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Narrating African Futures : Prospective, Counter-Factual History and Speculative Fiction

Initiated during my fellowship at the USIAS (from September 2017 to August 2019), my research project focuses on what has gradually become a new “mediatic and artistic catechism”. For several years now, not a month goes by without an article, a journal issue, a scientific report, a prospective essay, a novel, a comic or a movie devoted to Africa’s impending role in the future of humanity. Indeed, Africa’s demographic and economic growth has reached spectacular scores, making it the host of a quarter of the world’s active population in a very near future. The question of Africa’s future has therefore become a major geopolitical and economic issue, discussed as such in a wide variety of discursive and visual productions. The past decades also witnessed a boom in literary, artistic and cinematographic representations of African futures, located either on a critically endangered planet Earth, or in distant intergalactic worlds. These fictions are produced both by authors from the black diaspora in the United States and in the Caribbean, who engage in the development of what is today known as “Afro-Futurism”, and by authors claiming to occupy the field of “African science fiction”, a very prolific contemporary genre, which, as I will demonstrate, deeply resonates with American or European science-fiction novels occasionally settled on the African continent. Economists, historians, philosophers, novelists and artists have thus developed innovative ways of staging and telling the future of Africa, be it spelled out in texts or pictured in images.

[But taking interest in these representations of the African future has led me to unveil a double paradox.

The first one is that a narrative – and this is what we are talking about here : how does one narrate the future ? – is traditionally performed in the past tense, sometimes in the present tense. A narration performed in the future tense, however, is extremely rare in practice: Narrative anticipations taking the form of a prolepsis are generally enunciated in the conditional mode, thus designating not a genuine future, but a present hypothetical condition. In view of this, how does one narrate the future, if not as an already bygone temporality and/or as an unreal, not yet existing reality? Any projection in a more or less distant future will therefore mobilize the traditional means of narrative, but being a projection, and thus unable to merely relate or recall former facts, it will essentially a fiction *per se*.

Conjugating Africa in the future tense thus entails the proposition of a prospective, if not a prophetic vision, which is constantly put in tension with fictionality: As the future does not yet exist, as it is still to be done, it is necessarily of a fictional or fictitious nature, even when it is described as part of an attempt at economic forecasting. Hence the following questions : What links does economic prospective have with fiction? Can fiction as such claim its own powers of anticipation, or display a prophetic force? How does this capacity for anticipation transpire in works of fiction?

The second aspect of the paradox I mentioned earlier on, is connected to the persistent representation of the African continent as the cradle and the museum of humanity. For a very long time, Africa has been conjugated in “the past tense” and this representation still prevails today: Africa is commonly associated to archaic or primitive societies which gave anthropologists access to the earliest times and fundamental features of human societies. Africa was simultaneously perceived as a continent trapped in some sort of everlasting present, without any projection in the future, or even as continent without future, due to the numerous woes and handicaps it had to contend with. How could one imagine a future in

these unfavorable conditions? More importantly, how could this imagination of the future take advantage of or - on the very contrary - distinguish itself from this conception of Africa as a primal, an-historic continent? The first answer provided was very simple: Just as Africa, for many thinkers, made it into history with the beginning of the slave trade and the European colonization, the African future could only occur thanks to the historical, economic and cultural shock caused by the encounter with the West. In this perspective, African future could only be imagined as an unavoidable "evolution" or "modernization", which ultimately resulted in a "westernization". One easily guesses that such an answer could not satisfy those primarily concerned with the question – that is to say, the Africans themselves. The frustration generated by this interpretation of African futures could explain the distrust Africans writers have exhibited towards science fiction for a very long time. Because science-fictional plots often display the splendors and miseries of western hyper technology, occasionally describing the problematic conquest and exploration of alien worlds, located at the borders of the known universe, this literary and cinematographic sub-genre remained associated to a colonial or imperial imagery, the kind of which Africans writers had precisely attempted to get rid of.]

By exploring this ever-present “media catechism” celebrating Africa as the continent of the future, bound to play a significant role in the future of humanity as a whole; by concurrently exploring the exponential development of science fiction devoted to the future of Africa, and especially the boom of African science fiction, produced both on the continent itself and by members of the African diaspora living in America or in Europe,[beyond the double paradox I have previously highlighted,] I have stumbled on a frequent assertion: This concern for the future of Africa is invariably presented as a new attitude, introducing a clear break both with the colonial era and the associated literature, and with the dark and pessimistic vision of the future which prevailed until the 1990s.

The question that occurred to me was to establish if this widespread concern for the African future was truly new. While examining the alleged break with the colonial era, I intended to determine what elements have in fact remained unchanged, to the point that one could even consider that they have been inherited from the colonial era. On a more general level, one can also wonder where contemporary productions on African futures draw their leading themes and find their narrative models. What productions had or have a predominant influence on our ways of imagining the futures of Africa? Which ones manage to reach a truly international or even global, distribution? Are there significant differences between Western and African visions of the African future? Within the widespread catalogue of Western and African productions, what are the main places of emergence, the main spaces for dissemination? What are the main themes or figures allowing the representation of African futures? What prevails in quantitative – but also in qualitative terms? To put in a nutshell, are the representations and fictions picturing the future of Africa, in a literary, artistic or cinematographic form, primarily the work of white or of black authors? In which languages are they mainly produced? For which audiences? Where is their target audience and how does it react to these productions?

By digging into these various questions, I was able to establish a certain number of additional observations, and mostly the two following ones.

Firstly, it is remarkable to see that contemporary concerns (for geographical data, for geological and agricultural resources, for demographic and economic evolutions on the African continent) are in fact quite old and were already, for a very large part of them, at the very heart of colonial thought and fiction. Likewise, in his 2016 essay, *Afrotopia*, the

Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr rephrases what the Togolese economist Edem Kodjo put forward, thirty years earlier, in his prospective essay *...Et demain l'Afrique* (1985). Beyond their obvious resonances, the two African thinkers do also echo, albeit without their knowledge, mythological fictions published about a century ago like *Le Monde noir, roman sur l'avenir des sociétés humaines*, published in 1909 by the French writer Marcel Barrière, or *L'Afrique centrale dans cent ans*, published in 1926 by the Belgian writer Paul Salkin. In each of these publications, the same attention is indeed granted to geographic data, to social and cultural realities and to the urban changes defining the future of Africa.

Secondly, it also appears obvious that the relationship to these data, reflecting on given realities and expected changes, has hardly changed, over time. The celebration of a new attitude, preferring to wear rose colored glasses as we used to sport black colored ones, is deceiving, for the two competing prisms of afro-optimism and afro-pessimism have in fact been coexisting for a long time and are even declined through a whole series of complementary oppositions. I shall therefore start by asking the following questions: What are the dominant factual concerns related to the African futures and how do the two apparently antagonistic, but in reality complementary, prisms of Afro-optimism and Afro-pessimism, tend to interpret them?

Basic data (surface, population, labour input, productive capital factor)

Every single author writing on the future of Africa, either European or African, living in the colonial era or defining him/herself as a child of the post-colony, displays a fascination for the continent's geographical and geological gigantism. Indeed Africa, which could include both Western Europe, China, India and the United States within its borders, covers thirty million square kilometers, hence a quarter of the total land surfaces, which today divides into 54 countries and houses 1.3 billion inhabitants.

Africa also enjoys an unparalleled demographic dividend: There were around 230 million Africans in 1950, and there will be 2 billion of them in 2050. In 2019 Africa has regained the place it once occupied in the world's population, after having suffered a halving of its demographic weight due to the slave trade and to colonization. At the beginning of the 17th century, Africans represented 17% of the global human population, but this proportion dropped to 9% in the middle of the 20th century. Today, Africa is back to representing 17% of the world population and in a few years, a quarter of the world's active population will actually be living on Africa, which will inevitably position the continent as the new workshop of the world, just as Europe was at the time of the industrial revolution, followed by the United States, and then China or more widely Asia and India. However, some ten years ago, Africa was home to 17 million unemployed young people – a figure which has even worsened recently. It suffices to recall, as Sylvie Brunel does, that "the demographic explosion in Europe has resulted in the departure of 50 million migrants" to understand that this depressurization valve, which is currently "refused to Africa, despite of its current fast-paced demographical densification" (2015: 13), will not be contained for a long time. The "demographical cauldron" is bubbling: To prevent its impending explosion, massive employment strategies have to be set up, channeling energies to construct new economic structures.

In addition to the population growth, an economic growth "superior to 5% per year since the early 2000s, has promoted Africa, like China, as an exception in globalization". In five countries (Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana and Mozambique), the annual Gross Domestic Product growth rates are settled between 7 and 9.4% (for the record, China boasts

over a rate of 9% per year) .“Since the early 2000s, South Africa has also been added to the BRICs, an acronym created by the firm Goldman Sachs to name emerging countries. They have now become BRIICS (Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China, South Africa) ”(Brunel 2015: 39). In this emerging Africa, a few giants stand out, both demographically and economically: Gathering 170 million inhabitants, Nigeria belongs, alongside with South Africa and Egypt, to the three African countries “accounting alone for half ”of Africa's share of the world’s GDP (Brunel 2015: 35). South Africa takes pride in a 400 billion-worth gross national product and in 12,000 dollars per capita yearly income. Meanwhile, the Democratic Republic of Congo, being, with 2.3 million km², the second geographic giant of Africa, just after Algeria (2.4 million km²), painfully reaches 400 dollars in annual income per capita...

Africa has thus been called many names : "potential breadbasket of the world", thanks to its 200 million hectares of arable land (representing half of the unused arable land in the world) and to its abundant water and wood reserves; "future workshop of the planet, hosting a billion people who ask only to be able to work and to consume"; “vault of the world,” gathering "a third of the world's natural resources" (2015: 11), "nine-tenths [of which] remaining unexploited to this day" (2015: 45), and unprecedented mineral and energetic resources without previous exploitation (95% of the world’s available platinum resources, 75% of the phosphate resources, 50% of cobalt and chromium resources, a quarter of the bauxite resources). One should not forget Africa’s solar and fluvial annuity which seems inexhaustible – Africa’s seven great rivers (Nile, Niger, Congo, Senegal, Orange, Limpopo, Zambezi) do actually account for 15% of the world's hydroelectric potential, on a continent which is also one of the sunniest in the world. There is no getting around it: Africa is obviously a rich continent, but most of its inhabitants unfortunately remain poor (Brunel 2015: 15). Disparities are constantly increasing between countries, and within them, between social categories. To the present day, a third of the African population (386 million peoples) is still living with less than 1 euro per day.

Interpreting those data leads to two antagonistic worldviews.

Afro-optimism vs. Afro-pessimism

On the one hand, Afro-Pessimists underscore the extent of Africa’s predicaments such as its running poverty and its unfair insertion into global markets, the subsequent increase of inequalities within African societies or between Africa and other continents, the multiplication of economical, ecological and sanitary disasters, the surges of violence and the looming dangers of major conflicts or uprisings among desperate populations. In that perspective, the African demographical growth is often seen as a ticking bomb whose explosion and fallouts will soon reach Northern and Western societies through massive and uncontrollable migrations.

On the other hand, Afro-Optimists would rather focus on Africa’s many assets such as its huge size (which, as we have seen, could include both Europe, China, India and the United States within its borders), its huge geological resources, its agricultural and industrial potentialities, its outstanding economical growth in many countries and last but not least, its increasing demographical uprising.

[Afrocentrism vs. Eurocentrism

African futures in a globalized world are generally seen through two antagonist prisms. The first spectacles are Western or Eurocentric ones : Under the impact of globalization, Africa is bound to become the “new Lion” or the “next Giant” by experimenting a path towards development, as already explored by previous leading continents such as Europe, America and Asia. On the contrary, other thinkers, such as Felwine Sarr in his essay *Afrotopia* (2016), insist on the need to follow an autonomous path of development, which would for example measure the Gross National Happiness Index instead of focusing only on the domestic product, and rely on relational solidarity logics as privileged in traditional Africa rather than on a competitive pattern.

Globalization of Africa vs. Negrification of the World

A third tension should finally be mentioned, connecting between two orientations which seem at first glance contradictory, but are in fact complementary. On the one hand, some thinkers see Africa through the lens of globalization, thus emphasizing the “global-becoming” (*devenir-monde*) of Africa. This perspective has been perfectly exemplified by the *Atelier de la pensée*, organized these last two years in Dakar: The volumes resulting from these workshops are significantly entitled *Ecrire l’Afrique-monde* (2017) and *Politique des temps. Imaginer les devenirs africains* (2019). On the other hand however, some thinkers rather chose to see globalization through the prism of the historical traumas undergone by Africa. In so doing, they warn us against a “negro-becoming” of the world, arguing that the pernicious effect of neoliberalism would be that more and more human populations will be exposed to the dehumanizing treatment which was previously imposed on black African black, held as disposable, exchangeable and interchangeable subjects. In my point of view, these two orientations are in fact complementary, as they are similarly tackling the dialectical relationships between Africa and globalization. Moreover, these rival orientations are sometimes defended by the same thinkers: As an exemple, Achille Mbembe is both the author of an essay entitled *Critique de la raison nègre* (2013), exposing the dangers of a “negro-becoming” of the contemporary world, and the co-organizer of the *Ateliers de la pensée* in Dakar, where he loudly professes his belief in Africa’s “global-becoming”].

To conclude on this matter, I will say that regardless of their understanding of Africa’s position in a globalized world, Afro-Optimists and Afro-Pessimists share a similar conception of Africa as a continental reservoir, designed to fuel or to regenerate the world, depending on which resources – material, human or spiritual and artistic ones – are actually emphasized. I will also argue that discursive sources of various nature and status share a common bank of images, arguments and narrative patterns, which can be exposed by an intermedia cross-reading and a thorough literary analysis, thus allowing to elaborate on the existence of common assumptions structuring the way we conceive, imagine and narrate the African futures.

[Different approaches

Several approaches were obviously possible to address these questions.

A **historical or historico-literary approach** would have favored a diachronic perspective, running from colonial era to the postcolonial era, thus highlighting dominant patterns, recurrences, but also pointing breaches and disruptions by relating them to their respective contexts of production, as well as to their own cultures of emergence. To put a long

story short, science-fiction and prospective narrations about the African future have existed in Europe starting at the end of the 19th century. Publications on this matter were however usually quite insulated : Until the middle of the 20th century, they were one-off publications, without precedent nor follow-up in the collected works of their respective authors. It was not until the 1970s and the 1980s that science-fiction truly emerged in Africa, embodied by authors such as the Congolese Emmanuel Dongala (*Jazz et vin de palme*, 1979) and Sony Labou Tansi (*Conscience de tracteur*, 1979). Except for the British writer John Brunner in the sixties (*Stand on Zanzibar*, 1968), renowned Western SF-authors did not demonstrate interest for Africa before the late nineties : only then did Mike Resnick in the United States (*Kirinyaga*, 1998) and Paul McAuley in Great Britain (*White Devils*, 2004), turn to stories taking place in a futuristic Africa. Meanwhile, a current of speculative fiction, soon labelled as Afro-futurism, had developed in the United States with African-American authors such as Samuel Delany (*Babel 17*, 1966) and Octavia Butler (*Survivor*, 1978; *Wild Seed*, 1980). In the specific universe of comics and superheroes, an important event occurred in 1966 as Stan Lee and Jack Kirby gave birth to “the Black Panther” : In the 1990s and 2000 the destiny of the Wakandan superhero was entrusted to renowned African-American screenwriters such as Christopher Priest, Reginald Hudlin and, more recently, Ta-Nehisi Coates. It has been repeatedly argued that the 21st century was bound to be dominated by a so-called African science fiction. This statement however is deeply paradoxical since contemporary Afro-SF is mainly produced by white writers from South Africa or Namibia (such as the novelists Lauren Beukes, Gavin Chait, Alex Latimer, Sarah Lotz, Deon Meyer, Nick Wood; or the filmmaker Neill Blomkamp...), and by offspring of the African diaspora born and established in Great Britain or in the United States (Nigerian-American Nnedi Okorafor, Nigerian-American Deji Olukotun, Anglo-Nigerian Tade Thompson). North African or Black Africans (such as the Egyptian novelist Ahmed Khaled Towfik, the Ugandan novelist and filmmaker Dilman Dila, the Kenyan filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu) remain a minority in this field. If one goes from the English-speaking area to Portuguese-speaking and French-speaking Africa, the harvest is even scarcer: *Barroco Tropical* (2009), a speculative fiction by the Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa, born to Portuguese-Brazilian parents, is rather an exception in the author’s main production ; on the Francophone side, to this day, the attempts at narrating an African future could be summarized in a list comprising two films (*Les Saignantes*, by Jean-Pierre Bekolo in 2005; *Africa Paradis* by Sylvestre Amoussou in 2006), two short stories (“2070 en sexe exquis” by Florent Couao-Zotti in 2013 , “Lutèce sur Nil” by Abdourahman Waberi in 2019) and two novels (*Aux États-Unis d’Afrique*, by Abdourahman Waberi in 2006; *Rouge Impératrice*, by Léonora Miano in 2019).

Tackling the question of African futures in terms of literary history is certainly of great interest, but it also raises two major problems. Firstly, it inevitably gives priority to literary productions over cinematographic – or more broadly speaking – visual productions. It also grants as an obvious precedence to European works over African works, which occurred later and were less numerous during the 20th century. Secondly, a historical approach implies to rely on an already established periodization and on a geographical fragmentation between various literary domains and “national” traditions (French literature, African-American literature, African literatures, etc.): In so doing, it hardly allows to highlight the continuities from one period or from one work to another, thus compelling the writer to inevitable repetitions.

Likewise, an approach **in generic terms**, focusing on literary genres and sub-genres (the novel, the theater, the essay; science fiction, fantastic literature, speculative fiction, etc.), and an approach in “gendered” terms if not “racial” terms, focusing on the author’s identity

and cultural belonging (are they male or female, of European or of African origin?) would certainly have allowed to demonstrate certain predilections, but it would also have induced another form of compartmentalization.]

For this reason, in the writing process of my essay, I have settled for a thematic and typological approach, which seemed better suited to display the recurring patterns, figures and structures, circulating from one period, tradition, practice or work to another. I will thus proceed to present five main themes, followed by five dominant figures, whom I have identified in literary and cinematographic works about African futures produced in Africa, America and Europe. Eventually, I will conclude my observations by showing you how these various themes and figures are all gathered in a prolific, both textual and visual, cultural production, which has been irrigating mass culture for more than half a century, with increasing success, especially since the release of a very successful cinematographic adaptation: I will indeed talk about the *Black Panther* saga produced by Marvel Comics, and of its adaptation by the African-American filmmaker Ryan Coogler in 2018, which reached rapidly 1,4 billion dollars of operating revenues just in theaters.

The African Eldorado and the Jihadist Impediment

As we have seen before, grey literature and contemporary mediatic publications most commonly present the African continent as an Eldorado, all at once a garden, a breadbasket, a vault and a workshop of the world thanks to its incredible natural, geological, mineral and human resources. Yet another dominant theme had imposed itself as a corollary to this image of the African El Dorado, casting a dangerous shadow over the promised land : I am talking about the jihadist threat, which unfolds in the Sahelian area, constituting "an arc of crisis" and "a black hole", "a zone of collapse at the very heart of the continent" (Brunel 2015: 33, 34, 141) from an altogether historical, geographical and cultural perspective. Considered as the largest desert in the world, the Sahara occupies 9 million km², which represents almost a third of the continent's surface. Nevertheless, "despite the apparent hostility of the environment, it was never empty of men" (Brunel 2015: 141) and "from Mauritania to Somalia" (2015: 146), it "became the epicenter of 'a holy war against the West'" (2015: 32). As the geographer Sylvie Brunel points out, "Jihadistan is spreading. The risk is to see a huge Islamist front unite tomorrow, linking Afghanistan to Mauritania, throwing its tentacles southbound, in Nigeria, in the Central African Republic, in Mali, in Kenya. The continent's most powerful state, Nigeria, is undermined from within by the rise of Islamism, murderous attacks, urban sabotage and religious wars. The northeast of the country has been handed over to terrorists refusing not only Western education, which they denounce as a sin, but also vaccination campaigns and the education of young girls" (2015: 33). Sylvie Brunel thus alludes to the "Boko Haram" movement, whose name precisely means "Western education is a sin" in Hausa language (2015: 154). She is obviously not the only one worried about the "transformation of the Saharan and the Sahelian areas into a sanctuary of anti-Western criminal globalization" (2015: 153). Under the label "Jihadistan", she brings together various centers of rebellion and terrorism such as Aqmi (Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb), Boko Haram (in Nigeria and Cameroon), the National Liberation Movement of the Azawad in Mali, "the fighters of the faith of Ansar Eddine, rigorous Salafists supported by Aqmi, who want to impose sharia in the north of Mali and to destroy the Saints of Timbuktu's tombs" (2015: 153), the members of the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (Mujao), who want to "create an 'anti-

Western theocratic system which would lock up the Sahelo-Saharan area” according to the formula used by the political scientist Olivier Vallée ”(2015: 153), and the Muslim Seleka militias in the Central African Republic (2015: 155). This “Jihadistan” as sketched by Sylvie Brunel has been the subject of many publications in recent years, each of them displaying an equally evocative title: Let us mention the works by Samuel Laurent, *Sahelistan* (2013), Serge Michailof, *Africanistan* (2015), by Olivier Hanne and Guillaume Larabi, *Jihâd au Sahel* (also 2015) and, more recently, the essay by Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos: *L’Afrique, nouvelle frontière du djihad?* (2018). The concern demonstrated by journalists, islamologists, and contemporary political scientists for a future Africa bound to become a jihadist and/or terrorist stronghold is reflected in several contemporary fictions. Let me simply mention two.

Published in 2017, the second novel by American-Nigerian author Deji Olukotun, *After the Flare*, is set in the near future on planet Earth. It depicts the disastrous consequences of a powerful solar flare whose electromagnetic winds have paralyzed numerous electrical and electronic systems, thus allowing for a wave of cyber-attacks to interrupt any possibility of communication on a planetary scale. To protect itself, America has cut itself off from the rest of the world, which is now threatened by the regular collapse of satellites orbiting the earth. The tropical zone was the only one spared, and Nigeria, which has become the only country with an operational space program, is thus charged with an important mission – launching a rocket, the Masquerade, to go and save Masha Kornokova, the famous astronaut who has remained in orbit in the international space station, which is about to fall on Earth. Preparations for the mission take place in the vicinity of Kano : however, they are met with hostility, attacks and sabotage orchestrated by a group of jihadists.

Also published in 2017, the second novel by South African author Gavin Chait, *Our Memory like Dust*, takes place in the second half of the 21st century, in a future Africa devastated by a series of economic, ecological and environmental disasters. A British engineer, Simon Adaro, undertakes the building of a solar farm, on a rocky plateau sinking into the heart of the Sahara, between Mauritania and Senegal. Just as the Nigerians in *After the Flare*, he is confronted to the rise of a regional power, “the Ansar Dine Jihadist Empire ”, founded precisely on the border of the two African states.

One would think that the representation of an African future threatened by the jihadists in contemporary English-speaking fictions echoes the actual concerns expressed by geopoliticians, journalists, diplomats and military, as they speculate on the potential emergence of an Islamic State in the Sahelian arc. In fact, the anxiety surrounding jihadist Islam in Africa and the literature echoing it, first and foremost mirror the obsessions developed in the 19th century by thurifers of the European colonial expansion. These preoccupations have been expressed in a couple of French novels, which depicted the African soil as a stage for an epic struggle between the projects elaborated by European soldiers, scholars and peasants and the ambitions of African religious and military leaders, who proved to be fundamentally hostile to the technical, scientific and civilizational progress brought by Westerners on their territories. I will mention at least five of these novels, all published between the late 1880s and the late 1900s, each and every one of them displaying the same fear of what the authors invariably call the “Muslim fanaticism”. For two decades, authors as diverse as André Laurie, Émile Zola, Émile Driant, Jules Verne and Marcel Barrière have been imagining the obstacles encountered by ambitious French engineers, cultivators and officers, whose agricultural and mining businesses as well as hydraulic projects (including digging a canal allowing to pour the Mediterranean Sea into the Sahara, and thus create an inland sea in the heart of Africa), are faced with systematic sabotage performed by backward-looking

Muslims. In *Les Exilés de la Terre*, published in 1888, the popular novelist André Laurie thus tells how a French astronomer, Norbert Mauny, goes to Sudan to build a huge magnet designed to attract the moon, by isolating and electrifying a mountain of pyrite – the ultimate goal being the exploitation of the moon's mineral resources. This project, aiming at the colonization and the exploitation of new territories, is however thwarted by the madhist insurrection against the English, which leads to the capture of the city of Khartoum by jihadist troops, who show great hostility towards the Western presence. *Fécondité* by Émile Zola, published in 1899, focuses on a French family settled in Algeria, Mathieu and Marianne Froment and their twelve children, who implement the agricultural innovations and dream of a trans-Saharan rail link. This industrial dream and the African utopia pictured by Mathieu and Marianne's grandson Dominique, are endangered by the ever-recurring "terrible problem of Islam" and "religious fanaticism". In *L'Invasion de la Mer*, Jules Verne's last novel, posthumously published in 1905, the action takes place in the middle of the 20th century, as an Alsatian engineer, Schaller, a former student of the Ecole centrale des arts et des manufactures, is commissioned to build a canal between the Gulf of Gabès and the chott El Djerid (in southern Algeria), the objective being to flood the region and create a Saharan sea. This visionary project is jeopardized by a rebellion conducted by Hadjar, a Tuareg chief who leads the Jihad and refuses to be dispossessed of his land and power. Likewise, in *Le Monde noir, Roman sur l'avenir des sociétés humaines*, published in 1909, the novelist Marcel Barrière stages the war opposing the Captain Baratine, put in charge of the pacification of Niger and Chad, and "the last Mahdi", an alleged caliph going by the name of Mohamed Belal". Yet the most impressive and prolific novel on this theme is undoubtedly *L'invasion noire* by Emile Driant, best known as Captain Danrit. Published in 1894, the novel takes place in a near future, as it is set at the beginning of the 20th century (around 1915): At this time, a religious insurrection carried out by a Wahhabi sultan in Africa grows out of control and leads to the overwhelming invasion of Europe by fanatic African Muslims. This lavish novel, stretching on no less than 1279 pages, can also serve as a transition and as an example for another dominant theme in fictions narrating the African future: several stories focus indeed on the invasion or at least on the massive migration of African populations to Europe, and on the resulting wars of the worlds.

Massive migrations and wars of the worlds

L'invasion Noire by Danrit gathered four volumes, reporting firstly on the "African Mobilization", then on the "Concentration and the pilgrimage to Mecca", on the surge of African troops "Throughout Europe", eventually concluding with a depiction of the unsuccessful siege of the French capital and the ultimate African defeat "Around Paris". After using gruesome biological weapons, bombarding the cities of Europe with corpses of plague victims and cholera carriers, African troops are decimated thanks to a deadly gas which, incidentally, also murders several tens of thousands of people among the European populations. A similar scenario is displayed in two futuristic and sensationalist serial novels published by the African-American journalist and writer George Schuyler under the pseudonym Samuel I. Brooks in *The Pittsburgh Courier* between November 1936 and April 1938. The first novel, *The Black Internationale*, recounts the conspiracy orchestrated by a brilliant African-American scientist, Dr. Henry Belsidus, to accumulate a formidable fortune, thanks to avant-garde technologies such as hydroponic cultivation and the use of solar energy, especially in aeronautics. His ultimate and most secret plan is to build a network of Black

Americans and Africans, who will be entirely dedicated to his cause. His plan is executed in the second serial novel, *Black Empire*: Belsidus aims at nothing less than overthrowing the European colonial order and installing black power in Africa, starting in Liberia. Before he manages to reach his goals, in an attempt to weaken the British industrial power and to divert the attention of Western public authorities, Belsidus gases 15,000 qualified engineers and technicians, during a huge meeting organized in their honor in the Delphane Hall in London. He is also responsible for the contamination of major European cities, such as London, Paris, Marseille, Rome and Vienna, where contagious diseases are transmitted by previously infected rats. When the conflict finally starts in Africa, both the French and English naval and air fleets are literally pulverized thanks to the use of revolutionary machines, the so-called "cyclotrons" whose "atomic or protonic rays" are able to disintegrate any metal. The electrical communication systems of enemy are destroyed by a radio ray, which proves able to put them out of use. Having migrated to Africa and liberated the continent, African Americans members of the Black internationale found a black empire, thus inaugurating a new era of prosperity.

The theme of massive migrations and the representation of war of the worlds opposing Africa and Europe can also be found in German literature, albeit in different variants. In his 1924 novel, *Berge, Meere und Giganten*, published in an abridged version in 1932, Alfred Döblin retraces the evolution of humanity between the 23th and the 28th century, picturing it as a dialectic combination of technophile periods (invention of entirely artificial foods, experimentations on the volcanic matter, creation of hybrid and monstrous creatures: "the giants") and reactionary technophobic phases. Döblin's anticipative novel starts after the First World War, when the industrial complexes take power in Europe, provoking a drastic fall in the birth rate as a result of technological innovations – which ultimately justifies a massive African immigration. Later on, after a major conflict between Europe and Asia, recounted in the second book of the novel ("The war of the Urals"), an African consul, Zimbo, imposes his authority on Germany. More recently, one could also mention *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (2018, French translation in 2019 under the title *Les Affamés et les rassasiés*), the second novel by the German novelist of Hungarian origin Timur Vermes. Settling the plot in 2020, the author imagines the odyssey of an African migrant, Lionel, who, in order to avoid smugglers, decides to seize the opportunity offered by the presence of a reality-show crew: Under the watchful eye of the Western cameras, he announces his intention to walk 10,000 kilometers with 150,000 other refugees to seek asylum in Germany. As the African masses inevitably move north, grappling with a host of journalists, businessmen and mafia thugs, all determined to take advantage of this pitiful procession of human misery, political passions are unleashed in Europe, and especially in Germany, where the incoming migrants are increasingly perceived as a horde of invaders.

The world upside down, or Africa dominating Europe

Beyond its focus on migratory issues and belligerence, George Schuyler's second novel displays a theme, the domination of Africa over Europe, which had been furtively initiated but immediately pushed away in Danrit's *L'Invasion Noire*. This third theme I would like to discuss has nonetheless flourished in the French-speaking world: it can be summarized as a reversal of the existing world-order, allowing Africa to take precedence over Europe, and even to exert a colonial, if not imperial, domination over the Western world. The novels exploring this peculiar motive can be considered as examples of counterfactual history (answering questions such as : what would have happened if Pharaon's Egypt had not been submitted by Rome, if

Christian Ethiopia had become a colonial power, if Africans had discovered the New World before the Europeans did?) or even as euchronias. It is worth noticing that all of them do not take place in the future. For instance, *Lion's Blood* (2002) and *Zulu Heart* (2003), two novels belonging to *Insh'Allah* series by Steven Barnes, an African-American author of speculative fiction, take place in the 19th century and narrate the consequences of a civil war opposing Christian Ethiopians and powerful West African Muslims who colonized America and organized a lucrative white slave trade, by deporting slaves from Europe and especially from Ireland. Back in 1968, in his novel *La Revanche de Bozambo*, the Guyanese novelist Bertène Juminer had already imagined a colonial domination exerted by Africa over "Ouolove" (and not Latin) America and over the Western Baoulian Europe, which longs for political independence. Juminer's thoughtprovoking novel is set in an indefinite future, depending on a new calendar (before and after Grand-Baobab). The Djiboutian writer Abdourahman Waberi plays the same trick of inverted mirrors in his 2006 novel, *Aux Etats-Unis d'Afrique* (*The United States of Africa*). The novel could be considered as euchronia, for it recalls decisive episodes of mankind's history, such as slavery and colonization, the space conquest of space and the first landing on the moon, but it systematically rewrites to Africa's benefit. Africans are thus presented as the initiators of major historical turns, while other traumatic events, such as the two World Wars and the Holocaust are mentioned, but without further explanation related to their causes and their actors (the Nazis, the Soviets) .

In both novels, however, the main narrative modality allowing the inversion of the existing world-order remains of a literary, if not simply linguistic, nature. In *La revanche de Bozambo* for instance, the valences and uses of symmetrical terms such as "black" and "white" are repeatedly inverted. According to this new chromotopy, an "exonerated" suspect is not "whitened" but "blackened" (*noirci*). To demonstrate one's good faith, one is expected to show a "black paw" (*patte noire*), instead of a white one, as mentioned in Jean de la Fontaine's fable "Le Loup, la chèvre et le chevreau". An upstart young man will be called a "noir-bec" considered as "pied-blanc" and a former colonial settler who came to naught (*faire chou noir*) and found himself driven away from his homeland at the time of the independence, is considered as "pied-blanc". As to Abdourahman Waberi, he rather chooses to use another literary process, which could be coined as the process of the "Africanized Duplicate" of reality: In *Aux Etats-Unis d'Afrique*, the characters drink Pape Sy soda, Sarr Mbock beverages or Neguscafé coffee, they delight in Mc Diop burgers and Hadji Daas ice cream, while watching films shot in Haile Wade, reclining on a sofa they purchased in Nka. However, aside from these ingenuous parallelisms and from the Africanization of several idiomatic expressions (such as the proverbial and always postponed "Greek calendas", which become African ones ; or the cacophonous "bell-rings", indicating divergent views in idiomatic French, which Waberi transforms into "another sound of minaret"), the depicted African world is merely mirror of the reality we experience on a daily bases, truthfully echoing its faults and prejudices. The depiction of the impoverished European population, which is perceived as structurally inferior, barbaric, subject to tribal rivalries and bloody ethnic wars, magnifies our own attitudes and biases towards Africa. The same could be said about Sylvestre Amoussou's movie, *Africa Paradis*, which was released on the same year as Waberi's novel: Looking ahead to the year 2033, Amoussou pictures a successfully unified African continent, living in wealth and prosperity while Europe is shattered by decades of internal warfare. As the film opens, a heated debate is going on in a Pan-African parliament, opposing critics and supporters of the European immigration. The rest of the film shows the tribulations of a young French couple, Olivier and Pauline, who, like many unemployed European migrants, are denied a future in

their and seek the black paradise. More recently still, the novel *Rouge Impératrice*, published in August 2019 by the Cameroonian novelist Léonora Miano, reproduces this very narrative framework by imagining a thriving and prosperous Africa, set in the 22nd century. The continent has been unified under the ancient name of Katopia and it now has to deal with the tricky issue of immigration, as it became a refuge for the «Sinistrés» (Casualties), mostly French citizens who have fled their birthplace to make a better living in Africa, but who remain so nostalgic about their colonial past and imperial rank that they fail their integration in Katopia's host society.

African dystopias

The depiction of a world upside down, displaying a powerful African continent, able to rule over Europe can be considered as an utopian prospective. However, fictions about the African future are mainly dominated by a dystopian pattern. I will further distinguish two main types of dystopias: on the one hand, the post-apartheid situation, resulting from the collapse or, on the contrary, from the intensification of this peculiar form of racial domination and segregation which lasted in South Africa for almost half a century, from 1948 to 1991 ; on the other hand the post-apocalyptic situation, resulting from various technological, ecological, economic, sanitary, humanitarian or demographic disasters.

Post-Apartheid Dystopias

Post-apartheid dystopias are essentially produced by white South African authors, of Afrikaner origin, such as Nobel Prize winners for literature, Nadine Gordimer (1991) and John Maxwell Coetzee (2003). Respectively ten and twenty years before receiving this prestigious prize, both authors published a dystopian novel, *July's People* (1981) for Gordimer, and *The Life and Times of Michael K.* (1983) for Coetzee. Both novels depict the South African society, as it has fallen under the yoke of authoritarian military governments who encourage violent actions – be it the white hunt, in *July's People*, or the persecutions of civilians, especially of Blacks in *The Life and Times of Michael K.* The same topics, including widespread violence and increased distrust between white and black communities, are found in fictions first written in Afrikaans, such as *Na Die Geliefte Land* by Karel Schoeman (1972) or *Horrelpoot* by Eben Venter (2006), respectively translated into English under the titles of *Promised Land* (1978) and *Trencherman* (2006). The two aforementioned novels share the same starting point: Seeking to settle old family affairs, descendants of Afrikaners who once fled to Switzerland or Australia return to the land of their ancestors and end up being confronted with a decaying South African society. The country's situation is particularly grim in *Trencherman*, since a nuclear catastrophe caused the collapse of the government and the consecutive flight of a majority of the white population. The novel focuses on the character of Martin Jasper Louw, best known as Marlouw, who is looking for his nephew Koert, a powerful boer whose farm in Ouplaas is now engaged in intensive meat production, without any consideration for the disastrous ecological consequences. As the character's name point out, Eben Venter's novel can be read as a tentative rewriting of Joseph Conrad's famous novel, *Heart of Darkness*.

In recent years, novelists Lauren Beukes (*Moxyland*, 2008; *Zoo City*, 2010) and Nick Wood (*Azanian Bridges*, 2016) have imagined the daunting mutations of the South-African apartheid-regime in a society dominated by widespread technological innovations. Both authors set their stories in the present days (the 2010s and 2020s) or an imminent future –

2018 for *Moxyland*, aka. ten years after the novel's publication, 2011 for *Zoocity*, that is one year after the novel's publication). Scientific innovations have provided for new technologies such as electronic chips and advertising implants incremented in the human body (*Moxyland*), and "Empathy Enhancers" incorporated to the skulls and allowing to read human thoughts (*Azanian Bridges*), but they have also induced the implementation of new segregation forms, setting aside the so-called *animaled people*, common criminals who end up associated to a totemic animal, which grants them certain powers and turns them into sought-after assets for the ordinary citizens of Johannesburg.

At the junction of post-apartheid and post-apocalyptic fictions, Deon Meyer, a South African author specializing in thriller, recently gave his insight on the topic of African futures in his novel *Koors*, first published in Afrikaans in 2016, but immediately translated in English under the title *Fever*, and in French as *L'Année du Lion* in 2017. The novel takes the form of first-person narrative, as narrator Nico Storm tells about an epidemic that wiped out nine-tenths of the human population. Storm's father, a white man named Willem Storm, founded Amanzi, a utopian colony gathering both Blacks and Whites, designed to rebuild human society and to restore a prosperous way of life. Unfortunately, he is mysteriously murdered by a group of men who storm out of a helicopter. While investigating the murder of his father and reporting on his life in Amanzi, Nico Storm collects and transcribes numerous recordings, thus giving voice to a multitude of characters and orchestrating a true multiracial and multicultural polyphony. At the end of the story, the reader will understand that the murderous fever which befell humanity had no natural cause : It was planned and programmed all along by an elitist conspiracy who intended to drastically reduce the world's population.

Post-Apocalyptic Fictions

John Brunner's 1968 novel, *Stand on Zanzibar* had already pinpointed the problem of human overpopulation, planning that it should arise at the beginning of the 21st century (the novel indeed begins on May 3, 2010). Brunner's novel focused on the exemplary setbacks experienced by a fictitious African country, Beninia, which put its destiny in the hands of an American multinational, General Technics, hoping that it will save the country from underdevelopment.

Another story by a British author, *The White Devils* by Paul McAuley (2004), is set in central Africa in the 2030s, after a vicious pandemic, the so-called black flu (408) which has decimated the world, provoking multiple international conflicts and encouraging the use of new biological weapons. Determined to wage war on bioterrorism, the American government choses to bomb a Congolese laboratory: In so doing, they release a dangerous viral enzyme (428) able to transform the trees' cellulose into a viscous matter (the trees end up melting down like candles !), which then hardens into plastic. It takes no time to turn the primordial forest into a huge dead zone spreading over central Africa (427). Meanwhile, the two Congo are administered by five multinationals (p. 124 and p. 336), including "Obligate" which, under the guise of restoring democracy and investing in the future by treating the environment as a priority (p. 290), engages in risky genetic manipulations (using engineering methods also implemented by dissident biopunks - p. 337 and 346). Starting with the creation of Pleistocene Park, mutants are thus conceived from human embryos in order to resuscitate the extinct Australopithecus and to breed super-soldiers, the eponymous "White Devils". Fascinating from start to finish in its many twists and turns, the novel takes the form of an investigation

led by Nicholas Hyde, a British humanitarian, who is himself the clone of his late brother, killed in a car crash (359). McAuley even manages to allude to post-apartheid fictions, since several references are made to the Riebeecksland, an Afrikaner fundamentalist enclave taking refuge in Tanzania (331).

On the African side, post-apocalyptic fictions are especially concerned with the staging of the confrontation between two communities, castes, or rival social categories. This statement verifies in *Utopia*, a 2009 novel by the Egyptian writer Ahmed Khaled Towfik, depicting the city Cairo in 2023. The Egyptian capital is torn between the colony of Utopia, protected by high walls, electrified barbed wire and surveillance patrols, home to powerful business leaders, doctors and politicians living secluded and in opulence, and the slums where "the others" try to survive, fighting for their life in a universe where « there is nothing left but poverty and haggard faces, from which savage, hungry eyes bulge out » (p. 51) and where "religion is the only hope [people] have for a better life, after death" (ibid.). The situation is slightly different in *Who Fears Death?* (2010), a novel by Nnedi Okorafor, allegedly inspired by the civil war in Sudan. In a post-apocalyptic Africa set in an undated future, Okorafor describes the opposition between the light skinned Nuru "supposedly coming from the stars", and the Okeke, black as the night because they were "created before the day" (p.42). The Nuru dominate and exploit the Okeke, whom they have reduced into slavery, by instrumentalizing a holy work, the Great Book. The violent interactions between these two communities, culminating in the rapes perpetrated by Nuru men on Okeke women, sometimes result in the birth of Ewus, half-breed children who are considered as cursed. Okorafor's main character, Onyesonwu is one of those, but she is also endowed with exceptional powers and with an extraordinary destiny: She has to fulfill a prophecy by rewriting the Great Book and thus put an end to the Okeke's subordination.

Released in 2017, the first novel by the South African author Gavin Chait, *Lament for the Fallen*, tells the story of an equally exceptional figure, the hero Samsara fallen from the sky in a Nigerian village, Ewuru, after having escaped from the Tartarus orbital prison. Set in the 23th century, Gavin Chait's novel imagines that Africa has been devastated by a series of violent conflicts, the water wars, and that Nigeria is now ruled by warlords who ransom the civil populations. Samsara's arrival will change the deal : Even though he is initially taken for an extraterrestrial being, he comes from the colony of Achenia, a terraformed planet created by the humans living on the space station after they left Earth's orbit, one hundred and fifty years ago. In his own world, Samsara was "one of the nine", member of a group of soldiers endowed with extraordinary physical and psychic capacities: as he describes them, "fast healing, able to withstand any level of concussive injury, ability to project my awareness to greater distances, able to blend my appearance to suit the environment. (...) The Nine, in full attack mode, are the equivalent of half this planet's military" (p.90). Gavin Chait's post-apocalyptic novel thus offers a smooth transition, leading us directly towards the fifth theme I intend to explore today, namely the African Adventures and utopias in outer space.

Adventures and utopias in outer space

Like African dystopias, adventures and utopias in outer space can be considered from two complementary points of view : on the one hand, a whole bunch of stories are devoted to space travel, to the colonization or terra-formation of new planets by African space-travelers; on the other hand, alternate fictions focus on the arrival and installation of extraterrestrials in Africa.

When it comes to African utopias in outer space, the undisputable champion is without any possible doubt the American novelist Mike Resnick, who stands out as one of the most prolific and award-winning science-fiction authors today. From the 1980s to the 2000s, Resnick published no less than five novels (*Ivory*, 1988; *Paradise*, 1989; *Purgatory*, 1992; *Inferno*, 1993; *Kirinyaga*, 1998) and two novellas (*Seven Views of Olduvai Gorge*, 1994; *Kilimanjaro*, 2008) imagining African futures. At first glance, this impressive fictional production seems to corroborate the traditional connection between imperialism and science fiction: indeed, Resnick's narratives stage a "galactic era", which witnessed humanity venturing into space to colonize distant worlds, starting on the internal border and then progressing towards the external border, the fringe and the spiral arm of the galaxy. If we stick to the chronology, this galactic era should start around 2900. However, Resnick's first Afro-futuristic novel, *Ivory*, begins in the year 1885 of our era and extends over nearly seven millennia - thus ending in the year 6304 of the galactic era. It narrates the transmission and the quest for a pair of elephant tusks belonging to Malima Tembo, a giant elephant killed in 1898 near Mount Kilimanjaro. After *Ivory* came Mike Resnick's great Afrofuturistic Trilogy, *The Infernal Comedy* (comprising *Paradise*, *Purgatory* and *Inferno*), which draws inspiration in the history of three African countries - Kenya, Zimbabwe and Uganda - to describe the colonization of three distant planets, thus stating that even a paradisiac world can be turned into hell through well-intended colonization. But Mike Resnick's most famous novel is undoubtedly *Kirinyaga*, a novel taking place on a terraformed planetoid, orbiting around earth. The narrator Koriba describes the progressive failure of the ideal society he attempted to build in the outer space, between 2123 and 2137, trying to accurately reproduce the traditional culture of the Kenyan Gikuyus. Resnick's novel thus confronts two contrasted African futures - one on Earth, in Kenya, one on Kirinyaga. This dual representation also inspires the *Kilimanjaro* novella, depicting a Masai utopia created one century after the failure of Koriba, between 2234 and 2243. Drawing on Koriba's mistakes, the creators of the second African planetoid try to proceed differently in every way: they accept foreigners (who were not welcome on Kirinyaga), they promote the development of an ecological tourism, without fear of altering the traditional Masai culture. Eventually, the new Kilimanjaro turns into a prosperous African theme park.

Mike Resnick's utopian novel thus introduces an important figure, belonging *per se* to the representation of the African future: I am thinking of the African cosmonaut, sometimes called the Afronaut. The African attraction for space travel and interstellar cruises also plays a significant role in the novels by South African author Alex Latimer (*The Space Race*, 2013) or by American-Nigerian writer Deji Olukotun (*Nigerians in Space*, 2014). Finally, Resnick's novella *Seven Views of Olduvai Gorge* tackles another important leitmotiv and a key component of outer space adventures: It tells about the arrival of extraterrestrial beings, who land on earth several millennia after the extinction of the human species. Setting foot in Africa, in one of mankind's original places of birth, the extraterrestrials look for further archaeological traces and end up reconstructing the whole human adventure, starting from its original cradle.

The most famous work dealing with the installation of extraterrestrials in Africa is without contest the 2009 film by Neill Blomkamp, *District 9*. Bloomkamp's aliens are promptly confined in refugee camps, which quickly turn into violent and criminal ghettos, partly ruled by the West African mafias who control weapons trafficking, food and prostitution. In reaction to Blomkamp's film and to his negative depiction of Nigerian thugs and mobsters, two authors of Nigerian origin, Nnedi Okorafor and Tade Thompson, offered their own version of the first encounter between extraterrestrial beings and Africans. Published in 2014 and titled *Lagoon*,

Okorafor's novel proceeds in three acts, narrating the first contact between the aliens and the people of Lagos, then a series of troubles and urban riots caused by the extraterrestrial arrival, and eventually focusing on the advent of a post-capitalistic society, born from the symbiosis between the human and extraterrestrial races. The same symbiotic perspective is displayed in Tade Thompson's novel, *Rosewater*, which was published in 2018 as the first volume of a now completed trilogy. The narrator, Karoo, works in an agency specializing in the repression of cyber fraud, putting to use the extraordinary psychic powers he developed by entering in contact with the "biodome", an extraterrestrial entity which mysteriously appeared in Nigeria in 2055. Every year, the "biodome" opens up and performs miraculous cures, healing severely ill patients and even resurrecting the dead. However, Karoo soon comes to realize that his life is threatened: All the other "sensitives" – for that is the name given to those who develop unusual psychic abilities thanks to the "biodome" – die in unclear circumstances, making him wonder if they were the unknowing victims of a plot. Karoo's thorough investigation eventually leads him to discover that the alien colonization of Earth has actually started.

A few Recurring Figures

Beyond their thematic echoes and their common narrative frameworks, the novels and films devoted to the future of Africa also display five recurring figures. Although their avatars can be quite different from one fiction to another, these figures share outstanding common features. They do not necessarily cohabite in every single narrative, but they are intimately bound together by the contrasts opposing one to another : the witchdoctor or sorcerer thus plays an important part in some novels, while other pieces of fiction rather focus on the figure of the great scientist ; the great warrior, chief or enlightened king finds his counterpart in the figure of the augmented human, or the African mutant endowed with supernatural powers or even the superheroine or superhero who is granted an almost divine status. Finally, the astronaut embodies the go-between or the mediator, circulating within different worlds, whether terrestrial or intergalactic, human or extraterrestrial ones.

Black Panther, matrix and synthesis

If we now push our synthetic ambition a little further, we will easily establish that a single character, T'Challa, condenses all the previously mentioned figures, while *Black Panther*, the serial work dedicated to his adventures, published on a monthly or bimonthly basis for more than half a century, brings together the five major themes we found diffracted in the various fictions dedicated to the representation of African futures. Indeed, T'Challa is altogether a great king, a great warrior and a superhero not only provided with extremely advanced technologies, but also endowed with extraordinary telepathic powers. These outstanding assets are explained by the fact that he is also one of the greatest scientists of his time and a psychopump wizard, able to circulate between the worlds of the living and the dead. Finally, he is a most remarkable Afronaut, travelling not only to the stratosphere, to move faster around the Earth, but also to the moon and to other planets in his numerous adventures. I will therefore argue that *Black Panther* is all together the matrix and the synthesis of the various fictions depicting the African future I have mentioned earlier on.

Wakanda, an African utopia?

As some of you may know, T'Challa is the king of Wakanda, an imaginary kingdom located in Central Africa. Just as the aquatic empire of Atlantis, led by Prince Namor, the Latveria, located in Central Europe and ruled by the cyborg scientist Dr Doom and the island of Genosha possessed by the Slavic mutant Magneto, Wakanda is one of the great fictional geopolitical powers set up in the Marvel universe. Having resisted any attempt at invasion over the centuries – be it African, foreign or even extra-terrestrial endeavors – Wakanda has never been colonized. For a very long time, it has been insulated of the rest of the world, until the reign of T'Chaka, father of T'Challa, who first put an end to this isolationist tradition. In his second marriage, T'Chaka thus married a South African woman, Ramonda, while financially supporting the fight of the African National Congress against apartheid. In the first *Black Panther* series, scripted by Don McGregor, he ends up murdered by Ulysses Klaue, a Dutch physicist and descendant of Afrikaners, leading a mercenary operation in Wakanda. However, in the third *Black Panther* series, scripted by Reginald Hudlin, and in the cinematographic adaptation directed by Ryan Coogler, T'Chaka is murdered outside of Wakanda, during an international summit. Succeeding his father on the throne, T'Challa creates the first Wakandan embassy in the United States and appoints his cousin T'Shan as Wakandan ambassador to the United Nations.

Wakanda thus enters the international scene as an extremely advanced African country, both on the economical and on the technological level. It draws its power from the exploitation of a unique mineral : the vibranium, which proves able to transform sound frequencies into mere energy. Consequently, the Wakandan economy does not rely on the exploitation of fossil resources, but only on renewable energies such as sound, air, water and light. Vibranium is integrated to very sophisticated technologies, such as the polyvalent fleet of N'yami vessels, which can be both nautical and aeronautical, circulating underwater and in the air; the kimoyo-net (*Black Panther*, *Avengers of the New World*, vol. 4, 2016), cards and pearls, which allow wireless and even hologrammatic communication. Life-changing medical techniques also merge traditional pharmacopoeia (relying on the power of a mystical heart-shaped flower) with vibranium prostheses.

Politically and socially, Wakanda is based on fairly traditional, even archaic structures, since its monarchical regime proceeds from the animist cult of the Black Panther god, totem of the dominant tribe. Tribal rivalries are exacerbated there, for other ethnical groups also pay their respects to their own totemic gods. The central power of the Black Panther is thus regularly challenged and endangered by various rebellions, such as that of N'jadaka/Erik Killmonger in the first series, scripted by Don McGregor, Christopher Priest and Reginald Hudlin, or that of the warrior philosopher Tetu and the witch Zinzi in the last series written by Ta-Nehisi Coates.

All the ingredients are thus brought together to decline the main themes characterising the depiction of the African future.

The invasion, the war of the worlds

Over the decades, Wakanda has picked up fights with several countries. The first enemies were Wakanda's fictional neighbors, Niganda and Azania, which are barely masked avatars of Uganda and South Africa. The second main foe are the United States. Throughout his adventures, the Black Panther thus fights against various segregationist regimes and their followers, such as the Ku Klux Klan or the white Afrikaner Supremacists. T'Challa also regularly opposes US imperialist politics and its repeated attempts at interference. He also enters into

a temporary conflict with the Middle East, defeating a rival superhero, the Arabian Knight. Wakanda also defeats fictional geopolitical powers belonging to the Marvel universe such as Atlantis, Latveria and Genosha. Responding to the attempts at political hegemony of a megalomaniac African scientist, Frederick Kiber, T'Challa eventually annexes an island owned by the latter in the Indian Ocean. Finally, the Black Panther is involved in various intergalactic conflicts: He foils a plan of invasion masterfully orchestrated by the Skrulls, an extra-terrestrial species with extraordinary mimetic powers; he faces an attack of the Deviant Lemurians, another terrestrial species of the Marvel universe, led by Lord Ghaur; but the Lemurians ultimately join the human resistance against the super-villain Thanos in *Infinity Wars* (whose final battle takes place in Wakanda). Last but not least, T'Challa is one of the few humans who has been able to defeat Galactus, the mythical devourer of planets and worlds.

The world upside down

Many episodes of the *Black Panther* series stage the technological and therefore military superiority of Wakanda over the United States, the Western world, and the extraterrestrial powers. On the occasion of various anniversaries or special annual issues, writers tend to imagine Wakanda in the future - generally on the scale of half a century : in this storylines, Wakanda systematically becomes the dominating power on Earth, which is exemplarily demonstrated in "The Once and future King" special issues for Black Panther's 35th anniversary, published in November-December 2001 (BP 36 & 37, gathered in the third volume of the series scripted by Christopher Priest), or in "Black to the future" (BP annual in 2008, scripted by Reginald Hudlin) and in "Black to the future II" (BP Annual 2018, scripted again by Reginald Hudlin, in the series "For the Eternal Wakanda"). In the last issues scripted by Ta-Nehisi Coates, the intergalactic empire of Wakanda has even colonized extraterrestrial planets. Pushing the concept of self-defense to the extreme, it has become a bellicose power submitting all potential enemies to an unchallenged Wakandan domination. This last series thus orchestrates what one could call a reversal of the reversal, since T'Challa himself is now leading the rebellion against the imperial power of the Black Panther.

Space adventures and utopias

However, one should not forget that the Wakandan king has previously experienced many other space adventures, thus establishing himself as one of the first Afronauts in the comics' universe. On the occasion of T'Challa's first appearance in a comic book in July 1966, he donates his revolutionary space ship to the Fantastic Four. Later on, with the help of his sister Shuri, he designs a rocket to travel in space, and he indeed travels to the moon with his wife Ororo Munroe, aka Storm, a member of the famous X-Men, in the series written by Reginald Hudlin. Recently, in a series written by Al Ewing, *The Ultimates* (2015-2016), T'Challa has even developed a technology of teleportation in hyperspace, which allows him to defeat Galactus, the devourer of worlds.

Wakanda, a utopia still on the verge of dystopia

Due to T'Challa's many enemies and to the impending geopolitical and intergalactic threats, the Wakandan utopia is always likely to tip over into dystopia. It should be noted that this ambivalence is also at the heart of Wakanda's main assets. For instance, despite its positive

power and beneficial effects, vibranium can be harmful if used as “crude ore”: when Jakarra foments a coup against his half-brother T'Challa (BP 6, November 1977) he turns into a monster for being exposed to it without precaution and ends up disappearing under the Vibranium hill (BP 7 to 10, January-July 1978). After this episode however, T'Challa develops psionic powers of telepathy and telekinesis (BP 11 to 13, September 1978-January 1979). The positive power of Vibranium hill finds an inverted mirror in the negative power of the Resurrection Altar, where T'Challa's first enemies (King Cadaver, Lord Karnaj, Baron Macabre, Salamander K'Ruel, Sombre) acquire evil powers as a result of various genetic mutations in the series scripted by Don McGregor. On numerous occasions, T'Challa's enemies manage to momentarily take power in Wakanda and thus transform the kingdom into a real inferno: this happens with Achebe and with Erik Killmonger in the episodes scripted by Christopher Priest in the 1990/2000s.

Finally, it is worth noticing that the mystical ritual which grants the black panther his royal status allows him to access a specific spiritual and metaphysical realm: this passage into the invisible world of Djalia, as it is called, confers certain magical powers, such as the ability to transform into various animals. However, the porosity between the world of the living and the world of the dead, while consistent with many traditional African beliefs, is also loaded with ambivalence, forcing the Black Panther to confront harmful creatures such as zombies or the evil figure of Mephisto, who plays a cardinal role in the conspiracy against T'Challa in the series scripted by Christopher Priest.

Conclusion

The volume, the density, the inventiveness and the success achieved by the adventures of the Black Panther for more than half a century suffice to demonstrate that these comics had more influence on the global representation of Africans futures than any other literary or visual production. While considering contemporary science fiction and anticipative literature – be it produced in Africa or elsewhere –, it proves difficult to distinguish which elements the authors borrowed from *Black panther* and which ones they inherited from other writers or from African cultures relating to fantasy and magic. Akin to that of the Afronaut, who has nowadays become an extremely popular figure in literature, cinema and even in contemporary art, Black Panther's success is undoubtedly due to his fundamentally hybrid character. Just as Wakanda was defined, back in the first issues of the comics, as "a nation of paradoxes, where technology meets primitive traditions" (BP 8, May 1974), the Black Panther embodies a new kind of paradox: How can one be a supremely accomplished – and therefore, extremely sophisticated, if not Machiavellian – global figure of power, and at the same time an authentically and deeply African King?

One could also wonder about the growing success met by these fictions dedicated to the future of Africa, both on the African continent and in the Western world, or on a global scale. What needs do they meet, what psychological aspirations do they satisfy?

Like any work of science-fiction, the narratives dedicated to the representation of African futures essentially help us to understand our contemporary world, to singularize dominant trends and to anticipate their possible evolutions; they unveil the fantasies and obsessions of our time, which, as I have tried to demonstrate, are sometimes inherited from previous ages. For Africans and Afro-descendants, those fictions most certainly have a compensatory function: By offering positive and powerful representations of Africa and African heroes, they provide a possibility to overcome the traumas of the past and the frustrations of the present.

For the Western audience, they also perform a double function: On the one side, they continue to convey familiar or even archaic representations of Africa, some of them inherited from previous ages. On the other hand, those fictions provide us with an experience of "defamiliarization" which arouses curiosity, astonishment and even wonder. As we have known since Antiquity, out of Africa, there always comes something new (*Africa aliquid semper novi*, said Pliny the Elder).