the South African SF publishing terrain has mapped on to the country's continued spatial divisions.

²⁸⁷ Open Streets Cape Town was held "twice in Cape Town's [central business district]; twice in the city's oldest township, Langa; in the historically Afrikaner northern suburb of Bellville; and in Mitchells Plain in the vast area known as the Metro south East or Cape Flats" ("Open Streets Cape Town: Reconnecting the Post-Apartheid City").

²⁸⁸ The design of the new Constitutional Hill is one setting that shows a deliberate attempt to spatially reclaim spaces of previous terror for present good, remember the crimes of apartheid, and regain a sense of working within and for all members of the local community. See *Number Four: The Making of Constitution Hill* (Constitution Hill Foundation, Penguin Group, 2006).

²⁸⁹ Missing infrastructure is one reason why South African writer Charlie Human's speculative *Apocalypse Now Now* introduces the world of spirits with an elemental closely harnessed to township life. Such elementals are "called township ticks. They're made of pure energy so people make deals with them. Communities feed them goats, sheep, the occasional thief or rapist convicted in a kangaroo court, and the elementals let whole neighbourhoods hook power lines into them . . . Sounds like a good deal when you've got no electricity. . . . All hunky-dory until some of their kids go to fetch a ball in its sewer and get devoured" (106).

5.2 DYSTOPIAN STATUS OF SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLISHING

“[N]o doubt, the biggest imprint has been made by Neil [sic] Blomkamp, the creator of *District 9* (2009) and *Chappie* (2015). . . . I think successes like that are crucial for independents like me, and others who want to tell compelling sci-fi stories that take place in Africa.”

(Roye Okupe, “A man of promise,” *Cityscapes* #7, p. 127.)

“Science fiction publishing is very small, which is an issue all over the world. Most science fiction writers are not blockbuster writers making lots of money, apart from maybe Michael Crichton. It is a hard niche. In Africa, it’s so hard just to get published. It has been really difficult. It’s only recently that publishers here have started to categorise [sic] things so we now have crime thrillers or speculative fiction.”

(Lauren Beukes, “Science ≠ Fiction,” *Cityscapes* #7, pp. 131-2.)

The process of creation, publication, and circulation is still overwhelmingly difficult for non-Western, non-white, and non-male SF writers.²⁹⁰ Even in South Africa, which has the largest sub-Saharan African book industry, “bookstores are rare outside major cities, and non-fiction accounts for 45 percent of sales. Most fiction titles are imported from abroad. South Africa . . . is one of the world’s most unequal societies, with many book-free households and few active readers” (Associated Free Press, “African book industry vibrant, but challenges remain.”). The reality is that South Africa has a textbook-oriented market; it is not a nation of leisure readers. In addition to confronting the (often) circular problems created when economic disparity limits access to books, there is also a tangible bias against local writers, which is why “[m]ost fiction titles are imported” (AFP).

This attitude is recognizable to both producers and consumers. In an opinion piece, reader Kelvin Odoobo writes,

“Talk about prophets not being appreciated in their own homes. We know more about *Harry Potter* than *Half of a Yellow Sun* and have we heard [of *Half of a Yellow Sun*’s] author[,] a young rising star[?] . . . In Africa, publishers dread fiction, preferring to stick

²⁹⁰ Although the Rabid Puppies still moronically yell otherwise.

to the safety of recommended school text books.” (“Opinion: Rwanda: Where are our fiction writers?”)

On top of these brutal limitations, there is the marginalizing of “popular” genre fiction. Book cover illustrator Joey Hi-Fi, someone intimate with the literary publishing processes and problems of South Africa, made sure to point out in a 2016 interview that writing speculative fiction narrows the already small chance of local writers becoming successful. He said:

It really comes down to who is buying the books and whether people are willing to take chances on new voices in fantasy, science fiction, horror, whatever genre you’re working on.²⁹¹ There’s a lot of exciting stuff happening. In the South African context, it’s very difficult to make it here doing writing genre. I don’t know if there’s an easy answer to this question, but I think you get easily discouraged from doing genre because there’s not a dedicated publisher for genre stuff.

. . . I think these voices exist; I think now we’re starting to see them in young writers who want to do genre stuff. Are the publishers going to publish these works? I don’t know if we’re even seeing them. (personal interview)

He continued, using the example of the now highly successful Lauren Beukes to illustrate the level of disdain for local work:

It’s very difficult to get them onto the shelves. It’s almost like they need to make it overseas first and then come back to South Africa.

. . . Book sales in South Africa are abysmal for genre . . . last time I checked, if you sell 3,000 copies of a book like *Zoo City*, you’ve done pretty well.

²⁹¹ It seems important to note that Hi-Fi does not refer specifically to genres like romance, or even detective fiction, but rather to speculative genres. If I were to expand this coda into a full chapter, such distinctions—and differences in publishing numbers—would need to be accounted for.

. . . *Zoo City* was really struggling locally. If it just existed locally, it would've just died on the vine. But Lauren—it got out overseas, and she got an award for it, and then people took it seriously. I feel like there are a lot of artists, writers locally, and that's what happens to their work. . . . We don't appreciate what we have. I'm really hoping this will change because there are a lot of talented writers locally—I just don't know what opportunities they're getting. (personal interview)

The opportunities appear to be extremely restricted, especially considering that only within the last two decades there has been a dynamic increase in interest for SF authors from postcolonial countries in the thriving markets and SF communities of places like the United States and United Kingdom. Since the South African markets use these other book markets to indicate which local SF is “good,” implementing a type of echo-locative, send-and-return model for local authors, this late-springing turn of the 2000s and 2010s is going to have a long lag time. We may only be seeing the start of the new SF shift in South Africa.

Of course, for some writers, there are even further hurdles within the publishing market, ones that relate to a further marginalized postcolonial South African position. At the 2016 Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, Nadia Sanger (Stellenbosch University), Nedine Moonsamy (University of Pretoria), Sindiswa Busuku-Mathese (Stellenbosch University), and Alan Muller (University of KwaZulu-Natal) presented a panel about “Literary Apartheid and the Literary Imagination: Getting Under the Skin of South African Speculative Fiction.” The panel's organizing goal was to explore the importance, and imbalance, of South African SF. Busuku-Mathese, in particular, noted that there seems to be yet another obstacle to South African SF writers: race. Most South African SF currently in

publication is from white writers. So are most of the SF producers I examine in this coda.²⁹² In 2016, Beukes expressed the thought that this discrepancy in publishing was because “we’re only twenty years out of apartheid . . . people have been ruthlessly repressed. I think we’ll start seeing it now” (personal interview). For a genre that I’ve argued has great community dependence and increasing community reflectivity, this is problematic.

However, the narrowing channel of the South African SF publishing market may still offer us an opportunity. It would seem, since there is so insistently a preference for “vetted” SF in these markets, that perhaps even the work of academic critics could help encourage the circulation of genre fiction.

While the critics assemble the critical-mass needed for action, a different type of movement continues to gain traction: that of independent, self-, digital, and/or community-backed publishing.

5.3 SAY IT AGAIN: POSTCOLONIAL SF IS LITERARY ACTIVISM

“Are we a lost generation of our people?
Add us to equations but they’ll never make us equal
She who writes the movie owns the script and the sequel
. . .
Will you be electric sheep?
Electric ladies, will you sleep?
Or will you preach?”
(Janelle Monáe, “Q.U.E.E.N.”)

Examining how underdevelopment functions at the level of literature shows us that intense economic disparity restricts access to published books even as racial inequality restricts access to

²⁹² This is not for a lack of trying; it’s for a relative lack of accessibility. The current pulp publication *Jungle Jim* offers several stories by South African writers of color; I was unable to obtain copies in time for the publication of this dissertation.

book publishers. As such, we need to more fully contemplate the production-*type* of the postcolonial SF boom, not only the diegetic worlds produced.

As I mention in my Introduction, many postcolonial SF writers upload their stories and critical essays onto free blogs or digital magazines. (Of course, this requires access to the Internet, which is also limited in many parts of the African continent. Postcolonial SF anthologies, novels, and films are also formed through crowd-sourced methods counter to traditional publishing houses. The restrictive state of South African publishing showcases why this maneuver is important.

Crowd-funding methods function as a vital type of organizing. So do alternative genre-motivating structures, like the new African Nommo Awards organized by the African Speculative Fiction Society to celebrate speculative fiction by Africans.²⁹³ By ‘organizing,’ I refer to the articulation of Utopian scholar Tom Moylan, where “disempowered people develop a new sense of themselves and discover ways they could join together to create a better world” (Moylan, “Steps of Renewed Praxis” 115). Calls for SF community participation and SF story creation are vital ways for postcolonial SF authors and fans to actively redirect the path of the SF genre.²⁹⁴

American speculative fiction author N. K. Jemisin noted that during RaceFail09, there was one moment in particular that seemed optimistic, “when the participating fans of color decided to do a very informal roll call” that “illustrated just how non-rare we were” (“Why I

²⁹³ The Nommo Awards include the categories of best novella, best novel, best short story, and best graphic novel. As 2017 was their inaugural year, eligible works include those published in either 2015 or 2016 (“Check Out the Short List for the 2017 Nommo Awards”).

²⁹⁴ Of course, all forms of publishing play a role in the capitalist literary system. As such, we *could* view the move to “alternative” publishing as a symptom of the “[s]timulated but unfulfilled desires” of the SF communities for diverse literature; instead of being revolutionary, this view would consider alternative-but-still-for-profit methods as making those desires “channeled into the service of . . . the consumer paradise” (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 7). But these publishing ventures do more than appease members of the SF community with disposable income who are already in-the-know, and at times they are less about profit than covering costs.

Think RaceFail Was The Bestest Thing Evar for SFF”). This RaceFail roll call and following community-supported publishing campaigns, such as the one to fund the *We See a Different Frontier* anthology, show a type of organizing to resituate people in the SF community previously “disempowered” by the discriminatory SF structures (publishing, awards, limited “Con” locations, etc.).

Considering postcolonial SF in this manner shows it to be not only a diversifying collection of texts, but also a process moving toward an inclusive world of SF fan /critical communities. Here I again turn toward Moylan and his idea of a “critical utopia.” It almost doubles as another way to present literary activism, since it serves as a motivating “process aiming toward and effecting transformation, but not by way of a fixed blueprint of a new society” (Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* xiv). While there’s much work still to be done in this regard, the formations of growing SF communities—and the revised concerns of established SF systems, like the Hugo Awards—clearly show an activist impulse.

5.4 BEWARE THE EASY WORK: THE FUTURE IS AN ELLIPSIS²⁹⁵

“Present time is provincial and empty. If humanity becomes too much taken with the present, we also see the possibility of imagining a radically other future. We lose the ability to hope. We lose what Bloch identifies as the novum: the unexpectedly new, that which pushes humanity out of the present toward the not yet realized future. For humanity to develop, we must keep an open faith in the future and guard against the memory which draws us back into the past and the anxiety which consumes us in the present. . . . In this way, Bloch locates the positive drive toward the future in the negative, in the radical insufficiency of the present.”

(Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* 21)

²⁹⁵ Here I riff on Moylan’s rhetorical question of Fredric Jameson’s “trap of articulating a desired future in the terms of the present” (“Steps of Renewed Praxis” 117), as in my example of Latimer I refer more to a close past.

Above I've conceptualized the activist impulse behind the mode of the recent publishing boom, but there is also often such an impulse within the diegetic world of postcolonial SF texts. In my chapters, I've highlighted the activist drive of the political and environmental corruption-ending aliens in *Lagoon*, the possibilities of world-citizens in *Turbulence*, and even "the right to [escape] the city" in "Them Ships." At the end of each of these stories, nothing is ideal, nothing is stable, and nothing is unsusceptible to change. Though that change is not always optimistic, the openness to change is still hopeful and, as such, still part of what Moylan calls the 'utopian impulse.'

This impulse is not easy. Nor is it simple. Postcolonial writers are often the people for whom, as Public Enemy phrased it, "Armageddon been in effect" ("Countdown to Armageddon" qtd. in Singer). Working toward an improved future world is extra difficult when one is not considered worthy of being included in the future, or even being included in the genre that imagines the future. In an unsent letter to her mother during her time at the Clarion Writers' Workshop, the now-celebrated SF writer Octavia E. Butler wrote, "I feel like I have to prove myself to these people . . . I'm afraid. . . . I'm the only Negro. That shouldn't mean anything. It means a lot. . . . I always survive. But it's wearying. It would be nice to win once in a while instead of just surviving. Ants survive" (July 1970). In many of the postcolonial SF texts I examined for this dissertation, it was difficult to see how characters maintain a balance on the tightrope between mere survival and more utopian victory.

In South Africa—a country that experienced the euphoric end of the apartheid era and the monumental end of the Mandela era, all while continuously suffering from deep economic

inequality and societal disjunction—neither blueprint utopia nor an easy, uncomplicated, utopian impulse fits.²⁹⁶ After all, both versions of utopia could be considered to have already failed.

This is made rather explicit in Ashley Jacobs’ “New Mzansi” (published in *AfroSF*). Jacobs’ experiences as a physician enable him to presents a dystopic South Africa, one where HIV-weakened immune systems depend on a particular drug concoction—pharmaceutical robbery at its finest—to survive. The main character assists his sick friend, Lion, through the streets to try and get him the miracle drug, and “as they walked, he caught a glimpse of an election poster from before Nelson Mandela’s death: “WE PROMISE JOBS AND NO CRIME IN TSHWANE” [Metropolitan Municipality of Pretoria, just north of Johannesburg]. Lion must have noticed as well because he let out a weak ‘Ha,’ which transformed into yet another fleck of blood hastily wiped on the back of his jeans” (loc. 1029). Jacobs’ story suggests that the utopian promises of post-apartheid South Africa are broken when social and economic hierarchies remain the same. However, his helpless defeat by the representative of the pharmaceutical industry changes the apathetic protagonist into a societal rebel, one willing to work for an improved society.

²⁹⁶ I still seek a way to engage with this very present sense: I know, and those like Moylan argue at length, that utopia is never easy, but it seems particularly fraught when it is being worked toward from the extra-perilous postcolonial position.

I can think of one easier utopian story, though it is British and not South African: season three, episode four of Netflix’s SF “anthology” series, *Black Mirror*. The episode, “San Junipero,” follows the “time-traveling” simulated reality romance between a white lesbian and a black bi-sexual woman who ultimately fall in love and decide to live together as uploaded consciousnesses in the artificial reality of San Junipero, an undying artificial utopia, maintained by robots who blink to the tune of Belinda Carlisle’s “Heaven is a Place on Earth.” The setting of the story is not specified in the episode, though pop-culture references are American, and viewers skew toward imagining it as Californian. However, the episode was filmed in Cape Town; Long Street’s architecture and Table Mountain’s relationship to the beach is recognizable. It’s a wonderful, delightful episode. But it also rips Cape Town out of its own spatial swirl for the purpose of a British storyline about something that is a bit more like a blueprint utopia. On its own, this is not so terrible, but when one thinks about it in the larger systems of the SF community and representation, and how South African SF does not endorse blueprint utopias, it begins to feel potentially problematic.

The one South African novel I found in my research that achieves a “blueprint” utopia is *less* open to the possibility of change: It achieves an *apartheid* utopia, rescuing the failed “utopian” society by transplanting it to outer space. Alex Latimer’s *The Space Race* (2013) takes place in South Africa, but the narrative thrust comes from a hidden space settlement program born from the Voortrekker itch. The plot revolves around the eventual launch of a “spacecraft, built in secret using a nuclear device left over from the apartheid-era arms race . . . the ship was destined for a distant and supposedly habitable moon” (loc. 37). On one hand, Latimer uses sarcasm to highlight the dangers of this nostalgic desire for an Afrikaner utopia. A character muses, “Doesn’t it make sense? The apartheid government just handed over control of South Africa to the ANC. They just handed it over, as though it was the key to some stinky bathroom at the petrol station. You didn’t think that was a bit strange? . . . The people at the top had a plan . . . And it’s not 1652 anymore. We’re well into the space age” (loc. 676).

However, the utopian moon is always connected only to Afrikaner history and future, not the inclusive history—nor an even superficially inclusive future—of South Africans. In the penultimate ending of Latimer’s novel, the journalist documenting the story thinks about how “at night in the streets of Cape Town, I hardly ever look up at the sky. . . I do not look around much either—I have recently felt uneasy with the spaces between people” (loc. 2711). Instead of feeling uneasy because of the distances that propelled the South African space race—separations of class, race, and continued, politically endorsed societal abuse—the journalist is self-invested; the spaces make him think of those murdered by the obsessive, racist, and ‘deranged’ Afrikaner antagonist, Stefan. Yet, the novel concludes with Stefan’s imagined account of landing on an alien moon, one with plants and oceans ready for colonization. The potential for Utopia on Earth and in space fails because of the taint of the unhinged rationale and depraved ideologies that

instituted apartheid; instead of ending those ideologies, Latimer forgives them for their poor nature and then seeds them into outer space. I agree with Nedine Moonsamy, who reads Latimer's novel as "an uncomfortable state of disavowal that ultimately restores the nostalgic dreams of the *volk* by turning it into a science fiction prophesy" ("A 'Funny' Feeling: Laughter and Nostalgia in Alex Latimer's *The Space Race*"). Even if it is a postcolonial SF story, this novel cannot hold a utopian impulse, for it celebrates and perpetuates colonization.

Compare this to Lauren Beukes, perhaps the most celebrated contemporary South African SF writer, who bluntly refuses to write blueprint utopias. In our conversation, Beukes said, "I grew up in Utopia. As a white South African, I grew up in Utopia. And I *know* what the cost of that was to other people. . . . What a terrible, terrible Utopia it was. . . . it was a terrible, terrible time of human rights violations and assassinations" (personal interview). Unsurprisingly, her stories peel away the rotting foundations of the utopian cityscape: the blood sacrifice behind a music agent's glamour in *Zoo City* (2010), the corporate-financed deaths in the high-tech cyber playground of *Moxyland* (2008). However, this does not mean her stories are without hope.

Beukes' *Moxyland* follows four human protagonists as they strive to subvert (and survive) the harsh techno-capitalist city of future Cape Town. They don't really succeed; most of them are killed or subjected by the various manipulating corporate systems. *Moxyland* is a cyberpunk story, which, as Eric Smith notes, means that it is "seemingly cynical (and thus, canonical)" (183). However, Beukes keeps a careful balance between hopeful moments supporting the conception that "the sense of community and transformation has been real and important" and the perception that "it's a total wank, where people are just as economically fucked as they were before, but now they're sick as well, or worse, . . . And that leads to spates of outbreaks all over and crackdowns just as bad as those bad old days when the police came

storming in to question and deport whole neighbourhoods [sic]" (loc. 482). The presence of one view of Cape Town does not erase, nor fully eliminate, the other. Yet for Beukes, the idea of the blueprint utopia is seductively dangerous; she holds herself accountable to a more nuanced mode of critical optimism. Unlike Latimer's *The Space Race*, most of these writers are not very nostalgia-motivated; like Beukes and Jacobs, they instead produce writing that critically engages with the past, and the present, without becoming mired in it. In doing so, they offer glimmers of hope in their diegetic futures.

5.5 NEXT TIME AROUND: REVOLUTIONS

"Come on, we're supposed to be talking to aliens by now, and instead we've only just started really talking to each other."

(N. K. Jemisin, "Why I Think RaceFail Was the Bestest Thing Ever")

"Where do we go?
Where do we go now?
Where do we go?"

(Guns and Roses, "Sweet Child of Mine")

In the preceding chapters I've explored a range of spaces, though I kept returning to the idea of lived space. As I explained in the introduction, I believe this is because the more dynamic thirdspace allows postcolonial SF writers to engage and re-vision most effectively. It could also be that, as Moylan says, "it is precisely the interim, lived space for building a new society, as identified by Gutierrez, that unfolds as the site for horizon-bearing confrontations and programs" ("Steps of Renewed Praxis" 118). I've explored both the lived space within the diegetic worlds of postcolonial SF texts and the lived spaces of the SF community through conferences with its critics and conversations with some of its generators. These experiences allow me to earnestly

suggest that one potential avenue for further spatially oriented postcolonial SF work would be to engage with the third type of SF community member: the fan.

My work draws together SF criticism and SF authors, but leaves the insights of SF fans relatively untouched, except for in my brief discussion of RaceFail09. It seems problematic to fully ignore the insights that we can obtain from the third type of SF community circle, especially if we wish to consider SF as the site of a type of literary activism. (And I do, now.) To my knowledge no one has yet critically examined the types of conversations, methods, and senses of the SF field from gatherings like the Indian National SF Conference (organized by the Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies, established in 1998) and SF fan organizations like Science Fiction and Fantasy South Africa (which organizes competitions, a fanzine, and monthly meetings, and was established in 1969).²⁹⁷ Such investigations could prove lucrative.

²⁹⁷ Perhaps we could also consider the way lived space offers, enables, requires, and affects narrative forms. Future work on postcolonial SF might also consider more formal spaces of textual “passages.”

In an earlier version of this dissertation, I planned on including innovative narratives such as China Miéville’s new, weird novel *Embassytown* (2011), Nalo Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* (2000), and Benjanun Sriduangkaew’s “Vector” (*We See a Different Frontier*, 2013). These are forms that formally represent linguistic lived space, the continuum of fiction-and-lived-reality via folktale, and fragmented virtual disembodied spaces. This cut chapter had fallen out of my mind until seeing the performance of ZiggZaggerZ, a.k.a. Shannon Theus’ performance of the “Bastard Manifesto,” Pavirthra Prasad’s enactment of “Nations in Orbit: Notes on a Terrestrial Performance,” and Kylie Korsnack’s talk “Towards an Aesthetics of Time-Travel: Writing-between-Worlds in Butler, Okorafor, and Baledosingh” at the 2017 Science Fiction Research Association Conference. While Prasad and ZiggZaggerZ affectively reminded me about my sidelined attraction to atypical narratives, Korsnack’s insightful invitation for her audience to think about the narrative forms of postcolonial time-travel texts reminded me of the generative power of written narrators. I owe them much for the reminder.

Many thanks, also, to my committee for engaging/activating/joining me in the many non-citation footnotes. Perhaps they will eventually forgive me if we consider those footnotes, as this one, to be a way of tracking the lived space of a feverish, dissertating mind. After all, the footnote may be a type of thirdspace. Its ability to pretend to represent simultaneous thoughts makes it a re-enactment of conceptual space. These nebulous considerations are also peripheral in their physical space, residing at the border of the bottom of the page. This makes them fit Soja’s consideration of the lived space as the “‘counterpaces,’ spaces of resistance of the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning” (*Thirdspace* 68). I think these footnotes may challenge, or at least amplify, the epicenters of this dissertation.

5.6 TOPPING THE CHARTS AND WHISTLING INTO THE AETHER: LAST THOUGHTS

“Africa is a continent poised between aspiration and actuality.”
(The Editors, *Cityscape* #7, 3)

“The Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute . . . will go down in history as one of the greatest protest events ever. This concert, this art, broadcast in more than 60 countries will influence the release of Nelson Mandela from prison.

. . . could this concert really influence the release of Mandela? Mere songs? Of course there were plays, novels, short stories, paintings, comics and various works of art whose impact, along with that of the concert, contributed highly to the abolition of the apartheid regime in South Africa. This is the power of art.

I strongly believe that in this century art will continue to shape the affairs of our societies. And, as someone who is biased towards sci-fi, I believe that art reaches far into time, creating possibilities ahead of now.”

(Shadreck Chikoti, Managing Editor’s Note, *Imagine Africa* 500)

I’d like to end with a story about a non-SF text.

(Don’t worry: It’s not about a traditional text, either.)

In the South African magazine *Chimurenga*, issue 13: *Dr. Satan’s Echo Chamber*, John Edwin Mason shares a bit of background about jazz musician Abdullah Ibrahim’s song “Mannenberg” (21). At first, Ibrahim’s work was considered

perplexing and, in the words of one Cape Town musician, ‘rubbish.’ Another called it ‘a lot of trash.’ Ibrahim himself has said that he couldn’t get Cape Town musicians to play his new music because they were still too invested in emulating American jazz. . . . Duke Ngcukana, a local musician . . . said much the same thing about himself. In the late 1960s, he once “walked out” on Ibrahim because he did not want to play ‘African music,’ so to speak, which, for us, at that time, was below [American jazz] (sic). (John Edwin Mason, “The Making of Mannenberg,” *Chimurenga* 15)

Obviously, the jazz scene of Cape Town in the 1960s and 1970s is a bit distanced, or at least distinct, from the SF scene in the 2010s. For one, the music scene was widespread, with more venues devoted to distribution and a greater reception of music records, radio broadcasts, and

performances. However, Ibrahim originally faced disinterest and disgust for his “locally oriented” art. So, too, are South African writers currently penalized for being local writers that work within discounted genres.

Yet, I argue in this project that there is great potential in postcolonial SF. I still believe that postcolonial SF has much to offer and that it will continue to grow in popularity and political import. After all, the unlikely “Mannenberg” became not only a hit (the record “sold more copies in 1974 and 1975 than any jazz LP recorded in South Africa”), but a revolutionary icon, “the anti-apartheid anthem of Cape Town” (21).

Postcolonial SF will probably never have quite the same sway as “Mannenberg.” Yet, it certainly has a lot to offer. If we entwine the lens of geocritically inclined spatial studies with the reading protocols of science fiction and weave them to the contextual arenas of investigation posited by postcolonial studies, we can work through the interventions performed in postcolonial SF texts.

Even with all of the film’s noted problems, Neill Blomkamp’s aliens-stranded-in-Johannesburg movie, *District 9* (2009), certainly brought the history of District Six to the attention of an international, millennial audience. Forerunners to postcolonial SF, like Octavia Butler, have inspired a new generation of diverse, insistent, active, and skilled SF writers. Postcolonial SF is now a wide-ranging field, offering intricate and generative texts for critical engagement. They offer us new ways to consider the spaces in which we live and the representations in which we work. I’ve done so in a range that spans Moreno-Garcia’s Mexico City and Okorafor’s Lagos to Basu’s nexus of India, Pakistan, and Britain, but there are many more spaces to explore. Outside the diegetic world, RaceFail09 proved that fans around the world are invested in seeing themselves represented in the SF they read. Alternative modes of

community-sourced publishing offer a tangible method of utopian organizing.²⁹⁸ The writers that I've interviewed and studied not only offer smart fictions, but also first-hand critical engagement with the production, reception, and reality-connection of postcolonial SF. As the site of three vibrant fields—postcolonial studies, spatial studies, and science fiction studies—it seems possible that in the near future, postcolonial SF may become the literary arena of more than one type of scholarly, political, and literary activist project.

In one sentence: Current postcolonial SF writers are showing that they—differently though just as insistently—agree with Sun Ra that “space is the place.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ See the workshops accompanying the deliberately utopian and politically active *Octavia's Brood* anthology. (Many thanks to John Reider for his reference of these workshops at the 2017 Science Fiction Research Association Conference.)

²⁹⁹ Here I quote the foundational Afrofuturist and free jazz musician Sun Ra's opening lyrics to “Space is the Place.” This song is also featured in Sun Ra's SF film *Space Is the Place* (1974). In the film, Sun Ra travels through time and space with his “Arkestra” in a successful effort to save the black race from the Overseer's control and incantations (such as white NASA scientists that try to assassinate Sun Ra). For Sun Ra, outer space is the place of the hopeful black future, and music is the way to get there. Although the type of space(s) and artistic mode used to get to the generative space(s) differ, the importance of space as the hope for the future resonates with the postcolonial authors I study.

For a contemporary, audio-based example of this ethos, see the Pan African Space Station (PASS), “a periodic, pop-up live radio studio; a performance and exhibition space; a research platform and living archive, as well as an ongoing, internet-based radio station” that works “in transitory spaces and at the intersections between different fields, organizing [sic] sound, music and words into new forms of knowledge, PASS is a machine for traveling at the speed of thought—it borrows its slogan, “There are other worlds out there they never told you about” from the philosopher, composer, and bandleader, Sun Ra.

“PASS seeks to challenge the concepts this present has of Africa and to excite new transitory and transient communities with each journey, bringing focus to collective experience and targeting an investigation into how we locate ourselves and how we mediate our human and historic commonality” (“About” <http://panafricanspacestation.org.za/about>).

APPENDIX A

TIMELINE OF POSTCOLONIAL SCIENCE FICTION

While this timeline is bluntly incomplete, it is representative of the shifts in the science fiction community and the genre's publishing output. Stand-alone anthologies, novels, series, and short-fiction collections are easier to trace and represent on such a timeline, which is included to give unfamiliar readers a sense of the development of the growing literary field this project attempts to analyze. Texts that were referred to specifically in this project, and that help demonstrate a sense of world SF community, are prioritized.

1986 *Penguin Omnibus of World Science Fiction*, edited by Brian Aldiss and Sam J. Lundall

1993 *It Happened Tomorrow (A collection of nineteen select science fiction stories from various Indian languages)*, edited by Bal Phondke

2000 *Midnight Robber*, Nalo Hopkinson

2001 *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative fiction from the African Diaspora*, edited by Sheree R. Thomas

The Last Jet-Engine Laugh, Ruchir Joshi

Whisper from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction, edited by Nalo Hopkinson

2002 *Empire of Bones*, Liz Williams

- 2003** *Cosmos Latinos: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Latin America and Spain*
Harvest, Manjula Padmanabhan
- 2004** *The Ten Incarnations of Adam Avatar*, Kevin Baldeosingh
River of Gods, Ian McDonald
So Long Been Dreaming, edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan
- 2006** *The Three-Body Problem*, Liu Cixin (in Chinese)
- 2007** “Poison,” Henrietta Rose-Innes
- 2008** *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet*, Vandana Singh
Kleptomania: Ten Stories, Manjula Padmanabhan
The Dark Forest, Liu Cixin
Utopia, Ahmed Khaled Towfik
Moxyland, Lauren Beukes
- 2009** *The Beast with Nine-Billion Feet*, Anil Menon
District 9, Neill Blomkamp
Cyberabad Days, Ian McDonald
The Apex Book of World SF, edited by Lavie Tidhar
The World SF Blog begins in conjunction with the *Apex Book of World SF*,
produced/edited by Lavie Tidhar
- 2010** *Zoo City*, Lauren Beukes
- 2011** *Jungle Jim*, an African Pulp Magazine begins publishing
Osama, Lavie Tidhar
Nineveh, Henrietta Rose-Innes
“Hello, Moto,” Nnedi Okorafor

2012 *Breaking the Bow: Speculative fiction inspired by the Ramayanae*, edited by Anil Menon and Vandana Singh.

Afro SF: Science Fiction by African Writers, edited by Ivor W. Hartmann.

The Apex Book of World SF 2, edited by Lavie Tidhar

The Future Is Japanese, edited by Nick Mamatas and Masumi Washington

Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction, edited by Grace L. Dillon

Rebirth, Josh Ryba and Daniel Browde

Turbulence, Samit Basu

2013 *We See a Different Frontier*, edited by Fabio Fernandes and Djibril al-Ayad

LAGOS_2060

Mothership: Takes from Afrofuturism and Beyond, edited by Bill Campbell and Edward Austin Hall

The Shining Girls, Lauren Beukes

World SF Blog becomes inactive (June)

2014 *The Apex Book of World SF 3*, edited by Lavie Tidhar

Diaspora AD Astra: An Anthology of Science Fiction from the Philippines

Women Destroy Science Fiction! Lightspeed special issue, edited by Christie Yant

The Three-Body Problem, Liu Cixin (in English, translation by Ken Liu)

Broken Monsters, Lauren Beukes

Resistance, Samit Basu

Lagoon, Nnedi Okorafor

2015 *Afro SF v2: 5 Novellas*, edited by Ivor W. Hartmann

Terra Incognita: New Short Speculative Stories from Africa, edited by Nerine Dorman

Imagine Africa 500: Speculative Fiction from Africa, edited by Billy Kahora

The Sea Is Ours: Tales of Steampunk Southeast Asia, edited by Jaymee Goh and Joyce Chng

Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements, edited by Adrienne Maree Brown and Walidah Imarisha

The Dark Forest, Liu Cixin (in English, translated Joel Martinsen)

The Book of Phoenix, Nnedi Okorafor

Binti, Nnedi Okorafor

2016 *Life on the Rez: Science Fiction and Fantasy Inspired by Life on America's Indian Reservations*, edited by Raymond K. Rugg

People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction, *Lightspeed* special issue, edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Kristine Ong Muslim

The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories, Ken Liu

Death's End, Liu Cixin (in English, translated by Ken Liu)

Slipping: Stories, Essays, and Other Writing, Lauren Beukes

Certain Dark Things, Silvia Moreno-Garcia

Rosewater, Tade Thompson

2017 *Binti: Home*, Nnedi Okorafor

100 African Writers of SFF, web-series by Geoff Ryman, hosted at *Strange Horizons* strangehorizons.com/100-african-writers-of-sff/. (Ryman's ongoing project highlights world SF authors.)

(Fall) *Binti: The Night Masquerade*, Nnedi Okorafor

Various texts³⁰⁰ listed on Silvia Moreno-Garcia's personal blog page "Latin Americans in English Language Speculative Literature List 2017"

³⁰⁰ Listings range from short stories to novels, including those from the *Latin@ Rising Anthology* (Wings Press). Publication methods range from individual publishing on WordPress Blogs and Amazon to small, independent presses like Broken River Books, large presses like Tor, and digital magazines like Electric Spec. This is a new endeavor for Moreno-Garcia's blog and is open for visitor additions of "any Latin American authors including: people born and raised in Latin America but now living in another part of the world, people with Latin American

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS WITH SCIENCE FICTION AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

These interviews were conducted at various times while I worked on this project. You will quickly notice that they differ in expansiveness. This is partially because as I progressed in my research, my questions shifted and grew. But I also conducted the interviews in a variety of spaces and times (in person, online, between panels, for multiple hours over tea, etc.), and that also changed the length and mode of conversation.

To indicate these differences, each interview begins with contextual information. I have decided not to streamline the interviews, as I would for a more public venue. Instead, I leave them as more inclusive conversations in the hopes that future academics—those brave readers who occasionally stumble into dissertations—may find useful information and anecdotes for a range of inquiries.

In all interviews, *FitzPatrick* is denoted by italics; the interviewed author is un-italicized.

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B.1 SAMIT BASU

Skype interview conducted by Jessica FitzPatrick

8:00 AM on June 21 for Basu, 10:30 PM on June 20 for FitzPatrick

Both indulged in caffeinated beverages

Samit Basu is known for being the writer of India's first fantasy trilogy, though he only started thinking in terms of genre categorization after completing *The Gameworld Trilogy* (*The Simoqin Prophecies*, 2003; *The Manticore's Secret*, 2005; and *The Unwaba Revelations*, 2007). His next series was the internationally acclaimed superhero duology, *Turbulence* (2012) and *Resistance* (2013). Basu is an author unrestricted by genre or form. He has written for comics such as Graphic India's *Devi* series (#3-10), *The Tall Tales of Vishnu Sharma* series, and contributed to Grant Morrison's re-imagined Mahabharata epic *18 Days*. Basu also collaborated with Mike Carey to make the comic *Untouchable* in 2015. In his graphic novel, *Local Monsters*, Basu dealt with the day-to-day dramatics of the inhuman at work and play in Delhi (illustrated by Ghanshyam Bochgeri, Liquid Comics 2013). He has written three children's books in *The Adventures of Stoob* series (*Testing Times*, 2014; *A Difficult Stage*, 2015; and *Mismatch Mayhem*, 2016). Besides his published fiction, Basu is a prolific essayist and blogger, and maintains a well-kept index of his various articles and interviews on his personal blog

(samitbasu.com). In 2006, he was awarded a fellowship from Sarai³⁰¹ to map the contemporary world of Indian speculative fiction. His resulting overviews of textual categories like “The Indian superhero” and “Indian children’s literature and speculative fiction,” as well as interviews with writers like Anil Menon and Payal Dhar, can be found on his main blog, where it redirects interested readers to a previous blog mysteriously and joyously titled “Duck of Destiny: Ve Haf Vays of Making You Kvack” (<https://samitbasu.com/other-stuff/indian-sff-project-06/>). Basu currently splits his time between New Delhi and Mumbai.

What is postcolonial science fiction to you?

I’m not very sure about anything once the word ‘postcolonial’ comes into play. I’ve heard my work being described as that, but it’s not like the colonial era was something that was ever anything more than a part of history for me. I was born around thirty-plus years after Independence, and the country has been changing so rapidly over the past ten, twenty years. Colonialism might relate most closely to me for things like publishing markets, where both the commonwealth publishing and things like that come into play. The biggest effect of colonialism is that I grew up reading, writing, and thinking in English, but as far as I was concerned, it was the only way to be.

And of course, for publishing markets, that helps. I’m going to ask you to talk about space. How do the spaces that your characters move through inhibit or allow certain types of plots? How do you world-build?

The larger efforts of worldbuilding—so my first three books, for instance—

The scale of those is massive.

When I was growing up, we didn’t have a genre classification in Indian bookstores. We just had one guy, a million years old, who would ...say “if you liked this, you would like this”. So I didn’t know I was writing a fantasy book when I wrote it. It was only after I wrote it. It was similar to books that I loved. I was aware of fantasy and of science fiction books, but I thought of those as descriptors, not as a set round for the industry because of course I was twenty-two when I was writing it, and I knew nothing—I still know nothing, but I knew a lot more nothing back then. So the first books, I was looking at worlds where different cultures, mythologies,

³⁰¹ The Sarai Programme is part of the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, and its mission is to conduct “research and reflection on the transformation of urban space and contemporary realities, especially with regard to the interface between cities, information, society, technology, and culture” (<http://sarai.net/about/>).

storytelling spaces came together. I remember when I read *Lord of the Rings*, I was ten or eleven, and I didn't notice that there were gender, cultural problems with them.

When you first read Tolkien, you don't—the orcs are just terrible.

I was used to reading books where I wouldn't have to look at anything external in terms of how I place myself in terms of relating to a character. So India, for example, is one of the only countries where even Archie comics are still consumed in large quantities, so I grew up reading those. Given that it was pre-world-war, kids eating cucumber sandwiches and watercress... As far as I was concerned, it was perfectly OK with me to relate to these people. It was only later when there were essays from Michael Moorcock and others that placed these in a more analytical context. And I thought, "Wait a minute—I'd be an orc...." So a lot of the original three books was about creating a central city where the Eastern and Southern parts were much more central, where the northeast corner which would be your British and Viking myth worlds—there were people from those worlds, but they weren't the main. If you placed it somewhere on a map, the main city was somewhere between Hong Kong and Bombay. It was between the world building. Instead of different cultures intersecting, you had different cultures and mythologies intersecting.

In Turbulence and Resistance the worldbuilding is a little different because it's our world.

I like to think of it as augmented reality. A lot of that was about trying for the first time to write about places I'd actually been. Even the bits of London, I knew the places and the streets and the shops, and I knew where they'd be fighting. Of course, the conceptual framework was all about the fundamental question of what would it be like if these people got abilities corresponding to their desires, there was an underlying joke to it, which Indians who want to be global citizens always feel, which is that to obtain a degree of importance in India, you need to receive validation from the West. That was not part of the plot so much as me laughing about it by characters and stuff when Indian writers have to follow it.

In your experience, does it work that way? Where you do have to get the validation, the applause in Western markets, and then you can come back and be successful at home?

I had a slightly different journey because the first three books did do well in India. They were bestsellers and so on. But I found out that there are lots of spaces that Indians are not supposed to write in. These boundaries are not just drawn in the West, but in India as well. What I found most interesting in publishing and getting—I was lucky enough to get really nice reviews—it was interesting because these were readers who were very into the types of books I was into, which led to the creation of those books, whereas the bad reviews were coming from people who had probably never read fantasy or science fiction. There were more—whether it was the editing or the critique, they were happening at a language level from people whose context were Western. So while they had nice things to say, it was much stranger for them than it was to genre readers in the west. Because genre is more important to the reading experience than the externalities of it, which are things I think publishers are more interested in looking at.

So Wired gave Turbulence a Geekdad Golden Bots Award for Best Books of 2012, which I think is very well deserved. But in their review, they included a line I found ridiculous: "Much of the

story takes place in India with references to Indian television shows, celebrities, and sports teams, but despite these locale-related details, the story is outstanding.” [Basu laughs] Talk about a back-handed compliment.

I don’t notice that sort of thing anymore. I started out with my first set of books, and there was always a, “Despite the fact that it’s not the right kind of book, the writing is nice.” So if you’re someone who is used to applying for visas and things, and then you get used to a certain set—it’s more people’s subconscious than a deliberate attempt to make you feel like an outsider. There’s nothing in a review that stings more than someone handing you a form that asks you, “Are you planning to commit acts of genocide? Yes / No.” This line of the review, if I had noticed it, I just hadn’t processed it at all because I was just so excited to be getting a *Wired* review. So now that you have pointed it out...

I’m sorry! The rest was absolutely glowing. If I wasn’t writing a dissertation about space...

To be honest, I hadn’t even noticed it. I was just really happy about the book finding a home abroad. A couple of years ago, there was this anthology I was in it with a short story, and I remember not posting the page which had the author bio on it because it began with, “Well-known author in his native India...” But again, I know there’s no intention to say anything to say things I might find strange. It keeps happening so it’s not really something that I notice anymore.

But when I’m published here—the *Simoqin Prophecies* and *Turbulence* were both number one on Indian lists when they came out—I would always get friends saying, “So when are you going to write a real book?”

Having said all of this, the publishing of books is infinitely warmer than the movie industry and so on where people aren’t used to articulating about how other people might think about them. I’ve taken about forty Bollywood meetings, and they have really helped develop a thick skin.

I have some questions about the progress on the Turbulence adaptation.

The *Turbulence* adaptation. I haven’t announced this publically as yet, but it’s been Hollywood-optioned a few months ago, but they’ve not said anything about it yet. The main challenge for it was trying to figure where it could come out. What studio or channel.... With *Turbulence*, I was on a book tour four or five years ago, and I had my first Hollywood meeting while I was there. The gentleman was very nice, and he broke it down for me and simply said, “We can’t make this movie without white leads. And we don’t want to set it in India, but we don’t know what to do.” I kind of liked that he said it very clearly because he wasn’t hostile, and he wasn’t trying to skirt around this issue by using code words. And it was something I already kind of knew. So with the new option, this isn’t something that has been brought up with me very clearly yet, but it’s what they mean when they say they’re looking for a place when they’re trying to figure out what kind of scale they want to make it on. But it’s very nice that five years since it got published, someone read it and wants to do it.

I wasted a year of my life trying to put together a Bollywood option of that film. I don’t even know after a year of working on it what the Bollywood version would be about. It was a nightmare.

Going back to what you were saying about Turbulence being the first time you were writing about places you'd actually been: How do you capture lived space in a comic or a book? They're the places that move around daily, but they're not like "Oh, that's a five-story-tall building," but not, "Oh, this happened in that building, and that building has a certain affect about it," or "This one corner has a certain puddle and no one knows why," the things where if you've been there you know, but you can't just Google map it and know.

I found there isn't that much difference between trying to capture unreal space and realized space. The central issue is one of confidence while you're writing it. If I'm setting a scene on the Millennium Bridge—the year after that, it got destroyed in the Harry Potter movie, and I was like, "Ahhh! It was about time." I have a list of monuments that have gotten destroyed. It's a question of the challenge of a space that is familiar to the abstract reader and a space that is. When you're creating, it's not that fantasy or science fiction spaces are unfamiliar at all. So we visualize every imaginary space as a slight extension of another imaginary space that we've encountered in the world that is familiar to us. And in many ways, your world is exactly the same.

For example, if I was setting a scene somewhere that was a very familiar space to Indian mythology instead of Western imaginary space, then I would be more concerned about how to make it clear what's going on now. If I set it in an underground volcano, then I know we all know what's going on here. So for me, that's more challenging than London. I set *Resistance* years in the future because I wanted to set it in New York and Tokyo, and at the time, I'd not been to either. So at the time, I was talking about a real-world space and the larger challenges of writing that book when I knew it was a book that would be coming out in America, and I was scanning reviews to see if New York was completely unconvincing, and they didn't say that. And I went to New York a year later, and I did a walk of the route, and it did look like it ("Oh, that's where... and it looks like this!").

Did you use other film /TV depictions? The nice thing about New York is that even if you haven't been there, we've all been there thanks to movies and such.

It felt really familiar. And when I finally when there, it felt like I knew it all along because I'd seen it 500 times, both constructions of New York that were actually sets in L.A. and also New York that were constructions in some way. New York and London are the most chronicled cities in the world, at least visually. So I was glad no one had noticed that I had—

Google mapped it? I didn't notice! But I've never been to Tokyo, though.

Neither have I! I was supposed to, but it fell through. And there I used books and maps and the like, too. Whether the space is real or imaginary, what you're really trying to capture is the sense of it that your readers haven't previously encountered.

Do you think that makes it harder to capture spaces that aren't as well documented?

The thing is I had never had a very clear understanding because I had grown up reading books that were absolutely not set here—so British boarding schools, for example, where these people are not like me, especially since these books were set in the early twentieth century. As a reader, I don't come expecting familiarity, and maybe that is a function of my distance from a publisher and things like that. When *Simoqin Prophecies* came out, I was very interested to see, because we don't have a science fiction or fantasy community like you have in America, so most readers were coming at it from a space of absolute unfamiliarity, and what struck me was that you had all these readers that didn't know in any way what fantasy science fiction readers were supposed to be like, but readers who were reading in the way that I told it. So that was very nice. It was only when the expectation came in that I encountered problems. When I sent the books out to publishers, on the same day I got rejections for it being too Indian and for it not being Indian enough.

So one set of people is saying, "Look, it's not translating their culture to us," and the other is saying, "You're using features and monsters we're not familiar with." And this was when the Internet in India was fairly new. I had no context, no research on how things worked, how to pitch books... The encyclopedia of advice wasn't there; it was all very new and coming in quickly.

On to fun ones, I think. How did you pick the superpowers?

In *Turbulence*, it came mostly out of a secret agenda. I wanted this one to go out across the world. I had not written my first three books with anything other than, "Perhaps I can write, I really like it, I don't know how to be good at it, I'm going to write until I stop and see if anyone other than my mom enjoys it."

The horrors of publishing hit one after the other, so with *Turbulence*, I was very clear that I wanted this book to sneak into bookstores around the world. I had no sense of what they actually wanted, but I had a long list of what they didn't want. So when it came to selecting the powers, I tried to look for powers that were globally understandable, if that makes sense. It was after seven years of writing about imaginary spaces, which got more and more tedious for me as I kept going into it. I wanted to write a book set absolutely in the present and reflected present concerns, and specific concerns. It was 2009, political parties coming to power, the growing importance of the Internet, the madness of the entertainment industry, the obsession with sports on TV, things like that. I knew various places that I wanted to set. There was much more matching a power with a character and seeing if it was something specific in a way that would travel. I hadn't planned on it being a superhero novel when I started out. I have a habit of raising the volume on everything. I have never been a nationalist at all.

You destroy the nation in that one, so it shows.

Yes. I found this fascinating, that work I created could find a home very far away. And I didn't want there to be obvious barriers to understanding these characters, at least the main four or five characters.

Any time you have a character like Tia who can eat chocolate and not gain weight, that's universal—you're good to go.

The problem is that all the good powers are taken. I'd also been writing in comics for some years, so the idea that you're creating anything original in these spaces is something that I think is futile at some point. It's really more about how to make this interesting in a way that has probably been done before, but you can't remember as being directly correlating to somewhere else.

At the end of Resistance, it's Tia, Aman, and Uzma who are the power trio that are going to shape the new world. Why them?

It was bias.

OK—I mean, I'm all about them getting to do it.

Essentially, I was fond of them, ever since the beginning of *Turbulence*. Those were the cast members I was fondest of. I'm just justifying it now. The kind of powers they have are the kind of powers I'd want most if I were starting as a superhero or a supervillain, and none of them are violence-based powers, though Tia—well, all of them—are violence-capable. They're more evolved conceptually than the standard "I-can-beat-people-up-really-well" powers that I found very irritating. The whole superhero explosion that's happening now are all characters created in the 1930s and 1960s, and they met the aspirations and ambitions of those times, which were global warfare—

Punching Nazis in the face.

Right. Which I don't really like. So I thought the twenty-first century aspiration was the global. So the human technology balance on the one hand, the ability to generate influence on the other, and the problem of too much choice and how do you live your life when you're faced with two things you want to do. Which actually kept Aman and Tia central because Uzma's power is really creepy. I wanted to have her in there because it's something I think most Indian people, if they didn't have to present a pleasant face to the world, have desired at some point or another, that people would just listen to them and they wouldn't have to consistently explain all the time.

Since we're on conclusions, I have a question about conclusions. The endings of The Gameworld Trilogy and the Turbulence duology aren't really endings. They're kind of beginnings. So what do endings like that allow you to do? Why not just end them with a neat little bow and say, "It's over now, and this is how it turned out"?

I don't know that any book has an ending to it. There's no story that you can't pick up from where it left off. If everything ends in the story, it's probably not a good story.

It still feels more open than Lord of the Rings. In The Gameworld Trilogy, the whole world is new, and in Resistance, it's literally Aman starting over again, redoing a speech to the world that he had just messed up.

It was tougher in *The Gameworld Trilogy* because I didn't know how to end it. I hadn't planned a trilogy in the first place. I wanted to end it with the first one—a couple of forceful twists, and then you're done! But I got arm-twisted, and with the next two, I had fun writing them, but it wasn't the same.

With *Turbulence*, I was clear that I didn't want to do a third one. I felt there was enough; I didn't have enough good, new ideas to do a third one. Since I was writing a more engaged book in terms of reflecting present-day concerns and interest, I wanted to not explain what had happened all along, and I wanted to not seal the fate of the world in that sense. I thought of what endings there could be, and none of them were good. When you start applying Indian standards to these things, they end in either huge victory or huge catastrophe.

You either destroy the world or you keep it the same.

And neither of them work.

In the back of the volume 1 collection of Devi, the interview with you explains how writing for comics is different from writing for not comics. Does that change the way you think spatially? Does you being a comic fan change things?

I don't think I've done any good comics yet.

OK—what makes a good comic? I want to make sure I'm on the same page with that.

There are so many kinds of good comics, so I agree that was a very big statement. But even in the field of the types of comics I was working in, some of it was not being allowed to take the stories where I wanted to take them. This was also my first encounter with industrial storytelling, which I don't like—at all. I didn't like the initial concept of *Devi* because I thought it was the most overdone... Being presented with the situation where you had to write this, I tried to bring a little more sense to it, and I don't know if I succeeded.

I think it trains you to write screenplays. The value of comics is twofold. For the first time, you have the sense that the space you have to tell your story is constrained. I think Comics are an excellent learning exercise for two reasons. One is that they teach you the value of economy. I've not written another 500-page book since I started writing comics. The books are just shorter and shorter. The children's series I finished last year were twenty-thousand words each. Comics have something to do with that. They make you think about what you need to say and how efficiently you need to say it, and if you're wandering off, do you need to or do you need to come back. I'm certainly not an economy writer, but if it's something that you want or that comics help you work up to, I didn't find it hugely challenging to do the Bollywood screenplay—I had a very good editor, in terms of telling me, "OK, this doesn't work. Do it again." I hadn't encountered any real editing with the *Prophecies* books in India; they were mostly looking at if it was written OK, so this was my first encounter with actual editorial writing.

The other thing comics teach you is to think spatially, which is not something you do as a writer at all. I certainly had never imagined an idea in your head, but you don't see it as a layout.

You're not very concerned with how your idea works on the page. Comics teach you with how an area will look. It's very interesting. That doesn't help you with writing books later, but it does help you when you're trying to do screenplay work.

Two questions about form. Would you want to do a web comic?

I wrote for *18 Days*, when they were supposed to be [print] comics, but I think they're using some of the same scripts. I would love to do web comics, when you're looking at short serial comics. Calvin and Hobbes is one of the things I loved most in the world. But if you can't draw, it is a very difficult thing to go into because it's one of the things there is never any money for. So finding artists to stick with you is very hard. I never want to be the person to make people work for free.

Digitally written text and printed written text. Ebooks are how I can access your Gameworld Trilogy—I can't get them in print, at least not easily. What do you think about that?

I like both ways of reading. I go through phases I don't understand—where I'll be reading print more or when I'll be on the Kindle endlessly. I never thought of it much. I don't have a resistance to reading. The empire of Amazon has helped a bit with that because you can find things on the global store that you couldn't find in Indian sites. For a couple of years, I was getting things written in India on trips abroad. I like the digital forms of text delivery. It's going to be a while because I don't know how to make careers of those things so I'm talking about it as a reader more.

Some people get very fired up about this, and others just don't care: For you, what's the main difference between the genres of fantasy and science fiction? Are you one of the authors who draws a sharp line about what one can do and what the other cannot?

I'm in the "don't care" category. I'm not a hard science fiction reader. All the books I love most in the broad spectrum are books about characters and societies in times and places. The world of P. G. Wodehouse is about as close to my real life as Hogwarts. So I don't understand why someone would like one or the other, but there weren't genres when I was growing up. I grew up in a house where it was completely uncategorized. I didn't know what books were children's books or grown-up books. I would just start on a shelf and go through. My slight fear of literary fiction comes from trying to read it as a child and having no understanding what was going on, and just feeling stupid for not understanding. My parents and my sister were very classic reading people. I found a lot of those classics were very boring. So fantasy and science fiction for me is . . . rewards and balance?

When my books came out, their attempt at marketing *Simoqin Prophecies* was "India's first fantasy trilogy," and I didn't care about that. But they said first SFS novel. So I had everyone expecting science fiction, which it is not. So I think categorization helps people decide what not to read, or what to feel comfortable about. The only reason for any of this is to give people a reason to avoid books in general. "I read science fiction, I don't read science fiction, I don't read anything else." I don't know if there's anything that scares me more than over classification of books.

I've not had the experience of fitting into a writing space either in India or abroad. It's mostly trying to enjoy the good aspect of each. It becomes easier and easier to ignore. I feel quite privileged since I'm able to write for a living. The sense of reality you feel in the creative work space...each is nice for certain reasons. The first time I went to London was very interesting to talk about specific elements of crafts with very celebrated writers in this space. I hadn't had that before. In India, the only other conversation with writers were gossip, basically—who is getting what award. Bollywood conversations are a whole other thing. Abstract beauty that have nothing to do with anything—lovely people, but all mad.

I'd like to ask about your project assembling Indian SF authors in 2006. What were the parameters and the points of the fellowship?

It was from an Indian research institute, and they'd asked me to apply. It was 11 years ago now, and if we entered the same questions to the Internet, you'd get a really wide range of conflicting information. This was the pre-social media age, so the way people tried to sell their work or protect themselves was really different. Everyone was really helpful and wanted to talk about what I had to ask. There were some writers that I knew and others who also ran blogs, and I would leave comments, and they would apply. Now I feel the other people you're talking to are all super familiar names. I've met Vandana [Singh], of course, but I haven't met the other ones. But they're all familiar names, and I think that happened in the last four to five years.

Do you have any thoughts about the academic interest in genre fiction versus readers or other writers? Writers can talk about craft, about markets, what's selling and not, while academics have their own take on things for better or worse.

The writer thing is what I can speak about most clearly. You have to be very careful about which writers you're talking to—I'm saying this about me as well. Every aspect of this life is changing very fast, and no one has a handle on what's going on. So science fiction and fantasy are entirely different. The structure of literary conversation is very interesting to me about how the genre is built on actual communities. So many conferences, panels, and discussions, but the danger of that, of course, is that it does tend to become very inward-looking. I was asking British writers a bit ago if they were involved in the online discussions—which is largely American-based—and a percent of me understood what was happening at the time, and it's not because I can't understand the words but “Where and what is this conversation?” In a spectrum of race and gender, it's very interesting. I can't process it. I've never been part of the community that is concerned with its internal pyramid of structure.

In terms of the academics, I don't understand postcolonial theory. It's a very uninformed response, whenever I've had one. That's been the stopping point of discussions. When you emailed me, you already had a really full list of people you have/want to talk to, whereas earlier, this would be the single starting point, and you'd branch out from there. Over the last fifteen years, there's been a lot more work. Around the world, you connect with people and they make more lists and things, and that's sort of helped.

Would you like to speak about what you're working on next?

It's probably going to be a near-future, social-science fiction sort of thing set somewhere in the Global South. This is perhaps a postcolonial thing, but I don't think I can do dystopia because whenever I read something dystopian, I know there are parts of the world where this actually happens.

Right. Repeatedly.

Right. I'm watching the *Handmaid's Tale*, and it's not just Saudi Arabia, but there are parts of India that look like this. Setting context to dystopia that works in this part of the world would be quite difficult because it would have to be so extreme... I don't want to write dystopia because my understanding is quite different, so I'm doing a lot of research, and eventually I'll write something.

Would you ever want to write Utopia?

I wouldn't know what my utopian society would look like. This was the same thing—I couldn't find a happy ending to either series because I'm no longer clear about what would a better world look like beyond things that are...basic.

Given that the whole world is going through a huge crisis, it is very difficult now to set your escapism in the future because you feel more of a responsibility to reflect reality. I'm speaking just from my part in the world. It seems my country is heading down this very dark path.

I'm in a state of shock with what's happening in my country. It's becoming harder and harder to set something in an alternative world or a fun fast paced thing set in the here and now. I don't know. I'm still processing if I have some kind of responsibility to do something really grim.

Or a responsibility to write something not really grim. This opens up all sorts of questions about the responsibility of a writer when the world is going to pieces.

It's a question of commitment. Either you write something that makes people feel better—that's one direction. Or...what seems to me, at least, from where I'm watching, what's been capturing the imagination of America for the past year is a certain type of science fiction.

With political upheaval, different ideologies...

That seems to be more the direction—I don't know whether I have a responsibility to do that type of writing, but I feel like given the time that's maybe what I should do.

While still having fun with it, somehow?

That's been the problem in starting with it. You can feel guilty for having too much fun when you're doing the world building. I now realize it's been a position of privilege to think about having fun with my books this far. I've never felt this sense of "You need to capture present day reality."

I'm also very confused about how this relates to the "standard experience" of Indian writing image, which is that you're to explain India to the world. It was very easy, earlier, to know what type of writing I didn't want to do. One is: "I understand India, and here is what it means." Because no one does. I've read all of the great Indian novels and none of them relate at all to my life. None of them. The other kind is the banally exoticized, self-Orientalizing, the whole mango jasmine, tourism, and beautiful brown thing. It's very easy to know I don't want to write either of those things. But now, this is really confusing. The last three years have been I don't know what I want to write anymore.

It sounds like it will be good, whatever it turns out to be. The anxious thoughts sound promising. I feel like there are more things to ask, but now I'm thinking about all of the terrible current event things.

See? This is the problem. Especially after watching something like *Black Mirror*. Every episode of that is a really interesting book if I set it here. I've been having all these fun ideas but it's not grim enough. I've never taken so much time to start working on the actual book. All of the books I've written have been written really quickly because most of the research has been stuff I've done—I know the essential shape of the story and worked from there. But now I just finished reading six books on climate change so now I'm *horrified*.

Well, the Anthropocene is the new arena in science fiction and academic circles. Which is good! We should be! On the other hand it often leaves out a lot of important things, like people at a local level.

For the first time I'm wondering where in the world would I want to move? And then there's the question of where in the world *could* I move? These are new questions I have, and I don't like them.

And thinking also about where in the world people are fleeing, in great masses...

We're seeing a rise in India of these really nationalist writers in fantasy and science fiction related space.

Really? In the genre fiction?

We don't like to be associated with Western concepts, so it's Hindu mythological fiction.

One of the reasons I started writing in genre (without understanding it of course) was that I assumed writers were a better type of human.

That's a lot of pressure to put on yourself.

I was living the correct Indian boy life as a student, went to business school because that's what you did when you earned a certain set of marks on your exam and I dropped out of that a month later and that's what was possibly interesting to the public when the book came out. With no understanding of politics at all, the people were loathsome without any label attached. But now I

see they are the post-shift elite. Now I know about the SF problems in the community in America. It's doubly offensive to me that the people whose primary strengths are imagination, and the construction of better reality, a more powerful reality than the one we live in, that so much of it should be so backwards and conservative...I don't understand it, it makes no sense to me at all.

I don't like it either, but on one hand it makes sense. It's just a different type of imagination.

The binary here is whether you're for the familiar or the strange. I didn't understand how conservative *Lord of the Rings* was because to me it was part of the strange as well—when you're talking about protecting the British countryside from the scary orcs, all I saw was the road that goes up to Mt. Doom.

And then... Oh, right, the Motherland of the Empire.

Right.

This question isn't related at all, but it also isn't sad. What's up with the duck?

In the blog or the books?

I meant the blog. But ...

The ship called the Duck of Destiny was named after the blog retroactively. For the blog, well that blog is pretty much dead. It was nothing. I just like ducks! So the dissertation?

[Recap of dissertation. See Abstract.]

That's interesting because as a planet we have been much less obsessed with what lies beyond the planet and more focused on fighting for space on it. I don't remember the last significant thing that happened in space...

We just found Earth-like planets potentially capable of sustaining life...

Right, but it seems like from the nineties on, there would seem to be a shift...Do share it, when you're done.

Spatially, it's been fascinating for me, thanks to the Internet, to talk to writers around the world. There's actually less common ground than I thought there would be. Before I was completely outside the community of fantasy and science fiction. I assumed—quite stupidly—that there was *one* community, a type of galactic space federation I just needed to join. But the more I encountered, the more I saw human subdivisions all over the place. In many ways it is as clannish as our world. Which is always very sad. The further you go away, the stranger you want things to be, and then you identify “Oh my god, it's the same!”

B.2 LAUREN BEUKES

Personal interview conducted July 19, 2016 by Jessica FitzPatrick

Haas Coffee Shop, 19 Buitenkant St., Cape Town, South Africa

Beukes and FitzPatrick ordered breakfast, Beukes with coffee, and later tea; FitzPatrick with tea, and later more tea

Lauren Beukes is a South African writer who currently lives and writes in Cape Town. Beukes works in many platforms and across many subgenres. Though she primarily writes in the fields of science fiction and horror, she also writes comics (the horror genre *Survivors' Club*, 2015-2016, with her friend and fellow SF artist Dale Halvorsen, and the twisted fairytale *Fairest: The Hidden Kingdom*, issues 8-13), nonfiction (*Maverick: Extraordinary Women from South Africa's Past*, 2005), and television screenplays (most intensively for *URBO: The Adventures of Pax Afrika* “sci-fi action adventure show for 7-9 year olds”). She has also worked as a journalist in South Africa and the U.S. (winning Vodacom’s “Best Columnist [of] Western Cape” in 2007 and 2008) and directed the documentary *Glitterboys & Ganglands* (2011). Beukes has won the Arthur C. Clarke Award (for *Zoo City*), the August Derleth prize for Best Horror, and the University of Johannesburg Prize (*The Shining Girls*). Her most recent work is *Slipping: Stories, Essays, and Other Writing* (2016).

She is relentless in her lineup of projects, which extend beyond the labor of writing fiction to literary modes of outreach: for her fans, by orchestrating soundtracks for her two novels “to reflect the mood of the book[s]” (published by African Dope Records, *Zoo City*

Soundtrack in 2010 and *Moxyland Soundtrack* in 2008); and for her community, by organizing charity art shows benefiting organizations like RapeCrisis and children's literature organization Book Dash.

How does a story's setting affect its characters? (You said in previous interviews that your writing process tends to be more plot-driven, but I'm curious about how the spaces the characters move through inhibit or allow certain types of plots and actions.)

The city is always a character in my novels. I think you get a real sense of it. This is why I'm struggling so much with my new one, because it moves around a lot, but also because I'm always writing from a very South African perspective. So Detroit and Chicago are both analogues of Johannesburg—Chicago because it is this bright, shining city, but it has terrible crime, terrible corruption, and the apartheid regime went to Chicago to learn how to do segregation better, which is that you drive a highway through the slums, to stop people from organizing and create divides. But also, you know, all the twenty-first century stuff: Nuclear fission was achieved for the first time in Chicago, the movie industry was based there before Charlie Chaplain moved to L.A., the skyscraper was born there...but it's also subconscious, something about the place that speaks to me.

With *The Shining Girls*, you know, I came up with the idea of a time-traveling serial killer, and I didn't want to set it in South Africa because the history of the twentieth century in South Africa is the story of Apartheid, which is important, but I've also covered it in *Moxyland* and *Zoo City*, I wanted to do something about women's rights and how things have changed for women, and it had to be set somewhere else, somewhere like America or the U.K.. I've looked at places I've lived—I've lived in New York, but NYC has been so done...and I've lived in Chicago, and I've lived in London, and, well, I was like, "Chicago!"

Do you think you chose Chicago because it is reminiscent of Johannesburg?

Yes, it is kind of finding those threads and teasing them out. And with Detroit, it started with the ruin porn, but I knew that my fascination with the ruin porn was because of the way people look at Hillbrow. There was an amazing—and by that I mean terrible—blog, I think it's still around, called the "Death of Johannesburg," and it is all about what these *black people* have done to Hillbrow, which used to be this vibrant, amazing place, and there's all these photographs of shuttered-up buildings, and piled up garbage. But it's looking at that stuff without looking at life. And Hillbrow is full of life. And Detroit is so alive, and so vibrant, and the arts community is *amazing*, and it's so exciting. So it's finding places where I can get under the skin of people's expectations.

But then it's also just writing Joburg because that's where I grew up, and it's finding sneaky ways to write about Joburg...

So, yes: The cities are a character. A couple of years ago an Editor made me write a short story, where he assigned writers a location and asked them to write like, South Africa 2039 or something. And he assigned Tankwa Karoo for me, because he knew how much I love cities and

he was like “Nope! You can’t have a city.” But it was alright because then I had Afrika Burns (which is a sister festival to Burning Man.) What’s exciting about cities is the way people come together and the way you can have a story that touches in all these kinds of lives, which I’m sure you can have in a small town as well, but not in the same way.

Different lives, right?

Well, you have desperate poverty and racism, right?

Yes, I was thinking the upper ends may not be quite as ostentatious.

Yeah, though I do think in the states, these people moving into these beautiful towns and living...

But they’re going back to the city now.

Oh, really?

Supposedly in the States there’s an undertow from the flight out of the cities to suburbia, where they’re going back again...and the people who choose to do that dynamic are the people with money.

It’s so devastating, really. Some of my best friends Sam Wilson and his wife Kerry Gordon moved out to Westlake, and it’s *so far away* by Cape Town standards—it’s like a 20-minute drive, but it’s like, “Oh my god, you might as well live on the other side of the world!” But the city’s just become completely unaffordable. And this district is supposed to be called the Fringe District, and it’s supposed to be where they were trying to set up cool artist studios and neat coffee shops, but the real estate is so expensive. It’s like they’re catering to trust-fund holders. Either you want real artists or you don’t.

And I’m interested in psychogeographies. As a human being, you have layers of association in a place, and all of these things fold over each other. I had a break-up a couple of years ago, and I definitely went back to places in order to overwrite the history, to ensure that place was no longer associated with him. But we all have that, and I’m really interested in the intersections of those psychic spaces and how different they are. What this place [a café] means to a homeless person who sleeps on the balcony at night. Or the cops who drive past here and are like, “Oh, bloody hipsters,” you know.

That’s really exciting to me because one of the spatial theorists I’m working with is Edward Soja, and he has this whole thing riffing off of Homi Bhabha about thirdspace, where it’s not just the physical thing, and it’s not just our conceptions of the thing, but it’s also our lived experiences.

Yes, absolutely. All cities are haunted, and that’s a common theme in my work. We are haunted by history and cities are haunted by these layers of experiences in each place. And often you won’t even know— what’s interesting is that you’re walking through these ghosts.

Have you read Tomorrow and Tomorrow? It's by a Pittsburgh writer, Thomas Sweterlitsch, and it's set in Pittsburgh. The city is basically nuked, and "Pittsburgh" is uploaded as a limitedly interactive archive. The people who survive are those out of town on a business trip, for example, and they can now go online in this archive and walk through their memories, their histories, but it's not a continuing present. It only allows them to relive their memories. So the main character can go back to where his wife told him they were pregnant, and he can go back to her getting out of the shower, but then someone starts deleting his wife.

(Gasp.)

It's really good. But it's somehow easier to think about these things as a file, but we do it all the time.

We do it all the time. It's space; it's geography.

And we rewrite things.

We rewrite things in our heads—it's our geography.

Going back to the slightly more physical... Moxyland cyberpunk technothriller... Zoo City is a magically realistic version of things. Why not set the cyberpunk technothriller in Joburg, and the magical, speculative story in Cape Town? Is there something about those spaces?

It's because I was living in Cape Town at the time, but I was really fascinated to look at the place and map out an imaginary future. With *Zoo City*, it had to be Joburg because I was really interested in Hillbrow and reclaiming space. It was also this striking image I had in my head, which was a young woman going to a closet and taking out a sloth, which she pulled on to her shoulders like a backpack, and what that meant. The secret history of Sloth comes from the time I went to see a sports psychologist who works with top level athletes to get practical advice on how to stop procrastinating on *Moxyland*, and I told him, "It feels like I'm pulling a weight onto my back, a procrastination fear-lump." So that's where the sloth comes from.

It's not like Cape Town is more techno...

I was hoping it wasn't: "Cape Town is the Future."

Oh, no. Well, a segregated, ruthless future, sure. With privilege and access, and the whole cell phone element [from *Moxyland*]*—I wish I had patented some of those ideas. You can pay here with SnapScan (I don't know if you have that in the States). You download it with your phone, and you just scan the code. You can also pay for parking with it. So, on one hand, it's nice to see it because I'm always thinking, "Moxyland!" But it's also nice because it's in your control, it's in your hand. You don't have to pass a card to someone, it's in your hand, and it's really cool. Everything is about the pin.*

So numbers are the new signature.

Right—but it’s also your phone in your hand. You have to get through the passcode first. If I ever wrote a sequel to *Zoo City*, I would totally use this—I had a smash-and-grab in Joburg just after I won the University of Johannesburg prize, and they got my R 70,000 check and my best lip gloss and my cell phone. But it was such a Joburg story. It’s completely off topic, but it’s a really nice story.

I’d been living in Cape Town too long, and I had the handbag on the seat next to me, it was 10 o’clock at night, I’d had a glass of champagne, and I was staying with a friend because I try to stay with people rather than at hotels because it’s too lonely. I knew his doorbell wasn’t working, and I couldn’t remember his apartment number, so I was checking my phone to see if he had texted me his apartment number, and I also wanted to let him know I was on my way. As my phone screen lit up, a figure reared up next to my window, smashed my window, launched himself into my car, grabbed the phone out of my hand, snatched my handbag, and was *gone*. I hit the accelerator and went straight through the red light. Thank god there was no oncoming traffic because it was just purely instinctual. Then it was just: “Ugh.” It is such a South African reaction to crime: “Oh my god, what a pain in the ass. I’m going to have to go to the *bank*, and it’s a rental car, and I’m going to have to cancel all the cards... Arrrgh.”

So I’m driving to my friend’s house anyway, and this middle-aged Muslim couple pulls up next to me—he’s wearing the taqiyah and she’s wearing the niqab—and they’re asking me, “Are you OK?”

So I roll down my window. “*What?*”

They’re asking, “Are you OK? We saw the whole thing!”

“I’m fine, I’m just going to go to my friend’s house.”

And they’re insisting “No! Are you OK? We saw the whole thing happen! Pull over. We want to check that you’re OK!”

“Ughhhhh! I just, I just—I’m *fine*.” So I pull over to the gas station on the side where you park. The couple jumps out:

“Oh my gosh, we thought they were going to hit us, and then they hit you—”

And as they’re talking, this young black couple emerges from their car. And the woman says

“Oh my god, they got you, too!”

And, you know, we had an interracial group hug in the garage in Joburg. And *that* is Joburg. The crime is shitty, *but* ...and that is a very different character than Cape Town, I think.

I used Yolundi’s phone to tweet for help, since I didn’t have anyone’s numbers, but I remembered some Twitter handles. And then she invited me to her wedding. I didn’t get to go because I was working on my novel, but the whole thing was so sweet.

So anyways, my phone got stolen. I wasn’t worried, because I had a pin code. So it was the one thing I didn’t cancel, and I figured I’d do that in the morning. Well, they ran up a R 30,000 charge on my phone overnight.

Doing what, using the Internet?

I'd like to think they were watching TEDx talks, and grannies from Lagos were able to talk to their little grandchildren for the first time... I think they may have actually just used it as a hotspot and offered to let other people use it. But they also subscribed to a lot of porn services and a lot of lottery services. And there were a lot of phone numbers phoned. A lot of R 10,000 into Africa, and R 12 to 15,000 into Europe. So I'm sure it was all syndicate business. So I got the list of phone numbers from Vodacom and passed them over to the detective. And now, it's a year later, I may actually release those numbers on the internet.

Can I ask a question for my students³⁰²? Was the detective's attitude just: "Oh, another one."

Oh, yeah. The detective was just annoyed. He was like, "What am I supposed to do with this?" No one had been murdered, no one had been hurt. But it was interesting because they didn't have Internet at the Hillbrow police station, so I couldn't email him. I had to phone him because he didn't have airtime on his phone. It was appalling, but also, he didn't care. He was like, "Look—you just need this for insurance. Piss off, leave me alone, I'm busy."

And I was like, "But I have this list of numbers! It's obviously syndicate!" He didn't care.

But how great would that be as the start to a novel, seeing what *are* those numbers—is one of them really interesting?

That is a really good story.

How do you depict lived space, the psycho geographies, in words? I was asking Dale this too. You know, how do you take this emotional register and put it into a medium that is tangible, or at least visible to our eye on paper or Kindle? How do you take the invisible things and make them tangible, or at least more tangible than thoughts?

I just kind of write...

Maybe it's less of a "How do you," and more of a "Can you say something about the fact that we can, through writing, or visual art," do that. We can do that, in a way that, at the moment, you can't otherwise.

Stephen King said it best that writing is telepathy. What happens when I write is that I'm summoning things, again this comes, for me, down to psycho-literariness, psycho-telepathies, which is that you're bringing all of your lived experiences, and that you allow the space to breathe and trust who it is.

I had a French journalist from Le Monde say, "Your books are very smart. Quite challenging."

Well, thank you!

He said, "You don't want to be a bestseller, do you?"

Yeah. OK. Fine. But it's about subtext, letting readers fill in the gaps. With *Broken Monsters*, I had a lot of people talk to me. A lot of the radio interviews they had people talk to me. "Well, what do you think of social media—is it evil?" No, it's just part of the world. I don't have the

³⁰² From my Detective Fiction course.

answers for you, I'm sorry. What I have are the questions. It's up to you to figure out the answers.

I sometimes get feedback from people who *hated* the ending and now they can't stop thinking about it. That's kind of the point. The point is to make my problems your problems.

When you release a story out into the world, do you want it to interrupt or engage with people's worlds? You don't seem to shy away from political thinking in your writing. I don't want to ask if you think literature can effect world change, but maybe I do kind of want to ask about that. I know you've spoken a bit about that during your 2016 TEDx talk, "Stories allow us to be more than we are"...

Stories are how we understand the world. Stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, but also stories are like an empathy hit. It allows you to step into someone else's world, lives, and experiences, and allows you to experience more than you are. They allow us to be more than we are. And that's critical. People who don't read are only living one life. They're living such a limited version of the world. So I think these stories can expand our understanding of things and our thinking of things.

I don't know if they can be political change, but I think it can mean something to individuals. I've had one instance sent me an email and said she was in Zimbabwe and had just finished *The Shining Girls*, and someone tried to mug her with a knife—I don't know if any of this is true, but she thought of Kirby, and she fought him off. She could've thought of anything. It happened to be the thing that she reached for in that moment. It could've been an old episode of *MacGyver* she'd seen the night before, but she thought of Kirby, and that's what brought her through.

I also had a woman wait for me at a New York signing, right at the end to come talk to me, and she said, "I don't want to get into it, but I survived something horrible, and what you wrote really resonated with me, and I just wanted to say thank you." I met a woman at a party in Cape Town a few weeks ago, and she said a similar thing, that she'd had a horrendous experience, and she found it really cathartic and empowering and that I got it right. And that's what really counts. Although those are not things I hold up when I'm beating myself up. Instead, it's the one tweet where, "Oh, I didn't like the ending."

What I think stories can do is give people other perspectives. And I think that to fully be human is to have empathy and to understand how other people are different to us. And other experiences and stories. It's the faceless horde versus a personal story you live in for a while, which makes it real and allows you to feel it.

Do you think this goes along with living diversely?

Yes! Absolutely. It's very important. I can't use it as an example anymore, but the show that was dangerous in South Africa was *The Cosby Show*. And now...

What were you guys doing, we needed this!

But also *Fresh Prince*, right—Black people are people! They have lives like us and can be a professional. What a radical idea!

So those representations are *vital*, absolutely vital. Have you seen the picture going around of the female ghostbusters? It's really sweet.

I saw the Webster Dictionary thing—A female ghostbuster is just ghostbuster.

Right! This is one of the actresses, Kristen Wiig, is leaning over to shake a little girl's hand, and behind her is this little black girl, and she's looking at her, and her face is so full of wonder, and excitement, and delight, and it's like, "YES." Like Ray in *Star Wars*. We need this. We vitally need this.

The whole world is terrifying right now.

Everyone at the keynote was like, "Look at England and Brexit, we know the 'Commonwealth' is falling apart!"

I hope the Rand gets stronger, but guys, can you stop fucking around now? But it's also funny to see British friends being like, "Comics have gone up by 25%!" and it's kind of like, "Welcome to our world!"

Can I ask about your book soundtracks? Why make a book soundtrack? Soundtracks are good for a lot of things—car trips, working out, productivity sessions— but why make a book soundtrack when we now have books on tape?

We didn't really have audiobooks back then. Well, I suppose we did, but not really in South Africa. I did it because I could, really. I knew people at African Dope Records and I thought it'd be really cool to do. That's also why I've done all the art projects, just because it seemed like it would be cool and fun and interesting to see how people played in your world. The soundtracks haven't gone particularly well, unfortunately. The first eBook was put together by my friend Arthur Attwell of Book Dash³⁰³, which is incredible. So he figured out a way to embed the soundtrack in the eBook. But that version no longer exists

That would be amazing. Would it just play automatically as you read the book, as a type of background immersion or...?

You could play it as you got to the page. So I said look, I have this crazy idea. My publisher didn't want to touch it. So the record label basically did it for free, and I said, "You don't have to pay me anything because they took all the risk," but it was interesting, the cross-pollination there. *African Dope* was kind of the Ninja Tunes of South Africa. So people would find out about it and be like, "What is this? The soundtrack to what?" in Germany or Finland, and that

³⁰³ "Book Dash gathers volunteer creative professionals to create new, African storybooks that anyone can freely translate and distribute" (<http://bookdash.org/>).

was exciting. That's what excites me, the—I don't know if I'd use the word intersectionality, but—cross-pollination.

We went to a slam poetry reading at InZynch near Stellenbosch, and that night was a combination of open mic academics, people who work creatively, and local poets. One of the local poets was from their youth program, and his piece was on intersectionality. It was amazing. I'm going to think of him anytime I hear that word.

I read a paper that criticized the *Zoo City* soundtrack because it was all old-school Kwaito. And it was very irritating because the academic had my number, and he could've asked to talk at any time, but instead, he wrote this paper about how *Zoo City* is a new colonialism when she goes off into Africa at the end...(big sigh) *Fine*. That's a reading you can have. But what irritated me is what he said about the soundtrack. He said that was my only understanding about African music. And I was like, "No, dude, that's what was available to us for *free*, the artists who were able to do it for free and *possibly* get royalties afterwards."

Imagine that: Your artistic visions are restrained by fiscal realities...

But it's funny how often that happens—if he had just asked me how this actually came together...

That's funny. It seems either academics really value the fact that, "Oh! I'm working on a contemporary text! I might get in touch with that person!" Or they just forget because that's not the training we get.

It's not journalistic.

Right! Of course we can look at Shakespeare, but why can't we look at current artists? So I'm trying to get a bunch of interviews for the dissertation, and everyone is saying "I never thought of that!" Why not ask?

What is the title, the question, of the dissertation?

Hacking the Future: The Space and Place of Earth in Postcolonial Science Fiction. We'll see how it goes. Looking at people who are labelled as, marketed as, or self-identify as—

—African?

I'm doing a bunch of places, so "postcolonial." And overwhelmingly, they don't go out into outer space, even though it's a genre that allows you to do that in a beautiful, productive way, like Samuel Delany's displacement effect works so well, but they don't do that. They say, "I'm going to do it from here, but it may not be the 'here' that you know, and how can we write back."

Do you know about Selly Raby Kane in Dakar? She's an amazing fashion designer, and two years ago, she did an art show and the idea was what if aliens came to Dakar and how would it affect fashion? She created all these crazy outfits based on weird textures and forms, and then

she had an art party in the streets (outside) the Dakar train station. And they built a robot—you know, it was lo-fi, but they had this huge street parade, and weird tentacles hanging from the roof. This year (I was desperate to go, and I just couldn't) she had all these interesting people who came out and there was kind of an augmented reality game, I think, and she brought out VR [virtual reality] people. She's *amazing*.

That is so great! Oh that's wonderful. To get all of that happening...

It's super rad. I also think Afrofuturism thrown around casually is a stupid thing.

It's a buzzword now.

But what does it *mean*? A black woman with a cool haircut in gold vinyl clothes? Didn't Grace Jones do that twenty years ago?

It can be done really well,

But then it comes down to this whole thing of "black culture is just one thing." And all of Africa—that's the worst, when people are going "to Africa." Where? Where are you going in Africa? And it's also—why do African countries in superhero comics have to be made up? Why can't you use a real country name? You use Germany?

What do you think about Black Panther?

I haven't read it yet—but I'm excited with Ta-Nehisi Coates writing it.

Wakanda is Africa, but not an African country, but yes, Africa...

It's so frustrating, because I love where they'll just gloss over the idea of the continent. One comic I was reading—a spy thing—had the Empress of Africa. It's so frustrating.

I know you write in a really wide range of textual mediums (practically all of them). Is there something different about working in each form? Do you like to do one and then rotate? Is one more refreshing to you? If you could speak about the different forms, that'd be great.

I learned the most as a journalist and working in kids' animation. So as a journalist, I learned from detail, transcribing hours and hours and hours of interview, understanding subtext in the pull quote—you know, the quote you pull out of the story which sums up something interesting reveals a lot about the character or the subject, and that's your dialogue. Those observational details. And in going to places and talking to people and seeing the things, I would have my mind changed.

It also gave me an eye for the weird details about the world. Hanging out in Nyanga which is one of our most desperate townships where the crime is really bad, and there's this rotten shack, and the kids are playing on the bed of the one bedroom with a paraffin stove and a dirt floor, and they use a lot of stuff as building material, and they've used this wallpaper which is for an ad

campaign, and it's an ad about playing to win 100,000 R. So you got these two little white kids with R 100,000 above this little black kid on the bed, and it tells you so much. It's the details you can't make up, which reveals so much. Or like the AIDS couple who described love as "a kind of infection. It was amazing.

That's also where it was really awesome to have guest chapters in *Zoo City* written by Charlie Human and Sam Wilson, because they came up with a fresh perspective I hadn't thought of.

Kids' animation taught me—so, you're writing a half hour show. We had no idea what we were doing, we taught ourselves, and that's what you have in South Africa very often because we don't have deep specialists. We don't have people you can look up to. A lot of the time, you've got to make it up and figure it out on your own.

Does that go along with training opportunities?

Probably. But, you know, we pitched the kids' animation show and they said, "Cool, do it." We were left to figure out how to write a script and work with other people. You don't have time in 24-minute cartoons to come in and say, "Hey, how's it going? I had a rough day at school today," and *then* the giant monsters do the thing. You've got to get to the action really quick, and you've got to get out the script really well.

I've seen some reviews of people who accuse me of writing for cinema. "Oh, she's writing with the adaptation in mind!" No, I write filmically because that's part of how I learned. And with animation, you have to describe everything. It has to be very clear because some poor bastard is going to have to draw it. They have to understand the interpretation because if you go back and check the charts and its, "oh, actually, she's supposed to be more sad," then they have to redraw it, and it's not fair. And so you have to be very, very clear. It's the same with comics. It's the absolute clarity, thinking about the choreography, it's thinking about the exact tone of the emotion, and the scene and what it looks like and what's important to be there. I'm not really a visual person: I'm basically face-blind. So it's been journalism and that taught me to think visually, and I wouldn't be the writer I am without either of those things.

Can we talk about FanCon? It sounded really cool, and it happened before I got here, and I was sad to miss it.

It was our first Comic-Con, and it was amazing. My ex brought my daughter because I had events, and they stood in line for an hour. It was like a proper Comic-Con. People were so excited, they brought out interesting writers and artists, and the people were super stoked. It was so nice to have. All the local comic book creators were there, the cosplay was phenomenal. A lot of anime, obviously, some *Steven Universe*, some of it looked like *Warhammer 40,000*, like robot armor, but it could've been from a game, some straight-up superheroes, a lot of elves... It was cool.

Was anyone—

—cosplaying any of my stuff? No.

Anything local?

No.

That would've been super cool.

It would have been cool. I would have died. With *Survivors' Club*, I'm surprised we haven't gotten more notice for this, that we have a black female gamer that basically gets attacked by the monstrous embodiment of Gamergate in the comic.

WHAT?

Yes. Dale tweeted about it. I asked him to take it down because—

—you don't want all the Gamergate people on you?

Exactly. He thought I was overreacting, and we had a bit of a fight about it, and I said, "Dale, you're not the one who is going to get rape and death threats." Yes, we put it in a comic, but let's not make the hashtag.

One mode of discourse is way more controllable.

And I've already been attacked on Twitter this year, so...

Academic jargon coming your way, but also Science Fiction jargon. Do you have any thoughts, feelings, or affiliations with SF vs. Speculative fiction vs. Sci-Fi, any of those larger categories?

I don't like labels generally because they tend to divide, and I want to reach the largest possible market. I think labels pin something down, like a butterfly pinned to a table, and then it can't fly. That's my cheesy poetic metaphor for the day. Maybe it should be a moth.

Or a beetle.

A badass scarab beetle with really big pinchers. Or a dung beetle. Because I feel like I roll up shit and turn it into something good.

Something beautiful.

And then eat it because I'm into coprophagia.

[Laughing] *That's probably the best answer to that question.*

It's like being a woman writer. Or being a feminist writer. Or being a white woman South African writer. It's just boring. It's like Serena Williams responding to someone asking if she's going to be the best female athlete by saying, "I like to think I'm going to be the best *athlete*."

I loved that so much.

Totally! I think that's so important. I understand why marketing teams need genre, but I think that's also again why I want to get away from writing another serial killer novel because I don't want to be pigeon-holed. And *The Shining Girls* and *Broken Monsters* are radically different from each other, and all my books are different. I want to keep doing that. I know it means I won't be marketable, and I won't be a bestseller, and that is OK. I get to write the books I want to write, I get paid well for that, and that's really all I want. And hopefully my readers will follow me wherever I choose to take them.

I love going to Science Fiction conventions and Comic-Cons, and it does feel like my type of people. But I'm also very wary of the Science Fiction label. Particularly in a place like South Africa where people say, "Oh, you write Science Fiction? Well, I'm never going to read it." Well, it's not what you think it is! And I know Margaret Atwood got a lot of flak for talking about the divide between science and speculative fiction, but it is this label that people have a certain attachment to, that they have a preconceived idea about what it is, and we need more expansive labels and new labels or just to abolish labels altogether. But that's never going to happen. In South Africa, I don't know if you've noticed, we have *African fiction*.

I've seen very large South African sections. I'll be going back to the Book Lounge—

—well, the Book Lounge doesn't have a South African section. Because basically, they're like, "Our South African writers are as good as anyone else's," which is really nice. But also, Sarah Lotz is British, but she lived in South Africa for a long time, and her books are set all over and she gets shoved in African fiction. And *Broken Monsters* is in African fiction...

Why? In my university library we have a solid African American collection, which is wonderful. But somehow, all of the African authors—all of them—are put there. In many cases, these are different things.

I would like to see less labels, and I hate being labelled.

More label things: How do you feel about the whole Mundane Manifesto movement? There's a whole list, but this group came up with rules feeling very passionate about it, promising to only set science fiction on Earth dealing with science in hard ways, a kind of combination of the "blue marble." And it's really limiting. Not everyone was loving on it. I don't see it as being the same as the writers I'm studying, who are still Earth-focused but not in the same way. So I didn't know if you were familiar with it, what you thought about that idea.

I heard about it, but I don't know why you'd put limitations on yourself. As an aesthetic choice, fine, but I would never do that. I would never tie myself to a specific dogma. Apart from always writing feminist stuff. That's who I am, and I'm not going to write anything else.

But I am interested in the mundane, and I am interested in the mundane details. I think *that's* what anchors my stories, that although they have these crazy elements, they're rooted in the real world, and you can understand the common experience.

Has anyone tried to throw you into the idea of the Anthropocene? Sarah Nuttall gave her keynote about it as "this is going to be the way, literary scholars." It's a whole planetary view. The critical idea that takes our contemporary times and puts them into geological terms, and basically the Anthropocene is the era of human fuckups. We've irreversibly done things to the planet, so what are we going to do now? Considering literature from the planetary angle. Have you thought about it? How does that idea strike you?

It should be part of a *Fantasia* scene set to beautiful classical music. But I don't see how it can be relatable. And I'm wary about using the term relatable because female characters have to be relatable. But the whole point of stories is to engage with a human, and geology is not human. And also, this is all great, the theory is wonderful, but are the actual fiction writers signing on for this? Is this studying a trend that exists? We've had vampire fiction, and we're now having geology fiction?

On one hand there's a lot that can be done with the rhetoric, but there's also the sense that the scale is too big.

It's too big to be meaningful. That's what I'm struggling with in my new book, the scale. (I kill 99.9% of the male population.) I also hate stories—books or movies—that are world changing. That this chosen one is going to change the world. In *Motherland*, my upcoming book, there is a boy who is a survivor, he's one of 40 million survivors in the book, and it's just a fluke. And his mom says to him, "You're not Jesus, baby. You're not the one." And she's trying to protect him and take him to a place where he won't be used as a reproductive resource, sex object, where he will be able to have a free life, where he can be a free human being, and she's struggling to find a place where that might be.

That sounds really fascinating. So is it set on Earth?

Yeah, mostly in America, then dipping in to less well-trod places from Dubai to China and South Africa.

That's not the normal narrative trajectory.

No, no. But again, it's all experience, which feeds into the book. But I've been hanging out with the artist Sophia Al Maria, who is half American and half Qatari, and she got us invited to an arts festival so we could speak together on a panel, and we got to spend some time in Oman and Doha as well, and it was just really interesting. And such an interesting perspective and different take on things. So opportunistic, because, yes, I got to go to this place, but that's what I'm always doing. I'm always looking for how stories fit together. And like I've said, I think Dubai is the inverse of Detroit. Detroit is this fucked-up place with this bright, shining place inside of it, and Dubai is this beautiful place, but it also has an underbelly.

What shocks you the most about what fans outside of South Africa don't know about South Africa?

Offhand? Well, the Russian publishers who made Zinzi a white girl with dreadlocks in the cover. I've got a black kid brother who is thirty one, and he was just teaching in Vietnam, and he had to come home because although he was great at his job teaching English and the kids loved him, the parents didn't want a black man teaching their kids. He said something to me like, "I just want to go somewhere in the world where being black doesn't matter." And I told him, "I don't even know where that is."

Wow—not even going somewhere where blackness is valued, just somewhere it doesn't matter...

Totally. In this upcoming book, the son is biracial, the mother is white, and so it went from her fearing for his life because of growing up black in America to fearing for his life because he went to being this holy of holies.

I've had a lot of stupid reactions from people, not readers, just general people. One of my favourite stories is when I was twenty in San Diego at a youth hostel, and a lady leaned over the fence and said, "Where are you from?"

"South Africa."

"I didn't know they had white people in South Africa!"

"Well, how do you think we had Apartheid?"

She thought about it for a long time, then said, "Yeah, you can't have a party without white people!"

But also in New York, friends would bring people to meet me, and they'd be surprised I was white. I was fifteen in Europe and someone asked me, "Where's your black man?" I didn't know if he meant my black boyfriend or my servant. I think he meant servant. So, yeah. It's also difficult, this idea of who is allowed to write what.

Can we talk about that?

It's very scary to talk about right now. I don't know if I'm going to write *Zoo City 2*, and I don't know if I'd write *Zoo City* now. I was very nervous at the time about writing a black woman. And I started writing Zinzi as white, but it didn't make any sense and abandoned it within three pages. I asked a friend Zukiswa Wanner, to be my cultural editor in *Zoo City*. I paid her R 1,000 to do it, which was a lot of money to me at the time, and she inspired a lot of Zinzi. Zukiswa's bolshiness I don't have that, whatever that is that she has, fearless, bolshy, don't take no for an answer, troublesome, funny... So, I ask her for edits, and she sends me back five pages of great notes. I phoned her after I read it and I thanked her because the notes were amazing. But I said, "You didn't really answer my question."

"Well, what's that?"

"Is Zinzi black enough?"

And she burst out laughing. "What is black enough? Is there only one way to be black? Have you created a character that is informed by her race, her gender, her life? Yes."

But it is important to check, to ensure that it resonates. Same thing with *Broken Monsters*, I had a lot of Detroiters read it and make sure that it was OK. And Zukiswa had been getting a lot of flack for writing *Men of the South*, which was her book from multiple male protagonists' points of view, and she had people writing her angry letter saying, "You must be a man! You couldn't write this!" But it also worries me. Look, I know it's been done horribly so many times. And I think we should be getting more writers of color and lifting up those voices. Diversity is important, and it's also my experience of the world. I had a young black woman come up to me at the University of the Witwatersrand in Joburg, and ask how can I write black characters. Well, that's my experience of the world—there are black people and gay people, and I'm not just going to write books about white middle class suburbanites: Kill me now. That's the last thing we need.

I'm open to being told I made a mistake or how I can do things better. But I also think it's ridiculous, like how Zukiswa was getting criticized for how she must be a man—the work of a writer is putting yourself in someone else's shoes. No one questions that I can write a serial killer, so why can't I write a non-serial killer, or a man, or a black character as long as I'm not doing it in a non-shitty cliché way and writing them as a fully realized human

There was a poet on a radio show right before me who talked about how she wrote a poem about being a woman in the red-light district in Amsterdam and imagining turning on the red light, and I thought, "Did you actually speak to any of them?" She didn't. And of course that's the imagination, but also she was in Amsterdam and she could have paid one of them for an hour and actually interviewed them and found out what it was like for her. Of course, she was extrapolating what it would be like for *her*, as a poet in that position, and that's fine, but I feel like there's room to go a lot deeper.

There was a panel at the conference about how people who are getting published are doing wonderful work, and they were talking about speculative writers, but they also discussed how there's a decided lack. Can you talk about that?

Of course. It's because we're only twenty years out of Apartheid. I was on a panel with Ndumiso Ngcobo, and we were talking to a school. The moderator asked me when we knew we wanted to be a writer, and I said it was when I was five, and I found out that writing was a real job you could have, getting paid to make up stories, for a living! And he said, "Well, you're lucky, because where I grew up, I only found out when I was twenty-five." And that is the thing, I had greater exposure to other possibilities because I grew up as a white South African under apartheid that prioritised me and my needs at the expense of the black population, who had inferior schooling, designed to force them into labour jobs. It's a huge cultural difference; people have been ruthlessly repressed by a racist regime. Those roots are deep, and we're starting to see major change, and fierce new black voices emerging. I'm very excited about the South African literary scene at the moment with writers like Mohale Mashigo, Nakhane Toure, Bongani Madondo, Kopana Matlwa and Panashe Chigumadzi making their mark. And it's so great to see them and it's like: This! This is what it should be! And I know it's difficult for white writers, but you know, suck it up.

Look at Amazon. There's got to be enough space.

Well...

No?

People don't really read in South Africa, if you look at our literacy rates. Only a million people buy books, and of that million, they're probably buying the new Dan Brown, and cookbooks, and the Oscar Pistorius book. I don't know how many—and there is still a huge preconception that South African fiction sucks. They'll say, "Oh, I don't read any other South African writers, but I read you." I think, "What the hell is wrong with you?" Partly, that's because we're still emerging, still finding our voice, and sometimes our publishers don't—unfortunately—always do the best job editing, and books are *so expensive*.

Let's go back to South Africans saying, "You write sci-fi, so I'm not interested."

People think of sci-fi as being *Star Trek* and *Battlefield Earth*. Although they watch sci-fi, so it's frustrating. The worst conversation I ever had was with a guy I was renting studio space with who said, "Congratulations, that's great, but I'll never read your books because I don't read books about or by women."

"Do you like *Eat, Pray, Love*?"

"Oh, god, no. It was terrible! It was dire! My girlfriend made me watch it; it was the worst!"

"So what about *Aliens*?"

"Oh, it's a great film."

Unfortunately, *Aliens* isn't written by a woman, but I made him rethink it.

And that's the unfortunate thing about genre fiction—you have Jonathan Franzen being held up as this kind of—

—can we not talk about Franzen? I don't want to give him space in my dissertation.

No? I loved *The Corrections*.

Eh.

Well: men writing about the domestic is life-changing and women writing about the domestic is chick-lit.

So I've got three things working against me: writing science fiction, being a woman, and being South African, because all three things suck for publishing.

Why not—

—write under a pseudonym?

Yes, or even something like "J.K. Rowling"?

It makes me sad. I wish I changed my name because Beukes is hard to say, it's hard to pronounce [*B/yew-kiss*]. And I'm sad J. K. wrote as Robert Galbraith. Why not Roberta?

We've already discussed book covers, which is where I was going next.

However, coming back to Dale, do you know my agents quote about his covers? My agent said about *Broken Monsters*, “It’s like he can see into a book’s soul.” And he does. I love most of my covers, but the South African book covers always have a special place for me, because it’s Dale and because we’ve known each other for sixteen years, but also because he gets it. I don’t write for an audience in mind, but there are friends I write for, and Dale is one of the people I write for. I want Dale to like my book. If Dale says I do a good job, that’s the quote I would want framed above my desk, not Stephen King or anyone because I don’t fundamentally believe them.

That really awesome, especially since you guys can have a good friendship and a good working relationship.

It was also really nice working on *Survivors’ Club*, the comic, because we’d do a read through in animation, to see if people laugh at the jokes—but you can also *hear* the different voices, the balances, and we have to fight about who gets to play which characters. We were designing the villain, and we don’t get to see her because I had to end pre-emptively, and I said, “Shit, Dale, do we have too many cool female characters?” And Dale said, “What, Lauren, like in real life?” And I love that so much.

Have you read Bitch Planet?

Yes, the first trade, it was amazing.

Can’t have too many female characters.

No, but also, that’s the thing about *Motherland*. It wouldn’t be such a great world without men; it would be terrible because women are just as evil.

But also that’s something that ties into people’s fears about that. When I was hanging out with the metro cops for a project I was doing for the city of Cape Town, I asked them, “What would happen to the gangs if all the men died?” And they were like, “Are you kidding? Mama American ran the gangs for *years*. You think the drugs are just going to go *away*?”

Patriarchy is a power structure like anything else. Why wouldn’t the women just step into it?

One of my students said it’s clear that South Africa inspires many of your stories, but why then do you write dystopian stories?

Moxyland is taking where we were in 2008 and extrapolating it. I didn’t predict Twitter or drones. And there’s a really interesting critique of the activism element in *Moxyland*. Today, you’re not alone, and that was really interesting. It is quite a bleak book, but, you know, so is *1984*, so... *Zoo City*, I hate to tell him, is Hillbrow. That is real. The only thing made up in *Zoo City* is the animals. That is Joburg. We live in dystopia, always. Most cities are dystopic. That’s why sitcoms like *Friends* are so dangerous because that’s not how New York is. Every city has dystopic elements. What does the student mean—poverty?

I think they mean bleakness—this student is a political science and philosophy student, and by starting with “you’re South African, why portray your cities in this dystopic way,” I think it’s the bleakness.

Moxyland could easily be moved to another city. *Zoo City* is *Zoo City*—you can’t move it out of Joburg. Some people think my novels are very dark, and they are, but I always feel like it’s shining a light in the darkness, (or rather how people can make their own light) and it’s people living in the abyss, fucking up, and then trying to do better. The theme in *Broken Monsters* is that we’re all broken, but it’s what you do with it.

Why not write a Utopian—

—Utopia doesn’t exist. Utopia is bullshit.

Right, I hate Utopia-as-a-place, too, but why not write a slightly more utopic—

Because where’s the conflict? And also, the thing is, I’m fundamentally interested in social issues, and that’s what I want to write about. And Utopia isn’t going to have social issues

Unless it’s all a lie.

Right. The thing is, I grew up in Utopia. As a white South African, I grew up in Utopia, and I know what the cost was to other people. And I don’t believe that Utopia can exist. Because we’re people. To be clear: What a terrible, terrible Utopia it was. I do not long for “the bad old days” at *all*. It was a horrifying time of human rights violations and assassinations and murder and exile, and a lot of South Africans are still in the dark about it because they didn’t listen to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. A lot of older white South Africans still long for, “I just wish we could have that back, that beautiful time, it’s so messed up now, it wasn’t that bad,” and people were *dying*. People didn’t know what happened to their teenage sons and daughters—they just disappeared.

What do you read?

I don’t read anything in a similar vein to what I’m writing. I try to read really beautiful and interesting books where the writing is amazing that I can aspire to. But I also want to read books that I can fall into. I don’t mind hard, but the story has to be rich and the characters have to be rich and I have to live it.

How do you read?

Normally four, five books at a time.

WOW.

It’s not great, but—I get sent a lot of free books, and a lot of them are not my thing, which then puts me off reading. Reading to me was always a scared act, and it was a sacrifice. Books have

always been expensive. (They're still expensive to me now, though I can readily afford them.) To go to the bookstore and spend half an hour choosing and say: "This is going to be the book," as opposed to getting three in the mail every week. Some of them are amazing—I got *Underground Airlines*, *Station Eleven*, *The Last One*—so I get a number of really good books, but also ones that I would never have picked up. It's interesting to see people's perspectives, and I donate the ones that I don't like to Rape Crisis.³⁰⁴

How do you read four or five books if you also read books that pull them into your world?

I put them down. I don't have enough time. I much prefer reading on paper—Kindle is, I'll do it if I have to but I'm much more likely to read on paper. And reading in the bath is nice. I have a window seat that looks out on Table Mountain, which is really nice. Also, story time with my daughter—we don't mess with that. It doesn't matter how late we get home, even when I'm like, "No mucking around, straight to bed, no TV," she'll ask, "What about stories?" "Of *course* we're going to have stories." She loves comics; it's been so great. She loves *Nimona*, *Lumberjanes*, and *Bone*. We read *Bone* when she was four years old. I had to get the color version because she didn't want to read it in black and white, and it took us three months to read it, and we got to the end and she said "Now *that* was a good story." And then, classic kid, "Again!"

You haven't asked me about the art stuff.

So, tell me about the art stuff.

I do a charity art project for each book. It started with *Moxyland*. Dale worked with a toy designer Michelle Sun to make the Moxy Monster from the cover of the book, and it was so cool. I was like, "I want it!" and Dale got it for me. And I thought, if I want this, other people will want this. So Sarah Lotz and her mom set up a little women's collective (Sew & Sews) in Montagu, which is a town just outside of Cape Town, and we set up these disenfranchised women with a sewing machine, and they made about 100 Moxy Monsters. The price was R 150 each and 100 or R 50 went to them, so we raised R 12,000 for them.

For *Zoo City*, we something similar, the Ami Collette donated five vinyl toy bears (custom bears you can paint on, like Dunny's) and I got different artists to paint them however they liked, as long as it was in some way inspired by the book. Dale did one, obviously, and we raised R 18,000 through an online auction for a kids' refugee home in Hillbrow. And when I won the Arthur C. Clarke Award, a friend made me a scarf sloth to wear to the award, and she made a second one so we could auction it off for Khulisa, which works with offenders and ex-offenders. The normal recidivism rate in South Africa is like 80%, but after they've been through Khulisa the chances of re-offending drop to 14%. During the Arthur C. Clarke tour my publisher arranged after I won the prize, I got three ex-offenders involved in the program to come read the prisoner chapter [from *Zoo City*], and it was so amazing to have them reading. It was incredible.

³⁰⁴ For more about the Rape Crisis center, see <http://rapecrisis.org.za/>.

So *The Shining Girls* came around, and it was such a big success that I knew I wanted to do something really cool with it. I had an art friend, Jacki Lang, who suggested we rip pages out of the book, give them to artists, and they can do whatever they want with it. Done. And we'll sell them for R 1,000 each, completely egalitarian, completely anonymous. We had a queue down five flights of stairs for two hours before we opened the doors. We sold out in twenty minutes. We raised R 100,000 for Rape Crisis in twenty minutes.

One of the greatest things was to see how artists respond to the art on the page, or just ignore the page. One of my favourite pieces was by South African artists, based in the U.K. now, called Will Kruger who did a faux Sears catalog advertisement for crutches over it. Jesse Breytenbach laser cut butterfly wings out of her page, Ida Elsje gold-plated hers with skull accents, Faith⁴⁷ blanked out words to make a new and enfant terrible, Ed Young, burnt his page and sent us a box of ashes. It might just be an art piece, but it might also be a dialogue, because I criticised his work previously in one of my stories. I emailed him, delighted, to ask about it, but he never got back to me.

Then we did a *Broken Monsters* art show in Cape Town and Joburg with the support of Nando's, and we raised R 350,000 for Book Dash, a local organization that creates free books with amazing South African writers and illustrators, with a dream that every child should own 100 books of their own by the time they're five years old. So the charity always ties into the novel thematically, obviously, apart from *Moxyland*, but I guess it's helping people out in "the Rural" [This is a reference to the novel]. *Broken Monsters* is about the doors in our heads, and that's fiction.

So to be able to help Book Dash was great.³⁰⁵

When do the ideas happen? Do they happen earlier and earlier with each book?

The *Broken Monsters* art show took a year because Jacki was so busy. With all of these things, we're doing them with no budget. This time, we approached Nando's and got a budget, but this stuff I do on my own, and I hustle, because that's what South Africans do—we hustle.

I love that not only are you sending stories into the world, but you're showing they can have real political clout.

³⁰⁵ Regarding Book Dash, Beukes explained: They do stuff small, which is why we need to not be doing the Anthropocene: we need to focus on local stories and local initiatives. You can't fix the world because we're so different—we're not all Klingons who love Shakespeare. Book Dash gets professional writers and professional illustrators together for twelve hours. And you have to make a book, mostly picture books, in twelve hours with professional editors. You have the energy and the electricity, and because you have this one day, it happens. If the book is not up to scratch, they'll rewrite the whole thing. Their big dream is that every kid in South Africa should own one book. So they make them available for free—you can translate them, print them as a PDF, or you can sell them because they're a creative commons promotion license. Don't try to apply copyright, but you can do whatever else you want. The whole point is to get books into kids' hands that they can own, and take home. And they specifically try to focus on black characters. They do it twice a year. They're all online at their website. If you translate it, awesome, but just make it available to them so they can put it up for others.

What I love about the *Broken Monsters* one is that stories beget stories. So you rip a page out of a book, do artwork on it, which then pays for original artwork and stories to be printed (because Book Dash is done for free)...so it's just creating all these stories. It's also nice because art is also a theme in my work.

I'm not out of questions, but at the moment I'm astounded with all the answers. This has been super fun.

You should also talk to Charlie Human, Sam Wilson, Osiname Molefe, Dan Buchanan, Frank Owen, Joe Vaz—he used to run *Something Wicked* for a long time, Nechama Brodie³⁰⁶...

[Going back to the skewed South African SF book market] It is hard. The black writers are also busy. Osiname is busy writing a political book about what it means to be black in South Africa right now, which is really important. But it could also be provocative science fiction, and if he could bring that into his fiction, it could be really amazing. It's tough. People latch onto young, black voices and want them for all the things. And it's like, "Leave them alone! We need them to write fiction!" But also I think what we're seeing is a surge in black realism, exploring the black experience, at the moment, and I think it will evolve to play across genre.

³⁰⁶ Sadly, I ran out of time to contact all of these excellent artists for this iteration of my project.

B.3 DALE HALVORSEN (A.K.A. JOEY HI-FI)

Personal interview conducted July 16, 2016 by Jessica FitzPatrick

Black Sheep Restaurant, ground floor level, Kloof Street, Cape Town, South Africa

Hi-Fi indulged in a rum shot, FitzPatrick in an Old Fashioned

Joey Hi-Fi is the working name of the wide-ranging artist Dale Halvorsen. Hi-Fi most frequently works as a book cover designer and illustrator but has also worked in packaging, “editorial illustration,” and comics (“About”). Hi-Fi is helping to bring to life the worlds evoked by contemporary postcolonial SF writers through his covers for Lauren Beukes’ *The Shining Girls* (special ed.), *Broken Monsters* (special edition), *Zoo City*, *Moxyland*, Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon*, *Who Fears Death* (French ed.), *Book of Phoenix* (French ed.), Tony Ballantyne’s *Dream London* and *Dream Paris*, Charlie Human’s *Apocalypse Now Now* and *Kill Baxter*. He has also designed the cover for the African SF pulp magazine *Jungle Jim* (no. 16, “The South African Sci-Fi Issue!”). Hi-Fi’s work is also highly celebrated—he has won British Science Fiction Association Award for Best Artwork (2010 and 2014), the British Fantasy Award for Best Artist (2014), and the Wojtek Siudmak Award at the Grand Prix de l’Imaginaire (2010) (“About”). As their interviews suggest, Hi-Fi is a countryman and friend of South African SF writer Lauren Beukes. Together they produced the comic collaboration *Survivors’ Club* (issues 1-9, 2015-2016) for Vertigo (DC Comics); interestingly, Halvorsen shifts from the position of illustrator to co-creator/writer for this comic series.

So, I'm not an art kid. First question is about Pokémon GO—it's everywhere, it's great, and it happened on Monday of this week. In the interview you did in March, you talked about digital animated book covers... It seems like we're getting closer and closer to this reality-digital overlap interface. Have you played Pokémon GO?

I'm familiar with *Pokémon GO*. I haven't played it.

Me either—just got tutored on it during lunch.

Lauren's brilliant at it—she's been catching Pokémon all over the place. She was like, "Hang on, guys. Just move—it's right over there!" I was like, "What are you talking about?!"

Digital covers are interesting because unless technology takes a left turn, you're going to see them more online. I don't know if it'll to help sell the books more; I think it will help them capture the mood and tone of a book, I think it'll work really well. ...If you're going to do an animated cover—I've seen very few that have made me gasp. It's like you take a still cover and then animate it in a slight way.

There's one for Jeff VanderMeer's trilogy... (quick google) It's called *Annihilation*.

OH! Oh! Interesting. I like those covers.

I really like them as well. That's a dream job for a book cover designer: to get three books and create connections between all three of them. I thought that was a very clever use of animation.

I'm going to have to look at them.

Currently, it's very much adaptations of the still, of the print, where you just change...it's not an animated cover of the book; it works the other way around—print first, then animation. Now it's viewed as, "Oh, we're special, we're doing an animated book cover," as opposed to the other way around, where you say, "We're want to do a really amazing animated book cover."

I don't think the Kindle lets me look at animated book covers very nicely.

No, the technology isn't there. It's the same thing in movies, as well—when they do animated movie posters, they're generally quite... they don't stick with people.

I was wondering if it's going to be expensive, and exclusive, if it'll become like fore-edge painting³⁰⁷...if it'll shift in the value.

To be honest, I don't know how much value an animated cover would actually add. I'd be interested in how publishers consider the value.

³⁰⁷ A painting technique where the image or scene is painted on the edges of the pages of a book when the pages are fanned (not visible when the book is closed) or the book is closed (no need for fanning).

And how do you display it?

Yeah, the technology would have to catch up. If you could do it on a Kindle or something, it'd make sense, but at the moment, when you have to do a cover on the Kindle, you have to knock off a lot of detail to have it rendered well.

That bring us to a question of scale. It seems like you see one thing far away and then when you come closer, you see a lot of more—letters are made up of objects. Can you talk about how this works? Does it relate to books, to how you like to think about things? Is it just fun?

I can't do simple things. Whenever I've sat down and said, "Just execute a very, very simple concept," I look at minimalist artists, and I'm like, that seems beyond me. I like hiding things within things, playing with positive/negative space. Not to the point of gratuity where I'm doing it just for the hell of it. It needs to work.

Increasingly now, when [I'm] working on a cover, I'm always clicking on a thumbnail view, because that's increasingly how people are viewing covers. So you have to try to catch people's eye at thumbnail size.

I read all the books that I do covers for. Part of the inspiration for my covers having different layers to them is that they're stories you want to revisit. I feel that the cover should be a reflection of that. I want something that people will look at, and at first that will leave an impression or make an impact on them, but then as they're reading the book, they'll be looking at the cover and saying, "Oh, so that's what that is." So it's about picking intriguing images to weave together in a greater visual narrative and give it artistic depth, which is something a lot of book covers don't have.

In the past few years, covers have been going very simple.

I'm not saying every book should be like this, but I want people to be wowed by a cover and also to feel that the person who did the cover understands the source material. I want them to be returning as their reading, and think, "Oh, wow! That's an interesting moment, or that this adds to the mood and tone..."

Are you a marginal note/page marker?

Sometimes it's digital if I'm sent a PDF. Then I can cut and paste passages and print them out and make notes on them, or make little drawings next to them...but generally I make notes, page numbers, and references to things, so I can flip back and forth.

Before we started talking about your readerly practice, you mentioned how you capture the emotional space through the objects that end up on your covers—intangible space, lived space, which is hard to capture in words, let alone images that are based on words. So how do you capture the intangible thing in this visually tangible medium? (Simple question, huh?)

Oh, that's a tough question. In regards only to space?

You can go where you want.

I've just always been able to read the book, and as I'm reading the book, different images will pop into my mind and . . . I think, "That's the soul, the core of the book." So when you see it on the cover, it moves you in an emotional way because you're talking about mood and tone, which can mean different things to different people. So when you look at the cover, that's my take on it, but then you ask the author, and they say, "That's not the way I saw it, but that is the essence of what I'm trying to say."

Lauren's books are very difficult—well not *difficult*, but—to encapsulate; that's where it started with *Zoo City*, because there's so many amazing ideas in there that you feel like you do it a disservice if you put—

—*A sloth*—

—An animal, or Zinzi with the sloth, or just a crocodile, because it's more about when you look at a book cover, it's about how it moves you emotionally. So as a book cover artist, you're just finding ways for people to have a look at it and go, "That's what the book's about," but also getting a feeling of the book as a whole. The mood, the tone, the atmosphere, the message, which I find personally very tough to do with a stock photograph.

And the idea that you look at it in the bookstore and are drawn to it in a certain way, and as you keep reading, you go back and there's still this emotional play. That makes a lot of sense.

A lot of book covers that I see are beautiful, and they do move you emotionally when you see them. But sometimes when you read through the book, you think, "That's a beautiful image that has nothing to do with the book, or it's a distant tangent to what the book is actually about. I've always felt that writers put a lot of research and effort into putting books together. Regardless of whether it's an average novel or a brilliant novel or a terrible novel, it's a lot of work. If you get hired to do a cover for that book, it's such an important component of that book being a success that you should put equal amounts of effort into it, and sometimes it's better not to take the easy way out.

May I ask about one book cover in particular: Lagoon? Again, thinking about space. We have the cityscape. Lagos is there, and it's getting basically drowned by this teal wave, and in terms of the division of space...the city is in this top, top thing, totally obscured by Ursula Le Guin's quote, and then you have all this ocean space, and the alien women (though we don't know exactly what she is) there in the bubble. And it's beautiful, and I love it, and it works very nicely for me to say, "Here's what I'm doing, guys!" and other academics are intrigued. So thank you for that—that's very helpful for me. But why even include the city if the ocean's the main thing?

Well, it's something about the visual hierarchies. The important thing is the title of the book. My idea was you have all these fantastical sea creatures and stuff, and that's where a large portion of the story plays out.

Including the beginning.

Yes. So I just thought it would be quite neat, again, with my obsession of positive and negative space, to make the typography out of the sea creatures. And that's where it started, and then I did various drafts to see. Part of the story is on land, as well, obviously, and it's not often that you get to see Lagos in a sci-fi novel.

I think this is the first time!

And it's not a recognizable skyline. I just wanted to include it in there so that it wasn't just all sea, that you felt that there's a little bit more to the story. And then obviously the inclusion of the figure, as well—you can read into that. Is the figure causing all these animals to swarm? (Which is also in the book.)

It's just a lot of different things together and just figuring out when you look at it, what do you see, and how does it make you feel? And that's what I settled on. When I say visual hierarchy, when you're designing a book cover, the title's important—either you have to have a striking title or a striking image to put the title over. So I just went with both a striking image *and* a striking title, combined the two so that it's nice and bold, as big as I could make it, and then it comes down to the layers as well, so that you say, "Oh, it's type; oh, it's type that is actually sea creatures." But it's not just a book about sea creatures because there seems to be another layer.

Humanoid and a city and—

Yeah—and it's also figuring out—you know, as a book cover designer, you're going to need a space for a blurb. How do you make that stand out? I just thought to bring in Lagos at the top and have that sitting in the white space I think would be more interesting than just having the entire cover being blue. I felt that the white being in the type needed to be echoed somewhere, was my thinking.

That plays out nicely with the way the city and the ocean contrast each other throughout the book.

I've actually done three of Nnedi's covers now. *Book of Phoenix*,

(puzzled stare)

The U.K. one.

Of course I got the American one. It's not the one with the wings outstretched?

No, it's the protagonist with her wings...

I think the American one is simpler. Because I have that, digitally, and...

(Google break on Amazon.com) *Yes, that's the one that we have. It didn't seem like you—not to pigeon-hole you.*

No, no. I also did the French cover for *Who Fears Death*. I haven't had the greatest success in the States.

Really? (finds image) OH! That's much more... Yeah. Wow. In that one, you really see her falling, right?

Well, it's kinda like flying.

Falling-flying.

And in the negative space, you see the flames are the two phoenixes,

And the tree—yes, yes!

I had more stuff going on, but then they were, like,

Simplify?

Yeah. It was a pretty fun one to do. The other one was *Who Fears Death*. I don't know if you've seen that one.

I've not seen the French one.

It's in Europe as well, because my covers get bought and published in other countries.

Trying to get Zoo City for my class this term was super fun—it's in between printings right now, which is super great.

Ah—here's the French *Who Fears Death*.

Wow! Here's a question about that: The one in the United States is much more in line with a lot of typical YA fantasy marketing. And by that, I mean—

Ah, ok. Is it this one?

Yes, that one! It's different than Akata Witch, right, but you still have this female figure, fantasy landscape, the faint wings. Yours—in addition to being beautifully rendered and very detailed, the skull and a lot more people... To me, this would be amazing to code as YA fantasy, but I feel like the bookstores would never code this as YA if they were to base it on style. I'm wondering if that has something to do with the different markets for the covers. Does the marketing have anything to do with the design?

Yeah. Young Adult, I find a little stifling to design for.

Yeah. Again, this is great, but you don't see that in YA.

I think you should, though. YA books tend to be really formulaic in how they approach things. It seems to work for them. I thought the *Hunger Games* covers were great—

But then everyone became the Hunger Games covers.

For a while, though, as far as I can remember, whenever you get a YA brief, it's like you read the book, and they're going to want you to draw or use a photograph of the character. Angsty girl, angsty boy, angsty girl and boy...that's generally how it works, and that's kinda the start of every single brief, it seems. I don't know why that is, why they think...

Seeing the figures might help connect—

—why seeing the figures helps people of that age connect... I'm not really a big fan of having realistic depictions of characters from books on covers, although I do get asked to do it a lot.

Why not?

I think it's best left to people's imagination. If it's an illustration, it's the artists' interpretation of the character, which still allows you to imagine what that person is like. I find when it's a photograph that they're clearly telling you who the character is, which doesn't leave a lot for the reader. That's the image stuck in your head when you're reading the book.

It's the book-to-movie adaptation problem, right? "That's not how I envisioned that!"

Yeah—so, I'd like to see a bit more risk taking in the YA genre.

I'm thinking of all the books I've seen now, and they're all kinda figured that way.

If I can speak frankly about that—in the publishing industry, in advertising, they call it “Me, too” products. Someone will have success with something, and people will miss why it was successful. And you see that in anything.

Like the Hunger Games covers—then you got Divergent, then it's not just a similar story but also a similar cover; it's the symbol, not the character.

Twilight did that as well.

Yeah, the apple.

A little more left field on theirs. But I think it just started, and they think that it just works, so they don't want to color outside the lines. In publishing, a lot of the cover designs are determined by the book sellers, and whether they think it is going to sell. I don't know if they're best placed to make that call, but I don't know. Book cover design is full of that. If it's a fantasy book, it needs to look like this; if it's a YA book, it needs to look like this; if it's a sci-fi book, it needs to look like this... Part of your job as a book cover designer—succeed or fail—is to try something

different. I'd rather walk into a bookstore and go, "Wow, what is this book—it's horror? That's really interesting. That's not what you'd expect from a horror cover." But I feel that people want to put it in the section and have all the covers look like—

You know you're in the aisle before you read the title of the aisle.

You're painfully aware when you're in the fantasy section.

And when it turns into the sci-fi section, you definitely know.

That's what I liked about *Annihilation*.

Right!

It intrigued—and it's not one of the books that's straight-out sci-fi; it had horror elements to it, it was a little bit Lovecraft-ian... How do you capture the mood and tone of that book? So they just went with something that was just—it was intriguing.

What if it's a trite book? What if it is...here's your typical fantasy formulaic...does that book necessitate the formulaic cover? Or can you still play with it through the cover and do something that the maybe story doesn't do? And the next question is, what do you think about the terms SF/sci-fi.

Well. The first one: (big sigh). That's the tough one. I always give my all, regardless of how I feel about the book. I feel that there's always something of value even in the worst of the worst written books.

I love fantasy books. I'm guilty. I love them.

I'm a good bad-movie fan. But I don't just do it to laugh at what they've done; you can also learn things from it—there's a genuine passion. This person didn't sit down to make a terrible movie or write a terrible book; they're really giving it their all. So there's always something you can take away from it. It's interesting you say, what constitutes a badly written book? A lot of badly written books are the most successful books. *Fifty Shades of Grey*; Dan Brown... *Twilight*.

They're not particularly well-written books, but there's obviously something that captured people's imaginations, either through clever marketing or... I mean, if you look at *Twilight*, they're not the most well-written books. And you look at the covers, and they didn't go the usual YA route on that. So, there are different ways to do things. *Hunger Games* came after *Twilight*—

Which is interesting—I hadn't thought of how the symbol tracks through different color palette[s].

It's picking one image from that book and thinking, "This is what makes this book; this would make a very interesting visual representation of the book. The *Hunger Games* obviously went with the—

—*the pin*—

—yes, more symbolic; and then *Twilight*, I'm not entirely sure, but it seemed to work...

I know one of them has an apple.

Chess is part of it.

Right! The chess piece.

If it's a fantasy book, you can read it and go, "Oh, this is a very vivid description of a particular kind of sword;" that's something visually to start off with to differentiate it from all the other fantasy books. But I think you do the book a disservice when you say, "Well, there was a successful fantasy book, so let's now we're going to make this look..." It's almost like you aren't backing the book; maybe people will mistake it for the other book and accidentally buy it. What was your second question, the tags?

What do you think about speculative vs. sci-fi conundrum—what do you think about SF vs. hard vs. soft vs. mundane vs... Do you think about them?

I do, but I also wonder why the obsession with the labels.

Very obsessed, and very protective.

I think—I love horror. And horror doesn't get the respect it deserves. The moment you say horror, certain images pop into people's minds. Pitching horror stuff is very, very difficult. But if you look traditionally in terms of film, a lot of Steven Spielberg is horror. Guillermo del Toro is horror. Francis Coppola's first film was horror. So there's obviously something that captures film makers' imaginations to start there, and then they move out of it. I think it's just like when people want to hear their work described, they don't want it to fall into something that is going to be misinterpreted or have some negative connotations for their work.

Why does horror have negative connotations? Why is it the misunderstood stepchild of genre?

I think it's one of the most challenging genres to work in, to do something interesting in. That goes for sci-fi, too. I'd probably say fantasy and horror share the same problem because you live in the shadow of all the big names, and there's a lot of terrible stuff and not a lot of good stuff. Yeah. My opinion is probably not going to be popular, but I don't understand the obsession with labels. I also call it sci-fi, horror, fantasy, although I do recognize differences.

The speculative idea of being all encompassing is nice and important for certain books. For others, it's like, "No, this is just sci-fi," and that's fine. It's good that it's just sci-fi!

But I do use speculative sometimes because I think a lot of novels are between. They're not exactly a straight sci-fi story; there's elements of other genres in there. Then what do you call that?

Right. And why do we have to call it based on genre?

So booksellers can put it in a particular section.

Oh right. THAT.

So people can find it easily and buy it.

So your Kindle can recommend it.

South Africa has a particularly unique problem, and that is that regardless of what genre you're writing in, as a South African writer, all the books end up in—

You're on the Africa shelf.

Yes, the gulag. Which is still bemusing to me. You want your work to appear where it can best be represented, so I think that's maybe part of the obsession with the labeling. You don't want a book that you've written as hard sci-fi sitting next to the latest *Star Trek* novel or something.

This is reminding me of all the weeklong conference discussions in my head. There was a panel about South African speculative fiction³⁰⁸ (that was their term), and one of the main takeaways from the talks was that it's interesting that a lot of what's being published, at least through the official channels, is white South African speculative fiction. They started off by saying, "Yes, there's really great stuff being done, and people are reading it internationally, it's a phenomenon, and thank goodness, it's about time, look at how cool this is," and then they pointed out that there's still a certain absence; a certain lack. Do you have any thoughts about that?

Just in a South African context?

Well, that was the panel, but we can discuss it more generally.

Because the African context is quite different.

Yeah. Nigeria's doing a lot, and Egypt is rather profuse.

It really comes down to who is buying the books and whether people are willing to take chances on new voices in fantasy, science fiction, horror, whatever genre you're working on. There's a lot of exciting stuff happening. In the South African context, it's very difficult to make it here doing writing genre. I don't know if there's an easy answer to this question, but I think you get easily discouraged from doing genre because there's not a dedicated publisher for genre stuff.

³⁰⁸ Nadia Sanger, Nedine Moonsamy, Sindiswa Busuku-Mathese, and Alan Muller on "Literary Apartheid and the Literary Imagination: Getting Under the Skin of South African Speculative Fiction" at the 2016 Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. For more about their panel, see the coda.

There wasn't one for a while, quite frankly.

We have traditional ones known for doing more Literary, which is fine, but I think genre needs a place as well. This comes back to the South African gulag for books where they all get lumped into the same category. There's not even a division between genre and Literary. So I think these voices exist; I think now we're starting to see them in young writers who want to do genre stuff. Are the publishers going to publish these works? I don't know if we're even seeing them. There was a brief spurt a while back, and now I'm not sure exactly what's out there. It's very difficult to get them onto the shelves. It's almost like they need to make it overseas first and then come back to South Africa.

Which is terrible.

I don't think we're seeing much diversity in who is writing these books now, but I think the talent is there, and it's just, those writers just need to get the opportunities. Either they need to self-publish or—

I was intrigued that there wasn't more digital publishing happening. (It's not ideal, but at least it's something.) And there's not—it seems like—which is interesting.

Book sales in South Africa are abysmal for genre. If you sell (I hope I'm not getting it completely wrong), but the last time I checked, if you sell 3,000 copies of a book like *Zoo City*, you've done pretty well.

Wow.

Zoo City was really struggling locally. If it just existed locally, it would've just died on the vine. But Lauren—it got out overseas, and she got an award for it, and then people took it seriously. I feel there are a lot of writers and artists locally, and that's what happens to their work. If you don't look outside South Africa's borders, we don't appreciate what we have. I'm really hoping this will be change because there are a lot of talented writers locally. I just don't know what opportunities they're getting.

It's hard anyway, right? But it's riskier if no one has done it before.

In creative circles, you need a support structure; you need people who are producing interesting music, films, books, comic books. I'm a big, huge comic book nerd, so we actually have some semblance of—I don't want to call it a comic book industry), but a comic book scene.

I ducked quickly into the Book Lounge [<http://www.booklounge.co.za/>], and I'm going back later to buy all the things. There seemed to be some cool local things happening.

But it's all self-published. It's really just people putting themselves out there, and they're just passionate about what they want to do, and they want to do something. No one's paying them to do it, no one is telling them to do it. These things are just happening. And amazing—just

amazing, amazing talent. If they lived in another country that had afforded them more opportunities, they'd be way more well-known or be able to do that full time. These are people that do this after hours, whether it's writing or drawing or lettering a comic book. They have other jobs, and then they do this. So when it comes to writing, if you feel there are people backing that kind of stuff, then it's easier for people to get it out. The same thing applies to books. I've seen a couple of calls for interesting speculative or sci-fi or genre stuff, but I hope a new publishing industry will come along and just...just help.

Offer more calls?

Yeah.

Can we go into comics? Graphic novels have made it more acceptable to teach comics in literature courses—

—that's another label people get angry about.

People get pissed off about that, right? The idea is, "No, it's a comic—it's just a long comic, and what are you doing trying to—

Or, "I'm a cartoonist, not a graphic novelist."

Yes. Do you have any affiliations in the debate, so that I don't misstep here?

No!

Ok, good! Would you have any interest in a "graphic novel"?

Yeah! I may be wrong here, but I've always understood that the distinction between a normal comic, which is episodic, and a graphic novel is that you sit down and write a story from beginning to end, and then you sit down and illustrate said story, and it's one sort of thing, and you're telling a story from A to B. Comics, I feel, are very more episodic. In my mind, the distinction is, "Have you read this graphic novel" versus "Have you read this comic book"... I'm not saying that one's better than the other, but I enjoy stories with a beginning and an end, and the comic book norm is not to do that.

You're always left hanging. If one story ends, another kicks off right away.

I'm a big fan of alternative comic books. (That's another one—it's just labels)

So what is an alternative comic book?

They're out of the mainstream. I'm a big fan of the one-man band, like Charles Burns, Daniel Clowes, Chris Ware, Emily Carroll... I think people who are writing and illustrating their own stuff, it's a fully realized vision, and it's uncompromising. It hasn't been done by committee; it's just one person's take and whatever they're trying to say. Adrian Tomine (*Sleepwalk*)—his

graphic novels—called comics—again, someone like Daniel Clowes doesn't want to be called a graphic novelist; he wants to be called a cartoonist. Same as Chris Ware. Tomine's *Shortcomings* is—

Oh—that one's been getting taught a lot.

Phew. So good. So good. Just how to tell a story, and done without any thought bubbles, and very few narrative captions. It's all dialogue. It feels like—not that you want a comic book to feel like a film, but it feels seamless.

I admit I like the moments when the text really plays with the story; like in Winnie the Pooh, the original animated movie, I like when you can turn the page and have Tigger slide down the text. I think it's great. But I think that definitely helps people who don't want that, or who aren't... Film is how they think of a visual literacy, not comics.

But films start as comics, generally, so it should actually be the other way around. And it's about labels, as well. I got sick of telling people I'm really into comic books because the first thing people think of is Batman, Superman...

Or [more generally]: Marvel or DC?

That kind of debate, and you try to pitch them something, which is not that. If you just enjoy reading, this has pictures, but if just you enjoy reading, this is a really great, touching story.

Also, you know, we all enjoy pictures because we all watch TV games and movies and video games and Pokémon GO and photos. It's not like we're above the visual. What do you do when you're stuck?

Go for a very long walk. Go for a run. Or just leave my computer and my desk and go somewhere else. I think basically all—very few of my ideas come from sitting in front of staring at a blank page and going, “Ummm.” That's just no good—I go talk to someone, have a conversation, that's generally what I do. When Lauren and I were working on *Survivors' Club* and we were stuck, we'd get up and go on a walk or run an errand or do something. It's weird how the brain works like that. Also bars. Bars are really good. You get a lot of good ideas at the bar.

As a dissertation student, I agree. Really key.

The cornerstone of my creative process.

I think a lot of people's creative processes.

It's almost magical sometimes when you're like, “I *do not know* what to do.” And you take a bath, and you're in there for, like, 30 seconds, and you go, “Ah, yeah, that's really interesting.” And then sometimes I have to hop out of the bath to make notes before I forget it. The amount of

times I've gone, "I won't forget this idea," and you get out of the bath and go, "Uh, what was I thinking again?" and it's gone forever.

And it was so good! The best idea I would've ever had.

So good! And you still remember it being good, but you don't remember anything else about it. I also put on a lot of restful music. I suppose it's kind of meditative. I feel the need to shut down and have a five-, ten-minute power nap.

You get into that state of being before you're going to fall asleep, and I find that your brain comes up with interesting things. Or when you're coming out of sleep—when I'm in that state, I can picture things very, very clearly because there's a lot going on generally. Full of images.

One of my students wanted to know why you use sea animals in the letters of the titles—I think we've talked about that a little bit, but if you could say more—and piggybacking on that question, I was intrigued with your deep love of negative space, which, again...labels, eh? Negative space—

Well, positive and negative space... human beings are wired for pattern recognition. I just think I'm slightly more obsessed with it than other people. Is this question in relation to *Zoo City*?

I sent my students your official site, and I told them to look through the examples of your work. I said, "We're reading one book, but he's done a lot; look through and use them to inform your questions." I think he means generally, but you do it more than once, noticeably, so that might be where it's coming from.

While working on *Zoo City*, I'd read Lauren's book, and I was like, "What am I going to do here? I know I don't want to use a photograph, I want to illustrate it, so what's the best way to do this?" I was really stuck on how best to encapsulate it visually, and after that, I decided to take a walk to the book shop and see what everyone else is doing, and I think, "OK, that's what everyone else is doing, so I'm going to go in the opposite direction." And I noticed that there were very few black and white covers.

I've always loved black and white because I grew up reading like *2000AD* and stuff, which is how I learned how to draw various periods in life. I've always struggled to add color to my work. I'm very much a limited-color-palette person.

I'll just point out that I think this makes your outfit very funny right now. (Hi-Fi is wearing black and white, entirely.) So it's your life palette.

Well, it's my clothing as well. I've always had an attraction to black and white. I don't know why. Really not black and white thinking, but I like black and white in terms of colors. That's why my obsession with seeing things in things—like, I used to read comic books and go, "Oh wow, that little painting right there looks like there could be something in there!" When I was working on *Zoo City*, I was like, "It'll be interesting and really stand out if the cover was just black and white." I wanted it to be bold and striking, and often the route I take is determined by

the title of the book, so when you have a title like *Zoo City*, which is short and punchy, you can do that. If it has a longish title, the imagery is going to have to take center stage, and the type is going to have to be secondary to that. I started with just figuring out how to do the letters and how to lay them out in the most striking way. Then I had a look at it, and I was like, “Hmm, how can I take it further than this,” and I started looking at the negative space in the letters, and I was like, “There’s something very intriguing there.” I just started scribbling and thinking, “That could be part of a sloth arm, that could be a bird, that could be a building,” and then slowly but surely, it took shape.

I was working on it and driving myself crazy because I was like, “Is this absolutely insane? Is the publisher ever going to buy this?” I said to Lauren, “Look, I’ve done something. It’s not finished, but just see what you think.” So the moment came, and she screamed and jumped up, and was like, “Oh my god! Oh my god! That’s *it!* Print, print, print!” I was like, “It’s not done yet!” And she was like, “Oh, I love it! Let’s do it!” I think she was a large part in selling it to Jacana [original publishers] at that stage, and they do take risks on covers. They were like, “Yeah, let’s do it.” That’s how it started, and I figured if I could get away with that, maybe there’s other stuff I can get away with. I have a real interest in the structure of type, different fonts, and how to combine it with illustration in different ways. Unfortunately, it is dictated by the title of the book; otherwise, I’d definitely do it more.

What’s too long? Three words?

Depends on what those words are, but yes. Generally, it’s two words. Two three-letter words would be perfect to follow the format for a book. Two three-letter words is better than...or three or four letters, like *Zoo City*, versus just three letters, strangely enough.

That’s not enough space?

No, it just leaves awkward space. The other way, you can actually fill up the space. But you know, I’m a big fan of purely typographic covers. There’s stuff that other people seem to get away with that I’ve never been allowed to get away with, like breaking up the word “S-T-A-R,” and then “T” elsewhere. I’m like, wow, it’d be so awesome if we could do that, but some artists think it’ll be hard to read, but you see it on the shelves all the time.

And with *Lagoon*, I was thinking that *Lagoon* is pretty shortish; I can do something typographic with this. I’ll do the inverse of *Zoo City*, where the letters are actually formed by the creatures versus the other way around. I also just really wanted to draw tentacles, so I thought, “This is my opportunity!”

Another question... Do you have a saying about things being black and white? When we do, it’s really literal. (When I left my class, they were midway through our hardboiled detective readings, and everything is shades of grey, and there’s contamination, and everything is tainted. There isn’t a white space in hardboiled detective fiction...)

That’s the way it should be, I think. The world is shades of grey, not black and white.

And yet you love black and white.

Just graphically.

Just the strikingness of it?

Yeah—a book like *Zoo City* is shades of grey, not black and white. Me using black and white is not a comment on the story. It's just something that as an artist, I really still enjoy. I just love playing with pen and ink. I'm obsessed with Rorschach blots and Escher. It's just something I get excited about, when you look at something and then you see something else if you look at it long enough. Unfortunately, the way my eyes work, I can never see those 3-D posters or anything like that.

That makes me really happy! I can't either!

I do have mutant eyes, so...

What does that mean?

I have a weird astigmatism, where my eyes have learned to work independently of each other.

My astigmatism is that diagonal type, which I guess it weird, but they haven't done that.

My ophthalmologist gave me an eye test and was so confused. He disappeared for ten minutes, and I was thinking, "Oh my god, it's eye cancer or something, I'm pretty sure." He came back with a book and sat down and gave a really deep sigh, and said, "I don't know how to tell you this"—

"Your eyes are killing you!"

"We're going to have to cut your eyes out..." No. He said, "I learned about this at the ophthalmology school, but I never thought I'd see it." I was like, "OK... Out with it." He was like, "Well, your eyes work in a weird kind of way, so we can't give you proper prescription glasses as you aren't going to be able to see everything clearly. You just pick one field." Well, I like to draw, so that's my field... My eyes aren't that bad. If I look at something and turn my head and look at it again, there's something out of focus. I don't know why. I thought that's how it usually worked. In addition to that, they were like, "We can train you to use both your eyes together, but who knows what'll happen now that you've been doing that for your whole life," so I guess I'm stuck with these. It's just a weird eye shape.

That's really cool. I have LASIKs, so I have quasi-cyborg eyes, but clearly I've defeated it because now I need glasses.

I can't even do that. They didn't even offer it to me. I asked if it was going to get better or worse, and they were like, "We don't know," but it won't get better. It's just degrees of worse.

That's fascinating.

Black and white, obviously visually they're the opposite ends of the spectrum, so it makes it a lot easier to work with positive and negative space because you have the contrast to do it. If you're doing that in color, it's a lot more challenging. I suppose you could do it with red and white, but it would have to be a color and white. Black and white is timeless and kinda cool.

And everyone can see it.

Everyone can see it, and it's timeless in a way as opposed to picking a color that's dark enough, and that ends up a bit muddy.

Is it weird when reprints of books that you've done covers for have different covers?

That I haven't been involved in? No, not at all. It's really interesting to see how the other artists have interpreted the source material. Sometimes I look at it and go, "Oh, wow, that's really good. I wouldn't have done that, but it's very, very cool." And sometimes you look at it and go, "Wow. Did they read the book?" It's also interesting to see clearly the different markets that people operate in; this will work in this country—

Like the French cover versus that American cover.

The French seem to take a risk on stuff. They're a little more experimental. The U.K. is cool, but sometimes they have a very set way of doing things in some of their books. The U.S., I don't know... There's authors that I know and they've shown me the U.S. covers, and I've read the book, and I'm like, "I suppose it's...kind of...interesting." But it seems very disconnected from the source material. It's like they're looking at the title, and going, "OK, it's called *Broken Monsters*..." But not even sometimes. The cover I did for *Broken Monsters*, there's a weird void between what I did and what's in the U.S., and I'm not saying that those are terrible covers, but I'm just saying they're vastly different interpretations of (slight chuckle) what the book is about. It's a strange choice.

Yeah, you know. Markets.

If you Google the *Zoo City* covers for Russia... It's interesting.

Yeah, in Nalo Hopkinson's speech at the ICFA³⁰⁹ in 2005, she talked about how the Russian version of Midnight Robber was published with a blue person on the cover. It is a deliberately anti-blue-ish-ness book.

I personally don't understand why if someone's writing a story about a black character that you'd be nervous about putting them on the cover.

If you're going to focus on the character, you should focus on the actual character.

³⁰⁹ (International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts)

Yes. Or race swapping, as well.

What are you reading currently?

I've gotten sidetracked by podcasts... If you're in for a laugh, "My Dad Wrote a Porno." It's a British comedy podcast about a guy whose dad wrote a porno. Erotic fiction. And it's like out of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and it is one of the funniest things. They read out a chapter every week and tear it to shreds. The weird thing is that it appeals to me as a fan of good bad-films because it almost transcends taste, like *The Room* or *Troll 2*; there's a conviction where these people stand behind their work, and they have given a gift to the world. It is so bad that it becomes a piece of art in the end. In great creativity, you either want to succeed on or fail on an epic scale; the worst thing is being in the middle. Indifference is the worst thing. So now they're doing this podcast, which is ripping off their dad's book—I think in British terms they call it rinsing—they're selling the book, and it'll probably sell more copies now than it would've, but they're selling it on the premise of it being a good laugh. And his father chose the pen name Rocky Flintstone.

Noooooo.

(Laughs.) And he's written a series, and he just churns them out.

Does he ever guest-star on the podcast? Come on and say, "Here's what I think about what you're doing"?

He did do a Q&A from listeners... I can't say it helped very much because I think he applies the same logic to writing as he does to answering Q&A questions. It's like trying to put yourself in the brain of Tommy Wiseau—nearly impossible. Other stuff I'm reading... I was reading Daniel Clowes' *Patience*, his new graphic novel... just a lot of comic books. *Wicked + Divine* by Jamie McKelvie and Kieron Gillen. A friend of mine wrote a book called *Zodiac*, but it has nothing to do with the Zodiac killer. Sam Wilson, I've read him recently.

I've heard of that, favorably, but I can't remember how.

It's good! It's like when people ask what type of music do you listen to, and your mind immediately goes blank. I have a literal pile this high... *Southern Bastards* is another comic book I've read. It's pretty good. He was here for the sort of South African Comic-Con that we had.

Yeah, it was before I got here, which was sad. Are they pretty well attended?

We'd never had a proper—it was called FanCon—we've had free comic book day in Cape Town, and it was always pretty well attended, but this was insane. They were turning people away. (Jason Aaron! He does *Southern Bastards*.) Yeah, I'm a huge fan of Ed Brubaker, *Criminal*. I love really well done crime comics. There's not enough of them. *100 Bullets* is really good as well.

Do you get a lot of fan interaction here? If that was the first Comic-Con...

Yeah. I'm sure some local people would take offense at me saying this, but it feels very much that the comic book industry here is still in its infancy. If you'd walked up to a lot of people and asked them to name a South African comic, you'd get some certain examples. It's very much still underground, I'd say. So when it comes to fan interaction, it was really great to sit down, do a signing, have people come up and ask you questions about various things. We had a few panels, though not a lot of interest in book covers design. No one really wants to become a book cover designer, which is sad.

That is sad.

It's an underappreciated art, which I can understand locally because it's something you do for the love, not the money.

Surely, that drive is there, it's just—

I mean, I think that's how all genre works in this country—you operate on passion and sheer will. What amazes me, though, is when you're talking to other artists and they compare how much more love they get overseas than they do locally. We suffer from a cringe in this country where if something is South African, it's not as good as what other people are doing in *any* other country—pick a country!

That's so foreign to me as an American. I feel like often Americans are very happy and proud about what they're doing.

They should be!

Right! But there's such a disconnect to how it sounds like the way it is here. It seems sad.

It's always really encouraging when you see, like, Trevor Noah on *The Daily Show*. It's like, "See? Look! We are good now!"

Well, and a lot of his early jokes came out of that.

Right. And what Lauren does is if you work hard at something, then eventually you'll be able to live your job and dream. For me, I always wanted to work on a comic book series. I thought I'd be drawing it, not writing it, but it turns out I enjoy the writing more. And then these things can happen. I just wish it was more possible locally, and that we didn't have to self-finance and do everything yourself. But Kickstarter has changed that a little bit.

It seems like a great resource. A lot of anthologies and call for stories and such come from those... But even there, it's a question of getting the momentum. Then it can be useful.

Yeah.

Have you illustrated Cape Town other than for Charlie Human's Apocalypse Now Now?

I don't know if that really counts.

Well, I wanted to be gracious.

No, not really, I haven't at all. I try and stay away from the very obvious visual clichés. So if someone's written a book and there's a particular geographic landmark that isn't Table Mountain, or the phantom menace on all African book covers, which is the tree...

I'd like to see a tree as a phantom menace.

I probably would've drawn it then, although I haven't really read one where it's been a huge part of the story and something people would recognize. But if someone had written a story about the Tampon Towers, then I'd be up for drawing that. But no, not really, actually.

What about a smaller space? If Cape Town as the setting isn't as important as a lot of other things...but since Tampon Towers is smaller, can you do a lot more with it? Is it easier to fiddle with? Is that part of it?

It's also probably not that much of a cliché.

No, these are the first Tampon Towers I've seen.

A horror set in the towers, for example, I'd do that.

That would be amazing. You could do very feminist things with blood on that cover. That'd be wonderful.

(chuckle) Yeah. You were asking about graphic novels—that's actually how *Survivors' Club* started. I have an incredible collection of short stories. I don't make life easy for myself because they're really hard to do. But I was thinking of Charles Burns-ing it and doing a graphic novel that I'd draw after hours and just do myself, and get it out there at some stage in my life. I was actually talking to Lauren about some of these ideas. One of them was the original idea about *Survivors' Club*, that's where it started...

But yeah, to do a comic set in Cape Town that you can recognize the landmarks, and if you were reading it and you were overseas, you'd get a sense of the place. Because it isn't just *this*, obviously; it has a lot of different geography and history to it, so something that's always interested me. I hope that one day I get to do that, because when you do something for an American publisher, they're nervous when you say, "This is going to be set in Cape Town."

Which is dumb, because, again, I was just at a conference full of people from all over the world who would love that and teach it. It'd be great.

Have you seen *A Girl Who Walks Home Alone at Night*? It's an Iranian vampire Western. Well worth having a look at—a female director, Ana Lily Amirpour. It was really good; the place was called Bad City... It was a very fictional version of a town that is almost, again, timeless.

It's interesting, locally—it's not a 100% accurate depiction of Cape Town, but it has elements of it that exists, like an alternative universe. People don't get hung up on the details. But Hollywood films have been doing that for years, right?

Yes. Including having them set off-planet or in a fictional version of the place.

Right. So when Lauren and I were doing *Survivors' Club*, we would've loved to have them all set locally because it'd have been a lot easier for us, because we had to do insane amount of Googling. Lauren's been there a few times, so she knew a little bit about the geography, but we had to know things like, how far is this place? Can they get there? What do the buildings look like there?

Do you think it's less risky to set it in this real place where you live? Let's say you live in America.

Yeah, most definitely. And also the inverse, when American writers or writers outside of South Africa's borders set something in Africa, in any country, it's often not terribly well researched. You're going to see wild animals, you're going to see a hut or two—

—Trees. You're going to see trees.

You're going to see trees, regardless of where it is. I think the inverse is definitely not true. When local writers set something in America or the U.K., we do a lot of research because we're painfully aware that people get it wrong on this side, and we don't want to get it wrong on that side. We don't want people to have a look at what we're doing and go, "This is terrible! L.A. is not like this at all."

Many people at the conference were comparing Cape Town to L.A. in a lot of ways. Something about the beach and the mountains and sharp delineations between different economic classes...

I can see that.

But it's not, in a lot of other very important ways.

Topical!

Yes, very. I want you to do that graphic novel set.

I'd love to. I'm a very slow drawer because I get obsessed with details. I'll start drawing, and I'll get eight pages in, and I was like, "This is going to take me forever, if I treat every panel as an artwork. I really need to rethink how I do things."

To go back a bit—a lot of South African writers and artists are generally self-taught. Probably not the writers because you can actually go study writing. You can study graphic design and advertising, but all the other stuff, if you want to get into something that's not that, like comic books, for instance, you're going to be learning that craft yourself, and you don't have the

benefit of working with people who have been working in that industry for years. So comic books are very specialized, and you people doing everything themselves. Like lettering, for example, is very specialized! But locally, for a lot of people, it's an afterthought...how to write a story from start to finish...that kind of thing. A lot of these people say, "We're artists, you're a writer"... I'm not a trained writer, but I was one of those people who thought, "I'm going to write, draw, letter, do everything myself!" Probably just not do color because it's going to be black and white.

Well, right. I was talking to Nalo Hopkinson a while ago, who's lovely, and she was mentioning how even if you're trained as a writer, you're discouraged from practicing genre. So even then, you're not given the institutional support—it really seems like the mentorship has to come from a different type of community, which seems unfair and weird, but like a reality.

I grew up in a creative environment where if it's writing, it's Literary or bust. We're looking for the next Alan Paton or poet Antjie Krog. We didn't even have any Xhosa-speaking examples or Zulu-speaking examples. I think that shadow still looms a little bit large now. But I believe it *will* change, definitely. Comics in particular, because it's a really good teaching tool.

Can you say more about that?

I learnt a lot from comic books growing up. You put a novel or a comic book in front of a kid—it's not one or the other, but locally, we can get a lot done in terms of education with comic books, which just makes the learning experience a little more fun.

Yeah—sorry—I heard “make the colonial experience” a little more fun, not learning, and then I realized what you said.

Well, what's wrong with the colonialism? (*He asked very sarcastically.*) Lauren and I talk about this quite a lot, and it's one of her beefs, that there are not a lot of comic books for young kids. In fact, if you look at the output of the movies—Marvel has a bit more, but it's still pretty violent, and I don't know what DC is doing—but a lot of comics have become the domain of an increased age, appealing to twenty year olds, people who can handle—

—Very dark themes, very harsh truths.

Right.

Which is weird, because in a lot of other ways, education has gotten a lot more friendly with visuals—computer games and Sesame Street. Visuals work, and that's what they want and that's what they like, and books that are illustrated. For a lot of other children's literature, the illustrations are beautiful and valued. They're great.

I think it has led to some really interesting animated shows like *Steven Universe* and *Adventure Time*, stuff that you can appreciate as an adult, but kids will also get something out of it. I see a lot of copies of *Lumberjanes* around Lauren's house; her daughter's really into it.

The fact that Lauren's daughter is into this stuff makes me wonder: What was the gender ratio like at FanCon? Or in terms of fans in general here?

My memory of it is that I was really impressed that, among race and gender lines, it was very mixed.

YAY!

I feared that it would just be...ah...white men.

One very particular type of audience.

Not that there's anything wrong with that, but diversity's good—I think it makes for better storytelling. We actually did a panel there, and people think you come across as “PC” when you say things like that. But it's not that you're going through a checklist, but if you're going to write a character, they can't all be the same.

Even if they're all clones, they're all different.

Even in terms of storytelling. There's only so many variations of a particular stereotype that you can work with.

Weird question: Have you been invited to different classrooms?

No! No.

Really?

There's not a lot of people wanting to become book cover designers. The industry is so, so unbelievably small.

I admit, when I was younger, I mainly thought about book covers in terms of children's lit, as my mom's an elementary school librarian, and the illustrator is featured prominently, and you get that sense that the author and illustrator are the same...but in other cases, they're not featured, and you don't think about it as a career. The publisher picks it out, someone in-house does it; it's just something a random designer does.

Yeah. I got into book cover design for many reasons, but one of them was I just woke up one day and thought, “I don't feel like going into work. What am I doing here? Do I want to look back on my life and have just brochures and logos for companies?” In my opinion—and this is mine, there's nothing wrong with wanting to do that, but you need to have a passion for it, and I didn't. I didn't want to do it anymore. Literally, I just went in, I quit, and thought I really wanted to do book cover design. I didn't know how to get into it, but I just kinda lucked my way into it basically.

Very inspiring and terrifying.

Yeah—and I wasn't thinking about the money. It wasn't, "If I get into book cover design, I'll be a millionaire..." It's in fact the opposite.

Nothing you like tends to work that way. College teaching, for example.

Yeah, and it just so happened that Lauren was working on her first book—a non-fiction book [*Maverick: Extraordinary Women from South Africa's Past*]

I liked the poison bottle in particular, on top of the frame.

Well, you see, that's the photographic detail obsession I have. And she pitched me to the then-publisher Ocean (DC), and she said, "Take a chance on this guy!" And I remember pitching my first cover idea to her, and she hated it.

What was it?

It was an image made up of other images, but it was very much like vector design, and then I basically went back to the drawing board. Again, I took a walk and checked out what everyone else was doing and thought, "Oh, I'll do this thing." So I spent weekends just going to secondhand markets collecting all the little bits.

That's how I got in. I don't know how to answer people when they ask me how *do* you get in, because I don't know if publishers have...at least, I've never been asked if they're looking to hire an in-house designer. I've never been approached or asked to recommend anyone...

I wonder if it really is, who knows the author, how do you get in that way. Which is sad, since it means that the industry is really valuing one part of the equation a lot more heavily than the other. Not that it's easy to get in as a writer, either.

There are interesting things happening, but the market is so small that I think it's a big financial risk for publishers. I mean, there have been a few disasters. And strangely, Afrikaans language books do really well. But again, they're very much Literary. They're "real stories," not science fiction, horror—they're not genre stories generally.

That's also really weird that they don't have genre stories in Afrikaans.

I'm not saying they don't, but the big sellers are not genre stories. So I think if people took more of an interest in genre... I think it will eventually happen.

It seems to be shifting that way.

Well, the upswing in international interest in comic books has definitely had an impact here. I've had people be like, "OH! These are the things the nerds were into for all these years! These are really cool! A guy in a metal suit who's an alcoholic! I can see why—yes! A tiny man with anger issues! Yes, I can sympathize with that!" I'm very curious to see how they play out the *Black Panther* in Wakanda...

Me, too! I haven't seen the latest movie, Civil War, yet.

I thought it was pretty good. It also had South African actor John Kani in it. And they were speaking Xhosa.

OK, that's exciting to hear. That makes me a lot more hopeful.

In the last *Avengers* film, they had a scene in Johannesburg. The Hulkbuster scene...

Was that hopeful or not? It's there on the screen, but it's totally decimated...

Well, it's nice to see it in a big blockbuster movie. Generally, there was a time when things shot locally, you'd wince a bit and go, "Oh, it's going to be bad!" But that's not the case anymore. It's really exciting—there's still a thrill to go to a film and go, "Oh! That's Joburg! Or that's Cape Town!" And the vicarious thrill of them actually naming the country and not just calling it Africa. That's always good.

So what do you think about Wakanda... It's not a real African nation, but it is specifically African... Does it affect any of that thrill when it's a metaphorical name?

Well, Marvel has a history of doing that. I think also applies to, like, how do Eastern Europeans feel about Sokovia? Gotham City less so, because clearly, it's New York in the 70s. I just hope they do their research. I think these stories need to be written by people who understand the source material. So, whether it be a fictitious African country... I think that's what any genre writing needs. It's like, if you want really good LGBTQ characters or really well-rounded African characters or Asian characters, you need to bring people in who understand what it's like to have grown up as... And I'm not saying that only a certain group can tell a certain story, but just do your research. At least have that discussion with them.

Did you follow RaceFail09 at all? Or is that more of an American thing? After 2009, in terms of the American market, you see a lot more interest in different anthologies and novels and things from elsewhere, which is great. It seems like it is not as international as it could've been, considering it is online. It's connected to the Sad Puppy/Rabid Puppy takeover of the Hugo awards.

I mean, if there's an outrage about something—outrage aside, there's something wrong. And I think that needs to be addressed. I think the diversity in whatever creative field is going to take a while to course-correct. You see it happening now and certain people being dragged along kicking and screaming along for the ride. You see it happening now with the *Ghostbusters* film.

Such hate! My goodness! Have you seen it yet?

No—but regardless of whether it's a good or bad movie, it's an important film.

And they didn't choose comedic lightweights—they're people that have been considered funny.

There are certain things that I'm really glad are happening. I never thought there'd be a *Black Panther* movie. I am *shocked* that it took so long to get a *Wonder Woman* movie. I just hope there isn't some kind of... It's such a terrible double-edged sword, where if they don't do well, they'll be like, "We can't do that again! Let's bank on the white dudes."

Things get overanalyzed before they even come out, and then you get preconceived notions. If you go into the film thinking you'll hate it, you probably will—it will take brilliance to win you over, and then you can leave like, "Goddammit, I hate you, but I respect you!" I will say I think it's good to have equal representation out there, but it's also a matter of what's behind the scenes, giving different actors opportunities, having writer rooms that are equally balanced. You want the best people for the jobs, but the only way you can get the best people is by giving them the opportunity.

That goes along with the star industry, right, which is still alive and present.

You see it in comic books as well. This will be controversial, but the whole 'Sulu is gay' thing, which I think is great—I think it's important to have LGBT representation, but I mean, why has it taken so long? There's still a stigma to have, like, someone on a sports team can be gay.

Right. "What do you mean they can function with other people?!"

Or the toilet, the transgender toilet—it's just a very vocal minority that does it. It's the same as the NRA. Oh, I've lost my train of thought.

You ended in a good place, but you were going somewhere. We should've written it down. Do you do Post-its?

It's easier on my phone. The thing with Post-its is that I used to lose them, or then you just have a book full of Post-its. On the phone, you can search for keywords, though then you have to figure out the autocorrect and do some deciphering.

You have to think like a machine that's not that smart yet.

When you type things in really quickly.

B.4 NALO HOPKINSON

Personal interview conducted Nov. 16, 2014 by Jessica FitzPatrick

At the home of a gracious member of Parsec, Pittsburgh's premier science fiction and fantasy organization

Hopkinson and FitzPatrick shared an appetizer spread, and both indulged in tea

Hopkinson was born in Jamaica and has lived in Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, and Canada (for 35 years). She currently resides in California and works as a professor of creative writing at the University of California, Riverside (UCR). In addition to her writing and teaching duties, Hopkinson also helps organize conferences and writing series, such as the 2015-2016 programming on Alternative Futurisms in Science Fiction, which fostered discussion among writers and critics working on science fiction through the lens of racial and cultural diversity. She is the author of six novels (including *Brown Girl in the Ring*, 1998; *Midnight Robber*, 2000; and *Sister Mine*, 2013), two short-story collections (*Skin Folk*, 2001; *Falling in Love with Hominids*, 2015), and a chapbook (*Report From Planet Midnight*, 2012). She is the editor of fiction anthologies *Whispers From the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* (2000) and *Mojo: Conjure Stories* (2003). She is the co-editor of fiction anthologies *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction* (2005) and *Tesseract Nine: New Canadian Speculative Fiction* (2012). Hopkinson's work has received Honorable Mention in Cuba's "Casa de las Americas" literary prize. She is a recipient of the Warner Aspect First Novel Award, the Ontario Arts Council Foundation Award for emerging writers, the John W. Campbell Award for Best

New Writer, the Locus Award for Best New Writer, the World Fantasy Award, the Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the Fantastic (twice), the Aurora Award, the Gaylactic Spectrum Award, and the Norton Award for Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy.

Please note: This interview was previously published as “Writing from the Body: An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson” in the *Hot Metal Bridge*, Spring 2015, issue 17 (<http://hotmetalbridge.org/an-interview-with-nalo-hopkinson/>). Since this interview was originally published at *Hot Metal Bridge*, I have retained their formatting, including the identification of the interviewer (J. FitzPatrick) by the title of the magazine instead of the normal italics. Many thanks to publisher *Hot Metal Bridge* for allowing me to reprint the interview in this dissertation.

On Nov. 15, 2014, Nalo Hopkinson presented on “Keeping it (Un)Real” for the Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy Author Lecture Series put on by Carnegie Mellon University and Parsec. The interview follows—and at times refers to—her talk.

Hot Metal Bridge: What is “postcolonial science fiction”?

Hopkinson: I remember when Uppinder Mehan and I were doing the anthology, *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*. I knew what “science fiction” was—and that itself is a contested term—but he had to explain to me what “postcolonial” was. And of course it was a long explanation with many long words in it. People had been telling me that I wrote postcolonial literature, and I had no idea what they were talking about. If I were to explain

it now in terms of science fiction, I would have to go to a dictionary even though I've edited an anthology of postcolonial science fiction. But to me science fiction is a sort of perfect way to be talking about colonialism and its aftereffects because that's the core story of science fiction: going to other places and meeting new aliens and taking their stuff! [laughs] So when you get that awareness being brought into science fiction by writers and critics from postcolonial communities or with an analysis of colonialism and its effects, many times we already have a lot of the language for making fiction about it, a lot of the language for critiquing it, for saying here's what may result, or here's what could be different, or here's some of the possibilities, here's what this experience is like psychically. And there is some resistance in the science fiction community to people doing that, but there's also a whole lot of people going "Hell yeah! It's about time! We've wanted to see this for a very long time." So it's a very fruitful genre to be doing that kind of work in.

It has been a genre that has been predominantly white, western, middle-class, and male for a long time. Now it's closer to being 50-50 in terms of male and female writers, but there have been waves of people claiming science fiction for their own. There's the whole feminist wave; there are anthologies based around queer experiences in science fiction, and increasingly, anthologies based around communities of color. There's one coming out that's talking about ability and disability. And so the community's generating its own material as quickly as it can, and being that we're so internet-connected, we're very quick to take advantage of things like Kickstarter to get small things funded. And as with any small community that has been marginalized and is accustomed to activism in support of its own survival, give us any little bit of money and we can make wonderful things happen.

One of the things I'm seeing about those anthologies is often it's a younger expression. It's younger folks with not as much experience. So, for instance, one of the things you'll see is the copy editing won't be as strong as something coming out from Simon and Schuster. And I have to put that aside, to some extent, and look at the message, look at the vigor, insight and imagination in the work. This is modern day samizdat. This is "we can now take the means of production into our own hands." And people are learning on the ground, learning from each other. When I think of a zine, I don't expect everything to be spelled correctly. What I want is the message, the challenge to my own preconceptions and those of others. When I pick up these anthologies, what I want is the story and the sensibility. And those are coming out in droves. There's a lot of push-back...but there's a lot of push-forward.

HMB: As long as it's not a Doctor Dolittle pushmi-pullyu type of stalemate...

Hopkinson: Right! Forward tends to win out.

HMB: During your talk at Carnegie Mellon, you mentioned science fiction's relationship to our "real" lives, but also to the reality of the classroom. Does teaching interact with what you're writing, or how you're writing?

Hopkinson: It does... the lovely thing about teaching is that the students challenge you because they want to know why about everything. Sometimes they want to know the why of things you've never questioned. It's also quite humbling. More than once I've found a particular

literary strategy that I see failing over and over in someone's work or in a group's work—I'm noticing it because I've done it myself. So I have to confess and say, "Yeah....there's a reason why I know this so well. And I hadn't even thought about it until I saw it in your work."

Because I'm teaching in a plot driven form, I bring a different way of looking at structure to people. My metaphors for craft tend to be scientific and kinetic. (Go figure.) When it comes to teaching craft, we try to open their eyes. Which means you have to have different strategies because you never know what's going to make the lights go on for a student. I bring different strategies from our genre that many of them haven't seen or heard of before, and often they tell me it's the first time they've thought of something in a particular way. I also bring my current hobbyhorse, which is about the way that fiction really works by creating a sensory kinetic map for the reader. The sensory map is the protagonist for the reader to enter and move around inside the story. It's not that we receive the story, it's that we're inside the story, exploring and learning about it as the protagonist does.

HMB: Kinda like a video game?

Hopkinson: Better. Hmm. No—let me not do a disservice to video games. Good ones can do this just as well. You have to create strong sensory images for sensation and movement. So if you say "She was angry," that's just delivering a fact. If you say, to use an old cliché, "A pulse beat in her temple," all of a sudden the reader's nerve endings are firing. A pulse may not actually beat in reader's temple, but those nerve endings are firing. They've scientifically mapped this.

I bring a certain amount of science to the craft of writing; I bring a fair bit of magic to the craft of writing. I try to give them as many new ways of approaching it as possible. And because I also come out of a Caribbean writing tradition that has very much privileged writing in vernacular, I do a lot of getting them to practice discovering what their own vernaculars are, listening for other peoples', and trying to make sure that not every character speaks the same, or necessarily speaks in the same register as the author. It's a hard one for them to grasp at the undergrad level, I find. They've had the expository essay so dinned into their heads that they try to write fiction in bland, declarative prose, and it just doesn't work.

HMB: That type of writing sounds really ugly and horrible.

Hopkinson: I often wonder why, if you think that's what fiction is, would you major in creative writing at all...

HMB: Let's move away from the chilling idea of undergraduates who can't write anything but exposition and back to your idea of moving through the literary world. Science fiction and fantasy are genres that are not only plot-driven, but also world-driven; the world-building relates intensely to what can happen in the plot. Previously you've mentioned that when you write about Big Important Issues you don't want them to have an incredibly easy fix—just because you're a character in a fantastical or science fictional world, there's still no waving a magical wand and escaping from lineages of violence—

Hopkinson: No superhero who can make time go backwards.

HMB:—right! So how does this avoidance of the genre-specific “easy outs” affect the worlds, the spaces and places, you build? This may lead into more general ideas about the use of literary place...

Hopkinson: One of the things I have to challenge frequently in younger writers is the unquestioned notion that the character doesn't have much baggage, that the character is just a vehicle for story. When in fact everything in our history creates our environments. The fact that there are train tracks running by this river that we're sitting by and that those tracks have a certain width is an effect of history. The fact of what we're sitting here eating is an effect of colonialism—We're eating figs.

HMB: And marmalade!

Hopkinson: Even though it's below freezing outside. All those things affect our experience of the world. They affect the character's experience of the world in subtle ways. It is better to avoid a long information dump on those connections, but you do have to really live inside your character to know what the world is doing to them and what they're doing to the world. I have to have people ask questions such as: “What is this person's history?”, “What do they do for a living?” I mean, questions you're probably asking in fiction anyway become all the more important in science fiction and fantasy because you're creating the world from the ground

up. You have to choose what to put in and what to leave out. It's too easy to make protagonists into ciphers.

HMB: Writers have to ask the question, "Is the character you're writing using the steampunk gadget, or are they building the gears for the steampunk gadget?"

Hopkinson: And if you're building the gears for the steampunk gadget, how does that affect your body? There is, and I remember having this problem, so I can't say "youth nowadays"...but today there's not a very strong sense of history. Anything 20 years in the past might as well be from 2000 years ago. I'm a voice for research. The character of an upper middle-class 19th century young woman from New York is not wearing shorts to the market.

HMB: And if she is, that writer is doing something very deliberate with the timeline.

Hopkinson: Exactly. The writer is creating an alternate history. It's not that you can't do it, but know why you're doing it. And what it affects.

HMB: Including how everyone else in that world will react...

Hopkinson: Certainly. And I sometimes fear I'm overwhelming my students because there are so many layers of competency you have to take on in writing science fiction and fantasy. When your writing concerns only reality, there are things you don't need to question.

Writing science fiction and fantasy means you need to question whether there's even a sun. And then question what direction that sun comes up in and what color it is.

HMB: Let alone how many suns there even are.

Hopkinson: And then, using the answers to those questions: what color does it mean the plants are? What is the composition of the air? Given that composition, what is the biology of creatures on the world you've created? Lots of competencies... It means people who are trying to write science fiction and fantasy will at first usually be very clumsy. It means at the apprenticeship stages science fiction can look a lot less mature than mimetic fiction because there are so many more steps of knowledge to take on and then try to synthesize. So for creative writing teachers, what I'm trying to say is to be patient; don't assume this person can't write. You may just have to bring them to the understanding of, for instance, the emotional connection to the character (we tend to focus a lot on the plot because the story falls apart if the plot doesn't work).

You have to find ways of making students see other things. I don't think he will mind me telling this story because he's told it himself on the Internet, but I had a student who had been at a workshop for four weeks and was facing two more weeks. He had been told over and over again that his writing was hollow.

HMB: Hollow?

Hopkinson: Hollow. There's a particular type of journeyman science fiction writing that's just hollow. The character feels like an eggcup with legs. In his story there was a teenager trying to survive on her own with a freshly broken ankle, but he hadn't written any effects of her trying to walk on a broken ankle.

HMB: Ah-ha. Hollow.

Hopkinson: And he thought he'd had a breakthrough, but just got exactly the same feedback he'd been taking in for 4 weeks. So he came to me not knowing what to do next. And I said, "When you write, where are you writing from?" He said, "I'm in the character's head, and I'm thinking about what are they thinking about..." and he used the word think over and over again, and finally I said, "You need to write from their body, and I don't mean emotions—those will come through—but what are their sensations and what is movement doing to them." At first he didn't see why it was important and was having a hard time understanding it...

HMB: You can't focus on anything, let alone think, when your stomach is gurgling about being hungry.

Hopkinson: Right! So he listened, and went away and wrote the next story. And he nailed it. I started reading it and critiquing it, but the whole time I was thinking "Something's different...Something's different..." and I realized the character had just skinned his knee and my knee was burning. The character was embarrassed and I could feel my own checks flushing. I was in the story for the first time.

You might need to do that with the students writing science fiction and fantasy. They've been writing it in isolation because everybody tells them these genres are bad writing, are bad literature. If they haven't found the science fiction community, these writers are working completely in the dark. They might have one set of competencies working beautifully and miss things that to you are obvious. So bring them to it before you decide that a) the literature is impoverished and b) the student has no talent.

HMB: I think sometimes the many-layered competencies of the genre seeps through to the demands on its readers. I just finished teaching *Midnight Robber*. The first third of the book occurs on the technology-filled planet Toussaint. Though they were reading critically, I noticed most students were also just thoroughly enjoying the differentness, the future-ness, of that planet. And then the protagonist, Tan-tan, gets banished to a very different planet. The class realized that, just like her, they had to reassess, they now didn't know what was going on. And then, in the middle of regaining their footing, there's sexual violence.

Hopkinson: I tried to put in signs that it was going that way... Much of that was done in rewriting. It wasn't so much in the first draft, but I went back in subsequent drafts and figured out where the points were that I could embed hints so that hopefully it wasn't a total surprise. Some people still were surprised.

HMB: As were some of my students before we discussed those indicator signs. However, even though they were hard to read, the students appreciated the sections dealing with sexual

assault and its aftermath. Those sections invited important discussions; it let them talk about things that they wouldn't have otherwise. Your writing often allows for such conversations. I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on hard subjects like sexual violence: how do you write about them? How do you teach about them?

Hopkinson: Writing about hard subjects, writing about sexual violence (which is the one that pushes most people's buttons the hardest), but also any kind of violence—bad relationships, fraught relationships, bad things happening to good people—I'm still learning to do. I'm really good at being explicit about sexual violence, about any violence. I'm very good at imagining what happens to the body because I write from the body, so it brings people in even when they don't want to be brought in. I'm learning when to temper that.

I don't believe in soft-coating it, but sometimes you can bring the reader in as far as they need to go and give them the mercy of looking away a little bit. I had to write a scene that had actually happened, where a freedom fighter in Haiti named François Mackandal was burned at the stake. I wrote the scene from the perspective of one of the witnesses. So, I took the reader up to seeing Mackandal tied there. I show them the flames being lit. I can imagine what happens to a live body being burned. But instead of writing that, I have the witness say, "a burning body smells like pork." I didn't need much else. The reader's already gone there. I didn't need to go through all the sensations and the screaming. I'm learning when the reader's already there with me so I don't need to grab them by the hand and drag them to the corpse. It's that sensibility I try to teach. Sometimes you do want to rub the reader's nose in things. You know that that's going to make some readers mad at you. And you might be triggering people if you're writing about a

traumatic experience akin to one they've had. I think the really important thing about that is: if you're going to do it, then get it right. 'Cause it's bad enough they're re-experiencing it, but if you get details wrong then it's a little betrayal. So do your research. So now I'm trying to be just a little bit gentler on the reader, but not much.

When it comes to writing sex, I write all kinds of sex and sexualities. Which means I need a reader who won't be freaked out by being in a body that's not, perhaps, the one they'd want to be in, having an experience that's not one that makes them comfortable. To me that's part of the fun of it. Susie Bright, who used to publish an annual anthology of erotica, found it wasn't doing so well because it was pansexual. She tended to have more female readers than male readers, 'cause female readers are more used to that and more comfortable with it; male readers didn't want to find themselves in a sexuality they weren't comfortable with having a reaction to and, of course, erotica is there to turn you on. I like messing with that.

Sometimes I've had to write my way into a scene that I didn't know how to approach, or was afraid to approach because it wasn't my sexuality or it was and I didn't want to talk about it. And I found one trick would be to sort of tell it from the experience of a character I was more familiar with. Usually in a sex scene there's either an equivalence of play or there's the equivalent of pitcher/catcher, so I learned I could pick the one I felt more comfortable with and write from that perspective. I could turn off the internal censor and let myself play with the situation I was writing.

HMB: Would you then go back to the scene and do it from another perspective, or would you keep it from the slightly more familiar and comfortable one? It might depend on the story; if you needed a particular character's view...

Hopkinson: If it wasn't the point-of-view character, I have the point-of-view character observing those reactions. That's the easiest way to explain it. At some point you have to just kind of go for it. Tell yourself nobody need ever see this, and just go for it. Afterwards, if you find it strong, you'll want to send it out to publishers.

HMB: I know of no enticing transitions from the topic of sex scenes so, instead, a dorky question: What is one thing (magical, scientific or somewhere in-between) you've created or greatly appropriated that you wish was real and you could use/have or just existed in the world?

Hopkinson: That might be a hard one for me; I'm not sure I tend to do that. When I was a kid I hated dolls. I hated playing make-believe. And now it's what I do for a living. So I don't have that sort of wishful thinking. I wouldn't own a magic wand, for instance.

HMB: You wouldn't want a TARDIS? Everyone wants a TARDIS.

Hopkinson: No. I wouldn't time travel. Time travel is baaaaaad.

HMB: Ok, sure: it can go wrong in many ways. It can be awful. But...wouldn't you just want it?

Hopkinson: No, no. [shakes head] There must be something...

HMB: I want your colourdot because lipstick is evil and devilishly hard to apply. In Midnight Robber, the character Ione just has to put her favorite colourdot on her lips, purses them together, and has perfect lip color.

Hopkinson: Oh, like that—Sure. I would like to be able to wake up every morning and choose what body I want to be in. Today I want freckles and I want to be 7 feet tall.

HMB: Talk about something that could really change the way you write and teach! What have you read lately that stuck in your head? When I ask this awful question—because it's an awful question to try and answer—what pops into your brain?

Hopkinson: It is an awful question. I'm not sure it ever helps anybody, but people ask it all the time so it must be helping someone.

HMB: Well, it gives you a name and a title to look up.

Hopkinson: Yes, it does. I think I'm currently just feeling overwhelmed, like "there's so much to read!", so I want titles but...[distressed groan]

I really enjoyed the graphic novel series *The Rabbi's Cat* by Joann Sfar. I preferred them in the French, but the English is good, too. It's set in a Jewish community in Morocco and told from the point of view of the rabbi's cat, which is a delightfully evil little beast. The cat is upset because it's intelligent, but can't speak, but the rabbi's parrot is stupid and can speak. Eventually the cat says "So one day I ate the parrot" and then the cat can talk. The story speaks about the anti-Semitism of the time, living there in a Jewish community that is literally under siege. At one point the cat wants a Bar Mitzvah, so now the rabbi has to figure out if a cat has a soul...

HMB: Especially if the cat can talk because it ate a parrot.

Hopkinson: Exactly, it hasn't stopped being a cat; it's still a hunter, it has a moral code we wouldn't think of as being good. The cat also has a huge crush on the rabbi's daughter. There are four books in the series and it's just delightful. I've been reading a lot of graphic novels. I liked *The Invisibles*. I liked *Bayou* by Jeremy Love, another series of graphic novels that won a competition DC Comics was having. It's set in Jim Crow era in the American South and is fantastical, so it uses the black folklore from the time. There's a talking hound dog sheriff who has real dogs and who hunts down "bad behaved" negroes...and there's a giant golliwog, but it's white, and it comes out of the swamp and eats people whole.

HMB: That sounds terrifying.

Hopkinson: It is terrifying. And so beautifully drawn; it's very childlike. There's a little girl who's trying to save her dad. They're both black and he's been wrongfully accused of

something, and she knows if she can't stop it he's going to be lynched. So she's going through this magical bayou to get to him.

HMB: This is why people keep asking you that awful question—that's a fantastic answer.

Hopkinson: I'm going to be teaching Bayou in a couple of weeks. I'll see how my students react. I'm teaching them the folklore roots of science fiction and fantasy, having them come in and tell folktales from their own backgrounds, and linking folklore modern day literature that draws on folktales.

HMB: Since you've been thinking about this for pedagogical purposes...Other than your own writing, which draws on folktales a lot, shifts and connects and takes different parts and combines them, and other than Bayou...anything else you find really striking which uses folktales?

Hopkinson: I just reread Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose*, which was part of the fairytale series of novels curated by Terri Windling. It's still such a powerful novel. It talks about one of the places where Nazis imprisoned and killed Jewish people where nobody came out, and it does so in the context of the *Briar Rose* story. When people talk about fantasy as escapism...this story does not let you look away for a minute. It's beautiful. And it holds up very well.

I taught Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* which draws on lore about the Chinese goddess Nu Wah, because I wanted to bring in folktales from as much of the world as I could. I'm teaching

short stories as well, there's a beautiful one called "I Shall Do Thee Mischief in the Wood" by Kathe Koja. It does things to the Little Red Riding Hood story that...are so delightfully messed up. You keep thinking you know who or what the wolf is and it keeps slipping on you.

The conversation continued on into the amazing resource of UCR's Eaton Collection of Science Fiction & Fantasy (the largest publicly-accessible collection of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and utopian literature in the world), and meandering among thoughts about diverse classrooms, Pittsburgh tunnels, and knitting. Eventually all the tea was drunk, the extra crackers and cheese packed away, and Hopkinson departed for her flight.

B.5 SILVIA MORENO-GARCIA

Email interview conducted January 27, 2015 by Jessica FitzPatrick

Silvia Moreno-Garcia is a speculative fiction writer operating in the swirling confluence of science fiction, fantasy, romance, noir, horror, and weird fiction. Self-identified as “Mexican by birth, Canadian by inclination,” Moreno-Garcia currently lives in Canada where, in addition to her fiction writing and “day job,” she co-edits *The Jewish Mexican Literary Review* with Lavie Tidhar and *The Dark* horror magazine with Sean Wallace. Moreno-Garcia’s first novel, *Signal to Noise* (2015), won a Copper Cylinder Award; her second novel *Certain Dark Things* (2016) was one of NPR’s best books of 2016; and her third novel, *The Beautiful Ones*, is forthcoming (Fall 2017). She also has two collections of short stories, *This Strange Way of Dying* (2013) and *Love & Other Poisons* (2014). Moreno-Garcia has also edited the World Fantasy Award-winning anthology *Cthulhu’s Daughters* (2015) and is a publisher with the weird fiction micro-press *Innsmouth Free Press*, which is still active, though the *Innsmouth Magazine* has finished its fifteen-issue run (2009-2014).

What is “postcolonial science fiction” (to you)? Do you write this? (Do you sometimes write this?)

I write a whole slew of things from horror to (recently) straight crime fiction with no fantastic elements. I do not like to confine myself to any division or label in terms of genres so I would say I sometimes write this.

I imagine postcolonial science fiction is a category that questions and responds to the colonial or Western legacy we have inherited.

Is it important to you to create characters from a particular social position? From a particular place in the world? Why do you choose the locations (time eras, social classes, worlds even) that you do? What effect do you think these locations have on the reader's perception?

I write what I know and I write what I like. And though this may seem like a very basic answer, it is the truth. I do not set out to write stories with a didactic purpose. I sometimes resent the question of "why do you write about Mexico." White people don't get asked why they write about Pittsburgh or New York. It's just assumed that they do because it is a natural impulse. It is a natural impulse for me to write about the place I grew up in.

I do not solely write about Mexico. Some of my stories are set in Vancouver. The location and time period is dictated by the story. I set something in Vancouver's Chinatown because I was interested in the neon signs around that area from that era. I had a Mexican luchador solve a crime in Vancouver because missing feet had been washing around Vancouver and I live near a place called Leg in Boot Square where a leg once washed ashore in the 19th century.

I like history and every place has some history. When I find something in history that sparks an idea, I write about it.

As for social positions, many, I would say, most, writers are from a middle class or upper class background. This is especially true in Creative Writing programs. They often do not have any idea what it is like to grow up poor or in the company of a family member who is illiterate. But my great-grandmother was illiterate. My youth was marked by several switches from having some money to almost no money to being better off back down to very little. At one point when I had immigrated to Canada I was writing stories for a freebie paper and they would pay like \$30 and a few times they paid with vouchers to eat at a bar. So I took my baby son and my husband to this dingy bar to eat because, hey, free food. My husband worked two shifts when we arrived in Canada and I remember his exhausted face as he got a handful of hours of sleep while earning minimum wage.

I write about people who are rich and I write about people who are very literate and I also write about people who are poor and people who work in factories and people who wouldn't touch a book, because those people exist. There is no sense for me in imagining a zombie apocalypse in which the white, beautiful, rich people are fighting zombies because that's every single thing I always read. No one wonders what happens to the poor, to the disabled, etc., during the post-apocalypse. What's more, class structures remain the same in this new world or a wonderful, macho land is what takes place. One where men save the women with their guns and the women do the laundry or are randomly raped by the bad guys.

And I think. Well, fuck that. If the world is going to burn then maybe let's have a zombie post-apocalypse in which a Marxist-feminist commune flourishes. It's as likely as the macho survivalist fantasies. And if Tom Cruise or Brad Pitt get to survive alien attacks I don't see why someone who lived in the city's dumpsters couldn't make it MORE effectively than these white men who had spent their whole lives with iPads and subscriptions to Maxim and their new car.

In many of your pieces, including “Them Ships,” you do a lot of interesting things with music. (I can’t wait for your novel to come out.) How does music relate to space, for you?

Not a conscious choice. My parents worked in radio so there was a lot of music around my house. My father is a bit hard of hearing and he blasts music very loud. I play the same song 25 times in a row when I like it because I am obsessive and compulsive (and the 25 is a real estimate). It’s a nervous tic. I also have a lot of rain in my stories. I counted it one time and there was like 70% of stories had references to rain and water. I associate the ocean with freedom. I suppose I associate music with escape. Some people say books provide an “escape” and maybe that’s true at some level but it’s not the same kind of thing. You put on a headphone set and you can isolate yourself.

B.6 VANDANA SINGH

Personal interview conducted June 27, 2015 by Jessica FitzPatrick

Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) Conference

Stony Brook University, New York

At a table near the conference tea, coffee, and cookie refreshment outpost in the main level of the Charles B. Wang Center

Vandana Singh is a speculative fiction writer working in the modes of science fiction and fantasy. Born in New Delhi, India, Singh currently lives in Boston where she is a Professor of Physics, with a background in particle physics, and is Chair of the Physics and Earth Sciences Department at Framingham State University (Massachusetts). Her mutual comfort with science and creative writing imbues her fiction, poetry, essays, blog posts, and interviews (see her comprehensive website www.vandana-writes.com). As Singh says, “Being a card-carrying alien-writing science fiction writer is an interesting experience; my distance from my native shores necessarily affects what and how I write” (“About the Author”). Her first short-story collection was *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet* (2008), though her work has appeared in numerous anthologies such as *So Long Been Dreaming* (2004), *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2013), the Indian-Australian anthology *Eat the Sky, Drink the Ocean* (2015), and the collections of *The Year’s Best Science Fiction* and *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror*. She has one novella, *Of Love and Other Monsters* (2007), and has also published poetry in *Strange Horizons* (“A Portrait of the Artists,” 2003) and the 2006 anthology *Mythic*

(“Syllables of Old Lore,” “The Choices of Leaves”). Her concerns with the natural sciences and geopolitics in relation to climate change were the main focus of her keynote address at the SFRA Conference in 2015: ‘Leaving Omelas: Science Fiction, Climate Change and the Future.’ We talked the following day in between panels.

The way you talk about India in your Locus spotlight seemed reminiscent of the way you talked about moving away from Omelas during your 2015 SFRA keynote speech. Do you think certain places seem like they may already be en route to ‘walking away’?

‘Walking away’ is extremely difficult to do because we are all caught in an oppressive system, but this is where I see the need for us to look to old cultures, especially indigenous cultures that retain their relationship to the land and to ecosystems. Indigenous cultures are very varied, but one common thread that probably has something to do with thousands of years of really getting to know and be part of a place, is a holistic view of their place in the world.

Mainstream environmentalism in the West is problematic for me because it doesn’t make the connection between environmental and justice issues, whether these are social justice in general or justice for indigenous peoples. Growing up in India, I was part of a group called Kalpavriksh—I learned early on that environmental concerns and social justice are inextricably linked. You can’t kick people out of protected areas, you have to work with them—in fact, local people are often the best protectors of natural resources—their lives depend on those resources.

Since economic liberalization in the 1990s, environmental degradation has increased dramatically in India, going hand in hand with the oppression of tribal peoples. In the last 30 years, India has lost more forest cover and indigenous rights than in the 200 years of British colonial rule; but there are movements, there is resistance. For example, I have a friend who has traveled across the country—along with others—attending gatherings of local people in different parts of the country who are seeking alternatives to destructive development. They have come up with a website, Vikalp Sangam, that is an attempt to record and link these alternative movements.

One example of such a movement is in the desert state of Rajasthan, which has been having major water shortage problems. So several villagers got together and decided to go back to traditional ways of water harvesting—indigenous technology (stepped wells)—and now they have sufficient water. [For an explanation of stepped wells, see <http://www.archdaily.com/395363/india-s-forgotten-stepwells>].

If you have access to alternative experiences, you can shift the paradigm. Place, and our relationship to it, is something that modern humans have forgotten. But it’s important. Look at the mining rights of the land of the Apache [in the case of Oak Flat; for more information see “The Selling of the Apache Holy Land” in *The New York Times*,

www.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/opinion/selling-off-apache-holy-land.html]. Some tribes have declared that constructing the Keystone XL pipeline through their lands is equivalent to an act of war. [Also consider the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's protests of the Dakota Access oil pipeline, spanning 2016 through July 2017, the time of this dissertation.]

I think there is a need to understand the Other. The “if you're not with us, you're against us” rhetoric doesn't necessarily work in the complex scenario of climate change. In my keynote speech, I talked about my trip to Alaska and how I'd seen pipeline workers in the plane, headed for Deadhorse Junction near the oil fields. If we're going to be talking about empathy for people affected by climate change, let's also extend that to blue collar workers who work in the fossil fuel industry, in some of the most difficult environments in the world, who are eventually going to be out of jobs.

Any thoughts on bio-friendly/green buildings? (Your story “Delhi” is very architecture-based.)

Some caution is necessary because there is so much greenwashing. Consider the LEEDs gold certification—I spoke with an architect in India who told me that it is a really low standard compared to what is needed, and also compared to what a lot of traditional Indian buildings have by way of energy conservation. There's an office building in Zimbabwe that uses biomimicry, which is an approach to design that looks to nature, not to exploit or destroy, but to learn from, at least in principle. Anyway, this building in Zimbabwe doesn't need A/C because it is structured based on termite nest design, which maintains a comfortable temperature even when there is intense heat outside. So green building can be a cover up, but done well, it can also lead us to think dramatically differently in paradigm-shifting ways.

Why end your keynote address on a wolf howl?

I was thinking of the John Donne quote [“the bell tolls for thee”] and how in Idaho they're starting to kill wolves again, hunting them down from the air. The wolf howl is part of what I want to say that can't be said in words, so I wanted to include it in an academic semi-formal talk about new ways of doing things. I'm also a singer in the Indian tradition—plus I was talking to Ursula Le Guin, and she said, “Do it.”

How do we teach this new way of doing things?

Pedagogically, we can start by making ourselves aware of the paradigms and frameworks we unconsciously take for granted. Consider the damage from Hurricane Katrina—one of the things that exacerbated the damage was that when the levees were built back in the 60s, the engineers drained the salt marshes. They didn't have the big picture; they were just focused on the problem they were trying to solve with regard to protecting New Orleans from flooding. But the saltwater marshes naturally moderate the effects of hurricanes, and had they remained, the damage from Katrina would not have been so great. Interestingly, there is a biomimicry-based effort at UMass Boston where researchers are working on recreating oyster beds and perhaps even bringing back salt marshes in the local area.

Another example of a blind spot is what's happening in the Arctic. Arctic ice is melting, so there is more access to oil and gas reserves on the ocean bed. Logically, you'd say, "Well, global warming and climate change are a threat to our survival, so we need to get off fossil fuels. But instead, the oil companies and politicians are trying to figure out the best ways to get more oil and gas from the Arctic. This is an example of a positive (in the sense of additive or amplifying) feedback loop or a vicious cycle, because the original problem gets exacerbated. An example of a natural amplifying feedback loop is the melting of the ice. The darker water absorbs more sunlight instead of reflecting it, which melts more ice, which exposes more water, etc. Geopolitics of the Arctic seems to be setting off another amplifying feedback loop.

What should SF be doing more of?

SF is still very much a mirror to the norm, while its mandate is not to be a mirror to the norm. It's to the point that there are writers (re)creating American capitalism on other worlds, with alien life-forms, when the sense of place and history is likely to be non-earth-like. Such stories are even praised for their creativity, which always makes me want to tear my hair. We should be exploring new ways of thinking—making the ordinary extraordinary, where maybe there are alien situations that are the norm. SF should be doing *that*. Instead we keep returning to old tropes, violent upheavals that don't really upend old ways of thinking... so where's the place for quiet revolutions?

Quiet revolutions?

My children's book [*Younguncle Comes to Town*, Viking Children's Books, 2006] was published first in India, then here in America. It is set in India and among other things it showcases people, ordinary people, creatively solving their own problems. A British publishing house turned it down, apparently because it was too quiet. You'd think it'd fail in America, and in fact the brave editor at Viking who bought it took a risk—but you can find it in most public libraries now. And it's a very quiet book. It also doesn't dumb things down for kids . . . We already have alternative ways of thinking and writing, and if we can just make space for them, it'll happen.

I've read recently that bioregionalism is being proposed as a post-national way of organizing around environmental justice. That way of organizing people is based on natural boundaries and resources rather than nations. Conceptualizing what's needed for that ethos offers a type of alternative thinking: In Bolivia there is a Law of Mother Earth ["Article 3 of the law defines Mother Earth as 'the dynamic living system formed by the indivisible community of all life systems and living being who are interrelated, interdependent, and complementary, which share a common destiny.' The law provides legal-institutional support for nature itself." Keith Pezzoli, "Bioregionalism," *Keywords for Environmental Studies*, edited by Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David Pellow, New York University Press, 2016, pp. 25-28].

B.7 KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY VANDANA SINGH

“Leaving Omelas: Science Fiction, Climate Change, and the Future”

Science Fiction Research Association, June 25, 2015

Imperfectly transcribed from notes taken by Jessica FitzPatrick

I was just in Barrow, Alaska. [Shows a picture of her by the arctic beach.] I want you to look at this and get a severe sense of displacement.

There’s a metaphor about me [an SF writer] being here [at an academic SF conference]. It’s like physicists in Geneva inviting a proton to come and hang out when it’s up for the scientists to figure out its protonness. It’s when I read SF critics that I figure out what I wrote.

“Omelas” is like William James, where the suffering of many are avoided...

But, since we should “pick one possible interpretation and run with it, hopefully in a direction that is interesting to you,” an axiom of the story is what to do with leaving. [Singh’s reading is:] The betterment of the child *would* cause suffering. Omelas is a paradigm that offers them no way of being in the world, and that place they’re walking to is other possibilities, more grounded in quotidian possibilities.

Omelas is not our world, but we depend on the exploitation of many children, animals, twenty-five percent of the world’s resources...

If we accept that we live in Omelas, what can we *do* to escape it? The economic system is completely at odds with the Earth systems, a world that aims for infinite growth on a finite planet. The big, looming monster is the climate crisis.

[I was involved in a project where] scientists talk to writers “Entanglement” (coming out)—I wrote a story about the Arctic being the canary of global climate, and asked about why the arctic is changing at twice the rate of other areas. Traditional knowledge and ways of being (marginalized, anyway) is being destroyed along with all the ice. And in Barrow, Alaska, they need the oil—the livelihood of oil—but oil is ruining the world. We’re at the edge of the apocalypse; we’re running life. Talk about *estrangement* [referencing Suvin]...and the suppressed histories, liminal voices—just examine the paradigm below the globe. We need to start thinking of walking away.

SF has not lived up to its transgressive potential. Marginalized voices come in for that potential, [and when they do, it's] not actually bringing in a diversity of cultures/races, but a diversity of ways of being and seeing because we need that type of diversity if we're to walk away and better our world.

We seem to be failing at talking about apocalypse. It's easy to write about destroying the world. It's a lot harder to write about living through the apocalypse and figuring out a way to make it livable, to make it visible.

Marginalized people, indigenous people, have come up with models of co-existing with each other and maintaining social relationships. Native elders were co-authors with scientists on [that project's] ice/climate change research studies. Traditional knowledge is valuable, even among scientists who are notorious for discounting, stubbornly. Sciences and emotion or spirituality—we don't tend to think of them together, thanks to the Newtonian paradigm (and the industrial revolution). All the –isms of today have their origins in the Newtonian paradigm, in being reductionists, where you study the parts and you understand the whole.

But most real systems are about context and interactions between the parts.

And here, close to the end of the world, we see we're coming up with something [in projects like the scientist-tribal research team] new and different, something *not* reductive, but aware of the invisible around us. And SF hasn't gotten quite to the point where we're doing it well. When utopias fail to be the main mode, dystopias don't seem to have the craftiness to imagine communities that work. What we're up against is a failure of the imagination, and we don't know what kind of structure may emerge.

Truth is always neither relative nor absolute. Karen Barad is a physicist philosopher who has come up with the notion of agential realism. Concepts do not exist independently of context—they emerge through the way we intra-act with matter, with our apparatus. It's freeing, agential realism. It allows for a fluid and contextual view of identity (identity is important in the struggles of marginalized peoples, but it is also important to be able to let go of any one kind of identity when the context changes). When you are running through the forest and there are no other humans, does it matter that you are American, or a woman, or whatever?

The non-human doesn't really arise in fiction. (The lack of non-human actors—it's boring! It's pathological! It's as if our species needs a shrink!) We're trapped, in a bad place, but we can walk away to freedom.

In physics, an electron is not a wave or a particle unless you have a conceptual space around it.

Eduardo Kohn, in *How Forests Think*, wrote that semiotics is more fundamental than language, but it's no longer true that we're the only ones with language. Prairie dogs, white-handed gibbon.... It's so funny, we look at the sky and wonder are we really "all alone" in space, when all around us are all these others! All these conversationalists!

Inanimate matter speaks when the electrons interact. These are the first steps from decolonizing ourselves from the Newtonian paradigm.

The lone hero model isn't going to work. It's the age of a million heroes, and more. So I think we're going to get a post-Newtonian SF, science, fiction. I don't think it's going to be any one thing or any one way—I think we need to get away from that. If we move away from the oil...

The old way of being entangled with place and the particularities of place need to come back. Is it possible to write the story of one person any more if we're writing about climate change? Does a short story about an autumn leaf matter? If so, or if not, why *not* write about leaves?

I'm going to end on a wolf howl.

So, I warned you.

[Singh does a damn good wolf howl]

Never ask who the wolf howls for—she howls for thee.

APPENDIX C

COMPARING MORENO-GARCIA'S "THEM SHIPS" NARRATOR WITH CHERRIE MORAGA'S "FOREIGN TONGUE"

Sentence footnoted: "As a translator trainee, [the narrator of "Them Ships"] does 'know how to say' the words to code Leonardo's escape as a mistake. She understands the power in owning language, for those who do may also *choose* how they wield both words and silence" (FitzPatrick 85-86).

I suggest there are potential comparisons between Moreno-Garcia's narrator and both the speaker and the subject of "Foreign Tongue" by Cherrie Moraga in *The Last Generation*:

She withholds
the language
not the words
but the abandon
they evoke.

She refuses
bites her lip
to repel
el deseo
que quiere
estallar
por la boca.

Traidora

que soy
to discover
la fuerza
de la lengua
por los labios
of another
not hers.

This poetic selection is useful because it speaks of not speaking, and then of speaking to claim one's position as a traitor but also an empowered figure; this movement and binary position is replicated in the form of the poem, as it slides from English in the first stanza to English and Spanish mid-second stanza, to Spanish—except for the reference “of another”—in the third. This poem is slightly less relevant than the Tafolla poem because the speaker of Moraga's poem doesn't associate with any specific political movement, only her own survival; nor does she directly name herself as a Malinche. Yet, our knowledge that the context of the narrator's strength, and the possibility of potentially joyous “abandon” ensure a strong connotation of la Malinche, making this poem a rewriting of the Malinche myth and part of the Chicana feminist reclaiming movement.

APPENDIX D

CHART DEMONSTRATING THE SURPRISING LACK OF SPATIAL DESCRIPTORS IN SILVIA MORENO-GARCIA'S "THEM SHIPS"

In the mode of a creative exercise, I attempted to write about the space where I composed the "Lived Space's Seepage: Re-examining the Physical Space of the Alien-Controlled Arena" section. I began by listing the physical, social, and lived elements of my space, and then extrapolated on them. I then attempted to pull all spatial descriptors from "Them Ships" and arrange them according to how they aligned with my own spatial awareness.

My findings are demonstrative enough that I include the entire experimental chart below. Perhaps the most important finding is that extrapolation of space was *easy* to do. Even in a space less cluttered than mine, such as the room shared by Leonardo and the narrator, it would be easy to concentrate on the specifics of what is present in that space. The absence of such consideration is more than a streamlined mode of writing, since Moreno-Garcia does allow the narrator to share Leonardo's description of the spaces they inhabit in the alien center. As I suggest at length in my chapter, such a pointed control of spatial descriptions and resulting revelations indicates that the physical space of the alien center is only a stage for Leonardo and the narrator to play

out their interactions and ultimately their judgments of each other. Moreno-Garcia avoids creating a detailed alien environment in order to focus on the lived spaces of the humans.

Table 2: Chart demonstrating the surprising lack of spatial descriptors in Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s “Them Ships”

Spatial Descriptions and Revelations	Mine (as I write)	Narrator of “Them Ships” in Alien Center
The floor	Wood, slots arranges in alternative squares the burnt sienna, the oddly splintered patch below my left foot that will snag my socks if I’m not careful, the solid rollability that lets me glide to the right if I need to claim a tissue from the side table, otherwise just out of reach	
The color of the walls	Beige, with divots and raises where years of plaster cracked, fell, were painted over before cracking and falling	
The objects I can place my body on and must move around	The black pleather office chair, cracking and covered with a fleece throw, with armrests that my arms never land on while working because they don’t fit above my desk, a spray-painted metal table the length of my outstretched arms, with the rolling file cabinet and the coffee table, which is there because my apartment isn’t large enough to place a desk in isolation, but which also often feels as though they’re flanking the chair so that I can’t escape to a non-	<p>“I’m also glad now I only share my room with Leonardo. Got my own bed now. My own desk.”</p> <p>“the nice bed”</p> <p>“the small mirror”</p> <p>“When we eat in the big hall . . . sit next to”</p> <p>“the alien data banks”</p> <p>“the patio”</p>

	writing activity	
The smells	Scrambled eggs—onions, garlic, tomato, pepper, and thyme layering the smell that coats even this corner of the apartment since it was too cold to open the windows while I cooked—and toast I had for dinner, the chilled cinnamon in my tea	“it’s even easier when that person doesn’t reek of alcohol-laced coffees, like my dad did” “Catch is this smells like being used”
The sounds	The footsteps of my apartment building’s hallway (I too live contained with strangers), the click of my keys, the drone of a coffee shop stimulator so that I don’t have to listen to hallway conversations and recognize how thin my walls are	“putting on the headphones and listening to my music. ...the aliens let me charge the player. Otherwise I’d kill that little shit.” “Leonardo’s been nicer and quieter lately. That’s good.”

The lighting, the placement of lights	I write in a spotlight of the utilitarian desk lamp surviving from college, plastic-coated to look like chrome with a heavy head that likes to hang if someone nudges it	“there’s no windows in our room (the cell, Leonardo says), but there’s windows in the dining hall” “standing with my alien advisor by a window”
The temperature, the need to add or remove layers of clothing to be comfortable sitting, standing, wandering, crossing, reclining, stretching in this space	The way what I’m wearing and how I’m thinking changes what I notice about this space. It has cooled—and my blood is stagnant—I am thankful I already encased myself in a fuzzy sweater <i>and</i> socks	“there’s the uniform with my red jacket . . . the first piece of clothing that fits me” “...I could slice the smug smile off his face with a glass bottle. I’m here so I can’t do squat”
Personalization: my space, not yours; not a system’s (<i>Even in solitary = prison writing; self-presentation</i>)	Without turning my head I can see the savagely collaged bulletin board with its striation of experiential proofs, a giant Woodstock Pez dispenser, a candle, a bill, a gifted Ganesha, a polished piece of labradorite, a Batman bobblehead, a wind-up robot...	“I didn’t understand Leonardo’s books when we first started sharing a room. It seemed so stupid to hang on to those. They were not even fun books, but the textbooks he’d been carrying in his backpack . . . I guess I kinda see the point. The books are like the music to me”
Resonances	I have lived here for seven years. I have written many things here, by choice and by a lot of effort. It is not always a pleasant location, but not usually a threatening one...	“if they’ve come to kill us it’s alright ’cause at least they’ve given us something beautiful” “The jellyfish ships swim in the sky, so pretty against the sinking sun. I want to be on them ships.”

As I state in the chapter, Moreno-Garcia seems to actively *avoid* illustrative language. As this chart suggests, perhaps this is due to the difficulty of presenting neutral descriptors—the

way we interpret spaces tends to illuminate our emotional relationship to those spaces. Even the spare details of the narrator fall into this occasionally (“the *nice* bed”).

The harshness of the narrator’s judgment would be diminished if the alien center was painted too rosily. As it stands in the story, the narrator’s preference for even this sterile, possibly prison camp over her pre-alien existence makes a condemnation of humankind’s ability to ignore the more unfortunate positions of their fellow humans.

APPENDIX E

FULL CARMEN TAFOLLA POEM, “LA MALINCHE,” AND ABBREVIATED CLOSE READING

Yo soy la Malinche

[...] I came to be known as Malinche
and Malinche came to mean traitor.

They called me – *chingada*.
¡Chingada!

(Ha – *¡Chingada!* Screwed!) [...]

. . . And then the omens began—a god, a new civilization,
the downfall of our empire.

And you came. My dear Hernán Cortés, to share your “civilization”—
to play a god,

. . . and I began to *dream* . . .

I *saw*,
and I *acted!*

I saw our world
And I saw yours
And I saw—
another.

And yes—I helped you—
(against Emperor Moctezuma Xocoyotzín himself!)

I became Interpreter, Advisor, and lover.

They could not imagine me dealing on a level with you—
so they said I was raped, used,

chingada

¡*Chingada!*

But I saw our world
and your world
and another.

No one else could see!

Beyond one world, none existed.

And you yourself cried the night

the city burned,

and burned at your orders.

The most beautiful city on earth

in flames.

You cried broken tears the night you saw your destruction.

My homeland ached within me

(but I saw another!)

Another world—

a world yet to be born.

And our child was born . . .

and I was immortalized ¡*Chingada!*

Years later, you took away my child
(my sweet mestizo new world child)

to raise him in your world.

You still didn't see

You *still* didn't see.

And history would call *me*

chingada.

But *Chingada* I was not.

Not tricked, not screwed, not traitor.

For I was not traitor to myself—

I saw a dream

and I reached it.

Another world . . .

La raza

la raaaaaaa-zaaaaa . . .

(*Sonnets and Salsa* 22-24)

As Tafolla establishes him, Cortés correlates both to the aliens (with their promise of another world, with their not-depicted alien language, and their god-like ability to destroy human social systems—the “given” world before their arrival), and to Leonardo (with his promise of escape to another world—America, with his academic language, with his crying over the loss of his beautiful existence in what to the narrator is a “fucked city,” and with his betrayal of the narrator’s trust).

Unlike the figure of Cortés/Leonardo but akin to Moreno-Garcia’s narrator, Tafolla’s Malinche sees the multiple social systems in play: not *just* her own or Leonardo’s experience of the Earthling-only world; not *just* the society of the aliens, but a third option of becoming part of a human-alien system and of recognizing her “dream” of flying in the beautiful ships.

While Moreno-Garcia’s narrator is not involved in biological questions of hybridity (*la raza*), she is still a lynchpin of a sociological moment of hybrid creation and of two species/races coming to understand and live with each other.

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