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# Where to, Africa? Narrating African Futures, between Prospective and Science Fiction

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## **Where to, Africa ? Narrating African Futures, between Prospective and Fiction**

### **Introduction**

For several years now, not a month has gone by without an article, a journal issue, a scientific report, an 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 and the question of Africa's future has become a major geopolitical and economic issue, discussed as such in a wide variety of discursive and visual productions, especially in prospective terms.

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. This is how it all started : as I was reading on this topic, I stumbled upon the frequent assertion that the concern for the future of Africa was new, introducing a clear break firstly with the colonial era and the colonial literature, but also with the dark and pessimistic vision of the future which prevailed until the 1990s. I started to question that claim, which actually did not fit into my reading experience of both colonial and postcolonial, European and African literatures.

By digging into that subject in my recent book, *L'Afrique au futur : le renversement des mondes*, I was able to establish a certain number of 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. One could even argue that the later anticipated, to a large extent, the Forward Planning and the Futurology that rose up in the West right after the Second World War.

Secondly, it also appears obvious that, for a very long time now, African Futures have been considered through two main kind of discourses as well as through two antagonistic spectacles. There is basically a dual approach of African futures, namely through Foresight and Science-fiction, which both constantly oscillate between optimistic or pessimistic views; they are therefore closely related in many ways.

My talk today will thus first concentrate on the links and commonalities one can find between Foresight and Science-fiction ; I will then expose, in a second part, some important data about the African continent, as well as the paradoxes that they give rise to, to help you understand better the main themes that are usually discussed when it comes to narrating African futures ; I will then elaborate on these themes, introducing five of them, as they are staged in Foresight and Science-fiction about Africa ; finally, I will try to give you some insights about the reasons why some topics are preferred by European or African writers.

### **A quick survey of Prospective and Science-fiction's commonalities**

First of all, let me say that the very project of narrating the future entails the proposition of a foresight, 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. Therefore fiction lays at the bottom of two rivaling yet complementary forms of narratives, Prospective and Science-Fiction. Prospective is usually defined as a “discipline aiming at building relatable narratives of the future, taking into consideration the actual state of science and the understanding and expectations of a general audience” (Gaudin, 2013 : 5) ; and science-fiction is a subfield of literary or creative writing, that can also be based on current scientific and technical knowledge, and develops plots or scenarios and situations that are practically or theoretically possible : we then speak of hard science-fiction, just as we speak of hard science in opposition to soft or human and social sciences.

As far as Economics, Social Sciences and Forward Planning are concerned, we end up with fictionalizing thoughts or discourses, which mobilize the assets of imagination to carry on their thought experiments, and most notably their probable or possible scenario-planning for the future. Conversely, science-fiction or speculative fiction develop itself as a thoughtful storytelling which uses fabulation and plotting in order to narrate and think about those very same issues.

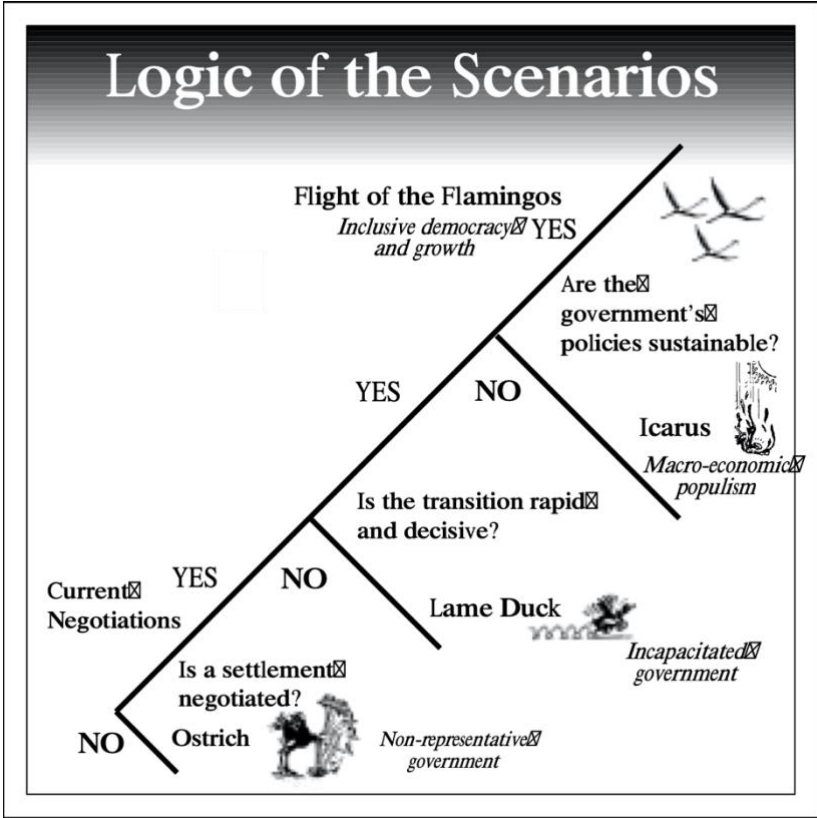
Now, if we move a step further, we can see that even when they split up into various types or different orientations, science-fiction and prospective still share some major commonalities. On the one hand, one can basically distinguish two types of science-fiction : a descriptive one, and a predictive one. The famous science-fiction writer, Isaac Asimov, used to define his field as “that branch of literature which is interested in the impact of scientific progress on human beings”<sup>1</sup>, as he tried to anticipate which problems we might be confronted with in the future, and which solutions we could come up with. Science-fiction was thus originally conceived as a predictive narrative, anticipating technological or social issues and their impending outcomes. Yet some writers, especially feminine ones like Ursula Le Guin or, later on, Octavia Butler, disagreed with that characterization of science-fiction, and they tried instead to develop alternative or futuristic worlds in which relationships between human beings or societies, or between humans and other species could run other paths than the ones we are accustomed to. Le Guin wanted to explore something different than the usual mix of violence and exploitation, and she settled for humbler stories than the heroic colonizing of other planets and the killing of other beings such as the aliens, which were at the forefront of so many science fiction novels. Since it doesn't rely on the prospective outcomes of technologies or imperial ambitions, but on thought experiments imagining societies without any hierarchy between sexes, genders or races, her science-fiction work could be defined as a descriptive one rather than a predictive one.

On the other hand, Prospective is usually conceived in three different ways. Most people tend to expect that the future will mostly look like the present, and foresight is then conceived as a “business as usual”, or “what would happen if we don't do anything special”: this is also a dominant thinking among economists who deal with forward planning. Yet there are two other ways to build on an existing situation, taking into account various facts and trends, so as to provide “relatable interpretations of the future”. One can also imagine some forthcoming change, and such an evolution could then go into two different directions: things will get better, or they will get worse, and these opposite views are usually defended by two different kind of foresight experts. On the one hand, the Cassandras build their pessimistic and dark scenarios on very strong data, but they usually neglect humanity's resourcefulness

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<sup>1</sup> « Social Science fiction » in Reginald Bretnor (ed.), *Modern Science Fiction : Its Meaning and Its Future*, Coward-McCann, 1953.

and the long term ability of human societies to adapt themselves to hostile changes and conditions. On the other hand, the tech experts are usually confident in science and technologies' abilities to provide unexpected solutions to various kind of problems, but their insights into what could be possible in the future often lack accuracy in their time frame. Forward and Scenario-Planning usually build on bifurcating paths to imagine the future, on a either-or basis. You could see an illustration of this kind of alternating storytelling in the Montfleury scenarios, sketched in 1992 to imagine South Africa post apartheid's future.



Be they descriptive or prescriptive, change-oriented or not, science-fiction and prospective thus share a common set of mind, mostly thinking in terms of opposition between positive or negative evolutions and situations, or to put it in more literary framework, they tend to stage things in both utopian or dystopian worlds and directions.

As far as the African Continent is concerned, I will now briefly expose how these contradictory orientations actually stem from a series of paradoxes.

**The Paradoxes of Africa**

Africa's surface, which could include Western Europe, China, Korea, India and the United States altogether within its borders, is the second one on Earth, right after Asia. It covers thirty million square kilometers, hence a quarter of the total emerged land, and half of the unused farmland in the world. Acting as a potential breadbasket of the world, the African continent is also a vault, since it holds a third of the world's natural resources, out of which nine-tenths still remain unexploited to this day; it also conceals unprecedented mineral and energetic

resources without previous exploitation (for example, 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 and a serious reserve of Lithium). One should also not forget Africa's solar and fluvial annuity which seems almost inexhaustible – Africa's seven great rivers (Nile, Niger, Congo, Senegal, Orange, Limpopo, Zambezi) do actually account for 15% of the world's hydroelectric potential, and the continent is also one of the sunniest place in the world.

Actually, there is no getting around it: Africa is a very rich continent, but unfortunately most of its inhabitants remain poor, and disparities are constantly increasing between African 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 dollar per day, and despite the fact that Africa could be considered as the future breadbasket of the world, its agriculture, which mobilizes 65 % of the jobs and 75 % of the foreign trade, still ranks with the lowest productivity rates ; the continent also lacks the manufacturing industries which could transform commodities and raw materials into derivative and finished products.

Africa nevertheless enjoys an unparalleled demographic dividend: there were around 230 million Africans in 1950, but there will be 2,3 billion of them in 2050. And by 2030, a quarter of the world's active population will 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 its industrial revolution, followed in the developmental pattern by the United States, and then China or India. However, some ten years ago, Africa was home to 17 million unemployed young people – a figure which has even worsened since. French geopolitician Sylvie Brunel reminds us that “the demographic explosion in Europe has resulted in the departure of 50 million migrants”; yet this depressurization valve is currently “refused to Africa, despite of its current fast-paced demographical densification” (2015: 13). It is no surprise that the “demographical cauldron” is therefore bubbling intensively. To prevent its impending explosion, at least ten million jobs should be created each year on the continent, according to African Economist Carlos Lopes in his most recent essay (*L’Afrique est l’avenir du monde*, 2021 : 114). In this context, the strong African population growth acts both as an impediment and as a potential leverage : following Asia's lead, Africa could become the next workshop of the world, but massive employment strategies have yet to be set up.

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 into 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 km<sup>2</sup> the second geographic giant of Africa, just after Algeria (2.4 million km<sup>2</sup>), painfully reaches 400 dollars in annual income per capita...

There are finally two subsequent paradoxes : paralleling its demographical and economical growth, the urbanization of the continent has been itself a major challenge over the last decades: 40% of Africans now live in cities, which tend to expand at the expense of farmlands.

But since the continent has been deprived of any real industrial revolution, Africa isn't harming the environment and the climate to the same extent that the other continents; nevertheless the damage and costs of climatic change will reach the highest figures in Africa, in terms of gross domestic product or in terms of environmental pressures and damages.

To summarize those paradoxes, I would thus say that Africa's current growth in terms of population, urbanization and consumption comes up against the slowness of its structural changes on the economical and political levels. Its becoming has therefore become a major issue, mostly figured into two opposite ways.

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, and the multiplication of economical, ecological and sanitary disasters, as well as 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, Western and Eastern societies through massive and uncontrollable migrations, or through new forms of political radicalism.

On the other hand, Afro-Optimists rather focus on Africa's many assets such as its gigantic size, its huge geological resources, its incredible agricultural and industrial potentialities, its outstanding economical growth and last but not least, its increasing demographical uprising.

To conclude on this matter, I would say that regardless of their understanding of Africa's position in a globalized world, Afro-Optimists and Afro-Pessimists often 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 and visual sources of various nature and status actually share a common bank of images, arguments and narrative patterns, which can be exposed by intermedia cross-reading and literary analysis, thus allowing us to elaborate on the existence of common assumptions structuring the ways we conceive, imagine and narrate the African futures.

For this reason, in the third part of my talk, I will settle for a thematic and typological approach, which seemed better suited to display the recurring patterns, figures and structures, that circulate from one period, tradition, practice or work to another.

## **Five main themes**

### *The African Eldorado and the Jihadist Impediment*

As we have seen before, Forward Planning and contemporary mediatic publications most commonly present the African continent as an Eldorado, being all at once a garden, a breadbasket, a vault and a workshop thanks to its incredible natural, geological, mineral and human resources. Yet another dominant theme had emerged as a corollary to this image of the African Paradise, casting a dangerous shadow over the promised land: I am talking about the jihadist threat, which unfolds in the Sahelian area, forming "an arc of crisis" and "a black hole", "a zone of collapse at the very heart of the continent" (Brunel 2015: 33, 34, 141). Considered as the largest desert in the world, the Sahara occupies 9 million square kilometers, which represents almost a third of the continent's surface. Nevertheless, "despite its apparent hostility, that environment has never been empty of men" (Brunel 2015: 141) and "from Mauritania to Somalia" (2015: 146), it progressively "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." (2015: 33).

Under the label "Jihadistan", Brunel 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 the law of 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" (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 simply mention the works by Samuel Laurent, *Sahelistan* (2013), Serge Michailof, *Africanistan* (2015), by Olivier Hanne and Guillaume Larabi, *Jihâd au Sahel* (also 2015), or 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 hosting a jihadist and/or terrorist stronghold is also reflected in several contemporary fictions. Let me simply mention two of them.

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 which generated electromagnetic winds and paralyzed numerous electrical and electronic systems, thus allowing for a wave of cyber-attacks to interrupt any possibility of communication on a planetary scale. The world is now threatened by the regular collapse of satellites orbiting the earth and Nigeria has become the only country with an operational space program. Preparations to launch a rocket towards the international space station thus takes 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, *Our Memory like Dust* by South African author Gavin Chait, 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 network of solar farms, 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 nonetheless confronted to the rise of a regional power, "the Ansar Dine Jihadist Empire", founded precisely on the border of the two African states.

### *Massive migrations and wars of the worlds*

Gavin Chait's novel also deals with another major contemporary issue: an increasing movement of African migration to the North, which faces the hostility of European powers and eventually overwhelms any kind of resistance.

The theme of massive migrations and the representation of a World War opposing Africa and the West in a near future can also be found in British and German literatures, albeit in different patterns. In his 1972 novel, *Fugue for a Darkening Island*, famous science-fiction English writer Christopher Priest stages his country, Great-Britain, facing the incoming of a million African immigrants, who are fleeing their devastated continent after a nuclear disaster in an

undetermined future. The tensions with the local population soon spark a civil war. More recently, one could also mention *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (2018, *The Hungry and the Fat* in English), the second novel by the German novelist Timur Vermes. Settling his 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 push north, grappling with a host of journalists, businessmen and mafia thugs, political passions are unleashed in Europe, and especially in Germany, where the incoming migrants are perceived as a horde of invaders, and are finally exterminated at the border with Austria.

### *The world upside down, or Africa dominating Europe*

The third theme I would like to discuss has flourished especially in the French-speaking world: it can be summarized as a reversal of the existing world-order, allowing Africa to take precedence over Europe, to the point that it exerts an imperial domination over the Western world. Back in 1968, in his novel *La Revanche de Bozambo*, the Guyanese novelist Bertène Juminer had already imagined a colonial domination implemented by Africa over “Ouolove” America and over the Western Baoulian Europe, just like Europeans used to rule over Latin America or on Western Africa. The Djiboutian writer Abdourahman Waberi played 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 uchronia, for it recalls decisive episodes of mankind’s history, such as slavery and colonization, the conquest of space and the first landing on the moon, but systematically rewrites them 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 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 homeland and therefore seek the black paradise of Africa. More recently still, the novel *Rouge Impératrice* (or *Red Empress*, in English), was published in 2019 by the Cameroonian novelist Léonora Miano. It reproduces this narrative framework by imagining a thriving and prosperous Africa, set in the 22nd century. In Miano’s story, the African continent has been unified under the ancient name of Katopia and it has to deal with the tricky issue of immigration, as it became a refuge for the «Sinistrés» (or Casualties), mostly French citizens who have fled their birthplace to make a better living in Africa, but who remain nostalgic about their colonial past and imperial rank, so that they fail to integrate in Katopia’s host society. Miano’s speculative fiction also presents many similitudes with *Le Retour de l’éléphant* (or *The Return of the Elephant*) by Tunisian novelist Abdelaziz Belkhodja, originally published in 2003 and set in North Africa.

### *Climatic and environmental changes*



The depiction of a world upside down, displaying a powerful African continent, able to rule over Europe, can be considered as an utopian perspective. However, fictions about the African future are mainly dominated by a dystopian pattern, which is mostly fueled by the fear of sanitary and climatic disasters.

*The White Devils*, a novel by British author Paul McAuley (2004), is set in central Africa in the 2030s, after a vicious pandemic, the so-called black flu, 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 chooses to bomb a Congolese laboratory: In so doing, they release a dangerous viral enzyme which is 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 all over central Africa, and bound to reach the other continents as well. Meanwhile, the two Congos are administered by multinationals which, under the guise of restoring democracy and investing in the future by treating the environment as a priority, engage in risky genetic manipulations. Mutants are notably conceived from human embryos in order to resuscitate the extinct Australopithecus and to breed super-soldiers, the eponymous "White Devils".

Deon Meyer, a South African author specializing in thriller, also recently gave his insight on the topic of African futures in his novel *Koors*, first published in Afrikaans in 2016, immediately translated in English under the title *Fever*, and in French as *L'Année du Lion*. The novel takes the form of first-person narrative, as narrator Nico Storm tells about an epidemic of coronavirus that has wiped out nine-tenths of the human population. Please note that this novel was written four years before the outburst of the 2019 coronavirus disease ! 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.

Various European and African writers have also dealt with the issue of climatic change and especially with drought in the future of Africa : the lack of water is at the core of French science-fiction novels such as *Demain, une oasis* (Tomorrow, an Oasis) by Yal Ayerdhal, *Aqua™* by Jean-Marc Ligny, *The Drought* by British novelist James Graham Ballard, *Water Must Fall* by South-African writer Nick Wood, or *Pumzi* by Kenyan filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu, to name but a few contemporary creators.

Released in 2017, but set in the 23rd century, the first novel by the South African author Gavin Chait, *Lament for the Fallen*, also 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. A man falling from the sky will change the deal : Even though the hero Samsara is initially taken for an extraterrestrial being, he actually comes from a terraformed planet, the colony of Achenia, created by the humans living on the international space station after they left Earth's orbit, one hundred and fifty years ago. Gavin Chait's post-apocalyptic novel thus offers a smooth transition, leading us directly towards the fifth theme I intend to expose 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 set on other planets. Taking place on a terraformed planetoid, orbiting around earth *Kirinyaga* is undoubtedly Mike Resnick's most famous novel. The narrator Koriba describes the progressive failure of the ideal society he attempted to build in 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.

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 extraterrestrials 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, developed extraordinary psychic powers 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: a thorough investigation eventually leads him to discover that the alien colonization of Earth has actually started.

## Conclusion

By reviewing the main themes through which African futures are often staged in contemporary literature, one can notice that science-fiction, just like prospective or forward-planning, depends a lot on the time scale that it sets for its temporal foray. When that time scale or span is set in the near future, from a couple of years to a couple of decades, the novels usually deal with the outcomes of our contemporary concerns or threats such as the Djihadist expansion in Africa, the environmental, sanitary and climatic looming catastrophes, or the

current migratory movements from the South to the West or to the East. Many novels actually set their plot in the 2030s, up to the 2050s, as does Deji Olukotun in *After the Flare*, Gavin Chait in *Our Memory like Dust*, Jean-Marc Ligny in *Aqua<sup>TM</sup>* or Paul McAuley with his *White Devils*.

Once you project your plot into a more distant future, such as the 20 second or the 20 third centuries, some other stories become possible. You can then imagine the unification of the continent under the guise of some United States of Africa, or a complete reversal of the economical and geopolitical relationships between Africa and the West, or even some space travels and various African settlements on other planets.

Moreover, the main orientations appear to be different, according to which time scale or lapse is privileged in the end. On a short scale, indeed, dystopian fictions and afro-pessimistic foresights tend to prevail, magnifying contemporary issues through a futuristic perspective. Things are thus staged to get worse in a near future. Yet, once you adopt a larger temporal scale or a bigger frame than the actual African continent, things are usually considered in a more optimistic manner.

There is still a common denominator to pessimistic or dystopian narratives on a short time scale, and optimistic and utopian narratives staged in a later future. Both are actually obsessed with an historical or eschatological topic, namely the end of time. Dystopias often evolve into an apocalyptic world, while utopias favor another mindset fantasizing, after an apocalyptic situation, some kind of reset in history or a great return to an original condition that leaves no other direction to the historical time lapse than a throwback to some idealized past, which is duly called a *retrotopia*.

What I have also discovered working on these topics, is that both our contemporary concerns and the most futuristic projections are actually quite old, since they were first staged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Jihadist impediment to unbound exploitation of the African Eldorado, massive migrations and incoming world wars, sanitary or environmental catastrophes, and even the reversal of world order or space races were already featured in late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries French or English speaking novels such as *Les exilés de la terre* by André Laurie (1888), *L'invasion noire* by captain Danrit (1894), *Fécondité* by Emile Zola (1899), *L'Invasion de la mer* by Jules Verne, *Le Monde noir* by Marcel Barrière (1909), *Under the Desert Stars* by Frank Koester (1923), *The Sacred Giraffe* by Salvador de Madariaga (1925) or *L'Afrique centrale dans cent ans* by Paul Salkin (1926).

I mention that finding to help you understand that the fostering of certain topics instead of others is not only determined by the time scale, whether the plot is set in a near or rather a distant future. Topics such as the jihadist predicament, the massive migrations, the sanitary and environmental catastrophes, the reversal of the world, the space travel and the exploration of other planets are both inheritance of the past colonial situation, between Africa and the Western powers, and an aftermath of the resulting globalization. Because of the European rivalry with native empires over the scramble for Africa, French and English colonial figures and writers were haunted by the spectre of powerful Islamic states who were actually disputing their claims to sovereignty over the African continent. The unexpected secondary effects of colonization, such as interracial and intercultural relations, also to some early dread of massive migrations and world wars, up to the fantasy of a mere reversal. Climatic change and sanitary disasters were also very seriously considered and anticipated in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries European literatures, as indirect results of a global capitalistic system encompassing the whole world. Narrating African futures was therefore a major concern of a world ordering in the making during the colonial period, and it keeps on being a laboratory of

the many ways we are actually either birthing or miscarrying our futures. I thank you for your attention.

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