

*Globalization, Postcolonialism, and Science Fiction: Nomadic Transgressions*

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While speculative fiction has not yet fully realized its transgressive potential, dominated as it has been by white, male, techno-fantasies—Westerns and the White Man’s Burden in Outer Space—there is still a strong undercurrent of writing that questions and subverts dominant paradigms and persists in asking uncomfortable questions. No other literature, to my knowledge, has written with so much passion about technological and social issues, nuclear war, or genetic engineering.

*Vandana Singh, “A Speculative Manifesto”*

## ABSTRACT

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By

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This dissertation seeks to establish science fiction as a critical framework for interrogating contemporary neocolonial structures. Specifically, I examine the ways an emerging subgenre of “postcolonial science fiction” provides valuable conceptual tools for imagining what postcolonial relations might look like in an era defined by globalization and multinational capitalism. By linking a critique of the genre’s colonial drive to the logic of advanced capitalism, postcolonial science fiction offers a critical lens through which to examine the continuation of contemporary neocolonial structures. For example, postcolonial science fiction questions several of the assumptions that underpin science fiction, including the genre’s colonial gaze, the appeal to an ideology of progress, focus on the “future” and the construction of an assumed cosmopolitan future, and an implicit faith in technological solutions or the inclination towards techno-optimism. Postcolonial science fiction links these generic qualities to the dominance of certain ideological frameworks in contemporary neoliberal culture, revealing the colonial underpinnings of both genre and the “real-world” socio-historical contexts from which genres emerge. Importantly, postcolonial science fiction is also constructivist, offering alternative epistemological frameworks for understanding our relationship to the future beyond colonial paradigms. Through the process of deconstructing and reconstructing sf’s colonial assumptions, I see postcolonial science fiction produced from diverse national contexts as expressions of a transnational desire to understand such questions as:

what do we need to do so that tomorrow is not characterized by the violence against others we exhibit today? Or, more specifically, how can we create new visions of “postcolonialism” that will materialize into more ethical practice? By explicitly foregrounding these questions postcolonial science fiction transforms the genre’s world building into a *strategy of postcolonial experimentation* that strives to understand the complexity of problems facing diverse global communities. Postcolonial studies might also benefit from thinking through the lens of science fiction, where creative projects function as ethical experiments towards mapping out the possibilities of transnational affiliation. As this study emphasizes, I therefore see postcolonial science fiction as simultaneously a subgenre and a process, strategy, or mode of relation established between people committed to imagining less exploitative futures.

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## INTRODUCTION

A study on postcolonial science fiction (sf) faces a central dilemma: namely, how are we to understand a subgenre premised upon two terms whose definitions are often highly contested? “Postcolonialism,” for instance, is a field that continues to spark debate around its meaning and significance in our supposedly post-colonial contemporary moment. As Sandra Harding notes, postcolonialism can refer variously to *the past* and the end of European colonialism in the 1960s; *the future*, in which postcolonialism is still an imagined state that has not yet been achieved due to the continuation of neo-colonial relations; or it can refer to a “*critical counterdiscourse* by the colonized;” and finally it can refer to the *borderland postcolonialism* created through migration and conditions conducive to hybridity (15-6; my emphasis). Such diverse understandings of the term “postcolonialism” significantly affects how postcolonial science fiction has been examined by scholars and the questions that arise regarding the importance of this subgenre. For instance, does postcolonial sf include only those texts that emerge from colonized or previously colonized peoples? Or should we take a broader definition of the term and consider all texts that deconstruct sf’s relationship to colonialism “postcolonial”? What happens to the idea of postcolonial *resistance* in particular when the definition of postcolonialism becomes so inclusive that it can be stretched to incorporate the work of pro-military, white, North American writers such as Robert

Heinlein?<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, can connections be forged between different global visions of sf, or does such a subgenre necessarily revert to a form of cultural relativism?

As these questions suggest, postcolonial science fiction has been criticized for its incoherency and failure to represent a united subgenre or politics. This criticism is due in part to the ways scholars acknowledge, as well as utilize, varied definitions of postcolonialism in relation to science fiction, and as I will explore in more detail in chapter one, subsequently stake different claims for the kind of work in which sf is engaged. Importantly, postcolonial sf also resists a unitary, singular definition because of the genre's critical stance and resistance to homogeneity. Gerry Canavan astutely points out that label of "postcolonial science fiction" risks associating the genre with simple and overdetermined definitions of "postcolonialism" that may construct the genre as a "tamed and domesticated genre, whose meaning and political import is always safely known to us in advance without our ever actually having to bother to read any of it" (496). For Canavan, the danger of reductive generic definitions is that labels such as "postcolonial science fiction" become oversimplified signifiers providing the means to easily classify and understand the thematic drive of these texts without ever engaging with them directly: "a tamed postcolonialism, reduced to a slogan, risks losing its ability to challenge and inspire us—it risks becoming dead theory" (496). Concrete definitions of postcolonial sf may therefore not only be impossible but undesirable, as the label can

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Herbert Klein's "Loonies and others in Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*" in Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal's *Science Fiction, Imperialism, and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2010). Despite Klein's insightful reading, it is hard to ignore Heinlein's history of pro-military, genocidal, and racially problematic narratives such as *Starship Troopers* (1959), which pits humans (the Terrans) against an alien group known as the Arachnids, or "the Bugs," and their allies the "Skinnies."

become a means of identifying and marginalizing texts whose subversive potential involves challenging centre/periphery socio-political relations.

Despite varied approaches to the genre, one can say that a general quality of postcolonial sf is its focus on and exploration of “difference”—whether this is social, cultural, technological, or economic—in the historical aftermath of colonialism<sup>2</sup>. By focusing on the question of difference, however, postcolonial sf also risks *perpetuating* centre/periphery binaries and the ghettoization of international sf. Indeed, one might consider the ways defining postcolonial sf as a genre concerned with the “Third World” replicates the paradigm of ‘add women and stir’ or ‘add people of colour and stir’ that emerges out of second and third wave feminism (Harding 82). As many postcolonial scholars have recognized, ‘adding’ people of colour to conceptual paradigms constructed on their very exclusion only contributes to perpetuating cycles of exclusion and exploitation. Furthermore, to understand postcolonial sf as all sf engaged with non-Western representations may be equally problematic. Apart from reiterating the binaries of East/West, the idea that a postcolonial sf is representative of all “otherness” results in a reification of difference within a Manichean economy. How, then, does sf criticism

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<sup>2</sup> “Colonialism” can refer to a wide-variety of historical situations, including, for instance, settler colonialism, dependent colonialism, European colonization, or specifically regional instances of imperialism such as Japanese imperialism in East Asia. In this dissertation, however, I use the term “colonialism” in a fairly broad sense. Following John Rieder, my dissertation considers colonialism to “refe[r] to the entire process by which European economy and culture penetrated and transformed the non-European world over the last five centuries, including exploration, extraction of resources, expropriation and settlement of land, imperial administration and competition” (25).

negotiate an understanding of the “postcolonial” such that explorations of difference are not subsumed into the logic of what Graham Huggan calls “marketing the margins”?<sup>3</sup>

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

At stake in the discussion of postcolonial science fiction is whether discussions of cultural, ethnic, or social difference can occur in ways that do not risk appropriating subaltern identities or presenting idealized and mythologized “others.” This dissertation will contribute to discussions about the relationship between science fiction and postcolonialism by considering the ways postcolonial sf is not only a genre but a process, strategy, or mode of relation between people committed to imagining less exploitative futures. I argue that postcolonial sf, in fact, transforms the genre’s world building into a *strategy of postcolonial experimentation* that strives to understand the complexity of problems facing diverse global communities. Postcolonial sf therefore performs the important task of deconstructing the exploitative logic of colonialism and capitalism while simultaneously constructing alternative spaces of resistance by privileging a non-imperial ethics of relationality. This process of deconstruction and reconstruction in the genre thereby also reveals the ways “postcolonialism” might best be conceptualized as an attitude or ethical view, rather than a historical time period or easily oppositional stance that risks reiterating centre/periphery binaries.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Huggan’s *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) for a more detailed discussion of the global commodification of difference.

<sup>4</sup> Here I also draw on Graham Huggan’s distinction between *postcolonialism*, which “relates to an ensemble of loosely connected oppositional practices...and by an aesthetic of largely textualised, partly

Throughout this dissertation, I examine how science fiction, produced from a wide-range of national contexts, is in fact the expression of a transnational desire to understand such questions as what do we need to do so that tomorrow is not characterized by the violence against others we exhibit today? Or, more specifically, how can we create new visions of “postcolonialism” that will materialize into more ethical practice? Such questions are the expression of “careful forms of sociability” (Bignall, *Postcolonial*, 220) that define postcolonial sf and are also representative of the ethical drive that characterizes this emerging subgenre. Furthermore, by conceptualizing postcolonial sf as both a genre as well as a critical stance, this study aims to redress the material/discursive divide that currently defines scholarship on postcolonial sf. I will challenge this bifurcation by emphasizing the importance of three levels of postcolonial engagement in the genre: first, postcolonial sf interrogates questions of representation; secondly, postcolonial sf interrogates the supposed end of colonialism as it reflects on the transition to a “post-colonial” moment and the material conditions of global, multinational capitalism; and thirdly, postcolonial sf considers the need for a “postcolonialism” that sees the epistemological, material, and ethical as intimately intertwined. Accordingly, postcolonial sf posits the need for a specific awareness—in both genre text and reader—of the ways colonialism frames sf tropes as well as the ways colonialism continues to frame the specific socio-political contexts in which texts, authors, and readers are immersed.

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localised resistance” and the term *postcoloniality*, which “is a value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange. Value is constructed through global market operations involving the exchange of cultural commodities and, particularly, culturally ‘othered’ goods” (6). In other words, Huggan distinguishes postcoloniality from postcolonialism as the former term exemplifies the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in which the discourse of resistance becomes a commodity itself and sold as “authentic” expressions of marginal communities.

## **Outline of Chapters: From Critique to “Autoethnography”**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters beginning with a chapter on the development of postcolonial science fiction, followed by five chapters that examine how postcolonial sf critiques and re-writes specific generic tropes such as the figure of the alien, techno-Orientalism, future development of information communication technologies, and technologically altered humans. All five chapters therefore engage in a dialectic that first critiques the colonial ideologies and structures that underpin specific science fiction tropes, then explores how such science-fictional tropes can be reoriented towards imagining more postcolonial relations and social structures. Additionally, I identify two kinds of postcolonial science fiction by whether or not they use an “autoethnographic” narrative (an idea that will be explored in more detail below); ultimately, however, I see both types of postcolonial science fiction as still performing the dual role of deconstructing generic conventions and colonial ideologies while reconstructing postcolonial alternatives. The dissertation’s conclusion further emphasizes the importance of attending to both the deconstructive and reconstructive qualities of postcolonial science fiction as part of its strategy of resistance.

In chapter one, I begin with an analysis of the development of postcolonial science fiction as a genre. This chapter outlines previous studies in the field and summarizes their major arguments in order to highlight the material/discursive divide that currently defines how scholars understand postcolonialism in relation to the genre. From this analysis I stake the claim that postcolonial sf might best be conceptualized as a strategy of resistance, critique, and postcolonial experimentation that requires attention to the epistemological *and* material structures of colonialism. Accordingly, it adds to

material/discursive critiques of postcolonial sf the question of ethics, both within the text itself (its representation of difference and ethics of relationality between characters) as well as within the reading communities interpreting these texts.

Chapter two begins with the analysis of a text that precedes the use of the term postcolonial science fiction. Though Ian McDonald's *Evolution's Shore* (1995) and *Kirinya* (1997) precede the emergence of this subgenre, I contend they can still be considered postcolonial science fiction because both texts critique the genre's semantic and syntactic structures, as well as the genre's complicity in reiterating colonial structures. Specifically, by bringing science fiction into contact with history, postcolonial sf such as McDonald's novels link the genre's colonial framework to contemporary imperial socio-cultural relations. Both McDonald's novels and Gareth Edwards's *Monsters* (2010) are therefore representative of a specific kind of postcolonial science fiction that remains within the boundaries of the colonial gaze but begins to challenge its epistemological and material framework. In fact, through the course of this dissertation two kinds of postcolonial science fiction texts emerge: 1) texts that still fall within sf's colonial framework but do so to critique the genre's complicity in semantic/syntactic structures of colonialism, and 2) texts that offer postcolonial articulations of what may be called autoethnographic sf narratives.

The distinction between these two kinds of postcolonial texts—one defined by exploiting the colonial gaze, the other defined by a form of autoethnography—stems from John Rieder's examination of the ways anthropology affects the colonial gaze of early science fiction, and will be explored in more detail in chapter two. Rieder contends that “the anachronistic structure of anthropological difference is one of the key features

that links emergent science fiction to colonialism” where “anthropological difference” is “the way late-nineteenth-century anthropology conceptualized the play of identity and difference between the scientific observer and the anthropological subject—both human, but inhabiting different moments in the history of civilization” (5). This understanding of anthropological difference means that for the scientific observer (colonist), the indigenous other is representative of a primitive past and indicative of developmental stages of society. Drawing on Robert Stafford, Rieder points to the ways that British colonists saw overseas travel as a kind of time travel to old worlds of a distant past. Accordingly, science fiction’s “other” worlds function through colonial reference for early sf readers: “when Verne, Wells, and others wrote of voyages underground, under the sea, and into the heavens for the readers of the age of imperialism, the otherworldliness of the colonies provided a new kind of legibility and significance to an ancient plot” (Rieder 6). The structure of anthropological difference therefore informs the colonial gaze in science fiction by constructing an anthropological subject, or other, who signifies a primitive past or the “colonizer’s own past” (Rieder 5).

After chapter two the remainder of the dissertation focuses on texts that fall into the second category of postcolonial sf that I identify as having an autoethnographic quality. This notion of the intersection of autoethnography and the colonial gaze comes from Rieder’s critique of the structure of the gaze. Using Alonzo Gartley’s 1903 photograph, *Native Hawaiian Fisherman with Throw Net*, Rieder shows how the picture epitomizes the structure of the colonial gaze. The photo depicts a Hawaiian net fisherman crouched in the waves as if searching for prey. He gazes off to the right of the camera, giving the impression that the photo is meant to represent its “subject” objectively and

naturally, and is a moment that has been spontaneously captured by a scientific observer. While this photograph clearly exemplifies how colonial anthropological frameworks influence the genre, it also provides a point for Rieder to explore alternatives to a colonial gaze. Rieder notes that, “[i]f one were to introduce a reciprocal gaze into the scene, for instance, so that the model could be allowed to stand up straight, look back at the camera, and address himself to the audience, the generic conventions would switch from those of the ethnographic image to what Mary Louise Pratt calls autoethnography” (10). Pratt defines autoethnography as “instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms,” and that if “ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations” (7). For Pratt, autoethnography requires using the tools of the colonizer (i.e. adopting idioms or conventions of the colonizer) and appropriating or transforming them through autoethnographic texts.<sup>5</sup> Autoethnographic expression is therefore “important in unraveling the histories of imperial subjugation and resistance as seen from the site of their occurrence” (Pratt 9), and a primary means of confronting imperialism in various contact zones.

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<sup>5</sup> By using the tools of the colonizer, autoethnography “opens up new ways of writing about social life” that can also emphasize the ways “identities are multiple and shifting” (Reed-Danahay 3). As Deborah Reed-Danahay suggests in *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (1997), autoethnography can therefore be “defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self *within a social context*” (9; my emphasis). The emphasis on social context in this definition of autoethnography is useful for thinking about the ways postcolonial sf places the “alien” other within a specific historical context thereby historicizing how difference is treated, a point I will elaborate further on throughout the dissertation.

Thinking about Rieder's comment regarding a reciprocal gaze functioning as a form of autoethnography through which the "other" engages in dialogue with the audience/observer, one can say that the reciprocal gaze of science fiction would most likely be offered through the narrative voice of an alien other. The act of "look[ing] back" by this reciprocal gaze is both autoethnographic and postcolonial because the subject which looks/speaks back "engage[s] with the colonizer's own terms" through "partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror" (Pratt 7). This idea of alien others speaking back to a dominant history of science fiction has much in common with Nalo Hopkinson's definition of postcolonial sf where she defines the genre as "stories that take the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things" (9). Indeed, Hopkinson's definition falls into the second category of postcolonial sf I have identified: those texts that offer postcolonial critiques by re-writing the conventions of science fiction within autoethnographic frameworks. In these science fiction/autoethnographic narratives it is the alien figure that takes over narration in order to examine the consequences of colonialism as both epistemological and material project. In fact, the remainder of the postcolonial science fiction texts I examine in the dissertation fall into this secondary category, as they all have main characters who are in some way "alien" others.

Chapter three is the first example of what an autoethnographic/ postcolonial sf narrative might be. In this chapter I examine *The Windup Girl* (2010), *Saltfish Girl* (2002), and *The Bohr Maker* (1995), novels which all tell part of their narratives from the

perspective of a character who is not considered “human.” Furthermore, all three have non-white, central characters (the recurring tendency to racialize technological others will be explored in more detail in the following chapter). These texts therefore use the tools of science fiction—involving the “partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror” (Pratt 7)—to question and undermine several of the assumptions that underpin the genre. Like the figure of the alien that I examine in chapter two, chapter three examines a specific generic convention (technologically altered “others”) that is challenged by postcolonial science fiction. The chapter examines how postcolonial sf brings the sf trope of technological others into contact with real histories of racial segregation, just as McDonald’s text links the logic of sf’s colonial gaze to the imperialism of the United Nations.

Chapter four explores the techno-utopianism that often functions as neocolonial mechanisms in what Gilles Deleuze calls “societies of control.” While late twentieth century science fiction may not depict the explicitly racist frameworks of yellow peril sf or the colour-blind futures of colonial adventure narratives, contemporary sf can still reiterate colonial ideologies particularly when it exhibits a certain techno-optimism, or faith in technological solutions. Neill Blomkamp’s *Elysium* (2013) is an example of such techno-optimism, as the film proposes that increased access to technological resources (in this case advanced healthcare) will help improve quality of life for the world’s poor. By foregrounding technocratic solutions the film’s conclusion implies that global “development” will solve the environmental and social devastation in this dystopian world. This push towards development has been identified and increasingly critiqued by scholars such as John Rieder who see the ideology of progress as symptomatic of the

genre's close relationship to colonialism in which the "narrative logic of growth or development" is used to establish a binary and imperialist relationship between technologically advanced civilizations and "undeveloped," or primitive, civilizations (29). Importantly, this imperial dimension is not a characteristic of science fiction only because science fiction inevitably draws on contemporary technoscientific discourse. The resonance between the genre's ideology of progress and the imperialism that scholars such as Andrew Ross and Wolfgang Sachs identify as characteristic of current planetary management ideals is thus one that warrants further examination.<sup>6</sup>

According to Deleuze, societies of control operate through computers and constant technological evolution, an indication that means of production are no longer distinct spaces, privately or state owned. Instead, the multinational corporation replaces the factory, and the "coded figures" of stockholders and banks signal that "the operation of markets is now the instrument of social control and forms the impudent breed of our masters" (Deleuze 6). Sf not only reflects this shift towards societies of control but in many ways anticipates and contributes to its technological discourses. "The operation of markets" and "coded figures" of modernity are most clearly foregrounded in subgenres such as cyberpunk. Reflecting the space race in the 1960s and vast progress in computing technologies through the 1970s and 80s, cyberpunk such as Gibson's foundational *Neuromancer* (1984) and Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (1988) depict cyberspace as the battleground of humanity's future. As Deleuze notes, such "invisible" mechanisms of control are not necessarily ones of sf only and the shift to a corporate system marks new

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<sup>6</sup> See Ross's *Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits* (1991) and Sachs's *Planet Dialectics: Explorations in Environment and Development* (1999).

forms of domination. Thus, beginning with the emergence of cyberpunk in the 1970s and extending to the current explosion of films fascinated with artificial intelligence—such as Spike Jonze’s *Her* (2014), Wally Pfister’s *Transcendence* (2014), and Alex Garland’s *Ex Machina* (2015)—the genre’s increasing focus on information communication technologies is part of a larger cultural shift towards a “capitalism of higher-order production” (Deleuze 6).

Despite the supposed end of formal colonialism (indigenous communities in settler colonies such as Canada, the United States, and Australia might disagree), many of colonialism’s exploitative structures therefore continue under the emergence of a “technoscientific empire.” In the age of multinational capitalism, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues that, “[a]n invisible imaginary imperial regime takes shape, one for which national borders are secondary obstacles. It is an Enlightened empire of shared commitments to instrumentality, justified by its promise of an ever-greater rationality and material abundance in the future” (*Seven* 244). Csicsery-Ronay notes that this global regime is maintained by the colonial impulse of material expansion and technoculture (“SF and Empire” 236), and that sf performs a critical role in mediating the transition from “colonial expansion to global imperial power predicated on technological hegemony” (*Seven* 218). Such technological hegemony is therefore driven by the same ideology of progress (in this case in the name of “technological growth”) as early colonial narratives. Similarly, the expansion of information communication networks appears independent of overt political ideology despite affecting all of social life. In many ways Csicsery-Ronay’s work consolidates the work of other theorists concerned with late capitalism and the development of information communication technologies, including, for instance,

Donna Haraway's work on the "informatics of domination" (160) and Manuel Castells's articulation of a network society that results in the rise of a "Fourth World" excluded from access to technological resources—essentially, the have-nots of the information age. Several postcolonial sf texts (such as *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* which I explore in chapter four) foreground the ways the binary thinking of colonial ideology is translated into new forms of neo-colonial rule between developed/developing countries, the First/Third world, and the global North/South. In sf this ideological division reveals the troubling conclusion that those who are unable to afford the latest technological tools will be left behind.

This study concludes with an examination of postcolonial sf as expressing a transversal politics, attuned to both the socio-historical differences from which texts emerge as well as their shared commitment to a certain postcolonial ethics. It is also important to note that postcolonial texts are often read very differently by different reading communities; Pratt makes this point in *Imperial Eyes* noting that, "[a]utoethnographic texts are typically heterogeneous on the reception end as well, usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker's own social group, and bound to be received very differently by each" (Pratt 7). These different readings, however, are vital to the genre, as they exemplify the ways that "[d]ialogue, rather than fixity of location, becomes the basis of empowered knowledge" (Yuval-Davis 129). Some readings of Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*, for instance, critique the book for its reversion to Orientalist tropes. In chapter three, however, I challenge this reading by suggesting that the novel's portrayal of race relations is in fact more complex than simply reiterating East/West binaries. The dialogue generated between fans,

scholars, and science fiction communities is in fact central to the ethical commitment behind postcolonial sf, as it exemplifies my claim that postcolonial science fiction is a strategy of postcolonial experimentation. Postcolonial sf texts open up a space of negotiation not only within texts themselves but between reading communities who challenge each other's interpretations, practice a form of "listening respect," and seek to remain carefully attuned to the historical relations that define readers' situated locations as well as those locations from which texts emerge. This space of negotiation between reading communities is also the space I identify in chapter five as premised upon an ethics of relationality.

## CHAPTER ONE: Re-orienting Postcolonial Science Fiction

To begin this study of the relationship between science fiction (sf) and postcolonialism I will first examine the genre's relationship to colonialism. Such an examination is important because while there is much contemporary work that identifies imperial characteristics in sf narratives, there is less analysis that examines the relationship between colonialism and postcolonialism in sf. Furthermore, there are a wide-variety of meanings behind the term "postcolonial"; how one understands the relationship of sf to colonialism is thus crucial to understanding the role postcolonialism plays in the genre. Some scholars, such as Patricia Kerslake, for instance, see the relationship between genre and empire as fundamental to sf's very core. In *Science Fiction and Empire* (2007), Kerslake argues that "[t]he theme of empire...is so ingrained in SF that to discuss empire in SF is also to investigate the fundamental purposes of the genre itself" (191). For Kerslake, sf's close relationship to empire is a consequence of the incorporation of "the idea and ideals of power and imperialism" into early sf by authors who "lived in imperial times" (190). Empire as Kerslake sees it, is a trope of sf that is about the exploration of power and the construction of centre/periphery relations within sf texts.

However, Kerslake also argues that empire is not necessarily a problematic trope in that, "[t]he best way to understand empire as it has been treated in SF is to consider that it does not describe a Western cultural bias, as has often been assumed, but that it stems from a many-sided impulse to which any one of us might be prone" (191)—that is, the "many-sided impulse" of "power and imperialism" (190). According to this definition of empire, "Empire's intellectual presence is neither good nor bad, but neutral. Its

fictional peculiarities are dependent upon those actions by which the narrative defines its boundaries and policies” (191). Kerslake’s attempt to recuperate the potential value of sf and its imaginative/explorative capacities means that she ends her study with the troubling claim that empire is “neutral.” In order to avoid this pitfall, a more sustained analysis of the relationship between sf and colonialism is needed—specifically, one that offers a more comprehensive analysis of the structures of the genre itself and how these relate to, or draw on, colonial frameworks. It is only through identifying specific aspects of science fiction and their potentially imperial inclinations can we begin to, first, analyze the extent to which the genre is complicit in reiterating colonial tropes, and secondly, determine whether this colonial bias can be challenged without losing the utopian potential of the genre to imagine the world otherwise.

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr.’s work on “Science Fiction and Empire” and John Rieder’s seminal *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) offer important starting points for analyzing the genre’s relationship to colonialism. Both scholars argue that sf is necessarily a product of colonialism, though they emphasize different aspects of the genre’s emergence. Csicsery-Ronay emphasizes the importance of technological expansion, arguing that

the conditions for the emergence of sf as a genre are made possible by three factors: the technological expansion that drove real imperialism, the need felt by national audiences for literary-cultural mediation as their societies were transformed from historical nations into hegemons, and the fantastic model of achieved technoscientific Empire. (“Empire” 231)

For Csicsery-Ronay, sf as a form of “literary-cultural mediation” is informed by the imperial project of nation states as well as technological development as it expands and propels the consolidation of global capitalism. Csicsery-Ronay argues this ultimately

culminates in the context of contemporary “Empire,” and draws on Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s work in particular to argue that sf “has been driven by a desire for the imaginary transformation of imperialism into Empire, viewed not primarily in terms of political and economic contests...but as a technological regime that affects and ensures the global control system of de-nationalized communications” (232). Hardt and Negri’s notion of Empire is differentiated from Kerslake’s use of the term in that it characterizes a “new global form of sovereignty” (*Empire* xii) and a new form of global governance established by transnational organizations such as the United Nations. For Csicsery-Ronay, then, sf is a product of techno-culture, and its fantasies of “technoscientific empire” (236) that are propelled and produced by sf’s internal qualities, including the genre’s emphasis on technological expansion/development and imaginary world systems.

While Csicsery-Ronay’s analysis of empire in sf emphasizes the imperialist dimensions of technological expansion, in 2008 and 2009, scholars, fans, and authors expanded discussion about the genre’s relationship to empire by engaging in one of the largest online discussions to date over sf’s complicity in cultural appropriation and representation. Known as “RaceFail 09,” or “The Great Cultural Appropriation Debate of Doom,” these online discussions were ignited over a series of posts by white authors on the subject of using and writing about characters from different cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Though I cannot delve into the complex series of discussions that ensued, it is important to note that RaceFail 09 was symptomatic of discussions that had been ongoing in sf communities about the genre’s complicity in reiterating problematic racial

representations and the genre's acceptance of a diversity of authors' and fans' voices.<sup>7</sup> For instance, the debate around race, representation and genre soon expanded to include struggles within the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) over charges regarding recurring sexism in the organization and its magazine; debate in the SFWA, again, about the need for encouraging more diverse authors of colour; and escalating tension over the Hugo Awards which was accused of being a "white boys club" (each of these struggles have continued since their explosion in 2009, with the latest debate being over the 2014 Hugo Awards). RaceFail 09 and its ensuing debates therefore marked a cultural moment in which science fiction communities were particularly attuned to the genre's relationship with colonial ideologies. If Csicsery-Ronay's work offers the beginning of an attempt to map out sf's ideological and genealogical debt to imperialism, Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) is an explicit study of the relationship between the structures of the colonialism and the genre's foundational characteristics. Rieder's ground-breaking and in-depth study of early science fiction offers new ways for mapping out the relationship between sf and colonialism, and was particularly timely given the increased attention by fans, authors, and scholars alike to questions about diversity in the genre.

Rieder notes in his introduction to *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* that it is not a question of whether sf engages colonialism but rather how much and to what extent. Starting with Edward Said's claim in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that the novel (as an artifact of bourgeois society) and imperialism are "unthinkable"

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<sup>7</sup> For more information see in particular Sarah Gatson and Robin Reid's "Race and Ethnicity in Fandom" in *Transformative Works & Cultures*, volume 8 (2011), or Helen Young's *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (2015).

without each other, Rieder argues that the generic structure of science fiction and colonialism are also “unthinkable” without each other (3). Rieder argues that the relationship between sf and colonialism is most evident in the articulation of two frameworks at work in the genre: the colonial gaze and the ideology of progress manifest in sf narratives. Accordingly, Rieder’s study analyzes how “science fiction lives and breathes in the atmosphere of colonial history and its discourses, how it reflects or contributes to the ideological production of ideas about the shape of history, and how it might, in varying degrees, enact a struggle over humankind’s ability to reshape it” (3). For Rieder, sf emerges at the height of the imperial project—a time when “colonialism made space into time [and] gave the globe a geography not just of climates and cultures but of stages of human development that could confront and evaluate one another” (6). Colonialism, which Rieder takes to refer to the “entire process by which European economy and culture penetrated and transformed the non-European world” (25), results in not only the expansion of imperial power but the consolidation of global capitalist economy that solidifies discourses about anthropological difference. This anthropological difference is racial, cultural, as well as an evaluation of where societies stood in relation to the “stages of human development” (6), in which colonized countries were seen as less developed, primitive symbols of a past before industrialization.

The term “postcolonial science fiction” itself appears amidst critiques of the relationship between sf and colonialism, primarily in scholarly writing in the late 1990s and early 2000s with discussions of texts such as Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995). Even before Kerslake and Rieder’s study in 2002, for instance, a special issue of *Ariel* titled “Writing Back: Speculative Fiction and the Politics of

Postcolonialism” explicitly examined the intersection of genre and the field of postcolonial studies. A number of writers have since been identified as writing in this subgenre, including, for instance, Laruen Beukes, Nalo Hopkinson, Larissa Lai, and Ian McDonald. Arguably, however, it is not until the publication of Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan’s *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy* (2004) that postcolonial sf consolidates as a genre.

An anthology of science fiction, speculative fiction and fantasy by people of colour, *So Long Been Dreaming* follows a fairly general definition of postcolonialism. As previously noted, in her introduction to the anthology Hopkinson suggests that postcolonial sf are stories that take place from the perspective of the “colonizee” (9). Mehan, in his conclusion to the anthology, reflects further on the term “postcolonial” noting that while it might refer to people exclusively from previously colonized nations, as a noun

[p]ostcoloniality [also] includes those of us who are survivors—or descendants of survivors—of sustained, racial colonial process; the members of cultures of resistance to colonial oppression; the members of minority cultures which are essentially colonized nations within a larger nation; and those of us who identify ourselves as having Aboriginal, African, South Asian, Asian ancestry, wherever we make our homes (269).

For Mehan, postcolonial sf might therefore be considered the realm of exclusively non-white authors, even though he acknowledges the ways postcolonial sf also troubles the binaries of colonizer/colonizee by attending to complexities of such identity formations. Hopkinson and Mehan’s anthology initiated a timely discussion of the ways sf reiterates colonial tropes.

Following Rieder's study of the close relationship between sf and colonialism as well as Hopkinson and Mehan's anthology, a handful of scholarly studies emerged examining the specific field of "postcolonial science fiction." These include studies such as Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal's *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World* (2010) and Masood Ashraf Raja, Jason W. Ellis, and Swaralipi Nandi's *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction* (2011). As these two collections exemplify, however, understanding the term "postcolonial" in relation to the subgenre proved more difficult than anticipated. Jessica Langer's *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (2011) points this out clearly, noting that sf shares with the field of postcolonial literature an inclination towards unstable generic definitions and taxonomical ambiguity. Langer's own study attempts to avoid the multiple definitions of postcolonial sf offered in previous collections by identifying what Langer sees as a theoretical framework that unites the two fields: the structuring framework of the "Stranger" and the "Strange Land." In her analysis of the ways sf presents postcolonial critiques, Langer expands on Rieder's work and argues that the dual poles of the colonial gaze—or what she calls the use of the Stranger and the Strange Land framework—are central signifiers for sf as well as "the very same twin myths of colonialism" (3). This binary is thus also symptomatic of the Manichean relations that define colonial contexts, where a number of other ideological divisions emerge between conceptualizations of civilization and savagery, modernity and its past, and biological determination and cultural construction. For Langer, postcolonial sf challenges the structuring framework of the Stranger and Strange Land in that postcolonial sf "hybridizes them, parodies them, and/or mimics them against the grain in a play of

Bhabhaian masquerade” (3-4). Thus, Langer focuses primarily on examining the ways sf narratives conceptualize the identity of the “Other” and perpetuate, or challenge, colonial discourses, assumptions, and stereotypes.

Throughout her analysis, Langer often follows the work of Homi Bhabha by arguing that the power of narrative lies in its ability to aid in psychological decolonization. For instance, Rieder argues that the colonial gaze emerges in the ways sf narratives engage with difference and is often articulated through the text’s description of the “alien” body. Langer expands Rieder’s argument to consider racial difference specifically, suggesting that because the alien body is defined by its physical differences, the language sf uses to describe this human/alien difference inevitably dovetails with the discourse of colonialism where physical difference frequently connotes racial/cultural difference. Thus, Langer argues, postcolonial sf hybridizes this representation of the alien body in order to highlight the inherently exploitative nature of the colonial gaze. *District 9* (2010), for instance, re-writes the myths of sf by revealing the ways the story of alien colonization is also the story of the colonization and exploitation of people of colour. Langer argues that the film links the dehumanization of “prawns” to the dehumanizing effects of colonial rule and discourse. By foregrounding this relationship, the film also re-writes the histories of people of colour into the often white or colour-blind futures of sf. Though Langer never explicitly defines postcolonial sf except to say that it is science fiction generally concerned with interrogating the “twin myths” of colonialism (the Stranger and the Strange Land), her work performs the important function of critiquing the colonial gaze and its manifestations in sf narratives.

In contrast to Langer's primarily discursive approach, Eric D. Smith's *Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope* (2013) examines the ways postcolonial sf is a thoroughly historical genre that highlights the material conditions from which texts emerge. Smith sees sf as an extension of the modernist/utopian project in that he considers postcolonial sf as those texts emerging primarily from the so-called "Third World." Smith argues that postcolonial sf marks the decline of magical realism, a mode formerly attuned to the transition between "a precolonial past and a post-industrial present" (11); where magical realism thrived in the context of the transition from pre-capitalist societies to a post Second World War and post Bretton Woods context, Smith argues that the contemporary global context (premised on, and thoroughly saturated by, informational capitalism, multinational corporations, etc.) finds affinity with science fiction's spatial and historical concerns. Smith's analysis enables one to consider texts such as Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* (2010), as sf that reflects South Africa's transition from post-apartheid state to a nation transformed by its embrace of neoliberal policy and technoscientific empire. Unlike Langer's primarily discursive analysis of postcolonial sf texts, Smith's analysis is less concerned with the question of representation and focuses primarily on examining why a text like *Moxyland* appeals to the dystopian strain of sf in order to explore a near future corporate state set in South Africa. Such a materialist critique, for instance, considers the effects of Structural Adjustment Policies on countries in the global South, critiquing the ways such policies encouraged increased privatization, deregulation of human rights and social justice, and weakening social infrastructure. Ultimately, Smith is primarily interested in emphasizing the ways postcolonial sf enables a historical critique.

Though both are seminal works in the field and offer critical insights into the significance of postcolonial sf as a genre, the divide between Langer's and Smith's approaches represents a troubling bifurcation in science fiction studies. While Rieder's articulation of the two major frameworks that link sf and colonialism (the colonial gaze and ideology of progress) is of central importance for both Langer and Smith (as it will also be for my examination of postcolonial sf), the authors diverge in the focus of their analyses. Namely, Langer focuses mostly on a critique of the colonial gaze, while Smith focuses on the ways postcolonial sf critiques the ideology of progress. Langer's analysis represents a critical turning point in science fiction studies as it begins to fill in the "hole" she identifies as being a lack of scholarly attention given to representations of people of colour in the genre (1-2). Her study highlights the central role people of colour often play as literal and figurative "aliens" in science fiction. However, Langer's emphasis on what Charles Taylor calls a "politics of recognition" exemplifies her primarily discursive analysis. While Langer's approach is certainly useful, Smith also articulates an important critique of Langer's emphasis on discursivity and hybridity; namely, that emphasis on representation can elide the material and economic structures that also have direct impact on the relationship between science fiction and the "Third World." The division between their approaches is in fact indicative of a broader split in postcolonial studies often referred to as the discursive and materialist divide. This bifurcation is split by theoretical approaches to postcolonialism (such as those of Bhabha) and primarily Marxist oriented critiques of postcolonialism.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Disagreement over this division was recently re-ignited, for instance, with the publication of Chibber's *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* (2014).

Accordingly, the division between discursive and material approaches to understanding postcolonial sf represents a gap in the knowledge of what exactly postcolonial sf is and why it is significant. I see two main issues arising because of this gap in the knowledge and the struggle to define postcolonial sf: first, the discursive/materialist divide which characterizes most approaches to the subgenre is a consequence of uncertainty over how postcolonialism functions in the genre's title. Langer notes in her monograph that, like the definition of science fiction, postcolonialism is "notoriously problematic" to define (4), and though she acknowledges the various understandings of the term that contribute to a discursive/material divide, Langer does not provide an explicit definition of her own. Instead she notes that a nuanced understanding of the term requires acknowledgement of the various understandings of postcolonialism and decolonization, and that "[i]f decolonization is the process of disengaging from a colonizer then postcolonialism is the process by which a decolonizing society negotiates its identity apart from that of its colonizer, and apart from its identity as a colonized place or people, within the context of both colonial history and decolonized future" (9). Langer's use of the term thus leans heavily towards understanding postcolonialism as a counter-discourse that aids in the process of decolonization.

A second major problem, extending from the first, arises as a result of a gap in knowledge about what exactly postcolonial sf is: how does a postcolonial sf and its study avoid replicating the structure of the colonial gaze? Similarly, does defining postcolonial sf as a subgenre revert to idealistic and/or exploitative identity politics and curtail its subversive potential? Indeed, how we define both "postcolonialism" and "postcolonial

sf’ may boil down to how we approach this question. As briefly noted above, there are several other understandings of the term postcolonialism.

Rieder points out that in talking about science fiction from colonial contexts, there emerges yet another complexity that should be acknowledged between two different kinds of colonial societies: settler colonialism and dependent colonialism. For Rieder, even though the distinction between settler colonialism and dependent colonialism may overlap, “the crucial theoretical consequence to be drawn from recognizing the structural differences between the settler colony and the dependent one remains clear: the break represented by the historical passage from colonial to independent or ‘postcolonial’ society has an entirely different status in the two cases” (“Colonialism” 489). Thus, Rieder argues, the postcolonial moment signifies different processes of colonial continuity and discontinuity in different national contexts.

### **Why “postcolonial” science fiction?**

This dissertation seeks to establish science fiction as a critical framework for interrogating contemporary neocolonial structures. Specifically, I examine the ways an emerging subgenre of postcolonial science fiction provides valuable conceptual tools for imagining what postcolonial relations might look like in an era defined by globalization and multinational capitalism. By linking a critique of the genre’s colonial drive to the logic of advanced capitalism, postcolonial science fiction offers a critical lens through which to examine the continuation of contemporary neocolonial frameworks manifest through particular epistemological biases *and* material structures. For example,

postcolonial science fiction questions several of the assumptions that underpin science fiction, including the genre's colonial gaze, the appeal to an ideology of progress, focus on the future or the construction of an assumed cosmopolitan future, and an implicit faith in technological solutions or the inclination towards techno-optimism. Postcolonial science fiction links these generic qualities to the dominance of certain ideological frameworks in contemporary neoliberal culture, revealing the colonial underpinnings of both genre and the "real-world" socio-historical contexts from which genres emerge. Importantly, postcolonial science fiction is also constructivist, offering alternative epistemological frameworks for understanding our relationship to the future beyond colonial paradigms. Through the process of deconstructing and reconstructing sf's colonial assumptions, I view postcolonial science fiction produced from diverse national contexts as expressions of a transnational desire to understand such questions as: what do we need to do so that tomorrow is not characterized by the violence against others we exhibit today? Or, more specifically, how can we create new visions of "postcolonialism" that will materialize into more ethical practice? By explicitly foregrounding these questions postcolonial science fiction transforms the genre's world building into a *strategy of postcolonial experimentation* that strives to understand the complexity of problems facing diverse global communities. Postcolonial studies might also benefit from thinking through the lens of science fiction, where creative projects function as ethical experiments towards mapping out the possibilities of transnational affiliation. As this study emphasizes, I therefore see postcolonial science fiction as simultaneously a subgenre and a process, strategy, or mode of relation established between people committed to imagining less exploitative futures.

What is significant about defining postcolonial science fiction though? Why define this subgenre in particular, especially when sf scholars increasingly share the view that genres are permeable categories, or as Sherryl Vint and Mark Bould put it in relation to sf in particular, “there never was such a *thing* as science fiction” (43)? Vint and Bould argue that attempts to define the sf canon reveal more about what is at stake when specific communities argue for sf as a unified, singular construct (“There” 43). Instead, they argue that “genres are never, as frequently perceived, objects which already exist in the world and which are subsequently studied by genre critics, but fluid and tenuous constructions made by the interaction of various claims and practices by writers, producers, distributors, marketers, readers, fans, critics and other discursive agents” (“There” 48). Rieder expands on Vint and Bould, arguing in “Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History,” that sf studies has increasingly embraced an historical account of genre theory (191). He makes five propositions about how to understand sf in relation to a historical approach to genre:

- 1) sf is historical and mutable;
- 2) sf has no essence, so single unifying characteristic, and no point of origin;
- 3) sf is not a set of texts, but rather a way of using texts and of drawing relationships among them
- 4) sf’s identity is a differentially articulated position in an historical and mutable field of genres;
- 5) attribution of the identity of sf to a text constitutes an active intervention in its distribution and reception. (Rieder, “On” 193)

Though Rieder’s propositions pertain to science fiction in particular, they are also meditations on the nature of genre itself. As Vint, Bould, and Rieder insightfully point out, genres are “historical and mutable;” thus, if the category of “postcolonial science

fiction” consolidates in the early twenty-first century, attention must be given to asking *why* such a genre emerges and *what* its historical significance may be.

A historical approach to genre thus recognizes that genres “are in a constant, unending process of coming into being” (Vint and Bould, “There” 43). I adopt this view throughout my dissertation, and by extension contend that postcolonial science fiction in particular highlights the permeability of genres. Importantly, postcolonial science fiction also shares this perspective on genre as a result of its socio-political inclinations, as it mobilizes generic iconography as a strategy of resistance. By this I mean that postcolonial sf might best be conceptualized as a certain “mode of thought” (Csicsery-Ronay, *Seven* 3). Csicsery-Ronay provides an important framework for understanding sf as not just genre but also as a “mode of response that frames and tests experiences as if they were aspects of a work of science fiction” (*Seven* 2). By seeing sf as a way of thinking about events, or a “mode of response,” Csicsery-Ronay suggests genres are more than cultural texts—they are also “complex hesitation(s) about the relationship between imaginary conception and historical reality unfolding into the future” (*Seven* 4). Science fiction is therefore inevitably both a genre oriented toward futurity and a “genre of the moment,” in that it is a reflection *of* “the particular historical moment in which we find ourselves” (Bould and Williams 7) while reflecting *on* our socio-cultural developments (to paraphrase Darko Suvin’s now infamous definition of the genre). Csicsery-Ronay contends that this hesitation between historical reality and future possibility functions both as a structuring principle of science fiction and a contemporary mode of thought that frames experiences of the world in science-fictional terms.

A main focus of this study is therefore exploring the ways postcolonial science fiction—as part of its “mode of response” (Csicsery-Ronay, *Seven 2*)—questions several of the assumptions that underpin science fiction, including the genre’s colonial gaze, ideology of progress, focus on the “future” and the assumed cosmopolitan future of much sf, and implicit faith in technological solutions (or techno-optimism). Postcolonial sf questions these generic assumptions and traditions by remaining attuned to the differences that define radically different welfare needs for people in the global South, and it challenges the idea of a cosmopolitan “we” by highlighting, first and foremost, the need for continued attention to the lasting impacts of colonialism on current global politics. As regions in the global South grapple with the environmental and economic debt incurred through a history of resource depletion and exploitation by colonial regimes, postcolonial science fiction asks whose interests are served by erasing colonial histories in our imaginations of the future.

Erasing histories of colonial exploitation serves to not only deny the continuation of contemporary neocolonial structures, it also serves to deny our own culpability in reproducing these structures. As Bould points out, “by presenting racism as an insanity that burned itself out, or as the obvious folly of the ignorant and impoverished who would be left behind by the genre’s brave new futures, sf avoids confronting the structures of racism and its own complicity in them” (180). Postcolonial science fiction reminds us that the global North and South not only have different pasts and presents, but if we continue to ignore these fundamental differences, they will have different futures as well. As Susie O’Brien argues about future speculations and scenario planning, there is a “ludicrous quality [to] future speculations that fail to take account of the historical

violence that undergirds the present and, by extension, the place from which speculation unfolds” (3). There is a certain epistemic violence as well as material violence that is propagated through visions of the future that erase global differences in economic, social, and fundamental human rights. This violence and inequality will continue to define the future if left unacknowledged.

Though this dissertation focuses primarily on those global regions subject to dependent colonialism as differentiated from settler colonies (such as Australia, Canada, and the United States), I contend that in the era of multinational capitalism and globalization, many of the structures of dependent colonialism inevitably affect settler colonies as well. Admittedly, what “globalization” means in contemporary theoretical discourse is highly controversial. Definitions of the term range from ideas about an increasingly technologically “networked” society (Castells), to theories that emphasize new cultural flows and increased hybridity (Bhabha; Appadurai), the development of a new stage of capitalism (Jameson), to theorizations of a shift in global power relations and the emergence of a new order of sovereignty (Hardt and Negri), to name but a few examples. My use of the term leans more towards Hardt and Negri’s argument that our contemporary moment is defined by “the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another” (*Empire*, xiii). Throughout this dissertation, then, I take globalization to mean the social, cultural, political, and economic forces, which, while still influenced by the boundaries of nation states, also simultaneously flow between them.

Indeed, postcolonial sf is distinguished by its recognition of both the forces of globalization and a recognition of the very real border struggles in specific geo-political

contexts. It is for this reason, for instance, that we cannot condense all “non-Western” sf into one category, since the power relations that define different nation states are still a significant determining factor of the borders and boundaries that exist. While readings of postcolonial sf are necessarily local and particular, mapping out shared structures of power and shared structures of feeling is an attempt to draw out the utopian dimension of science fiction. Postcolonial sf therefore also opens up a space to participate in the utopian project Fredric Jameson identifies as a “cognitive mapping,” which not only outlines the dynamics of late capitalism but also attempts to “think this development positively and negatively all at once; to achieve, in other words, a type of thinking that would be capable of grasping the demonstrably baleful features of capitalism along with its extraordinary and liberating dynamism simultaneously within a single thought” (*Postmodernism* 47). This utopian impulse can be found simultaneously in postcolonial sf’s narrative structure, adaptation of colonial tropes from early sf, and diverse reading communities.

Furthermore, readings that are cognitive maps of postcolonial sf’s relationship to globalization can actively engage in the process of connecting shared lived experiences against capitalism’s tendency towards increased divisiveness, or against its tendency to obscure the connection between cultural and economic spaces. By “increased divisiveness” I do not necessarily mean class division, nor do I mean the social/ethical divisions that arise between different groups of people. Rather, I refer to the claims of theorists such as Jameson and Georg Lukács regarding the limitations of language and critique to analyze “a social totality which can never be fully represented” (Jameson, “Aesthetics“, 102). Because of this limitation, for Jameson the danger of the world

“culture” and analysis of cultural products is that it “presupposes some separate semi-autonomous space in the social totality which can be examined by itself and then somehow reconnected with other spaces, such as the economic” (“Aesthetics” 102). The separation between aesthetics and historical analysis can thus elide addressing the shared “social totality” that inevitably permeates both and defines our contemporary moment: the shared condition of global capitalism as a mode of production.

Jameson argues that “any ontology of the present needs to be an ideological analysis as well as a phenomenological description; and...it needs to be historical as well as historically and economically comparatist” (“Aesthetics” 101). Postcolonial sf functions as a cognitive map because it refuses to divide aesthetic analysis from historical analysis. By doing so, postcolonial sf also generates a sense of non-individuality and collective being in the face of global capitalism which unifies even as it divides us. Generating this sense of collectiveness might carry the very stirrings of Lukács’s “class consciousness” in which “[t]he superior strength of true, practical class consciousness lies in the ability to look beyond the divisive symptoms of the economic process to the unity of the total social system underlying it. In the age of capitalism it is not possible for the total system to become directly visible in external phenomena” (Lukács 74).

Postcolonial sf not only maps out the shared conditions of late capitalism across nation states, it also recognizes that there are certain historical differences (in processes of colonization, for instance) that will affect how exactly nation states experience globalization. Postcolonial sf therefore acknowledges the complex dynamic between shared conditions and divergent local histories while still advocating for a common postcolonial ethic across national boundaries. In many ways, then, postcolonial sf shares

affinities with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's notion of "feminism without borders." That is, postcolonial sf is not "border-less" in the sense that it "acknowledges fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent" (2). However, postcolonial sf also "acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border, that the lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities are real" (2). Re-writing Mohanty's claim for a transnational feminist politic, I would thus argue that postcolonial sf posits that "a [postcolonialism] without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division" (2). Postcolonial sf performs this very task by acknowledging both historical difference and attempting to link diverse structures of power that affect global socio-political struggles. By negotiating this dialectic between the local and global dynamic of power, postcolonial sf suggests the need for a more comprehensive mapping of the commonalities and differences in experiences of empire.

Throughout this study, I suggest that some of the qualities postcolonial sf shares include an emphasis on the materiality of thought, an orientation towards mapping local struggles onto global movements, and a desire to foster alliances opposed to the logic of predatory capitalism. These qualities are examined in the project's four main chapters which consider recurring themes in postcolonial science fiction, such as critique of the genre's colonial gaze, the ideology of progress, the erasure of processes of racialization, and the appeal to techno-utopian futures. The desire to foster alliances across national boundaries emerges from these critiques, and it is an expression of an ethics of relationality that I suggest all the postcolonial sf texts explored here exemplify. Indeed, I argue that the most significant feature of postcolonial sf is a shared ethical commitment

to mapping the commonalities and differences in experiences of empire. As part of this study, then, I examine works situated in such diverse places as Thailand (Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*), Mexico (Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer*), and South Africa (Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*).

Postcolonial sf does not just critique colonialism and neocolonial structures, it also seeks to enact alternatives. The texts explored here make clear that material and discursive critiques are necessarily intertwined because of the ways in which they rewrite the structure of the genre internally through its semantic/syntactic structure and externally through its publishing practices as well as writing and reading communities. Performing the postcolonial ethos that the genre advocates for requires acknowledging and redressing its failures to include people of colour, actively confronting epistemological violence, challenging exploitative practices, and attempting to form a community ethic invested in understanding what exactly "postcoloniality" might mean for a global sf community. Postcolonial sf cannot only transform how we see postcolonialism, it must also transform how we understand science fiction and our visions of future progress. Separately, the terms "postcolonial" and "science fiction" are problematic and difficult to define, but together they may create a new site of knowledge that asks us to think simultaneously about the continuum of history and what links past violences (postcolonial) to future alternatives (science fiction). Postcolonial theory might therefore also benefit from thinking through the lens of science fiction, where creative projects function as ethical experiments towards mapping out the futures of transnational affiliation. Indeed, such creative projects are already underway, of which postcolonial science fiction is but one example.

While postcolonialism has often been conceptualized as a process or strategy of critique, doing so in the context of science fiction is particularly important as it requires scholars and critics to retain a self-reflexive lens necessary to avoid replicating structures of the colonial gaze. Defining postcolonial sf as a uniquely modern endeavour, for instance, risks privileging Eurocentric histories of science fiction that see “Western” sf as the genre’s centre and “Other” sf as peripheral responses. Indeed, Uppinder Mehan, in an early essay on Indian sf, points to the Orientalism of this approach; Mehan, somewhat satirically posits that, “Sf is as Western as Coca-Cola, big cars, and computers” and that “in the Orientalist scheme the West is rational and scientific; the East mystical and fantastic” (54). Certainly our contemporary understanding of popular science fiction comes primarily from examining Anglophone traditions sf. However, other writers and scholars have challenged the assumption that sf was not being written in the global South at the same time as its popularization in North America and Europe. In a post on the publication of the anthology *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers* (2013), for instance, author Tade Thompson was asked about the significance of “bringing the genre of science fiction to Africa” (Omenana 30). Thompson responded by noting that

one should be careful when using the phrase ‘bringing the genre’ to Africa. It’s always been here, and I’m not just talking about folk tales based on Malian cosmology. Our folk tales, our proverbs, our art, our culture, all of it has science fictional elements. We have just been trained to only see a certain kind of science fiction which is mainly of Western origin. We need to be taught to see, to grow new eyes and new minds. We also need to look back to history that is not told from the perspective of those who colonized us. (30-1)

While I cannot address the possibility of alternate histories of science fiction outside of the North America/European contexts that are traditionally associated with the popularization of the genre, Thompson’s statement usefully points to the need to be

aware of replicating colonial assumptions about the development of science fiction in non-Western contexts.

Embarking on a project of this magnitude is challenging since understanding postcolonial sf as an ethic or process necessitates careful and nuanced readings of texts from diverse regions. This study is therefore not an attempt to map postcolonial sf in its totality; rather, I only hope to offer an outline of the shared socio-historical conditions and ethical commitments expressed in postcolonial sf. As such, I have restricted myself to texts from a few geographic regions, delving into their local histories and global dynamic as much as I can within the context of my arguments. Furthermore, though I acknowledge the multiple definitions of postcolonialism that may inform the genre and its ethics, there are certain definitions which I do not engage with because of the nature of the genre. First, postcolonialism here is not aligned with the field of subaltern studies, as all of the texts I examine are written in English. Significantly, this allows postcolonial sf to participate in and simultaneously challenge the hegemonic structures of a genre that has predominately been associated with North American and European contexts. Sofia Samatar suggests in a roundtable with science fiction authors on the topic of “Different Frontiers: Taking Over English,” that perhaps the use of English in postcolonial texts is critical to the genre’s critique of colonialism. When moderator Benjanun Sriduankaew notes that the postcolonial sf anthology *We See a Different Frontier* (2013) is written in English and that “this is seen as ironic in light of the anthology’s theme,” Samatar responds by noting, “I don’t see anything ironic about it. English is a global language *because* of colonialism. How is it ironic to address postcolonial issues in English—a language of oppression and resistance, of loss and survival—a postcolonial language?”

(Sriduangkaew). As Samatar points out, the use of English in postcolonial sf in no way detracts from the genre's counter-narratives, and is rather a testament to the enduring effects of colonialism and globalization as well as the potential for resistance even while using the 'master's tools' (to paraphrase Audre Lorde). Samatar acknowledges that different languages might better express different "worlds" or national contexts; however, the "existence of these worlds does not erase the world which English expresses with terrible accuracy: a postcolonial world in which many people (myself among them) who wish desperately that they could write in another language, in their 'own' language, cannot do it" (Sriduangkaew). Future research might examine postcolonial sf in translation, but this project focuses solely on texts written in English as they directly respond to a history of Anglo-phone science fiction.

Furthermore, though I have already suggested this, it is worth repeating that postcolonialism as used in this study does not refer to the end of formal colonialism, nor does it imply that all nation-states are politically independent from western powers. It would be hard to argue for the end of formal colonialism from the perspective of Indigenous peoples in countries such as Canada, the United States, and Australia. In these geographic regions, Rieder contends that settler colonialism continues as both physical occupation and social reformation. The dependent colonialism that defines the majority of previously colonized countries in Africa, South Asia, South East Asia, and South America occurs primarily through the economic dependency of the Third World, solidified after the end of the Second World War during the supposed "decolonization" of many of the nation-states within these geographic areas. Seeing dependent colonialism as functioning first through formal colonization and secondly through economic and

political dependency, post-colonization also aligns postcolonial studies with the emerging field of critical globalization studies.

As a study that aims to reorient the discursive/material divide of postcolonial approaches to sf, this dissertation takes a historical and cultural studies approach in viewing texts as symptomatic of wider socio-political conditions. Accordingly, this study examines both science fiction literature and film. While each medium expresses its own unique sf qualities (film requires additional attention to sound, *mise en scène*, costuming, etc.), I also contend that postcolonial sf shares qualities that traverse specific literary and film characteristics. Though postcolonial sf film may offer unique, medium-specific characteristics, in this dissertation I am only able to and interested in establishing the similarities between film and literary postcolonial sf. Exploring their similarities is beneficial for a number of reasons—notably, if postcolonial sf can be seen as an ethic that traverses both film and literature, we might begin to think of the genre in terms of Henry Jenkins’s notion of “convergence culture.”

It is also important to state here, if only briefly, that postcolonial sf as I see it in this study does not seek to replace Indigenous science fiction, or related fields such as Afrofuturism and Latinofuturism. Rather, postcolonial sf is an attempt to map affinities between these diverse fields, seeing this as a necessary practice for thinking about the relationship between dominant traditions in sf (American and European) in relation to “non-Western” sf or sf that represents non-Western places and characters. Doing so is not to proliferate difference for the sake of profit, or to paraphrase Sandra Harding ‘add people of colour and stir’ in science fiction, but to find spaces of affinity beyond a representational politics. Giving voice and/or visibility to marginalized communities is

crucial but it is not enough—defining postcolonial sf as an ethic and strategy of resistance requires the interrogation of entangled systems of colonial epistemologies, capitalism, militarism, and scientific rationalism in order to map the terrain of our current inequalities. In order to construct more sustainable futures and just communities, we must think of relational encounters in their complexity, rather than through the lens of dichotomous relations between colonial/postcolonial, West/East, or global South/global North only.

## CHAPTER TWO: From Colonial Gaze to the Logic of Advanced Capitalism

This chapter begins to outline how postcolonial science fiction draws attention to the colonial underpinnings of sf's central tropes. Building on Rieder's argument about science fiction and colonialism, this chapter will start with an historical analysis of the emergence of sf in order to highlight the ways colonial ideologies are foundational to the genre's images and tropes before proceeding to examine two texts that are exemplary of the ways postcolonial sf deconstructs the genre's colonial drive. In a section titled "Decolonizing Science Fiction's Monsters," I will expand on Rieder's identification of the colonial gaze and ideology of progress as fundamental to the relationship between colonialism and sf using Rick Altman's definition of genre as defined by semantic and syntactic structures. Altman's foundational work on genre is in film; however, his approach is particularly useful to science fiction, because separating semantic from syntactic structures can reveal how science fiction's images (both in literature and cinema) are invested in ideological frameworks. Furthermore, separating the semantic and syntactic structures of film enables a more comprehensive examination of the ways postcolonial sf uses the images of sf while challenging its narrative (and colonial) structure.

Alien invasion narratives are a particularly useful medium through which to explore the semantic/syntactic dimension of science fiction as the figure of the alien operates within a particular ideological and epistemological framework established by the colonial gaze. Accordingly, I will examine two alien invasion narratives in this chapter: Gareth Edwards *Monsters* (2010) and Ian McDonald's first two *Chaga* books (1995-97). Both texts take place at "contact zones" and both focus on the gaze of the "colonizer" in

that their main protagonist is not originally from the countries where these aliens land. Furthermore, the protagonists in both texts are linked to the media: in *Monsters*, Andrew Kaulder is a photojournalist and in *Evolution's Shore* (1995) Gaby McAslan is a journalist. The similarities between these texts will help make clear the operation of the colonial gaze in sf, as well as the way both these texts begin the process of unravelling the colonial gaze of their protagonists. Additionally, though neither Edwards nor McDonald's texts articulate the explicit racism that Rieder identifies as endemic to early science fiction, they do articulate the presence of the colonial gaze in contemporary socio-cultural relations through the exploitative logic of advanced capitalism. Rieder asserts a relationship between sf and racism such that, "[t]he interdependence and permeability between the fictional narratives and the social discourses and circumstances in which they circulate makes the presence of racism in early science fiction inevitable" (97); however, I would extend Rieder's claim by pointing out that by reflecting current socio-economic relations, contemporary science fiction reveals the 'inevitably' exploitative logic of advanced capitalism (and racialized capitalism). Ultimately, I argue that Ian McDonald's *Chaga* trilogy and Gareth Edwards' *Monsters* (2010) link a critique of the colonial gaze in sf to the exploitative logic of advanced capitalism, revealing the ways in which despite the supposed end of formal colonialism, many of colonialism's exploitative structures continue under a contemporary technoscientific empire.

## Decolonizing Science Fiction's Monsters

Previous scholars have started their analysis of postcolonialism in science fiction from different premises of “colonialism.” Scholars such as Jessica Langer emphasize the figure of the “other” in colonial ideology and the power of narrative in psychological colonization and subsequently decolonization. Langer focuses primarily on examining the ways sf narratives conceptualize the identity of the “Other” and perpetuate, or challenge, colonial discourses, assumptions, stereotypes, etc. Langer’s emphasis on the discursive structures of colonial narratives draws attention to the ways sf tropes such as the alien, the invasion narrative, and the figure of the “stranger in a strange land” functions as central signifiers of the colonial ideology at the heart of the genre. Langer’s discursive approach can therefore be seen as following the semantic/syntactic paradigm of genre theory offered by Rick Altman. Altman argues that the semantic elements which constitute a genre include “traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets, and the like,” while the “constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable placeholders...might be called the genre’s fundamental syntax” (10). In other words, “The semantic approach thus stresses the genre’s building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged” (10). Though Langer never explicitly outlines this, *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* suggests that by altering the syntactic structure (the narrative relationship between colonizer and colonizee) of familiar semantic elements (aliens, stranger, etc.), postcolonial sf functions as a form of decolonization. While Langer’s text usefully outlines the semantic elements of colonialism upon which sf concerned with postcolonialism draws, her exploration of the particular syntactic structures of colonialism in sf narratives is limited.

As previously mentioned, however, John Rieder provides an insightful and telling analysis of the syntactic structures of science fiction as they exemplify particular colonial frameworks. Rieder contends that two generic frameworks in particular exemplify sf's close relationship to colonialism: sf's "colonial gaze" and sf's ideology of progress. Importantly, these two frameworks are central to both the genre's internal logic and the exploitative structures of empire. Sf's colonial gaze is one of the genre's most recognizable conventions, and manifests narratively as a fascination with the exotic that is frequently constructed through the binary division between technologically superior observers/scientists and "native" or alien inhabitants. Where the colonial gaze in Victorian adventure fiction is revealed through the gaze of the traveller upon "exotic" natives (as Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness*, for instance), the colonial gaze in sf translates to the binary division between human/non-human (alien or posthuman) others. This is most evident in early sf focused on scientific travellers such as H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) or Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). By constructing this dichotomy, narrative voice and power is given to the (white, male) observer while those positioned as alien "others" are often denied the same voice or character complexity; as Rieder says, the cognitive framework of the colonial gaze in sf "distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at" (7). Langer's work expands on Rieder, particularly when she argues that the dual poles of the colonial gaze—or what she identifies as use of the "Stranger" and the "Strange Land" motif—are central signifiers for sf as well as "the very same twin myths of colonialism" (3). This binary (between stranger and strange land or self and other) is thus also symptomatic of the Manichean relations that define colonial

contexts, where a number of other ideological divisions emerge between conceptualizations of civilization and savagery, modernity and its past, and biological determination and cultural construction.<sup>9</sup>

Gareth Edward's *Monsters* is an exemplary critique of the problematic assumptions and power structures that underline the division between alien "others" and human protagonists in sf. As a film, *Monsters* not only highlights the ideological construction of the "other," it is also a visual representation of how the colonial gaze functions as spectacle through the film's visual fascination with difference, or the "exotic." The film explains that six years earlier NASA had discovered the possibility of life beyond Earth; as NASA's capsule returns to Earth for examination, the capsule, which contained samples of the foreign organism, crashed over Mexico, which has now been populated by alien creatures and labelled an "infected zone." Andrew Kaulder is a photographer from the US who comes to Mexico to document the aliens and further his career. Mid-mission, however, he is charged with escorting his boss's daughter, Samantha Wynden, out of Mexico and safely back to the US. The film follows their trials in attempting to cross the infected border zone, which is highly militarized and supposedly dangerous. Kaulder and Samantha, both intimately connected to the media industry in the US, exemplify the colonial gaze of sf as it documents the violence and tragedy of creature attacks in Mexico. Like McDonald's novels, *Monsters* is told from the perspective of its human characters, and thus "distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks [US media], while denying or minimizing access to power for its

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<sup>9</sup> See JanMohamed's "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature."

object, the one looked at [the alien and the Mexico]" (Rieder 7). Importantly, the film makes clear that not only are Kaulder and Samantha observing the creatures, they are also observing the "foreign" culture they have found themselves in. Kaulder is shown incessantly photographing all aspects of Mexican culture; as a journalist looking to sell his pictures and profit from them, we know that these pictures will become part of the media representation of the "disaster" in Mexico. Hinting at Kaulder's complicity in a form of disaster capitalism, Samantha asks Kaulder, "Doesn't that kind of bother you? That you need something bad to happen to profit from it?" (*Monsters*).

However, *Monsters* soon begins to undermine the power dynamic established through the colonial gaze. As Kaulder and Samantha travel closer to the infected zone, they discover that more damage has been rendered by the American military in an attempt to supposedly "protect" Mexico than the damage that has been caused by the creatures themselves. Stumbling upon a memorial site lit with candles dedicated to the "5,000 dead" because of military bombings, Kaulder and Samantha are shocked into silence. The film lingers on a wall in particular that poses the question, "Que son los monstruos? [Who are the monsters?] No bombing" (*Monsters*). Up to this point, the images of the aliens that we have been shown on televisions in the film have depicted the creatures as violent aliens. This wall, however, stops the film (as well as Kaulder and Samantha) in its track, reorienting the colonial gaze to suggest that Mexico has not been "invaded" by the creatures but by a hyperviolent American military that is far more destructive. In fact, as Kaulder and Samantha travel deeper into the quarantined zone, they are told that the creatures are not naturally aggressive: "If you don't bother them, they don't bother you," says one of their guides (*Monsters*). Their guides explain that it is

actually the “American planes” (*Monsters*) that make the creatures angry and violent, and that they are otherwise peaceful beings. By depicting contact between the creatures and US military as one characterized by violence and struggle over power and territory, *Monsters* questions the “discursive framework of scientific truth, moral certitude, and cultural hegemony” (Rieder 10) that the colonial gaze attempts to establish in sf. The film asks not just *how* the “other” is depicted but for what scientific, political, and ideological purpose? These questions become more evident as Kaulder and Samantha begin to question their own assumptions about the nature of the creatures and the hegemony of the US military.

As *Monsters* exemplifies and as Rieder points out, the construction of the “other” through the colonial gaze also enables a critique of the self, or the observer. Hence, the “strange destinations of [foreign] voyages now also referred to a centuries-old project of cognitive appropriation, a reading of the exotic other that made possible, and perhaps even necessary, a rereading of oneself” (Rieder 6). This moment of using the “other” to understand oneself is made clear in *Monsters* when Kaulder and Samantha stand on the Mexican side of the border and stare at the immense wall built by the US to protect its borders. In a self-reflective moment, Kaulder notes, “You know, it’s different looking at America from the outside...in” (*Monsters*). Paradoxically, it is by contact with the “other” (both the creature and cultural other) in acts of appropriation that Kaulder is able to begin to critique the ideologies of American militarization and neoliberal exploitation.

Like the dialectic between Kaulder and the creatures in *Monsters*, Rieder uses H.G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1927) as an example of the oscillation between a “fantasy of appropriation” and its critique (6). Wells’s text famously depicts a Martian

invasion of Earth, requiring the reader to imagine themselves in the position of the colonized rather than colonizer as would be typical of most adventure fiction.

Importantly, Rieder notes that while Wells's texts plays with a "reversal of positions" in which (white) humans are now the colonized and Martians the colonizers, this framework still "stays entirely within the framework of the colonial gaze" as "the 'native' human narrator himself occupies not only the position of the dominated, dehumanized colonial subject, but also that of the scientific observer" (10). The narrator is still a human observer, and it is his voice that tells the story of the Martian invasion, not the voice of the aliens. Wells's narrative, however, also "estranges the colonial gaze by reversing the direction of the gaze's anachronism," and though it does not "demystify the colonial gaze by bringing it into contact with history as autoethnography would," it does set "the hierarchical difference between observer and observed swinging...with each swing potentially questioning and recoding the discursive framework of scientific truth, moral certitude, and cultural hegemony" (Rieder 10). In other words, Wells's text critiques the colonial gaze by reversing the positions of colonizer/colonized, revealing the ideological values traditionally attributed to each side of this binary.

McDonald's novels and *Monsters* function in much the same vein—though they perform postcolonial critiques of the colonial gaze and ideology of progress through sf, they ultimately fall within the framework of colonial gaze because the alien "others" of these narratives are never given a voice or do not take over the role of narrator/scientific observer. *Evolution's Shore*, for instance, focuses on a white, relatively privileged woman from the global North and her experiences with the alien Chaga, thus the book stays within the framework of the colonial gaze by oscillating between a (white scientist)

human versus alien dialectic. The same could be said about *Monsters*, which focuses on two white main characters who have found themselves the “aliens” in a foreign land. Both McDonald’s *Chaga* saga and *Monsters* are therefore exemplary of the first category of postcolonial texts I have identified as those that use the semantic structures (the figure of the alien, or Chaga) as well as the syntactic structures (the colonial gaze) of the genre in order to examine the extent to which science fiction is complicit in reiterating the structures of colonialism. For this reason, I see these texts as offering a critique of the genre’s colonial semantics/syntactic structure while still operating within a colonial framework.

Importantly, McDonald’s *Chaga* novels and Edwards’s *Monsters* ultimately do “demystify the colonial” by bringing their narratives into contact with specific socio-political histories (Kenya and Central America, respectively) a move that I believe enables them to be considered postcolonial sf. Though they are not “autoethnographic expressions” from the perspective of the people whose lands have actually been invaded or from the perspective of the aliens themselves, both the *Chaga* novels and *Monsters* do begin the process of unravelling the epistemic violence supported through our cultural imaginations of the “other.” Self-representation, while fundamentally important in its own right, is not necessarily the only means of critique. As Rey Chow argues in regards to gender and representation, “self-representation also raises once again the most tenacious problems of representation itself” in that “representation, even representation of the self, would always need to come to terms with those elements of heterogeneity that render the ‘self’ opaque rather than transparent” (46). In other words, Chow argues that the self inevitably becomes “other” in such representations revealing that, “In spite of

being imagined as the ultimate source of knowledge, the self does not necessarily ‘know’ itself and cannot be reduced to the realm of rational cognition” (46).

Chow suggests that representation is always complicit in and entails privilege and inequality (47). Thus, an individual’s experience is not always, and perhaps should not be seen as, representative of a group. I make this point for two purposes: first, to suggest, as I did in the previous paragraph, that McDonald’s *Chaga* novels and Edwards’s *Monsters* can still be considered part of the subgenre of postcolonial sf even though both authors are from Western, relatively privileged backgrounds. Secondly, I address the issue of representational politics as an attempt to think beyond identity politics in sf authors, as well as an attempt to recognize that encouraging a diversity of voices in the field—again, while critical, necessary, and fundamental to a postcolonial sf—is not enough. Simply encouraging diversity might in fact replicate the structures of the colonial gaze by painting non-Western authors as “exotic” voices to be exploited by the industry. Consideration of what constitutes a postcolonial sf needs to be more attuned to both the question of narrative representation and material practice. The increased call for diverse authors in science fiction is not only a question of representation, but a question of the structures of sf organizations that have proved unwelcoming or have not actively encouraged the participation of people of colour.

To conclude this journey of “decolonizing” sf, we might return to an examination of the second framework that structures both science fiction and colonialism: the ideology of progress. For Rieder, this second framework is the most defining feature of the relationship between sf and colonialism, as “science fiction addresses itself to the ideological basis of colonial practice itself, by engaging various aspects of the ideology

of progress” (30). Following Jameson’s work, Rieder sees progress as a form of social memory required by capitalism and expressed through narratives about social development, growth and expansion (Rieder 29). In sf, when narratives focus primarily on technological development, such focus can often eschew political charges by appealing to the idea of “scientific progress” and global development. However, as Rieder points out, early sf reveals the ways scientific projects are also driven by a colonial ideology of progress, as underpinning even “the most legitimate scientific endeavor” is also the “common assumption that the relation of the colonizing societies [seen as more technologically advance] to the colonized ones is that of the developed, modern present to its own undeveloped, primitive past” (30). Sf’s focus on an evolved future exemplifies the same logic as the imperial expansionist project in its vision of “growth,” expansion, and the building of new worlds. As will be explored in more detail below, this future orientation is a means for creating imperialist relations (through the continued exploitation of the global South for the development of the North, for instance) but it can also function as a site of resistance towards imagining alternative futures. How sf narratives engage with the ideology of progress is thus important to considering the extent to which sf engages with the principles of colonialism.

### **Nomadic Figurations: Reorienting the Colonial Gaze in Ian McDonald**

The back cover of Ian McDonald’s *Evolution’s Shore* (1995)—published as *Chaga* in the UK—describes the arrival of the Chaga in Kenya as “an alien infestation” in which “the Dark Continent becomes a frenzied backdrop of apocalyptic anticipation.”

The references to Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) are both troubling and appropriate. Charles Marlowe's anxieties about, and often racist treatment of, African identity are manifest in his "suspicion of their not being inhuman" (100) and the double negative of Marlowe's diction (not inhuman). Indeed, Marlowe's statement reveals what Homi Bhabha describes as "the agonistic struggle between the epistemological, visual demand for a knowledge of the Other, and its representation in the act of articulation and enunciation" (72). Bhabha suggests it is in this space of designation and disavowal that questions of identity arise. As an alien invasion narrative, McDonald's CHAGA trilogy—*Evolution's Shore*, *Kirinya* (1997), and *Tendeléo's Story* (2000)—examines the relationship between human and alien others in order to confront questions of subjectivity, identity, and alterity. Specifically, the CHAGA trilogy highlights how locating difference in a negative dialectical scheme supports the historical and material exploitation of people labeled racial, gendered, and sexualized others. When the Chaga lands on Earth, it colonizes the Kenyan landscape; yet it is the violent global response to this "disaster" of difference (led by the United States and the United Nations) that is the most shocking consequence of the alien encounter. Meanwhile, the Chaga is revealed to be a symbiotic rather than vampiric organism. McDonald's novels destabilize the colonial gaze of sf in order to critique persisting imperial structures and the epistemological traditions that enable them.

To briefly outline the plot of *Evolution's Shore*, the novel begins as one of several Chaga packages headed towards Earth lands in Kenya. Its origins are unknown and all scientists can conclude about the alien is that it is a vegetative life-form that incorporates the genetic material of plants, animals, and humans into its neurological network,

creating new symbiotic organisms from this collected DNA. The Chaga is not harmful to any organism it comes into contact with, and in fact supports those living inside its forest-like structure by creating new foods and vegetation. A reverse-terraforming of Kenya's physical landscape occurs as the forest spreads, transforming the land and communities it touches. Humans in contact with, or living in, the Chaga may also be physically altered and are known as "Changed" humans. As the Chaga grows, animals and humans begin to take refuge inside the alien forest to escape social persecution, poverty, and political constraint. The UN responds to this alien "threat" by restricting access to the Chaga and attempting to contain and kill it. The UN's supposedly benevolent assistance in Kenya, however, is soon revealed to be a means of exercising the organization's particular brand of humanism. In order to control and maintain strict boundaries between the Chaga and Kenyan people, the UN often uses violence and force against those they claim to protect.

Gaby McAslan is a journalist and the novel's protagonist. Born and raised in Northern Ireland, she is drawn to the Chaga because "[h]ere was the way to make the world know her name. Her star with her name on it" (*Evolution's* 26). Her obsession with the Chaga eventually leads to a job with SkyNet News in Kenya where her desire to discover the mystery of the Chaga's origins means that Gaby often resorts to shady dealings to obtain further information, regardless of the consequences to the people around her. Eventually Gaby does uncover a mystery in the Chaga—namely, that the UN's efforts in Kenya are not sincere attempts to assist the country because their research is partially funded by biotech companies working to harvest information from Chaga spores. The UN's focus on the alien as threat means that they ignore the economic and social realities of Kenya as its people attempt to cope with the realities of AIDS, poverty,

and the information revolution. This section will focus on the first two novels of the series, *Evolution's Shore* and *Kirinya*, which center on Gaby and her daughter, Serena. While *Tendeléo's Story* is set in the same world, it is primarily an alternate history of the Chaga landing presented through the narrative of a young Kenyan woman.

*Kirinya* takes place fifteen years after the Chaga first lands on Earth. Gaby now lives in exile in the Chaga because Serena is born a Changed child and both are prohibited from leaving Chaga regions. Meanwhile, the Chaga has grown to cover the entire southern hemisphere of Earth, dividing it into two halves along the equator, a partition that makes literal the economic, social, and political division between the global North and global South. The North, led primarily by the US, continues its attempts to contain the spread of the Chaga and Changed humans, resorting to extreme violence and incessant border patrol. *Kirinya* critiques US imperial dominance and the assumptions of liberal humanism exemplified by the UN. In this second novel, however, the violence of US military dominance is extended into space as the US attempts to secure control over a space object known as the Big Dumb Object (BDO), which hosts other Chaga life forms. While *Evolution's Shore* is set primarily in Kenya, *Kirinya* is set in regions generally considered part of the "Third World" or global South. *Kirinya* therefore highlights McDonald's broader critiques of globalization and imperialism.

The rest of the chapter examines the ways *Evolution's Shore* and *Kirinya* disrupt sf's engagement with the ideologies of colonialism. First, I begin by examining how the colonial gaze of sf visualizes negative difference in the figure of the alien, and how this vision of alterity follows epistemological traditions that construct the subject as the product of the phallogocentric gaze. Influenced by Luce Irigaray's feminist revisions of

Lacan, Rosi Braidotti suggests that “the phallogocentric system functions by constituting sets of pejorative ‘others,’ negative instances of difference” and that “[d]evalued or pejorative otherness organizes differences in a hierarchal scale that allows for the management and governability of all gradations of social difference” (*Nomadic* 96-97). Braidotti’s point is made evident in McDonald’s novels, which link a critique of the colonial gaze to the exploitative logic of advanced capitalism. Importantly, the Chaga also demonstrates the emergence of a third space of engagement that challenges the division by which the gaze rationalizes itself. In this space of hybridity the Chaga encourages a more ethical and positive affirmation of difference, promoting affinity with multiplicity over imperial domination. As a constantly transformative organism the Chaga presents a posthuman nomadic ethics, not only because it disrupts sf’s engagement with colonialism but also because it destabilizes the epistemological foundations of a fixed subjectivity, revealing the material conditions that continue to exploit a tradition of division between self and other.

### **Alien Subjects, Phallogocentrism, and the Legacy of Humanism**

As alien invasion narratives, McDonald’s novels challenge Western epistemology’s tradition of using the gaze to conceptualize and treat difference as a dialectical opposition based on aggression and exploitation. The dominance of this epistemological orientation is reflected in various frameworks including Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, Laura Mulvey’s notion of the male gaze, and the colonial gaze that, as Rieder explains, distributes knowledge and power. The next two sections of this

analysis will focus on critiques of sf's colonial gaze, examining first the way difference is conceptualized negatively before proceeding to outline the material consequences of this negative conception on social, economic, and political structures. Analysis of the gaze is central to understanding postcolonial critiques in the novels as "struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over *how* to see" (Haraway 194; emphasis in original). Furthermore, focusing on the relationship between difference and subjectivity as linked to sf's colonial gaze reveals that "the epistemology of the eye and the training to see is central not only to the scientific enterprise but also to the process of the constitution of the subject as an ethical and political entity" (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 190). In *Evolution's Shore* and *Kirinya*, sf's colonial gaze is represented through specific characters (such as Gaby) as well as through UN scientists, the media, the US military, and biotech corporations that seek to dominate and ultimately control the Chaga.

In Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, subjectivity is seen through the paradigm of castration in which the gaze "is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon ... namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety" (Lacan 72-73). Braidotti critiques this unconscious phallic structure, contending that epistemological traditions privileging phallogocentrism are complicit in equating difference with negative terms and can be linked to the historical dehumanization and exploitation of those constructed as gendered and racial others. Similarly, speaking of Bhabha, Griselda Pollock contends that "[w]e could argue racism, xenophobia, and fascism are premised on an extreme of the castration paradigm" (3). Translated to the alien others of sf, this phallic gaze is replicated as a colonizing gaze which, as Rieder and Jessica Langer have noted, oscillates between the positions of subject and object coded as

the relation between human observer and alien other. If the “colonial gaze distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at” (Rieder 7), alien others, such as the Chaga, are denied subjectivity and reduced to disposable bodies.

McDonald’s novels link dominant, male-oriented theories of the gaze to the colonial gaze of sf and subsequently to the scopic drive of Gaby’s unwavering desire to discover the origins of the Chaga. As a journalist who moves to Kenya because she is fascinated by the exoticism of the alien, Gaby represents the scientific observer who wants “to get there before it was all named and numbered and known and there was no mystery left for her to explain” (*Evolution’s* 27). Gaby not only aspires to understand the Chaga, but she also wants to claim it for herself—it is “her alien rain forest,” a fetishized other for which she erects a “little shrine” (27). When Gaby is finally given the chance to learn more about the Chaga from Peter Werther, one of the first people to enter and leave its forest, she is unable to understand where the Chaga falls along the dichotomous borders of good/evil and human/non-human. Complicating matters, Peter describes his experience in the Chaga as simultaneously “wonder and horror,” “beauty and terror,” “monstrous [and] wonderful” (55). Struggling to understand, Gaby positions the Chaga as an other in relation to herself and equates the Chaga’s difference with negativity when she asks Peter if it represents “[t]he heart of darkness” (55). Peter responds that, on the contrary, the Chaga is “[t]he beginning of all light,” “so strange that it cannot be *seen*” (55; emphasis in original). Gaby’s fear of the Chaga reveals that her desire to understand the Chaga is premised on violent oppositions in which the split of subject/other is—like Lacan’s phallogocentric conception of the gaze—based on a paradigm of absence and

loss. Where Gaby sees difference in the legacy of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—as negation, repression, or oppression of an other—Peter sees the Chaga's difference as an affirmative relationship and a horizon of possibility.

Additionally, the UN's brand of humanism is revealed to be a lens that merely replicates the structures of the colonial gaze. By categorizing the Chaga as a non-human other, the UN follows a history of colonial violence in Africa characterized by the exclusion, brutality, and dehumanization of people of colour. Braidotti notes that "[t]he equation of difference with pejoration is built into the tradition that defines the Subject as coinciding with and hence being the same as consciousness, rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour... [while] Otherness is defined in negative terms as the specular counterpart of the Subject" (*Nomadic* 75). The danger of this humanist tradition, as Braidotti contends, is that it results in the reduction of certain beings (historically non-Western others) to disposable bodies. As an alien invasion narrative, McDonald's texts are premised upon encounters with difference, and the extreme violence used by the UN to control the Chaga reflects the UN's desire to enforce strict ideological boundaries between human and non-human others. Like Gaby, the UN and the US see the Chaga's difference in primarily negative terms or, as one director puts it, the US military "can't think in any other terms than enemies, invasion, containment, and counterattack" (*Evolution's* 100). Thus, the UN's attempts to regulate access to the Chaga are attempts to dehumanize and eventually eliminate the Chaga's monstrous body. The US and UN even resort to using napalm (though unsuccessfully), and they ultimately take over Kenya in the name of protection, objectifying both Kenyans and the Chaga.

Furthermore, when the UN discovers Changed humans, it creates Unit 12, a highly confidential decontamination unit used to imprison Changed humans and subject them to scientific examination. By hiding Changed humans from public view and treating them as non-human scientific experiments, the UN maintains its power over them while claiming to protect Kenya and uphold universal humanist values. Similarly, *Kirinya* expands on the institutional prejudice of Unit 12 by emphasizing the development of terms such as “Space Monkey,” used by the US military to describe Changed humans. Not only is the term reminiscent of a history of racial violence and the disavowal of cultural difference, it also signifies the anxiety around non-anthropocentric subjectivity. Significantly, Changed humans inhabit the Chaga-grown southern hemisphere of Earth representative of the racial others of the global South. The UN’s boundary policing may thus exemplify Tony Davies’s claim that “[a]ll Humanisms, until now, have been imperial. They speak of the human in the accents and the interest of a class, a sex, a race, a genome” (131).

By drawing attention to the epistemic violence enacted under the name of humanism and phallogocentric paradigms of subjectivity, McDonald’s novels connect ways of seeing with the continued exploitation of the global South. Gaby calls this “intellectual colonialism” (*Evolution’s* 174), noting during a UN directors’ meeting that “[t]his is what it is all about ... UNECTAfrique/ Asie/Amerique.... The white boys telling the rest of the world what to think and how to think it. All the poor and the dirty and the overcrowded and the funny colored” (174). Too concerned with its own humanist vision and controlling the Chaga, the UN fails to address the material realities of Kenyan life. The UN forces millions of Kenyans to flee their homes, to live in poverty and

refugee camps as the organization's own resources are directed towards research for biotech corporations. UN peacekeeping forces are revealed to be corrupt soldiers preying on disenfranchised refugees; on Gaby's visit to a camp she sees firsthand "three blue-helmets laugh at a desperate old man offering them the only thing he valued: an aged, aged black bicycle" (117). Moreover, the UN's complete disregard of the status of AIDS in the country is made evident when it is revealed that the Chaga stops the development of HIV 4. HIV 4 sufferers discover that progression of the virus is stopped when Chaga spores enter their bodies; however, this also results in physical mutations that can include limb growth or Changed bodies. As a result, the UN hides this knowledge. Miriam Sondai, a Kenyan virologist who refuses to join the UN's efforts, criticizes the organization's neglect of HIV 4 by suggesting that AIDS is "an African problem in that the West does not want to get involved because it sees Slim [a nickname for AIDS] as a Malthusian check on African population growth" (93). Published in 1995, a year after the Rwandan genocide and in a decade fraught with tension over the status of AIDS in Africa, the novel channels contemporary criticism of the United Nations.

Significantly, McDonald's novels link a critique of the epistemological construction of difference with the exploitative logic of advanced capitalism as evidenced through the UN's insistence on the monstrosity of the Chaga and their attempts to control access to the forest. Reinforcing ideological and physical barriers around the Chaga means that the UN and the US military control access to a new, lucrative resource. When Gaby launches an exposé of military violence inflicted against Changed humans in *Kirinya*, she tells her boss from SkyNet that more than fear of alien others motivates the US. Rather, the global North fears they will lose their position of economic power:

The political strategy is to keep the South isolated and divided until the Northern corporates can develop bucky technology to the level where they can survive contact with us.... It's the classic alien first contact scenario: in almost any permutation contact with an advanced interstellar alien civilization, human society comes apart. Human society? Fuck. Western corporate capitalist society comes apart. They have a strategy for it, I've seen it, I had it wormed out of the Pentagon: quarantine, control, access restricted to government and military channels. (269)

Gaby essentially describes disaster capitalism, which Naomi Klein outlines in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) as the process by which international development institutions exploit natural and human disasters in the process of neoliberal expansion. The US is not the only nation involved in such exploitation—at the end of *Evolution's Shore* the UN's benevolent assistance is discredited when Gaby discovers that the organization is also funded by biotech companies and armaments manufacturers hoping to profit from Chaga technology.

While *Evolution's Shore* highlights the fear surrounding the Chaga's anomalous body, *Kirinya* emphasizes the real-life violence of epistemological traditions privileging a fixed subjectivity. Because the UN does not recognize the agency of Changed humans, it also does not recognize the sovereignty of new political nations formed in the global South. As such, abuse against Chaga communities (such as the Harambee) is not considered an international human-rights issue. In addition, the UN restricts the migration of people wishing to escape into the Chaga, holding them in transit camps. Serena sarcastically notes that while the North asserts that those contained in UN camps are refugees, they are in fact “hostages” (204), people who are treated as disposable pawns. Under the colonial gaze of the UN and US, the raced bodies of refugees and Changed humans are subject to the same degradation. The prejudice against Changed humans

culminates in the horrific massacre of a refugee camp, Soroti, in northern Uganda. When Soroti is attacked by unknown helicopters, Oksana and Serena watch as hundreds of refugees are killed by “missiles [that] blew them all away in a spray of flesh and shivered metal” (215). The attack is later revealed to be a “field test” (269) for Northern industrialists developing experimental weapons from Chaga biotech. With no UN personnel surviving the attack, the US manages to hide its involvement and it is only when Gaby collects stories of survivors that a different narrative emerges: “as the details of the massacre unfold, the magnitude of the lie the North is telling itself grows. If you have to lie, lie big. The story that it was a pitched battle between rival tribal factions holds. There is no contrary evidence” (239). The Soroti massacre exemplifies the inextricable relationship between epistemic and material violence. When difference is envisioned as “lack” it is either fetishized or feared—under this epistemological framework, Changed humans and refugees are constructed as inferior and disposable to “normal” humans, and the violence against them at Soroti is symptomatic of an epistemological framework that can only envision difference as negativity.

### **Reorienting the Gaze: “Desire as Plenitude.”<sup>10</sup>**

Unlike texts that simply reverse the colonial gaze of alien-invasion narratives, McDonald’s novels reorient the framework of the gaze. If the Chaga reveals how imperial authority is maintained through the process of differentiation, it also reveals the

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<sup>10</sup> Critiquing theories of subjectivity premised upon negative, dialectical paradigms, Braidotti writes, “[t]he idea of desire as plenitude and not as lack produces a more transformative and less negative approach to the nomadic relational subject than previously allowed, for instance by the split subject of psychoanalysis” (*Posthuman* 189).

productive potential of difference. Specifically, the UN's attempts to control the Chaga open up a space beyond the negative logic of the self/other dialectic. Positioned on the fringes of society, the Chaga is what Bhabha might call the production of a hybrid space. Bhabha points out that in cultural colonialism, "the *reference* of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid" (159; emphasis in original). As a symbiotic organism that draws on human, animal, and plant DNA, the Chaga is repeatedly described as something "we have always known" and yet simultaneously something that is "changed in subtle ways" (*Evolution's* 55) by its contact with others. Ultimately, it is the Chaga's constant metamorphosis that opens up intersubjective spaces that envision difference and desire as positive, mutually productive processes.

Despite the UN's frequent mistreatment of the Chaga, certain UN directors recognize its symbiotic nature, suggesting that the Chaga is "one species with many dependent variants" or, as one director explains, "symbs are like families, communities, clans, tribes if you will" (*Evolution's* 173). Similar to Octavia Butler's Oankali, this symbiotic relationship is complex; the Chaga's dependence on humanity can be seen as either exploitative or conversely as the production of a positive desire. I argue that the Chaga leans towards the latter as evidenced through the juxtaposition of UN refugee camps and Chaga communities. In opposition to the UN's disregard for those suffering under its care, the Chaga supports new life forms and social formations and presents an alternative to the poverty of UN transit camps by offering free, nurturing food. After

eating and living in the forest herself, Gaby “did not wonder the Western industrialists wanted it ring-fenced. The Chaga’s Grace Abounding was the denial of consumer capitalism,” an “insidious Eden where everything may be had by reaching out to take” (212). The Chaga’s strange generosity simultaneously inspires Gaby and worries her, and she once again sees the Chaga’s difference primarily in terms of negation and separation, fearing that the Chaga’s difference is “the end of everything it means to be human” (213). Conversely, Jake, a fellow news reporter, suggests she is a “pessimist” and that instead the Chaga is “a gate into new ways of being human” (*Evolution’s* 213). Jake recognizes the Chaga’s interdependence with humanity and sees its difference less as threat to humanity than to capitalist rule. While the Chaga collects DNA and alters Kenya’s ecosystems, Jake explains, “What the Chaga says to me is, now you don’t need to compete for resources, now all the rules of supply and demand are torn up: there is enough here for everyone, so now you can experiment with new ways of living, new ways of interacting, new societies and structures and sociologies” (213). In other words, the Chaga presents an alternative to consumer capitalism that does not seek to exploit those most acutely affected by this regime—people of the global South.

In addition to challenging the logic of the global market, the Chaga’s constant symbiosis results in the emergence of Changed humans, whose hybrid existence confronts normative ideas of subjectivity and embodiment. While the UN and US deny the subjectivity of Changed humans, their disavowal of the Chaga’s difference is instead

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sign of the productivity of colonial power.... [Hybridity] is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the “pure” and original identity

of authority)... It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (Bhabha 159)

For Bhabha, the “process of splitting” produces cultural difference through which colonial power is maintained; it is also symptomatic of the hybridity produced through disavowal, and subsequently that unsettles the notion of an essential, authentic identity. Changed people are reminders that fixed subjectivity and definitions of the human have also been used in exploitative colonial projects that define racial others as subhuman. Gaby discovers this when, after seeing Changed children, she links the contingent and historical meaning of the term “human” with the effects of colonial ideologies:

How many centuries has it taken us to learn to see that people whose skin is a different colour from ours are as human as we, and now you are asking us to hug these winged children and hybrid obi-men and changelings to us. Things we may not even recognize as human we must call brother and sister. (*Evolution's* 234)

If the idea of human subjectivity is premised upon the disavowal and repetition of difference, Changed humans signify a hybrid identity that makes evident the process of cultural differentiation between the boundaries of human and non-human other. The idea of a universal and whole subject is eroded, and linked to the detrimental effects of colonial subjugation. Instead, as an alien figuration that is constantly transforming and simultaneously animal, plant, and human in its various materializations, the Chaga promotes a nonunitary subjectivity. In doing so, it rejects a philosophical tradition in which difference is envisioned as either negation or fetishized other, reconfiguring practices of belonging.

Significantly, *Kirinya* expands on the notion of nonunitary subjectivity by focusing on the perspectives of multiple characters: namely, Serena, a Changed human,

and Oksana, Gaby's friend and Serena's surrogate mother. Bracha Ettinger's concept of the matrixial gaze may help explore how Serena and Oksana reorient phallogocentric conceptions of difference in the novel. Ettinger explains that the matrixial gaze embraces transsubjective spheres that contest male-oriented conceptions of the gaze as founded on fear and lack, proposing instead a "model for a *shareable dimension of subjectivity* in which elements that discern one another as *non-I*, without knowing each other, co-emerge and co-inhabit a joint space, without fusion and without rejection" (65; emphasis in original). The matrix reconsiders difference outside the binary paradigms of masculine-feminine by introducing an alternative passage of subjectivization that is not founded on the "desire for a lost object" but rather a "metramorphic link" (124):

*Metramorphosis* is an out-of-focus passageway composed of transgressive *borderlinks* that transform, simultaneously and differently, co-emerging partial-subjects, partial Others, partial-objects.... In its function as a passage to the Symbolic, metramorphosis acts from the shareable borderspace to create and redistribute the traces of these joint transformations of encounters, without taking the route of the masculine Oedipal castration. (Ettinger 65; emphasis in original)

The matrixial gaze/space supports the nonunitary theory of subjectivity proposed in Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects*. Both consider "subjectivity-as- encounter" (Ettinger 86) in which "becoming-together precedes being-one" (72). In this way the matrix is not symbiosis in the sense of fusion, nor is it a rejection of the other; instead it is an interconnected process of becoming.

As an isopath who "can share other people's identities" (*Kirinya* 101), Serena personifies the matrixial gaze. She "sees, hears, smells what you smell" (101), and can link to humans and animals alike. Serena's connections are matrixial encounters that engender the process of metramorphosis, or "transgressive *borderlinks* that transform,

simultaneously and differently, co-emerging partial-subjects, partial Others, partial-objects” (Ettinger 65; emphasis in original). When Serena joins the Black Simbas, a rebel group which uses violence against the North, she embarks on a mission that requires her to use her isopathic skills to force a surrogate body to commit suicide. Fueled by her anger towards non-Changed humans, Serena agrees to inhabit the body of Mrs. Meenakshi Khandewal (who has unknowingly been injected with Chaga spores) and commit a bloody suicide that will spread the Chaga into carefully protected non-Chaga areas. Serena’s isopathic connections with others are not one way, however, and the bodies she inhabits mutually affect her. Mid-mission, Serena tries to reaffirm the purpose for killing her host but finds she cannot; instead she discovers “vain, trivial, kindly Mrs Meenakshi Khandewal.... She found the well-dressed snobbish middle-class Indian woman who had nothing she could call her own but her two daughters. She saw a human being” (263). By inhabiting another’s body Serena learns that “the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another” (Haraway 193). Serena’s link with Khandewal affects her ability to treat another’s body as disposable, and the event is one in a series of many through which, despite her initial hatred of non-Changed humans, Serena discovers community and kinship in the space of the other.

Though Oksana is not an isopath, her insights as a linguistic shaman are particularly significant for exploring the relationship between alternative forms of subjectivity and phallogocentrism. Oksana believes in “the power of language over reality” (186). Oksana’s shamanism does not believe in or perpetuate “the tyranny of the

logocentric gaze” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 64), but instead she suggests that an alternative to the fixity of rational, linguistic structure exists, perhaps even as Ettinger’s feminine matrixial unconscious. Oksana explains that, in her version of shamanism, spirits are internal processes where,

altered states of consciousness remain unconscious, preconscious, because they have no language structure—or whatever structure they have, it is not logical, language-like. It’s like, in a dream, identities are not fixed; you can have a different face, your best friend looks like someone else, everyday words have totally different, but quite consistent meanings. A different logic—I know there is wisdom there, and very great power, if we can tap it. Shamanic flight is the flight within, to these altered states of consciousness. (181)

If, as Braidotti argues, “phallogocentric logic is embedded in language, which is the fundamental political structure and symbolic system or myth in our societies” (*Nomadic* 97), then shamanic flight into alternate realms of consciousness is a trajectory out of rigid and molar ways of being. When Oksana repeatedly emphasizes the “power of word over matter” (183), she does not suggest that language merely dictates reality. Rather, Oksana’s shamanism can be seen as a sort of utopian attempt to find an embodied language where the linguistic signifier is not based on absence and lack but on a process of becoming—where there is instead “language that describes its object so completely and precisely that to change a sentence, a word, even a letter, changes objective reality” (183). The closest Oksana comes to experiencing this is when she flies a Chaga-grown airplane, describing her sense of merging with the Chaga as becoming “womanplane.... She had wings for arms, engines in her belly. This was true shamanic flying” (189). In the matrixial sphere of shamanic trance, Oksana searches for “a different logic,” one in which subjectivity is a materialist, interconnected process of becoming.

## Enacting Nomadism

*Evolution's Shore* and *Kirinya* confront a central question about sf: as a genre deeply rooted in the myth that Langer calls “the stranger and the strange land” (3), how can it represent an alternative to the colonial gaze and its repetition of the human/alien binary? Furthermore, in representations of alterity, how does one articulate the construction of difference as both embodied and multidimensional? If language is the site at which subjectivity is enunciated, then imagining alternative representations of subjectivity is both a linguistic and epistemological endeavor. Influenced by Irigaray as well as by Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic thought, Braidotti offers the figure of the nomad as a discursive and political project that conceptualizes desire beyond a logic of division. Specifically, “[n]omadism is an invitation to disidentify ourselves from the sedentary phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking” (*Nomadic* 24). Like Donna Haraway’s cyborg, Braidotti’s nomadic ethics encourages “the transcendence of negativity ... [meaning that] the conditions for renewed political and ethical agency cannot be drawn from the immediate context ... [but] have to be generated affirmatively and creatively by efforts geared to creating possible futures” (*Posthuman* 191).<sup>11</sup>

McDonald’s novels portray the Chaga, Gaby, and the Freedom Tree as nomadic figurations that complicate the human/alien binary and the premise of division on which the gaze rationalizes itself. Importantly, McDonald’s novels disrupt the categories of

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<sup>11</sup> 2. Haraway’s work has close affinities with nomadic feminists such as Braidotti, and Braidotti often invokes Haraway’s cyborg figuration, arguing that “Donna Haraway’s work on vision and science offers the most convincing example of positive feminist-situated epistemology and an alternative take on visualization techniques” (*Nomadic* 206).

human and alien alike, portraying each as subjects that are nonunitary, nomadic, and engaged with difference in mutually productive encounters.

Braidotti takes from Haraway the term “figuration” as a methodology and way of expressing different subject positions. A figuration is not a metaphor but rather an alternative vision of subjectivity that is politically and ethically informed (*Nomadic* 22). Nomadism is about recognizing one’s ever-shifting subject position, moving away from essentialist and phallogocentric frames of reference. It is also about a sustained commitment to intersectional approaches and political figurations that are “purposeful tools for intervention in reality, figuration in that they make an impact on our imagination, but they are also forms and accounts of situated knowledge” (*Nomadic* 105). Nomadic subjectivity is in this sense a sort of posthumanism that emphasizes the different historical and socioeconomic situations of subjects and their diverging positions in global power relations. The nomadic subject, however, is not simply the cosmopolitan tourist; instead it is “consciousness-raising and the subversion of set conventions [that] define the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling” (*Nomadic* 26). The nomad embraces a transitory nature that emphasizes affective connection, bonding, and coalitions in transgressive spaces. Following Haraway, Braidotti emphasizes the potency of a nomadic figuration as a political myth that exposes the embodied social and political practices of particular locations. Nomadic transgression is therefore also actively opposed to the vampiric hybridity of advanced capitalism, which proliferates difference for consumption.

As an “alien” figure, the Chaga lends itself to nomadic thought by constructing interwoven spaces conducive to understanding encounters with difference outside the

rigid constructs of subject/object/other. In tune with the symbiotic organisms envisioned by authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia E. Butler, the Chaga demonstrates that alien figurations may themselves provide immanent lines of flight out of the binary logic that characterizes sf's colonial gaze. By engaging with difference in a symbiotic relationship, the Chaga rejects the double bind of self/other by reconceptualizing the negation of difference as a space of affinity, or a space of interconnection and affective relation. Peter Werther describes the Chaga as a sort of neurological network premised on the ideals of shared community and communication: "It's smart. The trees talk. The roots connect, like the cells in your brain. They touch, they share, and they think, but it is not any kind of intelligence we can understand" (*Evolution's* 56). Peter's description emphasizes the rhizomatic mode the Chaga functions in, both literally as a complex network and figuratively in its ability to reconfigure the self/other dichotomy. The Chaga's symbiotic relationship with all things that it touches means it is never one thing but is instead a liminal space, a "place of perpetual change and transformation" (232). Its engagement in a mutually productive symbiosis presents an alternative to the engulfing violence of the self/other dialectic.

Though Gaby is not an obvious example of a nomadic subject, her experiences throughout *Evolution's Shore* may be some of the most important, because her ability to take responsibility for her actions and embrace new ways of seeing and being are crucial nomadic orientations. Initially, Gaby's white, colonial gaze dominates the beginning of *Evolution's Shore*, and she is so consumed by the exoticism of the Chaga that she fails to see the lived realities of Kenyan people and her own position of entitlement. As Jerome Winter suggests, despite her criticisms of UNECTA as a neocolonial agent, Gaby is

“perhaps too oblivious of her own white privilege” (466). Even though Gaby frequently encounters the extreme disparity between the wealthy and poor in Kenya and the violence used to maintain such division, she is comfortable in her material situation and unable to recognize her own culpability. As a result, she is frequently described as “self-unknowing” (94), and her obsession with the Chaga initially prevents Gaby from taking responsibility for her actions and desires. In spite of this, through her contact with the Chaga she eventually learns what Braidotti argues is the importance of “cartographies of power that rest on a form of self-criticism, a critical, genealogical self-narrative” (*Nomadic* 16). Gaby’s encounters with the Chaga open up a space that encourages increased self-reflexivity and critical engagement with her embodied position.

Eventually the metaphysical cannibalism of Gaby’s anthropocentric and humanist stance is shaken during two major events in *Evolution’s Shore*: first, through her encounter with a Changed child and second, through her experience of decontamination in Unit 12 after the UN captures her inside the Chaga.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, Gaby’s first contact with the Chaga is written in the first person as diary entries, straying from the third-person narration in most of the novel. When Gaby finally ventures into the Chaga’s “heart of darkness” she begins to question the UN’s decontamination lies and constructed narratives of fears, and during her encounter with a Changed child she begins the process

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<sup>12</sup> 3. I draw here on Ti-Grace Atkinson’s feminist exploration of the “metaphysical cannibalism” that Atkinson argues has been exercised against women. While Atkinson and Braidotti consider the notion of “metaphysical cannibalism” primarily in relation to the subjectivity of women under patriarchy, Deborah Paes De Barros in *Fast Cars and Bad Girls: Nomadic Subjects and Women’s Road Stories* (2004) points to an extension of such cannibalism in Deleuze and Guattari’s work: “Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari consider the notion of ‘metaphysical cannibalism’ in another context. In their *Anti-Oedipus*, the act of consumption becomes finally a kind of colonization, a reclamation of a territory already claimed by another” (48). Atkinson, Braidotti, and Deleuze and Guattari all articulate the violence and exploitation of those subjugated under the traditions of Western epistemology and phallogocentrism.

of un-learning socially coded modes of thought about difference. Initially frightened and disturbed by Nicole, a Changed girl who has grown wing-like appendages, Gaby listens to Nicole's father explain that her wings are the result of a symbiotic relationship with the Chaga. Nicole's family is careful to emphasize "she is not a monster or a freak or an example of evolution in action or the first generation of the new humanity" (235). Forced to confront a child, Gaby functions in the nomadic mode by recognizing her resistance in accepting Nicole and subsequently the destructiveness of ingrained social prejudices as well as her own responsibility in perpetuating them. When Gaby learns of the "institutionalized infanticide" (235) of children like Nicole she is horrified. Meanwhile, Nicole's family expresses their hope for the acceptance of Changed humans and the possibility of seeing the Chaga as a form of "Transhumanity. Post-humanity. Pan-humanity" (233) that is not harmful or destructive but an entrance into new ways of being human. This is also the point at which the Chaga is a particularly potent political figuration, creatively envisioning a "pan-humanity" which is grounded in a critique of current social and political structures rather than hierarchal difference.

Gaby's nomadic shift towards the embrace of alternative visions of subjectivity continues when she is later captured by the UN and experiences decontamination in Unit 12. For the first time, Gaby is placed in the position of an objectified other as UN scientists hold her for observation, subjecting her to degrading tests. Held captive, Gaby is sterilized, probed, prodded, and finally sexually violated when she is forced into a "birthing chair" where "they did things with the dilators and the rubber gloves and the endoscope and the lubricating jelly" (241). When Gaby retorts, "You don't need to do this.... There is no medical reason for this. You just want to humiliate me because we

fucked the UN up the ass” (241), the doctor responds by continuing his examination with greater force. As the narrator of *Evolution’s Shore*, Gaby is stripped of power and autonomy, and placed in the position of a “contaminated” Changed human. Furthermore, when Gaby is finally released, she is brought on a tour of the other inhabitants of Unit 12 where she discovers Changed people who have transformed in various ways—some have multiple hands, can access multiple consciousnesses, or have grown winged appendages. Once again, Gaby is forced to confront her own white gaze when she sees a group of Changed beings and thinks of them as “Tree people. Monkey people. A hundred childhood racist clichés bubbled up in Gaby’s mind” (255). Gaby knows Changed people represent new ways of understanding humanity, yet her ingrained prejudices and ways of seeing reflect the dangers of epistemological traditions premised on self/other binaries. Enacting nomadism requires to her to acknowledge these destructive trends and “prick them with reason” even if “[o]ld prejudices burst hard” (255). It is not until after Serena’s birth and her mission with the iMerina that Gaby is perhaps able to fully understand the potential of nomadic thought.

*Kirinya* marks the imminent collapse of the North/South divide on Earth and the possibility of embracing a posthuman nomadic ethics when a rebel group, the iMerina, launches what they call the “Freedom Tree,” a project aimed at creating a space elevator between the Chaga-grown BDO and Mount Kenya. Because the US considers the BDO a valuable resource as a “gateway to the stars” (374), and because they do not recognize the subjectivity of Changed humans who inhabit the planet, the iMerina realize that continued US military control over the BDO will only perpetuate economic, political, and social inequity for both worlds. The Tree aims to connect Changed people on Earth with

the Changed on the BDO. A crew member of the iMerina ship, Tsirinana, names the project the Freedom Tree because “[i]n Sierra Leone, in the town of Freetown, there was a tree at the top of King Jimmy’s steps. When the slave ships were captured, the slaves were brought to the tree and had their chains struck off beneath its branches. It was they who called it the Freedom Tree” (400; emphasis in original). Tsirinana’s reference to the slave trade as a key source of inspiration for the space elevator associates colonial brutality with the treatment of Changed humans. Consequently, the Freedom Tree can be seen as an attempt to dispel the chains of epistemological violence produced under theories of subjectivity premised upon divisive, exploitative paradigms. Instead, the Tree’s physical and neurological connection between Earth and the BDO challenges such division and seeks to create spaces of nomadic affectivity and enlarged community.

In *Kirinya*’s imagined future the relationship between subject/other is one of metamorphosis in which “the fluidity of experience places both partial- subjects in a reciprocity without symmetry in which they are both transformed and differently transform each other” (Ettinger 83). The Chaga, as a partial subject, is affected by—and simultaneously affects—the lives of those it touches, and it constantly reinvents itself based on its encounters with difference. After the Freedom Tree is successfully “planted” on the BDO and the mission returns to Earth, Serena describes the process of change that has been initiated as a sort of metaphorical rebirth where Africa, “the mother of man ... [rises] out of the dome of ocean and the arc of night like a legendary child being born, that is old and wise, and at the same time forever young and curious” (402). The duality of the imagery Serena uses to describe the continent in this moment is symptomatic of the borderland that the Chaga embodies and her ability to see beyond the foreclosure of

binary oppositions; upon returning to Earth's atmosphere Serena "[sees] terminum striding across the curved land and now she saw it not as a line of division but a place of joining.... She [sees] the Freedom Tree climbing out of the heart of the line of division" (402). The Freedom Tree opens up a space of hybridity, and becomes "a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, [that] properly alienates our political expectations and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics" (Bhabha 37). The Chaga is converted from an alien other to a transformational process that rejects antagonistic dualism and finds instead liminal spaces of interconnection. Drawing upon sf's imperial history and reconfiguring the figure of the alien at the level of form and content, McDonald's Chaga is a theoretical meditation on the genre's historical engagement with the ideologies of colonialism. Braidotti might even call this an immanent politics in which McDonald's alien figurations function as "an epistemic detox cure" (*Nomadic* 16).

The Chaga, Changed humans, and the Freedom Tree present a future not only of bodily difference but also difference in the way we treat and understand alterity. If a posthuman nomadic ethics "urges us to endure the principle of non-One at the in-depth structures of subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple 'others,'" in doing so it also produces an "ethical principle that breaks up ... the master narratives of primordial loss, incommensurable and irreparable separation" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 100). As such, the Chaga negotiates difference without erasing it or resorting to hierarchal filiation. Sherryl Vint argues that "[t]he new selves SF might help us imagine are both the problematic selves and the unexpected others ... [who] remind us of the fragility of our boundary-making work and that the other always is an aspect of self made

problematic” (21). By imagining new relationships between self and other that work to destabilize essentialist narratives, the Chaga reveals the ways our boundary making can result in exploitative and destructive categories of difference. The “evolution” imagined by McDonald, then, is not only a biological one, but also a social, political, and economic transformation that will, like the Chaga and the Freedom Tree, change the landscape of our social and political world.

### **Science Fictional Lines of Flight**

*Evolution's Shore* and *Kirinya* use generic traditions to expose the epistemological assumptions behind sf's colonial gaze and reorient the genre's imperialistic tendencies. By re-working now classic sf conventions including the narrative of alien invasion, the discovery of Big Dumb Objects (BDOs), cosmopolitan envoys, and evolutionary change, McDonald's novels align with a strain of globally concerned sf. The Chaga series clearly draws on the works of previous sf authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Gwyneth Jones, and Arthur C. Clarke, similarly concerned with the genre's imperialistic tendencies and engaged with more cosmopolitan perspectives. If *Evolution's Shore* “plugs” into the megatext of sf (Winter 461), then McDonald's novels can be seen as inhabiting a space of multiplicity that plays with the evolving status of sf icons and themes. Asked in an interview about his appropriation of other texts, McDonald argued, “Everything influences you. To deny that is to deny any attempt to produce art at all” (Gevers).

McDonald's self-reflexivity is not postmodern play but is rather a reflection of his historical and social reality as a writer in Northern Ireland, a society he considers Third World (Gevers). In many ways, McDonald's sentiments echo Bhabha's discussion of hybridity and the enunciation of a Third Space in *The Location of Culture* (1994), in that McDonald's novels function as a space "which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 55). Committed to a revisionary engagement with the present, McDonald's future visions renew past symbols and histories, constructing in the process an in-between space that intervenes in sf's operations within the contemporary moment. This dedication to a politics of location is not simply an aesthetic endeavor: as McDonald points out, "I've never taken to all that Home Counties pinning-for-Empire/ degeneration stuff. I've been living in the last days of empire for most of my life, and it gives you quite a different perspective. Historical necessity" (Gevers).

While McDonald acknowledges an affinity with those under the rule of empire, his claims to Third World kinship are somewhat problematic. As an educated white male, McDonald's experiences are considerably different from those in the various cultural settings he appropriates. Kenya's history of colonization, slavery, and complex relations among a wide range of racial and ethnic groups results in very different experiences of colonization from those of Northern Ireland. McDonald's equation of Ireland as "Third World" thus must also be examined critically for its ability to render invisible the very specific violence and exploitation experienced by racialized others in the global South. For example, *Evolution's Shore* and *Kirinya* are told primarily from Gaby's perspective

as a Northern Irish woman, and Kenyan characters play mostly marginal, supporting roles. Kenya becomes a backdrop for general “Third World” struggles, and at times McDonald’s novels lose sight of the specificity of historical context in postcolonial nations.

Despite these concerns, McDonald’s novels do share a political affinity with postcolonial sf, a subgenre that has at times been criticized for its appropriation of various cultural settings while simultaneously praised for its utopian drive. For instance, writing about two other authors in the field, Lauren Beukes and Tobias Buckell, Eric D. Smith notes that “[d]espite their... limitations, both [writers] summon the critical resources at hand, however partial or compromised, however imbricated within the cognitive and cultural architectures of hegemony, to illuminate and engage the brute necessities of the present” (194). Smith’s comment is also useful for considering McDonald’s work in *Evolution’s Shore* and *Kirinya*—while occasionally problematic, both novels retain a desire to expose exclusionary and exploitative visions of difference. By referring to contemporary political and social institutions like the UN, the future of McDonald’s novels is brought into direct contact with contemporary realities. David Higgins argues it is sf’s very engagement with and sensitivity to imperial discourses and practices that allow for critical alternatives, and McDonald’s novels are examples of such political engagement.<sup>13</sup>

*Evolution’s Shore* and *Kirinya* use the genre’s engagement with colonialism to critique current imperial structures and ultimately to challenge the “hegemonic [and]

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<sup>13</sup> 4. See Higgins’s “Toward a Cosmopolitan Science Fiction” in *American Literature* 83.2 (2011): 331-354.

exclusionary power at the very heart of the identity structures of the dominant subject” (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 9). In this way, the Chaga functions as the nomadic figuration Braidotti advocates: its simultaneous posthuman imaginings and critique of Western imperialism create an alternative space that destabilizes the structure of a humanistic subjectivity and the social relations that support it. If subjectivity is understood as a socially mediated process and negotiation with external power relations (Braidotti, *Nomadic* 18), then McDonald’s critique of imperialism is also a critique of how we come to understand self and difference. This relocation of difference is not an attempt to imagine a radical alterity but to recognize the tradition of naturalized difference that has proliferated with advanced capitalism. If nomadic subjects follow a politics of location in order to deterritorialize and defamiliarize us from our static locations and subject positions, then McDonald’s texts not only defamiliarize us in the tradition of sf, they also defamiliarize our conceptualization of difference as a dialectical opposition based on consumption and exploitation.

CHAPTER THREE: “Race and/as Technology,” or Techno-Orientalism and Science  
Fiction(s)

This chapter will examine how postcolonial sf draws attention to the relationship between race, science fiction and scientific discourse, particularly through the lens of techno-Orientalism. In other words, postcolonial sf as I see it draws attention not just to the discursive processes of racialization but also to the supposedly “value-neutral” scientific practices that construct pejorative difference. Sandra Harding argues that, “value-neutrality is not value neutral” (61), and that postcolonial science studies have pointed to the ways modern science retains a distinctly European/colonial core by suggesting that it does. This is also part of the ideology of progress identified by Rieder—scientific development is often heralded as a positive endeavour for all, especially for the global South where technological development is seen as providing the means to transcend poverty, disprove racism (through genomics), and contribute to more equitable futures. However, postcolonial sf questions this techno-optimism, highlighting the ways colonial frameworks underlie many scientific claims that, if unacknowledged, could continue to have adverse effects on the lives of people of colour. If the “claims for modern science’s (value-neutral, internally achieved) universality and objectivity” are left unchallenged, Harding argues that one consequence is the “disvaluing [of] local concerns and knowledge” which in turn gives legitimacy and power to outside experts (61). Technological and scientific development can therefore be used as a tool of subjugation when less “developed” nations must continue to depend on expertise from the global North.

As a part of popular culture, sf's imagined futures have always engaged questions of race, though in early sf this was frequently through the absence of people of colour rather than through direct engagement with racial politics. Isiah Lavender III in *Race in American Science Fiction* (2011) succinctly notes, "Science fiction often talks about race by not talking about race, [and] makes real aliens, has hidden race dialogues"; furthermore, even though sf is a "literature that talks a lot about underclasses or oppressed classes, it does so from a privileged if somewhat generic white space" (7). As Lavender's quote suggests, several sf tropes—such as aliens, cyborgs, and technological others—are linked to the construction of "otherness," even if race is not foregrounded as this explicit difference. Species differentiation, for instance, functions as a form of racial differentiation in sf, and often reflects evolutionary judgements regarding which species is the more evolved life form. Rieder addresses this in relation to Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, for example, when Wells compares the Martian invasion of Earth to the genocide of Tasmanians. On the surface Wells's comparison astutely notes the cruel dehumanization and colonization of Tasmanians by asking (white) readers to imagine themselves as colonized people, but Rieder points out that Wells's "analogy [also] rests on the logic prevalent in contemporary anthropology that the indigenous, primitive other's present is the colonizer's own past" (5). The construction of racial difference via species difference in science fiction therefore points to a central feature that links the genre to colonialism: the construction of exotic others through which evaluative judgements are made regarding race and historical development. Such features are also indicative of Rieder's notion of the colonial gaze, revealing the ways science fiction's

vocabulary and narrative structure is invested in the ideological construction of racial difference.

If the ideological basis of colonial practice is central to much early sf, then it is also inevitable that “some of the racism endemic to colonialist discourse is woven into the texture of science fiction” (Rieder 97). Thus, when sf presumes an evolutionary white or colour-blind future, it contributes to the marginalization of people of colour by depicting race as a matter of little importance. As Mark Bould contends, sf’s colour-blind futures actually erase histories of racial struggle and thereby fail to engage the material conditions that perpetuate racist ideologies (“Ships” 180). When early sf did engage with race, it frequently reinforced racist assumptions and fears. This is particularly evident in early pulp science fiction, where yellow-peril narratives such as Philip Nowlan’s “Armageddon 2419 A.D.” and David H. Keller’s “The Bloodless War” depict Asian “hordes” at war with the United States. Betsy Huang points out how “American science fiction’s long Orientalist history” exemplifies “the West’s enduring ambivalence towards Asians as friend or foe in its conceptions of the future” (95). Indeed, though many of these yellow-peril stories were influenced by immigration policy at the time, such as the Chinese exclusion act, these narratives also reveal how the colonial gaze is ingrained in the genre’s very structure as evidenced through its tendency to reiterate binary divisions (between human and nonhuman characters, for instance) central to racist paradigms. Just as the colonial gaze is premised upon the binary between the one who looks and the one who is looked at, “the apologetic function of the concept of race does not depend on precise categorization, however, but simply on division itself” (Rieder 110). This division

is clearly evident in early sf which constructed racial division through alien others, as well as through explicitly racist/ethnocentric narratives such as yellow-peril tales.

Contemporary science fiction continues to replicate the structures of the colonial gaze and ideology of progress even if current genre texts appear less imperialistic and include more diverse characters. Where early sf presents clearly demarcated boundaries between its (white) scientists and (non-white) aliens, late twentieth century sf depicts a different array of alien “others” in the form of posthuman or technological others. In contemporary sf the changing semantic structures, or tropes, of sf do not necessarily signify the end of colonial regimes; rather, the binary logic of the colonial gaze is translated to new divisions between, for instance, the have and have-nots of informational capitalism, or between virtual and physical spaces in cyberpunk fictions. If early sf erases the complex history of race relations by depicting solely white societies and colour-blind futures, the inclusion of Japanese and East Asian characters in 1970s and 80s cyberpunk does not necessarily signify a departure from the genre’s colonial gaze. For example, Lavender highlights a moment in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) when replicants—who are considered nonhuman characters and referred to through the derogatory phrase “skin-jobs”—are explicitly compared to black men through a racial slur; in the film Deckard states, “Skin-jobs. That’s what Bryant called Replicants. In history books he’s the kind of cop who used to call black men niggers” (qtd. in Lavender 9). “Skin-jobs” and black men are both marked by their phenotypal difference, which is ultimately used as a way to identify, racialize, and project hatred onto a certain group of people.

Furthermore, the frequent association of “Asian” identity and settings with high technology (in Gibson’s *Neuromancer* or Scott’s *Blade Runner*, for instance) points to a

form of techno-Orientalism in contemporary sf and technoscientific discourse. In their explanation of techno-Orientalism, David Morley and Kevin Robins argue that racist assumptions have not disappeared with advancements in technoscience but rather are integrated into the technology itself. Depictions of Japanese technological dominance in cyberpunk, for example, often reiterate Orientalist fears where

[w]ithin the political and cultural unconscious of the West, Japan has come to exist as the figure of empty and dehumanised technological power. It represents the alienated and dystopian image of capitalist progress. This provokes both resentment and envy. The Japanese are unfeeling aliens; they are cyborgs and replicants. (170)

Even though cyberpunk might depict racially diverse futures, “the desire to conceptualize the East through a technocratic framework within cultural production leads to a re-articulation and re-emergence of the yellow peril” (Sohn 10), or a form of techno-Orientalism, as Asian characters are often represented through racial frames that present them as cold, calculated and emotionless robots. Asian characters and settings in contemporary sf therefore continue to reflect anxieties about the potential dominance of the East.

Two major themes define this chapter: first, through three different novels I consider the ways postcolonial sf challenges the assumption that advancements in technology are utopian solutions that will help transcend racism. Postcolonial sf challenges this assumption by exploring how technological developments can function to further propagate racist assumptions and colonial practices. Secondly, I suggest that these novels reveal how the bodies of people of colour are doubly racialized in science fiction by drawing attention to processes of racialization that continue to mark Asian bodies, reducing them to instruments of both science and narrative exoticism. To put it simply,

the bodies of people of colour have long been the “instruments” of science and used as tools for the development of modern science. However, by explicitly prescribing technological qualities to the bodies of people of colour, techno-Orientalism also disrupts the oversimplified binary of biological determinism versus cultural relativism through which race is often discussed. As Wendy Chun suggests, seeing race as technology “displaces claims of race as either purely biological or purely cultural” (38) thereby enabling us to “frame the discussion around ethics rather than ontology, on modes of recognition and relation, rather than being” (39). I expand on Chun’s claim to consider how postcolonial sf and techno-Orientalism can “frame the discussion [of race] around ethics” by seeing processes of racialization as *technologies of colonialism*. The colonial gaze of sf is therefore symptomatic of the very real, historical practices of domination and subjugation that can occur through the supposedly neutral field of scientific development. My critique does not seek to posit a blanket condemnation of modern science, but rather draws attention to the need to re-consider certain scientific practices through the lens of postcolonial and critical race studies.

Focusing specifically on techno-Orientalism allows me to address how Asian identity in particular is constructed, but my use of techno-Orientalism here also differs slightly from most contemporary definitions which tend to focus on the ways high-tech Asian future articulates anxieties about the West’s dominance into the future. In the latest collection on the subject, for instance, editors David Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta Niu define techno-Orientalism as “the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse” (2). This definition, while usefully broad, is not much different than the articulation of yellow-peril

fears in early sf where technologically advanced Asian hordes descended upon the U.S. Earlier definitions of techno-Orientalism also focus on the West's fear of losing their dominance as a consequence of the economic expansion of East Asian countries emerging out the 1990s economic boom and increased technological innovation. Cyberpunk has therefore been a central genre for the interrogation of what Toshiya Ueno calls the "Techno-Orient" that was "invented by the world of information capitalism" (228). Interestingly, attempts to define techno-Orientalism seldom foreground the ways specific technological developments can affect how Asian identity is constructed in narratives and what racial stereotypes are propagated. Differing slightly from these definitions, then, my examination of techno-Orientalism traces the relationship between contemporary scientific discourses, sf's engagement with these discourse, and the implicit processes of racialization that continue to define both fields. Postcolonial sf uses the genre's potential for cognitive estrangement to defamiliarize advancements in genomics and biotechnology, drawing attention to the potential dangers of colonial frameworks that underpin these advancements should they continue unexamined into the future.

### **Race, Technoscience, and *The Windup Girl***

Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009) presents a compelling departure from sf's traditionally white future, portraying a futuristic Bangkok where—despite advancements in technoscience—racial tensions and prejudices persist, affecting the daily lives of people of colour. *The Windup Girl* depicts a dystopian world in which a global

energy collapse, known as the Contraction, has led to the rise of biotech companies and their increased control over world-wide food production and distribution. Calories are the new currency and nations with their own seed banks are rich and not yet tied to the yoke of Western agricultural corporations. Thailand holds its own seed bank and is one of the few remaining countries whose markets are closed off from these multinational corporations. One such American biotech company, AgriGen, attempts to penetrate Thailand's market in order to integrate the country into the global economy, and thus subject Thailand to potentially detrimental economic and social effects as a result of AgriGen's superior technology. Bacigalupi's critique of the imperial practices and environmental consequences of multinational biotech companies permeates his work from *Pump Six and Other Stories* (2008) through to the to *The Windup Girl* and *Ship Breaker* (2010).

Importantly, *The Windup Girl* also highlights the complex effects of technoscience on discourses of race. Bacigalupi's use of Thailand as an "exotic" setting in which different ethnicities/races interact depicts a world in which latent ethnocentrism and Orientalism continue to persist, and people of colour in the novel struggle for their daily survival in a racist global political economy. Hock Seng, for instance, is a "yellow card," a derogatory term for Malaysian refugees of Chinese descent who have fled to Thailand to escape persecution in an increasingly fundamentalist Malaysia. The racial denomination "yellow card" is derived from the literal yellow identification card Chinese-Malays must carry in Thailand. Emiko, the "windup girl," is also a racialized character who, as part of a biologically engineered race of "New People," positions discourses of race in relation to developing technoscience. New People—called

“windups” for their characteristic “stutter-stop” motions (37)—are created by the Japanese to work as labourers and companions (read: slaves), replacing Japan’s dying population. Windups are illegal in Thailand, and only the Japanese are exempt from this regulation in exchange for their technological assistance to the Thai Kingdom. *The Windup Girl* positions race and racial politics as a central concern in this imagined future, exploring the historical impact of globalization, migration, and technoscience on the global South.

This section will begin by examining the complex construction of “Asian” identity in Bacigalupi’s novel; specifically, it will explore the ways *The Windup Girl* avoids constructing monolithic racial representations, taking into consideration the historical, political, social, and technological structures that influence how race is “read” and represented. I will start my analysis by focusing on the novel’s setting and use of ethnically diverse characters, arguing that the novel engages with the historical complexity of race relations in South East Asia. The second half of this section will focus on the intersections of technoscience and the cultural construction of Asian identity in what Peter Chow-White calls the “informationalization of race” (1168), or the reduction of racial politics to a matter of informational code and data. Significantly, advancements in biotechnology in the novel do not erase but rather perpetuate old racial ideologies, hierarchies, and practices. Orientalism is translated to a form of techno-orientalism in which prejudices and fears continue with the expansion of global information communication technologies. As such, Bacigalupi’s novel does not envision a colour-blind future; instead it portrays race as a matter of life or death, and Emiko’s constant fear of being discovered and mulched is but one example of the struggle for daily

survival raced characters face. *The Windup Girl* suggests that in an increasingly global political economy, advancements in biotechnology are not utopian possibilities that transcend racism but rather tools that mask racist and imperial ideologies.

### **South East Asia and Variations of Techno-Orientalism**

*The Windup Girl* is set in Thailand, and while it draws on the discourse of Orientalism as outlined by Edward Said, it also reveals the dangers of a different variation David Morley and Kevin Robins define as “techno-orientalism.” Morley and Robins argue that racist assumptions have not disappeared with advancements in technoscience but rather are integrated into the technology itself, thus “[a]s the dynamism of technological innovation has appeared to move eastwards, so have these postmodern technologies become structured into the discourse of Orientalism” (169). Though Morley and Robins refer primarily to Japan their observations may be extended to Thailand, a growing “tiger” economy in South East Asia. In more general terms then, techno-orientalism may be understood as “the desire to conceptualize the East through a technocratic framework within cultural production [which] leads to a re-articulation and re-emergence of the yellow peril” (Sohn 10). Importantly, Bacigalupi’s novel highlights the discourse of techno-orientalism while critiquing its assumptions and re-orienting its homogenizing framework. The novel achieves this by critically engaging with its setting and diverse characters in order to expose the effects of what Csicsery-Ronay Jr. calls the “technoscientific Empire” (8) that is our current socio-political condition.

Some readers have criticized *The Windup Girl* for using Thailand as an “exotic” setting and accuse the novel of Orientalism,<sup>14</sup> but I argue that by shifting sf’s traditionally “Western” focus to a geographic region seldom explored in sf, Bacigalupi’s novel actually opens up the narrative’s potential to function as an “ethnoscape.” Lavender defines an ethnoscape as a space that uses sf conventions to question the intersection of race and technology:

While sf’s conventional estrangements populate the fictional environment with, or structure it around, the presence of science, technology, mythology, aliens, androids, humanity, natural and artificial phenomena, politics, culture, language, religion, and so on, the ethnoscape reformulates that construction so as to create an alternative image that enables us to rethink the intersections of technology and race as well as their political, social, and cultural implications. (163)

As an ethnoscape *The Windup Girl* avoids exoticizing Thailand by confronting the relationship between race and developing biotechnologies in a country struggling to keep up with multinational agricultural corporations. By doing so, the novel highlights the racist and colonial practices of the First World and the effects of uneven technological development in an increasingly global economy. Historically, Thailand has never been colonized but like many countries in the global South it has opened up its borders to the information revolution and foreign investment. Bacigalupi’s novel, however, depicts Thailand as sealed off from international markets; thus, attempts to integrate the country into the global economy reflect fears that the country’s “irreducible difference will

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Jaymee Goh’s critique of *The Windup Girl* at *Beyond Victoriana*, a steampunk blog. In her review, Goh accuses Bacigalupi’s novel of being “Yet another novel in which a foreigner re-writes the history of a culture that doesn’t belong to him, blending fact and fiction in a blend which is unrecognizable.” At the *SF Signal* blog, Karen Burnham also critiques Bacigalupi’s use of “an exotic third world country,” arguing that Bacigalupi’s novel exploits Thailand’s image as an economically and politically unstable country.

remain aloof from, and impenetrable to, Western reason and universalism” (Morley and Robins 162).

Fear of Thailand’s alien culture and its potentially powerful difference is most evident in AgriGen’s attempts to penetrate the country’s carefully protected seed banks. However, Akkarat, chief of Thailand’s Trade Ministry, recognizes AgriGen’s offers as an attempt to maintain its technological supremacy and economic power. When Anderson argues that opening up Thailand’s borders to AgriGen and its science will be beneficial for the kingdom, Akkarat challenges Anderson’s claim of “mutual interests” reminding Anderson that the historical record of imperial contact has been one of exploitation and inequality:

This is not a question of perspective. Ever since your first missionaries landed on our shores, you have always sought to destroy us. During the old Expansion your kind tried to take every part of us. Chopping off the arms and legs of our country...With the Contraction, your worshipped global economy left us starving and over-specialized...And then your calorie plagues came. (150)

From Akkarat’s perspective technological innovation and Western notions of “progress” have only led to increased starvation, global plague, and continued dependence on the First World. Akkarat recognizes the social cleavages that have been rendered by an information/global economy, and that the consequences of uneven technological development translate to a form of neo-colonial rule. As global inequality and suffering increases, *The Windup Girl* challenges the logic of progress and development, revealing

the dangers of a global economy constructed on the basic principles of what Manuel Castells identifies as patriarchy and productivism.<sup>15</sup>

An analysis of *The Windup Girl* must address the novel's cultural and social references to Thailand as a place infamous for its sex tourism. Emiko's status as an illegal windup caught in the sex trade embodies techno-orientalist attitudes in which her genetically manipulated body is associated with assumptions regarding the supposed passivity of Asian women. Significantly, the novel suggests Emiko's subservience is less a consequence of her genetic variation than of her social, political, and economic situation. As Andrew Hageman states, "Emiko's exploitation in the Thai sex trade demonstrates that she has been programmed with directives to please, and it is this automation to meet market demands that in fact makes her an object that humans can treat with repugnance or with utilitarian apathy" (295). Reduced to the level of technological commodity, Emiko is little better than a *slave* in every sense of the word. Because prostitution has in fact been illegal in Thailand since 1960, Emiko's involvement in an illegal occupation positions her as outside legal protection. Furthermore, abandoned by her Japanese master in Bangkok, Emiko is also an illegal alien with no political status. As an illegal immigrant, sex worker, and a being considered sub-human, Emiko has no civic rights and is triply excluded from any position of political autonomy or power. Emiko's narrative, then, reflects the situation of many refugee women from surrounding countries (including Burma, Laos, and Cambodia) who migrate to Thailand in search of work, often participating in sex work or manual labor. Already denied political autonomy

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<sup>15</sup> See in particular Manuel Castells' *End of Millennium* (1998) Volume III of *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*.

as illegal refugees, migrant workers are further excluded from any position of power as sex workers.<sup>16</sup> Though the text's fictional representations cannot be seen as representative of prostitution in Thailand, as an ethnoscape the novel's setting highlights the economic, social, and political histories of Thailand, defamiliarizing readers from traditionally "Western" focuses.

While a simplistic binary division between the "West" and the "East" may be drawn in Bacigalupi's novel, racial antagonism is not unilateral and Thailand harbors many of its own prejudices. This is not a simple reversal of Orientalism into "Occidentalism" (Robertson 192), but a somewhat accurate reflection, in fact, of the complex history of racial, ethnic, and religious tensions within Thailand as a whole. For instance, in contemporary Thailand and much of South East Asia it is white skin that is foremost representative of beauty and social status. Walter H. Persaud argues that the privileging of whiteness is an effect of globalization and the history of cultural/political exchange in Thailand. Furthermore, ethnic tensions in the novel also reflect the historical record of conflict along the border of Thailand and Malaysia. Hock Seng, a Buddhist and Chinese-Malay, flees North to Bangkok when "the brown people turned on the yellow people in Malaya" (202). "The brown people" Hock Seng refers to are "the Green Headbands" of Malaya (67), whose persecution of Chinese-Malays forces Hock Seng to live as a refugee in Thailand. Hock Seng's escape to Bangkok from Malaysia mirrors the recent migration of Buddhist citizens in southern Thailand to central or northern Thai provinces in order to escape the increasing violence between southern separatists (who

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<sup>16</sup> For an excellent study on the complexities of migration and the sex trade in Thailand see Leslie Ann Jeffrey's *Sex and Borders: Gender, National Identity, and Prostitution Policy in Thailand* (2002).

are primarily Muslim). Ethnic tensions on the Thai/Malay border can be traced back to 1902 when Thailand's southernmost provinces were annexed, a region whose population is predominantly Malay Muslims. Though violence between separatists and the Thai government has occurred for more than half a century, it has escalated in the last ten years due to poor government relations, lack of representation for local minorities, abuses in human rights by Thailand's military, and poor socio-economic conditions in the South.<sup>17</sup>

*The Windup Girl* draws on Thailand's complex race relations. For instance, the Environment Ministry attempts to impede the negative consequences of globalization by resorting to a fierce nationalism that encourages antagonism against yellow cards and non-Thais in order to protect the "purity" of Thailand. Consequently, when Hock Seng flees to Bangkok in order to escape the Green Headbands he finds Thailand is not a haven free from racism either. The flight North for many yellow cards means they are able to escape persecution and death; however, "native" Thais also harbor their own prejudices against yellow cards. For example, Jaidee, a captain in the Environment Ministry and a native Thai, expresses his dislike for Chinese-Malays like Hock Seng:

Jaidee has a certain respect for the Chaozhou Chinese....They are utterly unlike the pathetic Chinese refugees who have flooded in from Malaya, fleeing to his country in hopes of succour after they alienated the natives of their own. If the Malayan Chinese had been half as clever as the Chaozhou, they would have converted to Islam generations ago, and woven themselves fully into the tapestry of that society....The Chaozhou are smart, where the Malayan Chinese are stupid. (117)

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<sup>17</sup> For more on the conflict in Southern Thailand see Zachary Abuza's *A Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand* (2009) or Duncan McCargo's *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (2008).

Jaidee's extreme sense of nationalism, xenophobia, and fierce loyalty to the Thai kingdom is reflected in his moniker as the "Tiger of Bangkok" (146). Like the Environment Ministry's attitude towards AgriGen, Jaidee treats immigrants and non-Thais as invasive threats to the security of Thai government, economy, and culture, or as Hock Seng says, "The Environment Ministry sees yellow cards the same way it sees the other invasive species and plagues it manages" (224). As a result, when the city breaks into war between the Environment Ministry and the Trade Ministry, yellow cards and foreigners suffer the most physical abuse at the hands of the Thai military. Thailand's attempts to retaliate against imperialism by inverting power structures only perpetuates a vicious cycle that feeds into the "us" versus "them" paradigm upon which colonial rule is premised.

Tellingly, Hock Seng's distrust of Thai workers reflects the internalized prejudices and ongoing effects of colonial encounter across South East Asia. As manager of Anderson Lake's factory in Bangkok, Hock Seng works primarily with native Thais though he constantly "curses that he works with Thais. They simply lack the spirit of entrepreneurship that a Chinese would throw into the work" (132). Hock Seng believes that, "they are Thai. They are all incompetent" (14). The stereotype of the "lazy native" is a prejudice often rendered against native Thais, and Hock Seng's statement reflects discourses surrounding work/labor in Thailand where ethnic "natives" in South East Asia are seen as less capable and ambitious than foreigners. Syed Hussein Alatas's influential critique of imperialism in *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) analyzes the image of Malays, Filipinos and Javanese as "dependent" (8) and lazy—an effect, Alatas argues, of persisting colonial ideologies and stereotypes in the region. Alatas contends that this

myth “has led to certain discriminatory practices...[and] a number of employers have avoided Malays because they believe them to be lazy...[or] not endowed with the capacity to do business. All these ideas derive their origin from the colonial image of the Malays” (17). Alatas claims the colonial myth of the lazy native permeates even current day constructions of Malaysians as dependent and requiring assistance. Though Alatas refers predominantly to the Malay Archipelago, his critique may be extended to Thailand, where the myth of the lazy native is also enacted against native Thais. Hock Seng, then, exhibits this colonial mentality, criticizing Thais for their lack of “the spirit of entrepreneurship” and incompetency (132).

Bacigalupi’s novel emphasizes the manner in which ideological constructions of race are reinforced by a history of economic, social, and political relations. Not surprisingly, the list of racial slurs and epithets in the novel is much longer than what has been explored here. For instance, Anderson, as an outsider, is frequently called a “*farang*” [white foreigner] (31), “*yang guizi*” [foreign devil] (29), and “devil cat” (28). Bacigalupi’s frequent use of racially loaded language is not, however, in the tradition of ethnocentric colonial fiction. Rather, the emphasis placed on racial distrust and animosity highlights the growing division between peoples forced to survive under the conditions of a brutal capitalist economy. Subject to racial discrimination and under a state of constant uncertainty and competition, Emiko and Hock Seng’s narratives are closely linked in their political exclusion as illegal aliens and their reduction to replaceable labor. This fact is made evident when Raleigh, a nefarious bar owner and pimp, threateningly tells Emiko, “I own every part of you” (159). Emiko’s cultural demarcation is not far removed from Hock Seng’s status as a yellow card. When Bangkok is locked down after the death

of Somdet Chaopraya—protector of Thailand’s Child Queen and the most powerful figure in Thai government—“only a few people are allowed in and out, ones who show residence cards. Locals” (224). Because Hock Seng carries, “only a yellow card for identification, it took [him] half the evening to traverse the city, avoiding checkpoints” (224). Hock Seng is thus positioned as migrant labor and, like Emiko, a refugee who must live in transit while denied social and political agency. By exploring diverse characters as they are affected by different political, social, and economic positions, *The Windup Girl*’s use of racial representations recognizes the complex history of race relations in Thailand, fracturing an Orientalist construction of “Asia” as a homogenous region.

### **Genetic Code and the “Informationalization of Race”**

In addition to portraying the continued imperial and racist structures of a future Bangkok, *The Windup Girl* also explores the effects of techno-orientalism on scientific discourses, namely on the field of genomics. If “new technologies become subsumed into the discourse of racism” (Morley and Robins 172), Bacigalupi’s novel examines the tensions between scientific objectivity and persisting racial prejudice, revealing, as Rieder puts it, that “the crux of racist ideology is not the opposition between civilization and savagery. It is rather the way scientific racism confuses cultural and natural phenomena” (109). This scientific racism is most evident in Gibbons, a genius scientist who has deserted AgriGen and is now harboured by Thailand to help the nation battle the mutating plagues of agricultural corporations and their genetically modified foods. The

relationship between science, biology, and culture is explored through the development of genetic technologies in *The Windup Girl*, revealing that old race models persist in this future world where changes in communication technologies have ushered in a new colour-blind age. Race in the novel is positioned through the paradigm of genetics, an equation that reiterates colonial mentalities and represents a disturbing manifestation of techno-orientalism.

As a “generipper” (357), Gibbons is one of the few people in the novel to embrace New People; however, his scientific interest in New People as products of evolution also reduces the complexity of their lived experience to scientific fact. While New People are “raced” bodies marked by their supposed difference, Gibbons refers to Emiko as a genetic “design” with which he is familiar (357). Gibbons’s claims to knowing and understanding Emiko are based on assumptions regarding her genetics, and his treatment of her as a programmed design reflects a shift in what Chow-White calls the “informationalization of race,” or the process by which globalization, changes in the global economy, and developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have resulted in a new mode of racialization. Chow-White explains racial knowledge is now constructed in terms of genetic “information,” reducing the politics of race to a matter of code (1181). Chow-White contends,

Where conventional conceptions of race have been articulated in terms of culture or phenotype, in the digital age, information is the material by which we work on racial meaning... However, race as information does not replace the dependency of racialization on ethnicity or skin colour. Rather, as the paradigm of race as culture emerged from the paradigm of race as biology, I would argue that the paradigm of race as information has emerged from both to create a new racial formation—the informationalization of race. (1171)

Because genetic technologies that focus on programming DNA are ICTs, such technologies are not merely tools but global systems which act as sites negotiating racial meaning through data that is collected, stored, and analyzed. This results in new racial classification systems that mirror old hierarchal systems with seemingly neutral terms. As Chow-White argues, “Racial classification systems that used terms such as Negroid, Mongoloid and Caucasian have become African, Asian, and European, which, on the surface, may appear more informational and descriptive than ideological” (1182). In addition to this, Chow-White argues the informationalization of race may continue to use the same markers of racialization (physical characteristics, ethnicity, etc.) but does not always rely on them, as the very structures of developing ICTs form new sites of creating and re-working racial meaning. *The Windup Girl* explores the dangers of this suppressed scientific racism through Gibbons’s treatment of Emiko.

Needless to say, Donna Haraway’s earlier reflections on technoscience in her landmark essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985) also examine the implications of developing communication technologies and biotechnology on discourses of race, gender, and class. Haraway outlines the transition from “old hierarchical dominations” to “scary new networks,” a development she calls the “informatics of domination” (161). Both Haraway and Chow-White consider the development of communication sciences and biology integral in the move from an industrial society to an information system, emphasizing the changes biotechnologies and genetics play on our understanding of DNA as the ultimate “code” of human life (Haraway 162, Chow-White 1168). Gibbons embodies this mentality in the technical and often reductive language he uses to describe

windups; to Gibbons, New People are subjects who are “easier to build” (243) and whose “mechanics” he “know[s] the secrets of” (358). Though Gibbons appears to be helping Emiko when he agrees to help reverse her sterility, he in fact reduces her to the status of “genetic material” to be disassembled and reassembled (358). To Gibbons, Emiko’s perceived difference is a result of her mechanics or biology. Despite Haraway’s appeal for a move away from essentialism and naturalized difference in the face of changing technoscience, Bacigalupi’s novel suggests, like Chow-White’s study, a renewed (and troublesome) relationship between race and biology as a result of developing ICTs. Chow-White asserts that advancements in human genomics require us to reconsider the ways technoscience may result in a reification of race, or a return to the “alter of biological determinism” (1185). As new scientific technologies and research develop, what becomes increasingly evident is the need to examine the effects of technoscience on the discourse and politics of race.

Gibbons’s acceptance of New People seems to encourage a move away from identity politics and racist ideology; however, Gibbons’s lack of any ethical approach in his scientific endeavours reveals he is primarily motivated by ego and power. His claims of authority over Emiko’s genetic design show a paternalism and a desire for domination—a desire made all the more troubling by his wish to be the scientist, or “god,” to lead the future of mankind into “the Eden that beckons us” (243). Gibbons fails to see the dangers of a future where, as a white male scientist, he continues to rule over racial and ethnic others. Though Gibbons appears to only jokingly call himself a “god” on numerous occasions (244), his sense of superiority permeates all his work. He views genetic manipulation as a technological tool divorced from ideology: “Our every

tinkering in nature, our every biological striving. We are what we are, and the world is ours. We are its gods. Your only difficulty is in your unwillingness to unleash your potential fully upon it” (243). This genetic “tinkering,” however, has resulted in a growing divide between the wealthy and poor, increased racial tensions, heightened nationalism, and global starvation. Such events are clearly not the “potential” Gibbons refers to.

Even as a supposedly objective scientist, Gibbons is unable to see how his own work is implicated in social and political structures. As a white scientist, protected and provided for by Thailand in exchange for his knowledge, Gibbons is further removed from the streets of Bangkok where poverty and racism are an everyday reality. Distanced from the realities of Thailand’s struggling people, Kanya realizes Gibbons sees his work as an intellectual game:

*We are in the hands of a gamesman. In a flash of insight, Kanya understands the doctor entirely...A man who found his competition too lacking, and so switched sides and joined the Thai Kingdom for the stimulation it might provide...We rest in the hands of a fickle god. He plays on our behalf only for entertainment, and he will close his eyes and sleep if we fail to engage his intellect...The man exists only for competition, the chess match of evolution, fought on a global scale. (248)*

Gibbons’s interest in Thailand and genetics is not out of compassion or empathy for the condition of others. While Gibbons appears to assist Emiko at the end of the novel, one cannot help but wonder if he is fulfilling his dream of having “a few more worshippers” (244). Hageman also points out Gibbons’s “discourse of diety,” asserting, “despite the hospitality he shows to Emiko and the cheshires, Gibbons still frames his vision of the future in terms of ‘gods’ with dominion from a position atop a hierarchy” (297).

Gibbons’s supposed scientific rationalism reveals an imperial streak for power and

domination. He is not altruistically motivated. As he explains to Kanya, Gibbons worked with AgriGen for so long because, “They paid me in the coin I wanted most” (246).

If Gibbons highlights the scientific racism of future technoscience, as a genetically altered human Emiko highlights the effects of this scientific racism on people of colour. New People are engineered, and thus considered “unnatural” (302) and “not human” (35). Emiko’s genetic structure determines her value and worth, and her “difference” and innate passivity is supposedly a result of manipulated genetic code. Physically, Emiko’s difference is barely visible except in a specific movement marked by its “heechy-keechy” stutter-stop motion (37). However, like Chow-White’s assertion that physical traits work alongside the informationalization of race, what marks Emiko’s “raced” body is not only her physical difference but her difference as manifested on an *informational* and *genetic* level. Her physical and genetic variation is considered indicative of innate difference, and Emiko often wishes her clients would “look at her, to see her instead of simply evaluating her as a piece of genetic trash” (37). Emiko is treated as “genetic trash” as a result of her race, and New People are considered a group containing immutable and predetermined differences from “natural” people. Because New People are treated as programmed “platform[s]” (357), Emiko is considered inherently subservient and incapable of autonomous thought and feeling, allowing others to continue to abuse her. Bacigalupi’s vision of developing technoscience is bleak—this future is not colour-blind, but rather one where biotechnology reduces the complexities of human life to “code.”

As a windup whose genetic difference renders her subhuman, Emiko’s narrative reveals the ways genetic technologies may rearticulate racist and colonial ideologies.

Emiko's biology is seen as predetermining her identity as racial other. Furthermore, her alterity is seen as indicative of psychological and social difference, and Emiko must be trained to control her "animal" urges. Emiko's teacher, Mizumi-sensei, reinforces this when teaching New People "there are two parts to a New Person's nature. The evil half, ruled by the animal hungers of their genes...And balanced against this, the civilized self, the side that knows the difference between niche and animal urge. That comprehends its place in the hierarchies of their country and people" (154). Mizumi-sensei's instruction that New People must "own their souls" (154) and "civilize" their animal urges is reminiscent of colonial endeavours to "civilize" different cultures. Racism has not disappeared, and as Emiko often laments, "Even if she is New People, there is nothing new under the sun" (38). The genetic variation of New People is treated as a condition designating one's inferiority, subservience, and obedience. However, as N. Katherine Hayles argues in her discussion of the posthuman, principles of reflexivity may reveal that, "an attribute previously considered to have emerged from a set of pre-existing conditions is in fact used to generate the conditions" (9). In other words, Emiko's supposed inferiority is constructed through the stories, teachings, and prejudices that represent her need to serve as an already naturalized quality. Taught all her life that she is subservient and genetically built to follow orders, Emiko begins to question these narratives: "Does her eagerness to serve come from some portion of canine DNA that makes her always assume that natural people outrank her for pack loyalty? Or is it simply the training that she has spoken of?" (184).<sup>18</sup> Emiko's question reveals the

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<sup>18</sup> Though not explored in detail here, Emiko's comparison to animals not only evokes slave comparisons to animals, it also emphasizes the anthropocentrism of this future world.

reflexivity and dangers of naturalized difference—she is unable to determine whether engineered genes have led to her servitude, or whether, as Hayles suggests, her servitude and submissiveness is an attribute which produces the very difference it presupposes. Emiko’s eventual defiance of her training and her ability to finally break free of her cycle of dependence on Raleigh and Anderson suggests that contrary to her genetic “code,” Gibbons may be correct in assuring Emiko, “Nothing about you is inevitable” (358).

Emiko’s resistance to her training results in a double consciousness in which she is frequently torn by her conflicting feelings to serve or rebel. To draw on W. E. B. Du Bois’ discussion of race in his study, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Emiko’s internal struggle is a form of self-discipline in which she is constantly subject to a sense of looking at herself “through the eyes of others” (38). Whenever Emiko begins to question her role and hope for an alternative future, “She squashes the thought. It is the other Emiko who thinks this...Two sides of a coin, two sides of the soul,” a DuBoisian double consciousness (154).<sup>19</sup> Emiko frequently suppresses her desire to rebel, reminding herself that such desires are not part of her niche. This form of self-discipline divides Emiko’s thoughts between what others expect of her and her own desires—“two warring ideals” in one body (Du Bois 38). As a result of this double consciousness, Emiko constantly struggles with her identity. However, like Haraway’s cyborg figure, it is not until Emiko embraces her partial and contradictory perspective that she begins to question the knowledge of her origins. While initially Emiko believes her genes dictate her

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<sup>19</sup> Du Bois describes this double consciousness as “a peculiar sensation...this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (38).

oppression, Emiko complicates this when she, “wonders if she has it backwards, if the part that struggles to maintain her illusions of self-respect is the part intent upon her destruction. If her body, this collection of cells and manipulated DNA—with its own stronger, more practical needs—is actually the survivor: the one with will” (34). This does not mean that Emiko’s body, “with its own stronger...needs” (34), defines or destines her to a predetermined future (even her inability to be fertile is not inevitable). Rather, to think of the body as “entrapped” by programmed social and genetic code is to deny the possibilities that reside in her multiple contradictions. Her “illusions of self-respect” are social and political structures that have demanded her to fulfill her role as a passive and subservient New Person, and it is not her supposed genetic difference that reinforces her subjugation. If “bodies are maps of power and identity” (Haraway 180), then Emiko’s constant struggle with her identity is one which recognizes that different bodies have been shaped by and participate in different historical, political and social structures. Not until the latter half of the novel does Emiko begin to understand the effects of institutional regulation and imperial relations between New People and “natural people” as they affect her identity and life (184).

Emiko’s politically and socially marginalized status suggests that the “colour-blind language in human genomics” masks a return to biological determinism (Chow-White 1182). This colour-blind language also hides the formation of new regimes of racial signification and discrimination in every day practices and institutions. Because Emiko is a windup, she is an illegal alien in Thailand and therefore denied political and social rights. Put another way, she “is a deeply maligned technoscientific posthuman” (Hageman 294). The Environment Ministry’s strict regulations against New People

means that if Emiko is discovered she will be immediately killed and mulched.<sup>20</sup> Emiko is not only legally marginalized; the physical abuse Emiko must endure at the hands of Kannika, one of Raleigh's "natural" girls, in order to survive reminds us of the continued effects of institutional racism in her everyday life. Kannika's violence is accompanied by verbal abuse as she calls Emiko a "Japanese plaything," telling her she "will always be nothing, and for once the dirty Japanese get what is coming to them" (38-9). Emiko's association with Japanese high technology, simultaneously revered and despised, subjects her to a form of techno-orientalism—because she is a female figure and Japanese technological commodity, Emiko's threatening difference reveals techno-orientalist fears that the West's "loss of its technological hegemony may be associated with its cultural 'emasculatation'" (Morley and Robins 167).

As a "raced" character, Emiko's "heechy keechy" movements also mark her body as the body of a woman of colour—"I am marked. Always, we are marked" (358)—and her continued abuse signifies the domination and exploitation of her body in the global political economy. Judged by her physical movements and genetic difference, Emiko mourns, "All they see are stutter-stop motions. A joke. An alien toy. A windup" (36). Though Judith Butler focuses on the sexed body when she suggests the body is "shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex" (103), Butler's argument may be extended to race. If the body is shaped by political and cultural forces, race and sex mark Emiko's as that of commodity, slave, and dangerous other. Markers like Emiko's stutter-stop motion are designed to

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Hageman also reflects on this, stating that Emiko is, "an illegal non-human alien who would be shredded and recycled if discovered" (294).

enforce Emiko's physical and ultimately social difference. As Gibbons explains to Emiko, "The windup movement is not a required trait.... The safeties are there because of lessons learned, but they are not required" (358). In other words, Emiko's body has quite literally been constructed to reinforce her subjugation. While identities cannot be disembodied, they are also always intimately bound by political and social relations.

Emiko eventually realizes that her biology does not predetermine her value or subject her to a life of servitude, but rather the practices and social structures of a world which "trained [her] to the eternal service of a master" do (252). In a world where "New People" are considered under the rule of those who are "natural," Emiko realizes she will always be viewed as simultaneously other than human and as less than human. As a result, Emiko dreams of escaping to the villages of the North where New People supposedly live away from the laws of the Environment Ministry. During a moment which mirrors Victor Frankenstein's creature and his own self-conscious awakening as he gazes into a pool of water, Emiko stares into the *khlong* (moat) waters and "sees herself in the canal's reflection with the green glow of the lamps all around...She feels perhaps she could become one with the water...Does she not deserve to float and slowly sink? She stifles the thought. That is the old Emiko. The one who could never teach her to fly" (253).<sup>21</sup> If Emiko once felt torn by a sort of double consciousness, it is at this moment

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<sup>21</sup> In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1831), Victor Frankenstein's creature gazes into a pool, comparing himself to the cottage dwellers he so admires:

I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified when I view myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. (116)

Like Frankenstein's creature, Emiko is trapped by her "marked" body and her own ambitions of freedom.

that her “jesses” are cut free (252). A few pages later, Emiko will fight against her allegedly ingrained passivity, retaliating against Raleigh, the Somdet Chaoparaya, and the men in Raleigh’s bar in a moment of violent rage. Despite recognizing her ability to break free of her supposedly innate dependence and urge to follow orders, Emiko knows she must eventually reach the northern villages to survive as Bangkok is still a city structured on racist principals which privilege “natural” people. As a result, Emiko continues to struggle against her submission until the end, as she is still living in a world that requires her to be submissive despite the urge to rebel she often feels. These boundaries are so ingrained in Emiko and have become so naturalized that even Emiko admits “she has been enslaved to think against New People, even when she herself is one of them” (155). Though Emiko is told she will always serve, when she hears of the villages up North where New People have no masters, “she makes herself stare at the mess and recognize that she is no longer a slave.... She is something else” (252). Emiko never reaches these villages, but as Bangkok floods and its inhabitants flee, Emiko is given the space and freedom to begin the process of reversing her cultural training.

### **Racial Futures**

*The Windup Girl* invokes a number of contemporary racial concerns, and its culturally diverse characters provide a point of departure for examining the importance of race in developing technoscience. Bacigalupi’s reference to the social, economic, and political histories of Thailand situates discourses of race in the novel on a local context, avoiding simplistic binaries between “East” and “West.” Edward Said argues, “When one

uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis...the result is usually to polarize the distinction...and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies” (45-6). Bacigalupi’s novel avoids replicating the binary division between “East” and “West,” instead emphasizing what Haraway calls the “historical systems of domination” that link bodies and power (161). In this future, technological advancement does not result in a colour-blind world, but instead perpetuates the racist structures of a vampiric global economy. Instead of examining the developments of technoscience and race in an information society from a Western-centric perspective, Bacigalupi’s novel is attendant to the complex history of race relations in South East Asia. In doing so, *The Windup Girl* departs from traditions of colonial adventure fiction by refusing to exoticize Thailand and producing an environment that foregrounds the intersections of race, technology, and imperial encounter. Bacigalupi’s novel does not suggest a post-racial alternative, but emphasizes the potential for continuing ethnocentric/racist ideologies and practices in developing technoscience. In this estranged world, familiar patterns continue as bodies are “raced” by the changing discourses of genomics, information technologies, and globalization.

### **“Race and/as Technology” in *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl***

The final half of this chapter continues to examine the relationship between race and technology, particularly biotechnologies and genomics, in Linda Nagata’s *The Bohr Maker* (1995) and Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* (2002). I argue that the representation of Asian bodies and their modification through genetic engineering in *The Bohr Maker* and

*Salt Fish Girl* constructs “race as technology” (Coleman 177), a move that enables each novel to explore the promises and perils of understanding race through genomics. Asian characters in both novels are differentiated by their genetics rather than visible physical traits, and the novels question how genomic research might lead to the re-emergence of racist assumptions about biological “destiny.” In this respect, *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* explore how the genetics of certain bodies continue to be seen as more valuable while others are deemed expendable and easily exploited, even if processes of racialization may no longer be premised upon visible physical traits. The identification of this difference in value on a molecular, genetic level is symptomatic of new biopolitical regimes that organize and divide bodies through a variety of processes, including scrutiny over one’s conception (natural versus unnatural birth), the ability to access technological resources to attend to one’s body, and the ability to make decisions over one’s body or not. Tellingly, Asian bodies in these narratives are “owned” and acted upon by other characters in the scientific community. By specifically using techno-Orientalist tropes,<sup>22</sup> both novels reveal the ways in which the bodies of people of colour are doubly racialized in science fiction, reduced to instruments of both science and narrative exoticism.

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<sup>22</sup> I reiterate here again that my definition of techno-Orientalism differs slightly from conventional uses of the term. Niu, for instance, defines techno-Orientalism as “a practice of ascribing, erasing, and/or disavowing relationships between technology and Asian peoples and subjects,” and clarifies that her “version of techno-Orientalism points to the way it ignores the history and constructions of relationships between Asian people and technology, particularly those deemed emerging or revolutionary” (74). Though Niu sees techno-Orientalism as a mechanism that disavows the participation of Asian people in technological development (89), I understand techno-Orientalism to mean the opposite; rather, I see techno-Orientalism as the attempt to “naturalize” the relationship between Asian characters and technology. By linking Asian identity to technology (regardless of whether this is through a process of ascribing or disavowing this relationship), techno-Orientalist narratives function as processes of racialization that represent certain bodies as instruments and “tools” to be exploited. My understanding of techno-Orientalism also serves to highlight how race has always functioned a technology of colonialism.

Despite their somewhat different subgenres—Greta A. Niu calls *The Bohr Maker* nanopunk and *Salt Fish Girl* is often examined in relation to postcolonial science fiction—both novels share many thematic concerns. To briefly summarize the plot of each, Nagata’s novel follows the separate (but soon to be intertwined lives) of Nikko, a genetically engineered man, and Phousita, a genetically altered woman. An illegal nanotechnology known as the “Bohr Maker” (described as a kind of molecular genetic technology) brings them together when Phousita is unintentionally injected with it and the Maker begins to alter her physiology, giving her access to technological resources previously unavailable to her in the poverty stricken community of Sunda. Nikko and Phousita have ambiguous “origins,” in the sense that while described and characterized according to their Asian features, they are not explicitly linked to a specific ethnicity/nation. This ambiguity is characteristic of both novels and their interrogation of the shifting relationship between race, anxieties about the body, contemporary genomics, and processes of racialization premised upon new divisions.

Like *The Bohr Maker*, Lai’s novel depicts a future where the human genome sequence can be altered and cloned. *Salt Fish Girl* is set in the near-future along the Western coast of Canada, and one of its primary narrative arches is about the relationship between Miranda and Evie, both characters of Asian descent. During a critical moment in the novel Miranda discovers that Evie’s genes have been spliced with those of freshwater carp in order to render her “nonhuman.”<sup>23</sup> Though it is considered illegal, multinational

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<sup>23</sup> Two primary narrative arcs occur in *Salt Fish Girl*: the first narrative, set in nineteenth century China, focuses on Nu Wa and the salt fish girl, while the second, set in the near-future, features Miranda and Evie. For the purposes of this essay, I only discuss the second narrative as it most clearly exemplifies the intersection between science fiction, techno-Orientalism, and biotechnologies.

corporations are revealed to be creating genetically altered humans like Evie for work in their factories, a future rendition of contemporary sweatshops.

My purposes in this section are twofold: first, I examine how both novels critique the ways Asian bodies are constructed as genetic “others.” By foregrounding difference at the micro-level of genetics, both texts interrogate the biopolitical reassertion of racial “markers” through genomics and critique how this difference continues to position certain bodies as more expendable and exploitable than others. Second, I examine how science fiction may provide the conceptual tools for imagining an engagement with race beyond its negative history as lack and abjection. That is, rather than offering critique only, I suggest *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* also construct alternative frameworks for seeing race as a tool of ethical deliberation. Using Beth Coleman’s influential work on race as technology, I argue that the use of techno-Orientalist tropes in these narratives might also be seen as opening up a space, or gap, that can “be exploited to liberate race from an inherited position of abjection toward a greater expression of agency” (177). Because techno-Orientalism positions the Asian body itself as technological, it becomes a particularly potent medium through which processes of racialization can be interrogated, critiqued, and reimagined.

By doing so, Asian characters in the novels move towards greater expressions of agency, as they utilize “[r]ace as levered mechanism” against the systems that attempt to contain them by “mov[ing] discourses of race from the field of science into that of ethics” (Coleman 182). Rather than framing discussion of race and what qualifies as “Asian” through the dichotomy of science versus ideology, *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* shift the discussion towards questions of process asking instead *why* certain modes of

representation are generated and *who* they benefit. Both novels are therefore more interested in interrogating the social and ethical implications of genomics rather than its accuracy or “truth”; as Jenny Reardon argues, “We may never resolve questions about the biological meaning of race, but we can make more reflective choices about whether and how we engage the debate” (59). Shifting arguments away from the biology/culture divide that often defines Asian Americanist critique, positioning race as technology means that *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* embrace the technoscientific discourse of science fiction to highlight the fragmented and relational terms (epistemological, material, and economic) upon which Asian/Asian American identity has historically been constructed.

### **Critique: Techno-Orientalism and the Asian Body**

A central concern that unites *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* is their interrogation of the biopolitical reassertion of racial “markers” through genetic technologies. By focusing on genetically altered posthuman characters of Asian descent, or who are represented as “Asian” in appearance, both novels inevitably draw on techno-Orientalist tropes. In one of the earliest theorizations of the term, David Morley and Kevin Robins define techno-Orientalism as the integration of racist assumptions into representations of technology itself; thus, Morley and Robins contend that “the alienated and dystopian image of capitalist progress” (170) is represented through dehumanized, emotionless Asian robots who also signify Western fear over loss of technological

hegemony. While scholars such as Morley, Robins, and Toshiya Ueno<sup>24</sup> focus primarily on the ways techno-Orientalism articulates anxieties about the West's economic status in the future, in this section I would like to focus on the ways representations of Asian characters in *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* express anxiety over how race is technology precisely because racial difference is established through genomics and new scientific practices.<sup>25</sup> Techno-Orientalism in these narratives is therefore not representative of fear over technological hegemony, but fear of increasingly unstable definitions and understandings of race in a supposedly "postracial" scientific age. Specifically, developments in mapping the human genome have led to increasing tension between genetic racialists and racial constructionists over the value of using genomics as a basis for understanding and discussing race.<sup>26</sup>

*The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* reveal the dangers of searching for "truths" about race through genomics, even when such scientific discourse appears to affirm the meaninglessness of race. In this way, they make evident Jenny Reardon's claim that in the early twenty-first century, "subtle differences among statements about the biological meaninglessness of race acted to shore up the power of biological experts and political actors to differentiate humans racially for the purposes of knowing and governing them"

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<sup>24</sup> See Ueno's essay "Techno-orientalism and media-tribalism: on Japanese animation and rave culture" (1999).

<sup>25</sup> There are several other working definitions of techno-Orientalism. In the latest collection on *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* (2015), for instance, editors David Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta Niu define techno-Orientalism fairly broadly as "the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse" (2).

<sup>26</sup> Jenny Reardon's work on "Decoding Race and Human Difference in a Genomic Age" is critical to my explication of techno-Orientalism in these narratives. Reardon's article outlines in much greater detail the various scientific, political, and ideological forces at play leading up to the Human Genome Project.

(40). In the novels examined here, the manipulation of human genetic material means that people can change their physical appearances (*The Bohr Maker*), or science has confirmed the equality of all people and “[s]tuff like that is not supposed to happen anymore” (Lai 160). However, even in these supposedly postracial scientific futures, racializing techniques continue to segregate and construct as abject certain bodies. This racialization occurs through the ways in which certain bodies are genetically modified without consent (positioning them as instruments of science), or through the ways in which access to biotechnology and scientific resources limits the ability of certain people to live according to the same standards of life granted to those in the global North. *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* therefore articulate contemporary anxieties around the meaning of “difference” in an age when bodies can be examined, probed, and modified at the very micro-scale of genetics.

In *The Bohr Maker*, for instance, it is significant that Nikko is the only character specifically racialized as Asian while other characters are described primarily through phenotypal characteristics (through skin or hair colour). Nikko’s face is “half-masked, his flat Asian nose and petite ears barely visible,” and the platelets that characterize his skin are frequently called “china-blue” (16). Furthermore, Nikko’s genetic alterations mean his face is defined by a “cold stare” and “lack of expressions” (16). These physical characteristics, however, indicate a greater biological difference. To Kirstin, Nikko’s secret lover and “Chief of the Commonwealth Police, charged with enforcing the laws that limited the use of nanotechnology” (20), Nikko is an “animal” (17) and “freak” (28) because he is genetically engineered. Though she fetishizes his difference as a “china statue” (20), Kirstin, considers it “one of her duties to ensure that society remained

human” (20), and she sees Nikko as decidedly animalistic, “feral” (17), and an inhuman statue; thus, Nikko’s physical “Asian” qualities come to be associated with the subhuman. In a future where people with money can change their physical appearances, identifying the novel’s only subhuman character with a specific racial category is an instance of techno-Orientalism in which Nikko’s “half-masked” face and “flat Asian nose” symbolize the fear of “dehumanised technological power” (Morley and Robins 170).<sup>27</sup>

However, Nagata’s novel does not simply reiterate techno-Orientalist tropes; instead, it critiques them specifically, and paradoxically, by constantly describing Nikko’s body through racialized terms, a move that makes legible the ways Nikko’s genetic difference is established with recourse to traditional racial taxonomies. It is Nikko’s genetic alterations that make him subhuman in the novel, not his epidermal characteristics; by making this invisible difference visible through the characteristic markers of techno-Orientalist discourse, Nagata’s novel highlights the dangers of reading biological “meaning” through genomics. For instance, despite Nikko’s claim that, “I am *not* an animal!” (18), he is considered to be first and foremost a scientific experiment, not a person with rights and agency. Though mixing human genetic material is allowed, the global government body known as the Commonwealth bans the combination of “human inheritance with nonhuman or artificial instructions” (22). Because Nikko’s genomic

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<sup>27</sup> In other words, Nikko represents western anxieties around unfettered technological/capitalist expansion in Asia. In *Spaces of Identity* (1993), Morley and Robins argue that “image[s] of the Japanese as inhuman” cyborgs reveals the “political and cultural unconscious of the West, [in which] Japan has come to exist as the figure of empty and dehumanised technological power” (170). Japanese/Asian cyborgs therefore “provok[e] both resentment and envy” as they represent technological progress as well as fear of the dehumanising effects of such development (170).

structure results from artificial instructions that create additional body parts and an “enameled hide” (16) which allow him to exist in space, he is not considered human. Instead, he is “an *experimental model*, a singular prototype of an artificial human variant that had since been banned” (16; my emphasis). Just as the bodies of people of colour have always been used as instruments of science,<sup>28</sup> Nikko’s body is a tool, valued for its utility as a scientific experiment. Accordingly, his right to live is premised upon the will of others, in this case the “authority of a research permit” granted by the Congressional science advisory committee that also includes an “expiration date” (19) for when he must be shut down. In order to make Nikko’s difference matter and to enforce his position as object rather than human subject, Nikko’s physical characteristics (as Asian) therefore “signify” the invisible processes at the micro-level of genetics.

Additional means through which certain bodies are marked as subhuman include access to genetic technologies and the agency to use them (something Nikko also does not have). Put another way, genetic differences are not the only determining factors to qualify as “human” in the novel. Because Phousita cannot afford body modifications that would enable her to have “ghosts” and additional cloned bodies, Niu argues that she, “lacks the modifications that make one recognizably human to the Commonwealth” (86). Phousita is not specifically described as Asian like Nikko, but her lack of agency represents Orientalist terms. Not only is she from the “primitive political entity” of Sunda (84)—referencing islands in the territory of Indonesia—Phousita is described through stereotypes typically associated with Asian women as petite and passive. She is

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<sup>28</sup> Thanks to Isiah Lavender III who reminded me of the particular case of The Tuskegee Experiment where the U.S. government infamously conducted a syphilis experiment on African American men in Alabama between 1932 and 1972.

“unnaturally small” and “stood no taller than a petite child of seven or eight” (8). Her physicality, like many racialized stereotypes, serves to initially indicate a passivity, as we are told that she “belong[s] to Arif” (40) and depends upon his direction. Furthermore, Nagata’s novel implies that Phousita’s modified body is part of what subjects her to the sex trade, positioning her as part of what Kirstin calls the “scourge of human rats” who live in poverty outside the Commonwealth (85). Despite their different backgrounds, Nikko and Phousita both exemplify how genetics becomes a determining factor in this future. One’s genomic structure not only defines who has the “right” to live but also who has access to technologies that would enable this kind of subjectivity. Agency in the novel indicates the right to live, thrive, and move as a free being, abilities denied to both Nikko and Phousita.

Like Nikko, in Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* Evie is represented as Asian, though the use of racial taxonomy in Lai’s novel serves primarily to indicate a greater, genetic difference. Evie and her sisters (the other women in the factories known as Sonias) all have “[b]rown eyes and black hair” (160), and there are rumors that they descend from “a woman called Ai, a Chinese woman who married a Japanese man” (160). Importantly, these physical characteristics do not matter until Evie reveals that she is “not human” because her “genes are point zero three per cent *Cyprinus carpio*—freshwater carp,” designating Evie as a “new fucking life form” (158). Upon learning Evie is a clone, Miranda notes, “She creeped me out...there was something sordid about her origins” (158). Indeed, prior to this, Miranda does not notice anything different about Evie. Miranda’s shift in perspective underscores the immateriality of race—Evie’s body is not raced until the scientific “truth” of her origins as being composed of non-human genetic

material emerges. This genetic indicator marks Evie as a biological other and provides the reason Nextcorp can exploit the labor of women of colour—where early colonialism used phenotypal characteristics to indicate the inherent inferiority of people of colour,<sup>29</sup> Nextcorp uses genetic difference to assert that Sonias are subhuman. In *Salt Fish Girl*, race is technology, not only because it is purposely and culturally engineered, but also because the supposedly neutral scientific field of genomics establishes race.

What racializes the “brown eyed, black haired” bodies in *Salt Fish Girl*, then, is not their phenotypal difference but the ways in which their bodies become instruments of science, reduced to biomaterial that can be manipulated, commodified, and controlled. While the origin story about Ai is a rumor only, Evie suggests the greater likelihood that the genetic material for the Sonias was acquired from the Diverse Genome Project which “focused on the peoples of the so-called Third World, Aboriginal peoples, and peoples in danger of extinction,” a project that was purchased by Nextcorp (160). Regardless of the origin story, in both cases colored peoples’ genetic material gets treated as a commodity to be bought and sold for scientific practice. This process not only replicates but *constructs* racist assumptions about biological difference and inferiority—by selling the biomaterial of only certain populations, specific bodies are targeted for their “bioavailability.” Rachel Lee argues that, “At the turn of the twenty-first century, an epidermal notion of race rubs against and in tension with other modes of aggregating populations” (210). One primary mode of segregating populations emerges from what

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<sup>29</sup> See for instance, John Agnew’s discussion of the way “‘race’ shifted in meaning from the looser sense of groups differing as much civilizationally as physically to a much stronger sense of complexion and physical stature as determining civilizational differences” in colonial geopolitics (45). Throughout *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America* (2014) Rachel Lee also points out the ways, “comparative anatomy and the equation of colored bodies with primitive sexuality and infectious disease were used to justify...colonial policies” such as those “in the Philippines and Asian exclusion legislation in the United States” (260).

Lee calls “a biomodification regime of primary class or economic stratification in which wealthier sectors of society supplement and extend their optimized bodily transformations, while poor and perpetually debt-ridden sectors of society become bioavailable to service this sector’s amplified transformations” (210). Lee offers the example of organ donors from the global South as an example of such bioavailability, alongside other examples such as the biopsied tissue of Henrietta Lacks and ensuing racialization of the cell line HeLa.<sup>30</sup> In a supposedly post-racial world where “[s]tuff like that is not supposed to happen any more” (160), the segregation of populations in *Salt Fish Girl* according to biological difference reveals that understanding race through genetics is a difference in degree and not kind from the overtly racist ideologies of colonialism.

Accordingly, while Evie and Miranda look exactly alike—indeed, when Evie suggests she is not human Miranda “looked at her blankly” (156)—what comes to matter is “the neoracializing mode of cloned or ontogenetic marking” (Lee 61). By focusing on processes of racialization, Lai’s novel avoids framing race as purely scientific fact or social ideology. Instead, *Salt Fish Girl* is more interested in examining what the ethical, social, and political stakes are of biological definitions of race. For Evie, part of the danger of identifying race at the micro-level of genetics lies in the hand of a corporation, Nextcorp, which defines human/non-human, or who can live and how through labor. Evie and the Sonias are therefore intentionally racialized for their labor and enslaved because they are, after all, not human according to the ideological divisions propagated by Nextcorp’s genomic research. Lai’s novel also highlights the ways in which ideological

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<sup>30</sup> For more information see Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010).

divisions between civilization/savagery or human/nonhuman are central structures of racialized capitalism where the exploitation of people of colour continues to be a reality. Just as the colonial gaze is premised upon the binary between the one who looks and the one who is looked at, Rieder points out that “the apologetic function of the concept of race does not depend on precise categorization, however, but simply on division itself” (110). By defining “human” and “nonhuman” difference through genetic variation, Nextcorp can continue to use cheap labor and exploit their workers with little regard for their well-being.

In different ways, then, both *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* present the racialized Asian body as a biological resource, distinguished by their supposed biological “inferiority,” and useful only for the purposes of scientific advance (Nikko) or fulfilling the desires of a biologically superior race (Phousita and Evie). Racism has not disappeared in these novels, and genomics justifies not only the difference and “subhuman” qualities of these characters, but also the wholesale killing of their communities. For instance, Phousita’s community is destroyed with little ethical consideration when Kirstin decides to burn it down to draw out Phousita and the Bohr Maker. The extermination of Sonias in *Salt Fish Girl* is equally brutal, as the safe house Evie formed with the Sonias gets destroyed when their nascent, self-governed community is discovered. Sonia 14 finds her murdered sisters in a field, where “[s]he recognized Sonia 148 by her hand, still wearing a ring cut from a bit of copper pipe” and “Sonia 116 by a mole on her heel” (250). The brutality of these murders reveals that racialized bodies are not only exploited but expendable. As Lee claims, “[r]ace operates as a mode of class-labor exploitation...but racism as it engenders moral repugnance refers to genocidal

obliteration (necropolitics), including the keeping of half-alive dehumanized others as bioemporiums and as scientific/clinical resources for the biopolitical elect” (217). The Sonias are kept “half-alive” as exploitable labor for the benefit of a biologically superior race, but once they challenge their limited agency are killed with little regard as they have no political rights and are not legally considered human. By foregrounding the emergence of new modes of racialization in these technological futures, both *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* clearly see dangers in the ways changing biopolitical regimes will understand and regulate difference.

### **Constructivism: “Race as Technology”**

*The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* draw on techno-Orientalist tropes, but they do so in order to critique the ways processes of racialization continue to function at the subdermal level even if in a supposedly post-racial age visible physical difference is no longer seen as meaningful. Instead, genomics posits difference at the micro-level, presenting a whole new set of dangers for people who are already in situations of economic and social precarity. By using techno-Orientalist tropes to exemplify the ways certain bodies are constructed as Asian, however, both novels also open up the space for understanding race itself as a technology. While this observation may seem obvious, as race is often discussed as a tool of subjugation, Beth Coleman contends that seeing race as technology can also function productively rather than “continu[ing] to naturalize racial difference as lack” (182). Coleman declares, “the adjustment suggested by the concept of race as technology is one away from race as information (i.e., race considered only in terms of quantifiable — and thus reessentialized — data) and one toward race conceived

as tool (as the possibility for *production and creativity*)” (193; my emphasis). Seeing race as “tool” or technology recognizes, as Wendy Chun notes, that “race has never been simply biological or cultural, but rather a means by which both are established and negotiated” (44). Race thus becomes a tool of ethical deliberation, in which thinking about, using, and negotiating the terrain of racial representation develops into a form of agency rather than a predetermined position of “lack.” In *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl*, it is precisely by using their position as Asian “others” that characters challenge the structures that confine them and form new understandings of community.

In Nagata’s novel, Phousita’s embrace of the Bohr Maker challenges the dichotomy of biology/culture in understanding the genomic “truth” of race. Though the Bohr Maker is a nanotechnology in the novel, its representation as a microscopic tool that can alter biological material means the Bohr Maker also symbolizes a broader discourse about the genetic realities of human difference. In the novel, the anxiety of understanding the “truth” of this difference manifests as anxiety over what is “natural” biology or not. This anxiety is particularly evident in a conversation between Phousita and Leander Bohr, the inventor of the Maker. Leander warns Phousita that if she allows everyone access to the Maker people will only continue to utilize it for harm as “[t]hey want to be more than human. They want to remake the world. They will murder the spirit of our Mother” and thus destroy the “biological continuum” (221). By “Mother” Leander means the “natural” realm of creation and genetic evolution, “[t]he billions of years of change, the billions of deaths of human and nonhuman entities, the constant unconscious improvisation of a trillion genetic lines” (222). As someone from Sunda whose life was spent trading sex for food, Phousita questions the “unconscious” nature of this

evolutionary process. She asks, “The continuum. What was that but pain passed from one generation to the next?” (222). Where Leander appeals to the supposedly rational scientific knowledge of genetic inheritance as natural evolution and fears the erosion of this process because of the Bohr Maker, Phousita identifies not the tool itself as problematic but the logic that underlies it as ethically questionable. Thus, when Leander asks for Phousita to destroy the Maker, she retorts, “I’ve heard that gods are stingy with their gifts, that they enjoy the suffering of the people...it makes their own lives more sweet” (221), recognizing that not only has nanotechnology been kept out of reach for the people in the Spill, but that doing so has enabled the life of plenitude for citizens of the Commonwealth. For Phousita, the Bohr Maker and its technology does not represent the struggle between biology and culture—rather, it represents an *ethical* struggle between who has the right to prosper and who must suffer for this.

Where Leander believes that the Bohr Maker would disrupt the natural process of evolution, or the “continuum of life” (222), Phousita recognizes that “nature is always already culturally altered; culture is always already composed of material nature” (Lee 11). That is, science’s claim to knowledge divested of ideological interest is problematic, particularly when an exclusive group of “experts” produce this knowledge and benefit from it most. As a molecular designer, Leander believes his objective scientific approach can be distinguished from social ideologies, but Phousita challenges this belief, asking Leander, “who are you to command the world?” (223). Indeed, Phousita’s challenge highlights a history of scientific knowledge that has produced racialized claims. As Reardon argues about the supposedly “colour-blind” claims made by geneticists in the late twentieth century, by positioning geneticists as the only people with the “molecular

tools that could pierce the ideological veil of the skin to view the truth that lay beneath it in the DNA” (52), biological definitions of race continue to “invest one group with the expertise to define race...circumscrib[ing] vital public debate about what we want to know about our differences and how those differences should matter” (58). Phousita, however, recognizes that the value and utility of the Bohr Maker must be a communal and public conversation, and she decides to share the Bohr Maker with the people of the Spill. Ultimately, Phousita cares less about whether the Bohr Maker will alter the nature of genetic development and more about how it will affect her people.

Similarly, *Salt Fish Girl* is less concerned with the reality of human difference and its genetic constitution, and more concerned with ethical questions, asking, “[W]hat relations does race set up?” (Chun 57). This concern first arises when Evie reveals to Miranda that she is a genetically modified human. Indeed, this encounter foregrounds race for the first time in *Salt Fish Girl*, but the novel shifts race from a tool of subjugation (in which Miranda was “creeped out” by Evie) to a tool which challenges Evie’s supposedly non-human status, making Miranda question her previous assumptions about the relationship between ideology and truth. Evie uses the signification of her body—her “brown eyes and black hair” (Lai 160)—as prosthesis which “adds functionality to the subject, helps form location, and provides information” (Coleman 194). In other words, Evie’s raced body serves as a prosthesis that asks what the ethical consequences of certain modes of signification are, or why certain bodies are “raced” in certain ways. Her story helps Miranda realize her ignorance and complicity in failing to question the surface appearance of what she has been taught to believe. When Evie asks if “everyone in this town [is] as out of it as you” (161), Miranda is offended by the

implication, but she soon realizes Evie is right. As Miranda ponders the implications of her new found knowledge that certain people continue to be dehumanized for the profit of others, she notes how Evie has changed her: “My world had suddenly become something quite different from what it had been mere moments ago” (161).

Despite the novel’s emphasis on the “dark forces of biotechnology” (as the back cover states), *Salt Fish Girl* does not condemn Evie or necessarily care about the implications of Evie’s genetic difference for understanding “human” genetics. Instead, the novel elides ontological questions of race to foreground the ways “[r]ace as technology recognizes the proper place of race not as a trait *but as a tool*—for good or for ill—to reconceptualise how race fits into a larger pattern of meaning and power ” (Coleman 184-5; my emphasis). Miranda’s shift in perspective from viewing Evie as something unnatural to viewing Evie’s difference as revelation represents a moment at which the question of ethics is at work, tracing “larger pattern[s] of meaning and power.” For instance, Miranda sees beyond Evie’s supposed difference to question the epistemological frameworks that she has unquestionably accepted. These frameworks have led her to believe what “the newspapers say,” to “respect private property,” that “[t]here must be laws governing human biomaterial,” and as previously mentioned, that “stuff like that is not supposed to happen any more” (161). Furthermore, the novel’s final section ends with the birth of a child and the development of a new form of family for Evie and Miranda. Tellingly, this section is titled “zero point three per cent” (252), suggesting that while Evie is still part “carp” and thus legally considered non-human, her future promises to be much different than the one of racialized labour she was subjected to. Accordingly, Evie might represent Chun’s claim that, “although the idea and the

experience of race have been used for racist ends, the best way to fight racism might not be to deny the existence of race, but to make race do different things” (57). Evie may be different, not because of her genetics, but because she constructed an alternative future in which race ‘does different things.’ Though Lai’s novel takes a firmly historical approach to understanding the shifting material and epistemological frameworks that define the realities of human difference, it ends on an ambiguous note about what will be done in the future and what will happen the “next time” (269) determinist readings of race emerge.

### **Racialized Labor(s)**

Wendy Chun notes that rethinking race as technology asks the question: “can the abject, the Orientalized, the robot-like data-like Asian/Asian American other be a place from which something like insubordination or creativity can arise?” (51). Nagata’s and Lai’s novels suggest yes, as *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* use techno-Orientalist tropes, but they do so in order to critique a history of racialized labor and its new biopolitical articulations in fields such as genomics, which problematically divest science from ideological values. This critique makes all the more clear *why* Lai and Nagata represent their characters as Asian, bodies that have stereotypically been associated with mechanical, dehumanized labor. Furthermore, Phousita and Evie, through being characterized in specifically techno-Orientalist terms, reorient the idea of race as prescriptive and determinist, engaging instead with race as a point of departure for critically examining the implications of reinscribing human difference at the level of

genetics. Both novels thus use the idea of mechanical/mechanized Asian bodies in a manner that highlights the ways race can be used as a tool towards more productive endeavors, enabling, as Coleman puts it, the “critique of racial instrumentalization, but in a fashion that exploits the nature of technology toward the human and the affective as opposed to toward dehumanization” (199). Paradoxically, then, through techno-Orientalist tropes that dehumanize Asian characters, Phousita and Evie bring to light questions about the way in which we continue to classify, use, and appropriate the meaning of human difference.

By addressing the history of racialized violence against Asians/Asian Americans while using the conceptual tools of science fiction to disrupt these occurrences, *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* exemplify Beth Coleman’s call for a renewed engagement with race beyond determinist attempts to define human difference. That is, *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* displace the question of biology versus culture all together, asking instead if race might be used as “an aesthetics and ethics” in which “an agent can judge the strategic value of one mode of representation over another” (Coleman 199). Importantly, Coleman notes that seeing race as a tool in this regard does not mean erasing the very real, material experiences faced by people of colour—instead, Coleman argues that seeing race as technology supplements critique by arguing for a dislocation of race from the biological that can function through the work of ethics, in which “*how we engage race as an extension of ourselves constitutes a key question*” (199; my emphasis). Thus, race changes from something that predetermines the agency of racialized bodies into a tool that raced bodies such as Phousita and Evie can use towards challenging the repressive systems that attempt to define them.

Both Phousita and Evie share central roles in changing the communities they are a part of, and they do so not *despite* their difference but *because* of it. For *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl*, engaging with race is not a matter of overcoming stereotypes about Asians as “model minorities” or presenting more “emotionally” complex Asian characters—it is instead about asking how our understanding of Asian/Asian American identity can illuminate the entangled networks of power that are continually inscribed on the bodies of people of colour. Mediating the boundaries of past and present, science fiction provides the ultimate space for this project of critiquing the historical processes of racializing while imagining a future in which race functions differently. Miranda says it best, perhaps, noting at the end of *Salt Fish Girl*, that her growing family with Evie represents, “the new children of the earth... out of DNA both new and old, an imprint of what has gone before, but also a variation. By our difference we mark how ancient the alphabet of our bodies. By our strangeness we write our bodies into the future” (259). These bodies of the future may be marked by histories of racialization, but their “strangeness” will also function differently than the assumptions of racial essentialism that preceded them. Like the engineered bodies of their posthumans, *The Bohr Maker* and *Salt Fish Girl* ask how conceptions of race might be engineered differently in the future, such that processes of racialization change from tools of subjugation to tools of communication and ethical deliberation.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Globalization as Techno-optimism: Examining Information and Communication Technologies through Postcolonial Perspectives

Contemporary science fiction does not express the explicitly colonial frameworks Rieder identifies in early sf's lost-race tales (such as those of Haggard's *She*), but sf still participates in a process of world-building that, upon critical analysis, reveals troubling assumptions about how we understand global "development." By considering how technology, the environment, and socio-political life will develop into the future, sf engages in a process of speculation and world-building that reflects current ideological assumptions about what social structures and technologies can lead us towards these futures. In this chapter, I argue that postcolonial science fiction questions the genre's focus on future speculation and the genre's frequent emphasis on technological development as a means towards social development (expressed through an implicit techno-optimism). Though these generic frameworks and assumptions—about focus on the future and techno-optimism—seem central to the genre, postcolonial sf suggests we must approach such ideas with caution and consider how they reproduce neocolonial ideologies. Importantly, postcolonial sf is not wary of discourses about the future in sf because of debates over the genre's predictive or allegorical qualities—indeed, postcolonial sf recognizes that sf does not seek to actually imagine the future, but “[r]ather its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 288). It is precisely because sf is a critical tool that defamiliarizes the present that postcolonial sf is attuned to what focus on the future—in both sf and technoculture—reveals about contemporary fascinations with techno-utopian possibility.

Namely, postcolonial sf is wary of how focus on the future risks erasing the historical context of the *past* and recurring cycles of violence that are perpetuated against specific groups of people. In this chapter, I explore the idea that Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* (2010) and Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* (2008), reveal an ambivalent, and somewhat suspicious, attitude towards focus on the "future" and imagining future worlds.

Specifically, this chapter argues that postcolonial sf, extending from its critique of the ideology of progress, offers a unique critical framework through which to analyze the assumption that technological development will lead to an increasingly egalitarian future. For instance, postcolonial sf such as *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* examines the consequences of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on how we understand the idea of global development and progress. I must be careful to note here that postcolonial sf does not reject technological development in a return to "nature" or "primitivism" foregrounded in texts such as James Cameron's *Avatar* (2008). Rather, if, as Bacigalupi suggests, "Science fiction hunts for the techno-fix, not the social-fix" (Liptak), postcolonial sf reveals that "social" fixes must precede or accompany technological development or science will continue to function as a tool of subjugation. Csicsery-Ronay defines the obsession with techno-fixes as indicative of "[a]n invisible imaginary imperial regime [that is] tak[ing] shape" (244). This techno-scientific regime is "an Enlightened empire of shared commitments to instrumentality, justified by its promise of ever-greater rationality and material abundance in the future, a future...managed by technoscientific means" (Csicsery-Ronay, *Seven* 244). For Csicsery-Ronay, sf becomes a "central mediating literary institution" for examining the development of this techno-scientific empire (244).

Through *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer*, I analyze how postcolonial sf questions, from the perspective of the global South (and thus in an autoethnographic framework), the assumption that technological development will positively affect the lives of people of colour. Such techno-optimism, or faith in the ability of technological development to save us from catastrophe (ecological or otherwise), is, as Imre Szeman argues, central to principles of modern science (814). Szeman argues that “techno-utopianism” is the political dream “that mankind produces only such disasters as technology can solve; the disaster arises only when the conditions in which to repair it are already in the process of formation” (814). Sf appeals to such techno-optimism by foregrounding the idea that scientific progress will lead the way to global development via technology; by doing so the genre risks eschewing any question of politics by constructing the idea that technological development is a universal need. However, as Rieder points out, early sf actually reveals how scientific projects are simultaneously driven by a colonial ideology of progress because underpinning even “the most legitimate scientific endeavor” is the “common assumption that the relation of the colonizing societies [seen as more technologically advanced] to the colonized ones is that of *the developed, modern present to its own undeveloped, primitive past*” (30; my emphasis). Sf’s focus on an evolved future exemplifies the same logic as the imperial expansionist project in its vision of a specific kind of economic growth, technological expansion, and construction of new worlds that signify its development and break from a “primitive past.” When techno-utopianism pervades visions of the future (both in sf and the “real-world” technoscientific discourses it draws on) pause should therefore be given to consider whether neocolonial

relations are being created with geo-political regions that have little access to technological resources.

Perhaps more than any other popular genre, postcolonial sf like *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* challenges the ideology of progress that lies behind techno-optimism. Part of the danger of focusing on the techno-fix, is as Szeman makes clear, that the “fantasy of past coincidence” only “reinforces the bad utopianism of hope;” in other words, “modern imaginings of science” depict technological development in the past as emerging just in time to help avoid potential disasters or to push economic and social development ahead (814). This “fantasy” that technology appears just in time to save us, “reinforces the bad utopianism of hope” as it assumes that science will eventually find technological solutions to all our problems—ecological, social, or otherwise. Such hope, however, is premised upon the image of a future where technology functions as deliverance (the similarities between religious rhetoric and techno-optimism are telling); when communities adopt this “bad utopianism of hope” they do not see the need for any immediate or radical change, as future technology will surely find a solution to current social and ecological problems. Thus, techno-optimism in sf and technoscientific discourses often serves to defer the need for radical social action into the future, and functions as part of the normalization of discourses of the apocalypse, where, as Frederick Buell argues, living in a state of crisis is no longer shocking news. The genre assures readers that ecological disaster or social collapse may be near, but technological development will always evolve in time to save us. This cultural belief is represented in science fiction itself: post-war science fiction often depicted technology in a pessimistic light due to fears of nuclear apocalypse, but much contemporary science fiction evokes

the genre's early sense of wonder over technological development. Films such as Blomkamp's *Elysium* (2013), Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), and Tarsem Sing's *Self/Less* (2015) represent contemporary wonder over the possibilities of future technologies in fields such as health care, space travel, and urban development.

*Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* exemplify a postcolonial science fiction that does not appeal to such techno-utopianism, in part because these texts emerge from social contexts where technology has frequently been used as a tool of subjugation. Rob Nixon points out that, "the affectless language of technospeak" can function as a mechanism of "the insidious, traumatic violence inflicted on the most vulnerable," and a form of "slow violence," which is characteristic of environmental and social problems in the global South (169). The Kenyan short *Pumzi* (2010) by Wanuri Kahiu, is another example of a text in the subgenre that is wary of technological solutions. *Pumzi* depicts a postapocalyptic world in which lack of water has led to the extinction of nature as we know it. Organic life seems to have disappeared, and humanity now exists in subterranean communities where holographic technology and medicinal "dream suppressants" are everyday features. Though this future is defined by high technology, as Asha, the film's protagonist discovers, it is also defined by a repressive regime in which people's bodies become the only available resources for sustaining life. Accordingly, human energy powers machines in this contained biosphere, and water is re-circulated from people's sweat and urine in order to be made consumable. *Pumzi* shifts the focus of ecological disaster from the cities and economic centres—such as New York, Los Angeles, or Tokyo—that dominate much of science fiction, focusing instead on what ecological change will mean for African contexts and people of colour. Technology in

*Pumzi* does not lead to a form of “liberation,” as resource scarcity means people’s bodies are subject to increased control in order to meet the demands of a fragile technological ecosystem. As I will explore below, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* also suggest that at a moment when information communication technologies seems ubiquitous and our virtual future decidedly near, careful attention must be given to the social, ethical and material stakes of an emerging technoscientific Empire.

### **Cosmopolitan Visions and Networked Communities**

Despite being from different geographical regions, both *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* share a number of similar approaches towards understanding the development of global communication technologies. Their similarities stem partly from the ways both texts challenge the techno-utopian fantasy that technological development can provide social and environmental justice for all. Indeed, they both disrupt fantasies of a “networked” cosmopolitan community. By examining the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) outside of current global economic centers and focusing instead on South Africa and Mexico, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* explore how technology affects the lives of people of colour, reversing the process by which “information loses its body” (Hayles 2).<sup>31</sup> I will begin by examining how both texts

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<sup>31</sup> I refer specifically to Hayles’s discussion of how “*information lost its body*, that is, how it came to be conceptualized as an entity separate from the material forms in which it is thought to be embedded” (2). As Hayles’s nuanced analysis suggests, “[w]hen information loses its body, equating humans and computers is especially easy,” a move that enables a critique of the liberal, humanist subject traditionally premised on the idea of fixed subjectivity; however, “[b]ecause information had lost its body, this construction [also] implie[s] that embodiment is not essential to human being. Embodiment has been systematically downplayed or erased in the cybernetic construction of the posthuman in ways that have not occurred in other critiques of the liberal humanist subject” (4). I see *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* as

emphasize the embodied effects of ICTs on individual people, before briefly examining how this emphasis on materiality also creates spaces of resistance in which ICTs can be used towards more ethical global encounters. Reading *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* side-by-side creates a map of how both novels use the discourse of science fiction as the basis for developing a shared ethical stance, particularly through their adaptation of cyberpunk themes. Hence, while *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* resist the tendency to generalize regarding the effects of technological development, by doing so they actually share a common ethical stance: that is, they are both committed to understanding technology as embodied, and thus see attempts to universalize and disembody information as a continuation of neocolonial regimes of power.

Before proceeding to explore the novels' thematic concerns, a brief summary of each text is necessary. Set in a near-future Cape Town, *Moxyland* is a post-cyberpunk text<sup>32</sup> that follows four characters (Kendra, Lerato, Tendeka, Toby) from different socio-economic backgrounds. All four characters challenge the claim that social relations will be improved by access to technoscientific resources, portraying instead how such technological developments "facilitate unfettered capitalism's inherently destructive and mutagenic dynamism, which turns every sphere of experience, from fashion to labour, into commodities" (Csicsery-Ronay, *Seven* 245). Kendra, for instance, demonstrates the

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pointing to the dangers of 'downplaying' the importance of the body and embodiment when discussing the effects of technological development.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Foster argues that "second-generation or 'post-cyberpunk'" shifts away from "romanticizing" cyberspace, and includes feminist, queer, and racial appropriations of cyberpunk conventions (Foster, xv). Foster argues that though many have claimed the death of cyberpunk since Gibson's *Neuromancer*, "cyberpunk didn't so much die as experience a sea change into a more generalized cultural formation" (Foster, xiv). Post-cyberpunk therefore reflects changes that occurred not only within the genre's textual practices but also within, "a variety of other cultural, social, economic, historical and political practices" (Foster, xvi).

biopolitical power of this near-future—as a “sponsor baby” (7), she is a brand ambassador for a drink called “Ghost.” Part of her job entails being injected with nanotechnology that brands her skin, marking her body with the corporation’s logo and effectively rendering her a “product” of Ghost. A side effect of the nanotechnology is the development of her addiction to the drink, establishing her as both the perfect consumer and marketer. By depicting the ways Kendra is marked and controlled by Ghost, *Moxyland* uses the vocabulary of science fiction to make literal the ways corporate power, as Hardt and Negri argue, “not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature” (*Empire* xv). Hence, Ghost sees Kendra as a commodity they own and whose life they are entitled to control over—when Kendra tells her employers she would like to end her contract with Ghost, the company no longer views her as useful and subsequently sees it within their right to “terminate” Kendra’s contract by killing her.

*Moxyland* therefore examines the transition from colonialism to the consolidation of new technological empires and the continued exploitation of the global South. Beukes’s novel reveals how the exploitative logic of South African apartheid is translated to new binary divisions between the technological “have” and “have nots” of a competitive, neoliberal world. Kendra and Lerato’s adoption of principles of instrumentality in a technoscientific regime exemplifies how the adoption of neoliberal principles regards human bodies and relationships as resources available for exploitation. Kendra’s body and identity as an innovative artist is used by Ghost to promote their “fashionable” brand, while Lerato shapes her personal identity according to the needs of Communique’s corporate goals. In order to escape poverty and the conditions of the

Rural, both characters deem this commitment to corporations as necessary to their survival. Arguably, the exploitation of human bodies in this manner is an extension of colonial logic itself—apartheid’s racial policies were deeply rooted in the struggle over South Africa’s resources; thus, by the time of deracialization in the 1990s, the country was already deeply divided by class structure. Adoption of neoliberal policies post-apartheid therefore only exacerbated existing class structures. *Moxyland* suggests that despite technological developments, socio-economic differences and the exploitation of people of colour will only continue if contemporary neoliberal ideologies are carried into the future.

Alex Rivera’s film *Sleep Dealer* (2008) takes place on a different continent at the US/Mexico border. Set in San Diego and Tijuana, *Sleep Dealer* depicts a near-future where “*info-maquilas*” host Mexican workers who remotely control robots working in the US. The film primarily follows Memo Cruz, a young man who is forced from his rural community to work in Tijuana after his father is killed by a US drone operator named Rudy Ramirez. In Tijuana, Memo meets Luz Martinez, who helps Memo get his cybernetic “nodes,” implants which are placed on his body and allow him to “jack in” (to use images from cyberpunk) to other machines, computers, or robots. Nodes are required for becoming a cyber-worker, and when Memo receives his and begins work in the *info-maquilas*, he is able to not only work but become part of a greater cybernetic/virtual network that has much in common with the Internet or World Wide Web. To Memo, this is initially exciting as nodes give him mobility and the chance to access a “global economy” (*Sleep Dealer*) which seems far removed from his rural home in Santa Ana del Rio. Through their nodes and the *info-maquilas*, workers are connected to robots in cities

such as New York and Los Angeles where they control the movements and actions of robots without ever needing to be physically present. Thus, labour is “imported” into the US without any actual physical immigration required.

Like *Moxyland*, *Sleep Dealer* examines the persistence of colonial frameworks in contemporary multinational capitalism. Lysa Rivera argues that *Sleep Dealer* is a borderland sf text which “not only offer[s] critical visions of globalization both today and in the future but also insist[s] on reading late capitalism as a troubling and enduring extension of colonial relations of power between the United States and Mexico” (416). The film, while clearly a critique of migrant labour and the exploitative conditions of late capitalism, also permits a counter-narrative in which Memo and Rudy are able to connect through the very resources (information communication technologies) that divide and constrain them. Unbeknownst to Memo, throughout the film Luz uploads memories and stories about Memo’s life to a platform called “Tru-Node” where people buy and share memories constructed by others. Eventually Rudy discovers Memo’s memories online, leading Rudy to personally seek out Memo in order to atone for the pain he has caused Memo’s family.

### **The White Noise of Cyberpunk and Fantasies of Disembodiment**

*Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* specifically draw on the tropes of cyberpunk in order to demonstrate that information and communication technologies are not neutral “tools.” By exploring what virtuality, or cyberspace, means for people of colour, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* challenge the genre’s fantasies of disembodiment, and thus also the idea

that the virtual space of technologies, like the Internet, can provide a “utopian space where everything—even transcending racism—is possible” (Nakamura xi). Rather than presenting connection to the Internet, or global network, as a tool that “levels” inequality, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* reveal the often violent physical consequences of being connected for people of colour. As Lisa Nakamura argues in regards to cyberspace, “[t]he socially marginalized have a different relation to postmodernity than do members of majority cultures or races. Hence, they have a different relation to cyberspace, or to put it another way they ‘do’ virtuality differently” (xv). By adapting the conventions of cyberpunk, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* not only challenge the genre’s traditionally white, male narrative, both novels also reveal that virtual spaces affect the bodies of people of colour differently. Characters in each text do not transcend their material bodies and socio-economic positions, and in fact often find that access to virtual networks further marginalizes them from access to greater agency and social power.

A brief examination of cyberpunk’s generic assumptions will help situate *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer*’s postcolonial critiques in the rest of the chapter. One of the most defining features of cyberpunk is the subgenre’s “theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry... [and the] theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry” (Sterling xi). Bruce Sterling, a central cyberpunk author, notes that, “for the cyberpunks...technology is visceral. It is not the bottled genie of remote Big Science boffins; it is pervasive, utterly intimate. Not outside us, but next to us. Under our skin; often, inside our minds” (xi). By “visceral” Sterling means that technology physically “invades” the body, and cyberpunk often foregrounds how technology penetrates the human body. William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, for

instance, focuses on protagonist Henry Dorsett Case, a “cyberspace cowboy” who “lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace” (5-6). In Gibson’s novel, cyberspace is depicted as a disembodied experience in which the mind separates from the body to explore the virtual world in a type of “consensual hallucination” (51). For cyberpunk, “the body [is] meat” (Gibson 6), and cyberspace’s disembodied experience is presented as thrilling, affective, and highly desired. Ultimately, as Sherryll Vint points out, cyberpunk is the “genre best known for its rejection of embodiment and embrace of an existence in cyberspace” (102). Augmentation of the body is therefore welcomed for both aesthetic reasons (such as Molly’s mirrorshades in *Neuromancer*) and in order to enable characters to enter the supposedly free realm of cyberspace. Importantly, technology is seen only as a tool, and much early cyberpunk fantasized about cyberspace’s technoutopian possibilities as a disembodied space free from the physical, social, and economic constraints that define the “real” world.

While the characters in *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* are technologically wired through the use of cellphones and cyberspace, their virtual worlds are very different from *Neuromancer*’s vision of a utopian “consensual hallucination” (Gibson 51). In *Moxyland*, Tendeka’s use of the virtual world called “Pluslife” reveals the dangers of disembodiment from the material world from the virtual. To begin, *Moxyland* posits that “invisible” spaces of the internet are intimately bound by the socio-economic situation of the user; in other words, socially marginalized users “do’ virtuality differently” (Nakamura xv) because they are confined by specific economic and social structures. Tendeka, for instance, uses Pluslife, “one of the worlds’ favourite virtual escapes,” to meet with his political mentor, a revolutionary he knows only through the avatar name of skyward\*. Unknown to

Tendeka, skyward\* is a corporate agent who, in true Orwellian form, adopts faux revolutionary personas in order to seek out and contain potential uprisings in the country. Although Tendeka wants to “[take a] stand against the bullshit of artificially imposed borders and bureaucracies” (122) by producing protest art, skyward\* convinces him that the only way to engage apathetic citizens is to create large scale spectacle: “we have to jolt them, surprise them, it has to be spectacular. we’re [sic] competing with media and advertising and promotions and pluslives, all helping people to avoid confronting reality” (126). When Tendeka follows skyward\*’s advice and launches a protest that involves destroying public property and extensive media coverage, he is infected with a virus released by state police. He refuses to receive medical attention, claiming his death is “the only way to show ... I’ve been infected with the M7N1 virus as an act of government-corporate censorship. Repression. This is human rights violation taken to its worst. They are wilfully killing their citizens” (289 ellipsis in original).

Tendeka believes that Pluslife is a space where “you can actually have an influence on the world” (49), and in a horribly ironic twist, by the end of the novel Pluslife does indeed influence Tendeka’s physical world. Socially disenfranchised, Tendeka has no choice but to place his trust in skyward\*’s advice. Skyward’s ability to affect Tendeka’s political and social beliefs ultimately results in Tendeka’s death, whose final act of rebellion reinforces the interconnection of the physical and virtual in two ways: first, not only does it emphasize Tendeka’s faith in skyward\*until his very death, it also reveals the ways in which Tendeka’s very violent and visceral death is the *only* way to show how power manifests through an immaterial network. As Steven Shaviro argues, through the network, “control is less visual than tactile” (*Connected* 32), and surveillance

states, exemplified through skyward's relationship to Tendeka, are "performative instead of constative; it is not what they say that matters, but what they do" (Shaviro, *Connected*, 34). In Tendeka's case, his self-immolation is the most radical example of the ways in which societies of control turn information into tactile mechanisms of control and self-surveillance—when Tendeka becomes too invested in protest art, his death is exactly what Communique wants.

Secondly, Tendeka's death also exemplifies the dangers, for people of colour in particular, of disembodiment from material spaces. Tendeka dies assuming Toby will broadcast his gruesome death as proof of state repression (both Tendeka and Toby were at the protest, though Toby was participating in a video game at the time). However, Toby, the most privileged character in the novel, does not believe Tendeka's physical pain as Toby is unable to distinguish between the simulated game he is playing, real life, and the protest. It is not until Tendeka's violent and gruesome death that Toby begins to suspect Tendeka is dying: "No, kids, the indicator for yours truly that this is some serious fucking shit is when he starts bleeding from every exit point ... it's so overboard gruesome" (301). Even at this point, however, Toby disturbingly equates Tendeka's death with a scene from a "total B-grade horror" (301) movie, and he views Tendeka's death not as important for the exposing the violence of corporate/state force but for the money that he will make off of reducing Tendeka's death to spectacle. While Tendeka dies assuming Toby will broadcast his gruesome death as proof of state repression, we are left uncertain as to how this footage will be construed, since ultimately, Toby admits it "depends on who's paying" for this "exclusive" (303). Tendeka's death thus exemplifies that "the ability to construct the body as *passé* is a position available only to those

privileged to think of their (white, male, straight, non-working-class) bodies as the norm” (Vint 8). As a socially marginalized character, Tendeka’s body matters—not just because he must be alive to protest, but also because his body and gruesome death bears witness to the depths of social and political injustice inflicted on people of colour. Thus, exposing the physical violence of the state is important to Tendeka, even if it means his death.

Beukes’s adaptation of cyberpunk themes reframes the genre’s inclination towards disembodiment by considering what virtual spaces mean to people of different racial, social, and economic backgrounds. Furthermore, by setting *Moxyland* specifically in the context of South Africa, Beukes’s novel considers the ways Africa has perhaps always been an othered, virtual identity for the West. Through processes of colonization and the representation of Africa as the “dark continent” of Western modernity, Gerald Gaylard argues “Africa has tended to have a virtual status for the West” (159). As a postmodern genre that emphasizes the idea of virtuality and fragmentation, cyberpunk may therefore be a particularly useful genre through which to explore processes of racialization. Both cyberpunk and people of colour share in conditions of “virtuality”—cyberpunk emphasizes disembodied, symbolic spaces, just as Gaylard points out how constructions of “Africa” and racial difference can be seen as virtual and symbolic identities. Nakamura extends the comparison between cyberspace and people of colour by pointing out that, “people of colour have always been postmodern (and by extension ‘virtual’)” because “[w]hile everyone in cyberspace is disoriented, *people of colour in cyberspace come to the medium already in this state*, already marginalized, fragmented, and imbricated within systems of signification that frame them in multiple and often contradictory ways” (xvi; my emphasis). Indeed, as Nakamura argues, people of colour

have always had virtual identities in that processes of racialization have always constructed “fluid, marginalized selves” (Nakamura xvi) in order to establish, and exploit, racial difference.

*Moxyland* thus situates the “postmodern” situation of people of colour in a specifically historical context by alluding to, and drawing out the continued implications of, apartheid in South Africa. In *Moxyland*’s afterword, Beukes elaborates on the significance of context to her sf novel, writing,

Of course, it [*Moxyland*] also grew out of the legacy of apartheid: the arbitrary and artificially applied divides between people, the pass system and the insidious Special Branch ... Don’t let anyone tell you that apartheid has nothing to do with South Africa now. Those roots run deep and tangled and we’ll be tripping over them for many generations to come. (311-12)

The “fluid” identities of race in South Africa have real, material consequences that continue to affect the country’s social relations. In this sense, *Moxyland* grounds cyberpunk’s fantasies of disembodiment by insisting on a politics of location.

Postcolonial science fiction like *Moxyland* critiques cyberpunk’s emphasis on disembodiment for how it erases the physical and material impact of processes of racialization on the lives of people of colour. Specifically, *Moxyland* challenges fantasies of disembodiment specifically because in a context such as South Africa, reiterating mind/body splits denies the ways apartheid has shaped the very real, material life of a nation and its people. Gaylard points out that consequently

rather than Gibsonesque warnings of the extinction of individuality in corporate hyperspace, for instance, current African writers tentatively advance versions of virtual identity that centre around relative location in motion. ... [I]t is precisely within the visceral geopolitical that contemporary African writers tend to locate their virtualities. (161)

Much contemporary African fiction contests the divide between bodily “meat” and mind, presenting instead a version of “trickster flexibility” that recognizes and highlights the fluctuating relationship between virtual identity and material geopolitical relations, fantastic and mundane worlds, and mind and body (Gaylard 161).<sup>33</sup> For Gaylard, this “trickster flexibility” refers to how one’s identity shifts in different geopolitical contexts, but it can also refer to the ways postcolonial sf plays with the conventions of cyberpunk to emphasize a politics of location instead of disembodiment. Trickster flexibility for postcolonial sf can therefore mean that the idea of virtual identities can be used, not only to reiterate mind/body separations, but also to reveal epistemological assumptions about how identity and race is understood in different geopolitical contexts.

Like *Moxyland*, *Sleep Dealer* rewrites fantasies of disembodiment. Specifically, the mind/body split typical of cyberpunk is critiqued in two ways in *Sleep Dealer*: first, Rivera’s film suggests that virtual labour and access to information and communication technologies will not lead to greater socio-economic equality.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, *Sleep Dealer* suggests that, in fact, ICTs and virtual labour continue to depend on the racialization, or “cybertyping” (Nakamura 3), of specific bodies. Nakamura coins the term cybertyping to explain “the process by which computer/human interfaces, the dynamics and economics of access, and the means by which users are able to express themselves online interacts

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<sup>33</sup> Importantly, when Gaylard speaks of African fiction, he speaks of trends and tendencies, not homogenous categories.

<sup>34</sup> *Sleep Dealer* has been examined by many scholars as a critique of immaterial labour, virtual labour, or cognitive labour and contemporary neocolonial relations. See, for instance, Luis Martín Cabrera’s analysis of *Sleep Dealer* where he argues “Rivera’s futuristic musings... sho[w] how technology and cognitive labor may actually reproduce forms of colonial exploitation and oppression rather than leading to automatic liberation from the shackles of physical labor” (590).

with the ‘cultural layer’ or ideologies regarding race that they bring with them into cyberspace” (3). How users “express themselves online” is not free from the constraints of socio-cultural contexts; cybertypes reveal that race and processes of racialization therefore do not disappear in cyberspace, but rather race is articulated in new ways through digital mediums. *Sleep Dealer* illustrates the supposed “erasure” of race online through cyber-workers, all people of colour, who are visually hidden from view by the factories they work in. In the following analysis, I examine how *Sleep Dealer* reveals that, despite the attempts to hide people of colour and cyberworkers from view in infomaquiladoras, race continues to “mark” the body of the other in cyberspace, albeit in new ways. *Sleep Dealer* therefore reinforces that “identity online is still *typed*, still mired in oppressive roles even if the body has been left behind or bracketed” (Nakamura 4). Importantly, cybertyping not only reflects new racial paradigms, it also reflects “anxieties about the ways that computer-enabled communication can challenge these old logics” (5), revealing the unstable premises upon which processes of racialization function. Identifying cybertyping allows readers to identify new racial stereotypes as well as question the epistemological and material frameworks that benefit from continuing to perpetuate these racialized identities. *Sleep Dealer* reflects this very dynamic between critique and constructivism by exploring the dialectic between the reiteration of colonial frameworks through technology and the potential for postcolonial connection and more equitable relations through the same technology.

Initially, Memo sees his nodes as a liberation from the constraints of everyday life on his family’s farm, but he soon discovers that nodes present a different form of physical constraint and oppression. As we see from the film’s beginning, Memo longs to

experience the world outside of his village. Nodes are connections that link the body to “the machine,” or larger global cybernetic networks, and though Memo does not have them implanted in his body at the beginning of the film, he tunes into remote radio broadcasts in order to connect to the rest of the world. When a woman named Luz finally helps implant his nodes, Memo notes hopefully, “Finally, I could connect my nervous system to the other system. The global economy” (*Sleep Dealer*). Luz warns him, however, that, “When you connect to the other side your body hooks into a machine. It’s a two-way connection. Sometimes you control the machine. And sometimes the machine controls you” (*Sleep Dealer*). Luz’s warning foreshadows Memo’s increasing physical and psychological deterioration because of his work in the *info-maquilas*, revealing that “cognitive labor may actually reproduce forms of colonial exploitation and oppression rather than leading to automatic liberation from the shackles of physical labor” (Martín Cabrera 590). Though Memo escapes the physical toil of working on his family’s milpa, he soon finds that having nodes takes a different kind of toll on his body, as Memo becomes noticeably hunched over from fatigue in the film and begins to lose his eye-sight. Memo now has access to high-technology and the global economy through his nodes, but in order to be paid Memo must work long, laborious hours in a factory where loss of eye-sight is common and workers often experience short-circuits that blind them.

Like Tendeka in *Moxyland*, Memo eventually discovers that connection to this “other system” (cyberspace and the global economy) does not mean he is able to escape the socio-economic and material limitations of his physical body. Reminiscent of contemporary *maquiladoras* and sweatshops, the factory Memo works in known as a “sleep dealer” because “if you work long enough, you collapse” (*Sleep Dealer*). Memo

begins to recognize that the separation of mind from body is impossible when he discovers the immense fatigue he feels as his “energy was being drained, sent far away. What happened to the river was happening to me” (*Sleep Dealer*). Memo equates his mental exhaustion with the extraction of natural resources in Santa Ana del Rio, Memo’s hometown where rivers are dammed by private US companies. In one particular montage, the film alternates between images of neurological passageways and images of pipelines carrying water to the United States in order to portray how both virtual labour and water are resources that flow out of Mexico into the global North. By equating virtual labour with the extraction of physical resources, *Sleep Dealer* points to the very real histories of colonial exploitation and the continuation of neocolonial forms of capitalist accumulation. Martín Cabrera argues that the term neocolonial is particularly important to the context of *Sleep Dealer*, as the film examines not only the manner in which living labor is transformed into objectified labor, it emphasizes the particular function of processes of racialization:

In order to transform living labor into dead objectified labor, capitalism—from its original entanglement with slavery and colonialism onward—has continually mobilized class, race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, national and regional identities, and any other form of oppression at its disposal in order to smooth the process of accumulation via the extraction of labor and its cyclical reproduction. (594)

Indeed, the *info-maquilas* depend on Memo’s racialized body, as it his poverty and limited social options that draw Memo to work long hours in the factories. It is Memo’s physical positioning on the “other” side of the US/Mexico border that enables this exploitation, where outsourcing labour to the global South (and “brown” bodies) also functions as a process of racialization that identifies certain bodies as exploitable labor.

Paradoxically, then, it is precisely because of the fact that virtual networks can make the body of the worker invisible that Memo's body continues to be racialized and positioned as exploitable and expendable labor. For Cybertek, the company which owns the *info-maquilas*, keeping the body of the worker out of sight is exactly what permits the ongoing exploitation of people of colour—because workers operate robots remotely, US citizens who interact with the robots do not see the fatigue on Memo's face, though the film constantly cuts back to Memo's tired eyes to remind film viewers of his exhaustion. Node workers are therefore doubly dehumanized; not only are they presented as “robots” in the US, thereby erasing individual subjectivity, node workers are also dehumanized through the physical and mental exploitation they encounter in the factories. Indeed, because all foreign labour from *infomaquilas* is mediated through the figure of a robot, Cybertek constructs the illusion that virtual labor is colour-blind. It does not matter whose body is controlling the robot, or what pain this body suffers, so long as the required work is completed. Such processes of dehumanization that simultaneously deny the subjectivity of the worker while constructing a universal image of node workers through “robots,” enables the United States to justify their continued use of racialized labour guilt free. Martín Cabrera notes that this is evident from

the first exterior shot of the *infomaquilas* [which] emphasizes...the colonial fantasy that attempts to separate the visibility and materiality of the brown bodies of the south from their transformation into dead labor for the predominantly white bourgeoisie of the north, thus constructing a cyber-apartheid of sorts that segregates white owners from brown workers. (594)

Virtual labour is alienated from the body of the labourer, and the work performed through robots is therefore seen as inhuman and easily available to ‘white bourgeoisie’ of the

global North. As I explored in chapter three, just as techno-Orientalism depicts the Asian body as a machine, revealing the ways a “U.S. techno-Orientalist imagination is thus rooted in this view of the Asian body as a form of expendable technology” (Roh, Huang, Niu 11), the depiction of Mexican bodies as machines is rooted in the view of foreign labour as inhuman, efficient, and robotic.

*Sleep Dealer* therefore resists participating in cyberpunk’s celebration of human/machine interfaces. Instead, as Lysa Rivera argues, the film “draw[s] from science-fictional metaphors and images of cyborgs and cyberspace, to comment on the ways in which ‘real’ labor practices in the US/Mexico borderlands region are quite literally exercises in dehumanization and exploitation” (424). *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* force readers to confront the reality that technological expansion depends on the bodies of people of colour. Techno-utopian fantasies that uncritically embrace technological expansion as a means of promoting greater social equality ignore and erase historical colonial relations that positioned people of the global South as “resources” to be used for the development of the global North. Furthermore, such erasure actually works to allow the *continued* exploitation of people of colour, since virtual networks are not recognized for the material and physical exploitation they perpetuate. Addressing social inequality is therefore not simply a matter of eliminating the digital divide, or giving more people access to information and communication technologies, because *how* these technologies are used significantly depends upon the user’s geopolitical location. Director Alex Rivera reiterates exactly this point in an interview about *Sleep Dealer*, stating “We are being sold a false bill of goods, that the more connected we become the more equal we will be... Statistically speaking, that’s not what’s happening. The more connected we become,

the more we are divided” (Silverman). What *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* therefore point out so well, is that technology functions differently according to the situated bodies it interacts with. For Memo, nodes are life-lines that enable him to support his family. For Rudy, who is also a node-worker, nodes are tools of military dominance used to protect privatized resources.

### **History and Futurity: ‘Fighting For a Future with a Past’**

As I have already suggested through other examples of postcolonial sf in this dissertation, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* draw on real histories of colonial exploitation in order to point to the ways science fiction’s emphasis on the “future” can erase the historical violence rendered against people of colour and the global South. In this section I examine how each text requires readers (or viewers) to interrogate sf’s focus on the future by remaining attuned to the violence of the past, or as Memo puts it at the end of *Sleep Dealer*, each text requires readers to “fight for a future with a past” (*Sleep Dealer*). *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* are therefore concerned with historical context and how the particular conditions of a place (South Africa and Mexico respectively) might inform its development into the future. Their caution towards representing the future is not due to concern over sf’s predictive or allegorical function, nor is it quite the same as Fredric Jameson’s critique of the ideological closure that limits cultural imaginings of the future. Rather, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* are wary of discourses about the future in both sf and technoculture for two reasons that I view as closely related: first, both texts are wary of discourses that render the future a *postpolitical* concept and secondly, both texts re-

politicize cultural imaginations of the future by resisting representations of a cosmopolitan “we” and rejecting the idea that escape from the escalating violence and poverty that defines contemporary global relations is possible at the moment.

The future risks becoming a postpolitical concept when the need to imagine better, alternative futures generates consent rather than interrogation into what kind of radical restructuring might actually be required to achieve a more equitable future. Theorists such as Slavoj Žižek and Erik Swyngedouw argue that “the postpolitical condition is one in which a consensus has been built around the inevitability of neoliberal capitalism as an economic system, parliamentary democracy as the political ideal, and humanitarianism and inclusive cosmopolitanism as a moral foundation” (Swyngedouw 24). Under a postpolitical condition, consensus is generated through negotiating group interests (such as the idea that the continuation of neoliberalism is inevitable though frameworks can be put in place for creating more equal job opportunities), a move which serves to curtail dissent by appearing to address a social concern—poverty—but ultimately also forecloses debate about the need for a larger restructuring of global economic and social relations. Žižek notes that a postpolitics “mobilizes the vast apparatus of experts, social workers, and so on, to reduce the overall demand (complaint) of a particular group *to just this demand*, with its particular content” (204; my emphasis). Postpolitics thus promotes a consensual politics that elides the need to address larger, often global, structures that are often at the root of social protests or movements.

The danger of a postpolitical condition for sf is that discourses around imagining the future (both in the genre and through the technoculture that informs/is informed it) can generate the sense of a global consensus around the need for better or alternate

futures. Though on the surface this appears to foster solidarity amongst a diverse groups of people, focus on the future also risks erasing current material and social differences between those in the global North and global South. Specifically, discourses around imagining the future are frequently premised upon the ideology of progress, which posits the idea of “development” or imagining “better” futures. As Rieder argues, however, the ideology of progress in science fiction is symptomatic of the genre’s close relationship to colonialism in which the “narrative logic of growth or development” (29) is used to define the relationship between technologically advanced civilizations and “undeveloped,” or primitive, civilizations. Rieder raises the example of *War of the Worlds* (1923) where the narrator compares the relationship between technologically advanced Martians and humans, to the relationship between British colonists and the “inferior races” of Tasmania. Wells’s novel, in fact, exemplifies the same logic of development evidenced today in which “underdeveloped” nations are seen as those falling behind in economic growth. The ideology of progress functions under the guise of development and growth but ultimately reveals its colonial roots.

Furthermore, by generating the sense of a global consensus around the need for better futures, then, focus on the future in sf can contribute to erasing the socio-historical differences between peoples in the global North and South. Scholars in the field of sustainable development, for instance, have compellingly argued that discourses about the future foster the idea of a cosmopolitan “we” that frequently ignores the fundamental differences in access to resources or socio-economic disparity between nations. In their work on the subject, Philip Catney and Timothy Doyle suggest that, in fact, “‘the future’ and issues of intergenerational justice have become central parts of the construction of an

environmental (postpolitical) consensus in which the claims of the ‘future citizen’ of the North take precedence over the current citizen of the global South” (Catney and Doyle 180). Accordingly, “concepts such as liberal cosmopolitanism ... can be used to promote a sense of solidarity through the development of a ‘global we’ which is dominated by the rationalities, and serves the interests, of the minority global North” (Catney and Doyle 179). This “post-politics of the future,” as they call it, constructs the notion of a universal we in the future that, rather than challenging “*the very framework that determines how things work*” (Žižek 199), only serves to perpetuate unequal socio-economic relations

Through its very form and themes postcolonial science fiction questions the construction of a cosmopolitan citizenship that is often generated through discourses around “our” collective planetary future. This is because by focusing on the lives of people of colour in different historical circumstances, postcolonial sf critiques a colour-blind approach that ignores the vast differences between, say, the impact of colonization in South Africa versus the impact of dependent colonialism in a place such as Thailand. As Mark Bould points out, “by presenting racism as an insanity that burned itself out, or as the obvious folly of the ignorant and impoverished who would be left behind by the genre’s brave new futures, sf avoids confronting the structures of racism and its own complicity in them” (180). Indeed, by critiquing the erasure of histories of racial violence, postcolonial sf simultaneously challenges the genre’s participation in similar ideological frameworks. Furthermore, postcolonial sf challenges the idea of a cosmopolitan “we” by highlighting the need for continued attention to the lasting impacts of colonialism on both the genre and current global politics. In other words, the subgenre is suspicious of focus on the “future” and future citizens because it is attuned to the

differences that define radically different welfare needs for people in the global South whose everyday concerns are very different from people in the global North. As Catney and Doyle succinctly put it, “Just because one looks to the future, and the rights of future citizens, does not mean that the people of the present are uniformly better off” (181). By setting their texts in specific geo-political contexts, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* remind us of the fact that not only are there fundamental differences between different communities, but also that these differences can be used to continue to exploit and dehumanize others.

By gesturing towards South Africa’s complex history of socio-economic development, racial legislation, and implementation of neoliberal policies, *Moxyland*’s futures are deeply invested in remembering and recognizing the impact of the past on how we imagine the future. For instance, as previously noted, *Moxyland* is clearly influenced by the history of apartheid in South Africa as Beukes herself makes clear. However, while race is an implicit factor in determining the differences between the novel’s characters, *Moxyland* focuses primarily on socio-economic stratification. This is not to say racist policies and economic status are unrelated; indeed, it can be argued that apartheid’s racial policies were rooted in the struggle over the division of South Africa’s resources. Adrian Guelke points out that early twentieth century legislation—such as the 1913 Land Act, which limited the land that could be owned by black South Africans — regulated the labor and land rights of African workers, and that systemic segregation was “deeply entrenched in the laws of South Africa well before 1948” (24). Additionally, Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass argue that “under apartheid,” which became the official racial policy in 1945, “the basis of disadvantage shifted from race to class” (4).

Thus, by the time deracialization occurred in the 1990s, the country was already deeply divided by class structure. Patrick Bond contends that this social stratification continued after 1994 and perhaps intensified as South Africa “witnessed the replacement of racial apartheid for what can be accurately described as class apartheid” (“South Africa Tackles” 819). Like many critics in the wake of South Africa’s democratization, Bond argues that the African National Congress’s (ANC) adoption of neoliberal policies, supported by such organizations as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, has exacerbated inequality in the country. Failing environmental sustainability, poor access to resources, and uneven distribution of wealth continue under a system many critics refer to as “global apartheid” (Bond).

Hence, while the official policy of apartheid was abolished over two decades ago, *Moxyland* suggests that racialized capitalism and the embrace of neoliberal ideologies are forms of invisible apartheid that continue to exploit people of colour and the global South. The company Ghost, for instance, uses people such as Kendra to promote their product, but when Kendra is no longer useful she is easily killed and disposed of. The corporate power of Ghost is thus symptomatic of larger, more complex systems of oppression; as Gordon argues, the figure of the ghost “cannot be simply tracked back to an individual loss or trauma” because “the ghost has its own desires, so to speak, which figure *the whole complicated sociality of a determining formation* that seems inoperative (like slavery) or invisible (like racially gendered capitalism) but that is nonetheless alive and enforced” (183; my emphasis). If defamiliarization is the key strategy of African postcolonial and postmodern literature (Gaylard 176), then *Moxyland* defamiliarizes the historical context of South Africa in order to highlight the continued struggles of race,

class, and gender in a post-apartheid era. By presenting futuristic narratives, Beukes's novels "extrapolate the effects of apartheid beyond the present to an imaginative realm which disorients and confronts the reader's conceptions of self and other, law-abiding citizen and criminal, sameness and difference, equality and freedom" (Stobie 379). Power, specifically the pervasive force of neoliberal capitalism, is made visible through the relationships between people, places, and corporations. In each relationship, the reduction of human beings to disposable commodities is prefaced by the figure of a ghost, reminding us that an unsettled past has returned once again.

In *Moxyland*, each character's resigned acceptance of neoliberal beliefs (particularly around socio-economic competition) reflects an unsettled past where racialized capitalism continues to haunt Cape Town. For example, Lerato—one of the novel's central characters and a corporate programmer—most obviously represents how neoliberal ideologies pervade *Moxyland*'s future, as she turns personal relationships into business partnerships and people into resources to be easily used and disposed of when they no longer support her economic pursuits. Indeed, Lerato actively works to turn herself into a commodity, or a resource, that will be valued by corporations—thus, while Kendra is physically "branded" by Ghost, Lerato works to construct her own personal brand in the corporate world. Driven by the need to "distinguish yourself if you're going to make any progress" (110), she hacks into Communique's billboards in order to establish backdoor monitoring sites and strengthen her market value to future employers. She is not interested in Tendeka's protest art, nor is she motivated by solidarity with revolutionary causes. Rather, her sideline work with Toby and Tendeka is an investment in future promotions: "Call it market research," she says (111). Internalizing the principle

of survival of the fittest, Lerato is ruthless in her attempts to maintain the material privileges she has acquired. Despite being born into the less privileged areas of Cape Town, she immerses herself in work with the sole objective of moving up the corporate ladder while avoiding any personal involvement that might obstruct her endeavors. She refuses a romantic relationship as she “can’t afford to be coupled with someone who might hold me back” (144), and her relationship with her sisters, to whom she only talks on the phone in order to acquire sound bites as a cover-up for Communique’s spyware, is strained.

Lerato’s rise through corporate ranks may therefore be indicative of what Seekings and Natrass describe as South Africa’s “distributional regime,” a regime influenced not by race only but by a complex network of class relations, public policies, and global economic environments that affect one’s socio-economic position. They argue that alongside persistent racial inequality, intra-racial inequality has risen in the country as a result of “not only the direct and readily visible ways in which states affect income inequality, such as taxation and cash transfers in the form of old-age pensions and other grants, but also the indirect or more opaque ways, including policies affecting education and the labor market” (4-5). Under such a distributional system, public policies ensured that educated white South Africans were skilled laborers protected from competition, while mechanisms were implemented to manage growing unskilled black labor. Seekings and Natrass argue that such policies resulted in labour forces increasingly divided along urban-rural lines as the state forced black labor back into the bantustans and rural areas.

The divide between urban-rural lines that Seekings and Natrass point out as symptomatic of labour divisions in South Africa is carried into the future by *Moxyland*

where Cape Town is split between an urban population—such as Lerato who works in the field of information communication technologies—and those such as Tendeka who live in the “Rural,” a space outside the corporate haven of Cape Town associated throughout the novel with refugees and impoverished communities of the disenfranchised. Lerato is able to “escape” the Rural (as she sees it), because she is given the chance to work in computer programming, and she develops her programming skills and competes for material wealth in order to avoid the threat of living returning to the Rural. Characters such as Tendeka, however, are denied the same material privileges as Lerato. The novel suggests Tendeka is a refugee originally from Harare (35), though he now lives in the Rural, part of Cape Town’s growing urban sprawl. Through Tendeka’s eyes, readers see Cape Town as a façade projected for tourists who want to see the “rainbow” future of South Africa post-apartheid. However, Tendeka challenges the claim that, “the sense of community and how transformation has been real and important. Like it’s not a total wank, where people are just as economically fucked as they were before” (43). Beukes’s novel does not depict a future free from poverty, but instead imagines a future Cape Town that continues to be affected by apartheid’s racial and economic policies. Against the tendencies of a postpolitical condition, Beukes’s novel re-politicizes the space of the future by reminding us that the violence that defines today will continue into the future if we fail to actively engage with understanding past inequalities and their contemporary manifestations.

Like *Moxyland*, *Sleep Dealer* questions whether a truly cosmopolitan future can emerge if the ideological and material frameworks that enable racialized capitalism continue into the future. In *Sleep Dealer*, Luz’s use of the program “Tru-Node” is one

example of how the idea of cosmopolitanism in fact functions to commodify and exploit difference under neoliberalism. Memories appear in Tru-Node as short films, or montages, comprised of mental images and photographic snapshots from a user's memory. As Luz's own memories on Tru-Node exemplify, the videos that are for sale cannot help but be influenced by the real-world location of its users—for Luz, this becomes problematic as her memories are complicit in a form of identity tourism as they enable users from other parts of the world to buy her memories for their cultural exoticism. Indeed, the very first glimpse we have of Luz's Tru-Node account is when the camera lingers on her computer screen—the memories Luz has uploaded for sale in Tru-Node are variously labeled “The Struggle Over a Well,” “A Witch Doctor,” and “The Rebels.” The title of these memories, as well as the brief glimpses we get of them, depict a rural “past” against the images of techno-scientific development in Tijuana, a place the film calls the “city of the future” (*Sleep Dealer*). This juxtaposition between rural/urban spaces in the film might function to point to the similarities between a colonial past and neocolonial future, but Luz takes this one step further by presenting rural life as idyllic and authentic against the gritty, neon-lit alleys of Tijuana. For instance, when Luz tells Memo about her Tru-Node project, she describes going to her friend's village as a step back in time.

Indeed, Tru-Node exemplifies Nakamura's claim that images of race on the internet function to redress anxieties about a loss of (white) identity in the digital age: “As machine-induced speed enters our lives...all of these symptoms of modernity create a sense of unease that is remedied by comforting and familiar images of a ‘history’ and a ‘native’ that seems frozen in ‘a different time and place.’ (7). Nakamura's argument is

that images of the “authentic native,” or racialized images on the internet, represents “the need for the native in modern times” (7); hence the emergence of racial cybertypes that “assuage [the] desire” for a return to the idea of original, “authentic” identities, especially in “a virtual environment like the Internet where everything is a copy...and nothing has an aura since all cyberimages exist as pure pixelated information” (Nakamura 6). By marketing her memories towards those in the global North who can afford to purchase these videos on Tru-Node, Luz, whether intentionally or not, contributes to constructing cybertypes and the image of an authentic “other.” Luz’s memory of Memo in particular, titled “A Migrant from Santa Ana del Rio,” represents Memo as a native struggling to immigrate into the future offered through Tijuana.

Furthermore, Luz’s acceptance of commissioned work to obtain further information and videos of Memo is a troubling indication of the ways affective labour exploits people of colour (particularly women), and often without their consent. Tru-Node is a virtual space where users from around the world can buy and share memories, because “your memories are too precious to waste” (*Sleep Dealer*). Though Tru-Node markets itself as a way to save memories, in Tru-Node even one’s private thoughts are commodified and exploited, as the program will not allow you to construct false memories and consistently warns Luz that she must “tell the truth” about her feelings for Memo. Arguably, Luz’s relationship with Memo is not innocent from the beginning—she purposely seeks out Memo after their first encounter on the bus. Rudy Ramirez had just purchased her memory “A Migrant from Santa Ana del Rio” and pre-pays her to seek out and find additional information on Memo. Luz’s relationship with Memo thus begins as a market transaction as she purposely uses her relationship to further her writing and Tru-

Node work. However, Luz's growing attachment to Memo is also exploited by the structure of Tru-Node itself—the program often forces Luz to “tell the truth” about her feelings for Memo, extracting personal feelings and emotions Luz does not want to share or sell. This type of affective labour represents the ways, “many jobs in the tertiary sectors demand not only the production of commodities, but also the production of affects,” a type of labour frequently required of women in particular who under capitalism are often “naturally” attributed care/nurture work (Martín Cabrera 587). Ironically, then, the “two-way” connection Luz warns Memo about also ends up exploiting Luz for her affective work, a fact Luz finally recognizes when she apologizes to Memo for ‘losing her way’ and selling memories of him without his knowledge (*Sleep Dealer*). Despite the film's criticism of how Tru-Node continues to exploit people of colour, *Sleep Dealer* also suggests that it is through Tru-Node's virtual platform that people can connect across their socio-economic differences. *Sleep Dealer* thus represents Tru-Node through an ambiguous and self-aware lens that I explore in more detail in this chapter's next section.

*Sleep Dealer* resists simply condemning Tru-Node for its exploitative qualities because the film offers a more nuanced critique of how aesthetics and the market are intimately linked. Through Luz, Tru-Node is depicted as an emerging cultural practice, and an artistic medium that represents the possibilities of using nodes for more than work. However, suggesting that Tru-Node is a virtual space free from the arena of politics and disembodied from the material world is problematic not only because of the identity tourism it hides but also because it separates culture/aesthetics from the market in a manner that seems nearly impossible to do today. Tru-Node is an aesthetic platform

where people can share their videos and stories, but it is also reveals the ways in which the global market affects even *how* and *what* art/culture is produced. Rudy, for examples, specifically requests Luz to compose more video footage of Memo that Rudy will pre-pay for. Thus, even the memories Luz sells of Memo are not “purely aesthetic” in the sense that they are shaped by the information Rudy wants, and produced from economic necessity—Luz *must* continue to sell her memories to Rudy in order to earn a living. As Frederic Jameson points out in a recent essay on “The Aesthetics of Singularity,” in our current historical moment “the very word culture presents a danger, insofar as it presupposes some separate and semi-autonomous space in the social totality which can be examined by itself and then somehow reconnected with other spaces, such as the economic” (“Aesthetics” 102). Tru-Node thus exemplifies Jameson’s argument that cultural analysis cannot be separated from phenomenological, ideological, and historical critique. Indeed, part of why *Sleep Dealer* might simultaneously condemn and celebrate Tru-Node is because the film has much in common with the online platform—both are subject to economic constraints and yet both imagine that artistic mediums can also offer counter-narratives to the simple appropriation and commodification of race or difference.

Tru-Node therefore represents an ideal site through which to explore the ways culture, economics, and politics are intimately bound. Specifically, Luz’s stories are borderland narratives that reveal how cultural and historical practices are shaped by the expansion of neoliberal economic hegemony and specific policies such as the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Lysa Rivera argues that, “[s]ince the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), borderlands writers and visual artists have increasingly turned to the metaphors and

motifs of science fiction to articulate concerns over the problems of the so-called ‘Fourth World,’” (416) a term Rivera borrows from Manuel Castells who identifies the Fourth World as those excluded from access/participation in the global informational economy. Rivera argues that the emergence of these sf narratives is therefore symptomatic of a very specific socio-economic history:

The emergence of borderlands narratives are, then, the formal result of very specific political and historical conditions: the annexation of northern Mexico, the subsequent and steady industrialization of the borderlands, and within that, the creation of a vast working class, now the “long-suffering ‘disposables’ of neoliberalism” (Hayden 271)...Post-NAFTA borderlands science fiction, in other words, is the *formal* articulation of a specific historical narrative: namely the history of US/Mexico capitalist labor relations in the region and militant fights for an alternative frameworks. (417)

By using cyberpunk conventions, such as the direct connection of cyberspace to human consciousness, *Tru-Node* expands the film’s critique of “free trade” to include a critique of how even virtual spaces are not borderless. Instead, divisions persist between the “haves” and “have-nots” of an informational economy. *Tru-Node* thus also represents a metafictional, or metacinematic reflection on borderland narratives and how they reflect contemporary geopolitical division. Such cultural products are, as Rivera and Jameson point out, *formal* articulations of greater historical conditions.

Part of the historical condition that shapes how *Sleep Dealer* uses sf tropes is the ongoing ideological struggle to reconcile immigration fears with the need for foreign labour and resources in the United States. This struggle is made clear in Alex Rivera’s earlier short *Why Cybraceros?* (1997), which makes explicit reference to mid-century migrant labor practices under the Bracero Program. The Bracero program, lasting from 1942 to 1964, was a series of agreements between Mexico and the US that brought

temporary workers from Mexico to work in railway and agricultural positions across the US. Like the “guest worker” programs that continue in many countries today, the Bracero program is only one example of countless other programs implemented by the US to facilitate and control access to cheap manual labour. A significant effect of the implementation of the 1942 Bracero program is that it enabled massive migration and increased “illegal” immigration as employers in the US discovered hiring illegal immigrants was less expensive than hiring braceros (Nevins 27). Indeed, Joseph Nevins argues that “through its actions... the INS [Immigration and Nationalization Service] actually encouraged unauthorized immigration” (27), and that this encouragement was facilitated in part by “powerful agricultural interests [that] played a significant role in producing and maintain a yawning gap between state rhetoric championing strong boundary policing, and actual state practice (29). Such massive migration, while economically profitable for US agricultural growers, also became the target of growing concern over national security, decreasing wages, and social “ills” (Nevins 28). These concerns alongside the Cold War and mid-century fears over foreign migration (from Asia as well as Central America), contributed to the ideological struggle to reconcile desire for foreign labour with the need to maintain the image of a homogenous, white national identity. As Nevins argues, however, the development of terms such as “illegal alien” reveal how immigration fears are closely linked to the continued exploitation of people of colour:

...we cannot divorce growing emphasis on illegal aliens from the long history in the United States of largely race-based anti-immigrant sentiment rooted in fear and/or rejection of those deemed as outsiders, a history that is inextricably tied to a context of exploitation and political and economic marginalization of certain immigrant populations. (79)

Constructing immigrants as “alien others” dehumanizes people of colour and permits the continued exploitation of their labour for the benefit of the global North.

*Sleep Dealer* draws from these continuing ideological struggles in the US over “illegal” immigration, and the film unapologetically points out how even if walled states are erected and physical migration is policed, people of colour will continue to be exploited by the global North as their labour is necessary to maintain the standards of middle-class America. “Virtual” labour, in fact, may be the ideal means of achieving this. As Alex Rivera points out in an interview about *Sleep Dealer*, the disembodied foreign worker on the ‘other side of the border’ reconciles the need for labour with a desire to continue to construct the other as abject: “the worker comes with a body... That body needs health care, and gives birth to children that need to go to school. So keep the body outside of the United States. Suck its energy and leave the cadaver or the problematic shell out of the picture” (Silverman). *Sleep Dealer* refers to this virtual labour as the “American dream,” making clear, as Lysa Rivera argues, the horrible irony of “the invisible (because disembodied) labor that makes consumerism affordable in the American middle class: physical and embodied, but all the while invisible, indigenous labor” (426).

In addition to drawing on the historical context of NAFTA and bracero programs, *Sleep Dealer* inserts reminders of the historical violence of forced migration from rural communities to urban spaces into its vision of the future. Specifically, this migration is seen as a consequence of the privatization of communal resources. Part of the reason Memo moves to Tijuana is not just to fulfill his dream of access to greater global networks, it is also to support his family. His family’s *milpa* is struggling because of the

increased privatization of water Memo's family must purchase from a US corporation. Not only does this point to what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession" and the link between neoliberalism and continuing colonial structures, the privatization of resources in *Sleep Dealer* is also reminiscent of the privatization of *ejido* lands. *Ejido* and *comunidad agrarian* lands are considered collective, social property, and elected leaders manage decisions about land use and resource management (Smith et al. 177). Such land was formerly legally owned by the federal government, though rights to farm and access the land were given in parcels to individuals (Smith et al. 176). However, as Smith et al. point out, "in 1992-1993, amendments were made to the Mexican constitution as part of a broader neoliberal economic strategy... Suddenly, the communal lands of *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias* were no longer inalienable social property, but could be partitioned and sold" (177). The privatization of the *ejidos* forced rural communities into urban cities in search of work, much like Memo's journey towards Tijuana. *Sleep Dealer* critiques this rural/urban migration primarily because it disrupts the possibility of alternative ways of living outside of the exploitative structures of multinational corporations—for Memo, working for Cybertek is the only means of supporting his family. Without access to communal resources, Memo's family cannot afford the exorbitant fees for water, and subsequently cannot afford to continue to pay their own farmhands. Their whole community is therefore affected by the damming of the river, as everyone struggles for money to buy basic resources. As Memo's father prophetically says at the beginning of the film, "When they dammed up the river, they cut off our future" (*Sleep Dealer*). The embrace of neoliberal policies—increased privatization, free markets, and free trade—therefore does not create a "city of the future"

where increased access to the global economy means increased social justice; rather, it condemns people of colour to a colonial past.

*Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* challenge representations of the future that suggest virtual spaces are realms free from the arena of politics. Instead, both texts consider how virtual spaces create the illusion of cosmopolitan arenas where everyone participates equally when, in fact, they do not. Focus on techno-utopian fantasies of “free mobility” in virtual spaces can erase the historical violence of the past, and in turn conceal current neoliberal frameworks that contribute to the ongoing exploitation of people of colour. Thus, even though Memo is able to move to Tijuana where the technological wonders of node-work draw him in, Memo’s migration to Tijuana is still primarily a matter of socio-economic necessity rather than choice. *Sleep Dealer* suggests the illusion of free mobility and cosmopolitan citizenship is in fact a reflection of how advanced capitalism forces the poor to migrate towards urban settings in search of work, only to be restricted by national borders or more powerful nations. As Rosi Braidotti argues, global migration acts as a driving force of empire, and “the dense materiality of bodies caught in the very concrete conditions of advanced global societies flatly contradicts advanced capitalism’s claims to being ‘immaterial,’ ‘flowing,’ or virtual” (6). The consolidation of a world-wide capitalist economy has therefore not led to increased mobility and freedom, but rather the solidification of new boundaries and borders that inhibit the movement of certain of bodies. Though this is not “settler colonialism,” it presents a new kind of dependent colonialism in which people of the global South are subject to economic power of the global North, revealing the ways advanced capitalism has reshaped social relations globally and locally. Old systems of domination are thus perpetuated and represented

through new mechanisms, including the ideological construction of cyberspace as the frontier of our new, cosmopolitan future. *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* therefore not only critique the ideological assumptions of cyberpunk, they also link epistemological critiques of disembodiment to the material structures that enable them: chiefly, the economic, political, and social structures of racialized capitalism.

### **Bodies of Resistance**

Postcolonial science fiction not only highlights the relationship between the genre's colonial gaze and the logic of advanced capitalism, it suggests that alternate understandings of the concept of progress and community will be necessary. In order to facilitate these alternate understandings, more self-reflective practices and a form of a "listening respect" (Bignall) is required in the global North. Postcolonial sf suggests self-reflective practices will include re-thinking Western epistemological biases and how they affect social policy and development. Though *Moxyland* appears to be the more dystopian of both texts, *Moxyland* imagines resistance to hegemonic forces by drawing attention to the importance of embodiment. In Beukes's novel, it is precisely people's embodied difference that reveals how ICTs can contribute to the continuation of neocolonial regimes. Thus, even though the novel ends on a rather ambiguous note with Kendra and Tendeka's deaths, by doing so *Moxyland* asks readers to consider how one's position in global networks is, in fact, a matter of life or death. Both Kendra and Tendeka accepted the utopian possibility of becoming parts of technological networks but mostly because they could not imagine an alternative. Tendeka in particular struggles to imagine

an alternative to his poverty, and exemplifies the differences in the capacity to aspire, or articulate visions of a different world, between the global North and South. This difference in the capacity to aspire and imagine real change is not due to Tendeka's individual failure—as Appadurai argues, the capacity to aspire “is not evenly distributed in any society” because “the better off you are (in terms of power, dignity, and material resources), the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration,” and the more likely you are to have access to networks where expressions of imaginary/symbolic realms can affect socio-political life (188). There is no illusion of a universal “we” in *Moxyland*, as even the capacity to hope for different socio-economic relations in the future is unevenly distributed. Kendra and Tendeka thus exemplify the limited choices offered to those of different social, cultural, and economic positions. Conversely, Lerato and Toby are able to survive by the end of *Moxyland* because they adopt a competitive neoliberal ethics—both use technology to further their socio-economic standing. By presenting characters who live or die based on their ability to navigate the conditions of a neoliberal corporate state, *Moxyland*'s resistance takes the form of a question: what enables some people to thrive under societies of control while others must die?

As previously mentioned, *Moxyland*'s ending does appear to be the more dystopian of the two texts, but *Moxyland* also offers glimmers of hope by rejecting simplistic representations of, and solutions to, South African struggles. *Moxyland* constructs this hope through several means, but one notable example is through the novel's recurring imagery of “ghosts.” Ghosts, traditionally relegated to the realm of the fantastic, haunt the fringes of Beukes's novel. Not only is Kendra physically branded by

the logo of the corporation “Ghost,” *Moxyland* is carefully attuned to the dynamics of *visibility* and *invisibility* in a context where historically certain groups of people have been systematically disenfranchised, forced and segregated into rural townships, and hidden from view. By drawing on spectral imagery and the idea of haunting, *Moxyland* confronts the psychological traumas of forced dislocation, alienation, and homelessness in the aftermath of colonization in South Africa. Such imagery is important to the novel’s critique of the enduring violence and exploitation encountered in supposedly postcolonial settings. As Avery Gordon argues, “What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (xvi). In *Moxyland*, spectral images function primarily as a means of making visible that which is absent, liminal, lingering, or haunting. Specifically, *Moxyland* makes evident the enduring legacy of apartheid in South Africa. Beukes’s novel examines the continued experiences of disenfranchisement in South Africa by linking the “invisibility” of people of colour in cyberpunk to the “invisibility” of racialized capitalism.

However, ghosts are also ways of reorienting our futures; as Gordon suggests ghost stories “not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future” (Gordon 22). The notion of a “counter-memory, for the future” seems paradoxical, but it is similar to Fredric Jameson’s claim that sf’s utopian impulse may serve the function of “transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come” (288). Gordon argues that ghosts are specters of the past dependent upon present social relations to be experienced and understood; thus, “this

sociality, the wavering present, forces a something that must be done that structures the domain of the present and the prerogatives of the future” (179). Ghosts, like sf texts, are liminal spaces that defamiliarize us, and in doing so always exemplify the “utopian dimension of haunting” (Gordon 181). In this context, the dystopian cyberpunk tendencies in Beukes’s novel might be reconfigured as attempts to envision more ethical alternatives to understanding current postcolonial struggles. Like Memo’s attempt to construct a “future with a past,” *Moxyland* suggests that recognizing and examining a “haunted” past can enact counter-memories against which alternative visions of the future may be imagined.

Thus, while *Moxyland* ends on an ambiguous note, Beukes also infuses moments of profound hope in the novel. Again, the key to this narrative of hope lies in Gordon’s argument that ghosts reorient the past and present in order to offer future alternatives. Writing about Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Gordon argues that one must consider an apparently counterintuitive aspect of haunting—namely, that

the force of the ghost’s desire is not just negative, not just the haunting and staged words, marks, or gestures of domination and injury. The ghost is not other or alterity as such, ever. It is (like *Beloved*) pregnant with the unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding. (183)

Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Morrison’s work, and Raymond Williams’s concept of the “structure of feeling,” Gordon takes an embodied approach to hauntings. She argues that ghosts point to the need for a different way of knowing and writing about the world, and that perhaps sensuous knowledge might provide this alternative since it “is a different kind of materialism, neither idealistic nor alienated, but an active practice or

passion for the lived reality of ghostly magical invented matters” (205). Gordon’s sensuous knowledge requires awareness of one’s own complicity in certain ways of knowing and being.

There are no explicit “ghosts” in *Moxyland* per se, but Kendra can be understood as being haunted—that is, through her photography, she, more than any other character, experiences moments of sensuous knowledge in which “the tangle of the subjective and the objective, experience and belief, feeling and thought, the immediate and the general, the personal and the social” (Gordon 200) present themselves to her. Drawn to the use of analog rather digital media, Kendra notes that, “what resonates with me about photography is the sense of immediacy. Catching the transitive before it slips away” (132). Her love of analog photography is not a yearning for a return to a pre-digital era but rather a desire for embodied experience—not the hyperreality of what Toby calls “anti-septic” digital media that are “dead without context” (171) but the capturing of a sensuous knowledge.

Kendra is particularly drawn to a photograph that belongs to Mr Muller, the elderly man who develops her film. The picture is an image of the “mangled wreckage of a truck engine embedded in the sludge of a dried-up irrigation pond, framed by grape vines shrivelled from the temperature rise none of the farmers wanted to believe in” (84), and she is affected primarily by the feeling the image evokes:

The image is beautiful, almost black and white, although he shot in colour ... But it’s the evocative simplicity of the context, of the meaning he’s brought to a landscape that’s impressive. It’s easy to gut-wrench with people ... but investing an inanimate object with the same quality is an accomplishment. (85)

Later, when Kendra experiences the shock of a violent protest, she will associate this photograph with Tendeka's bomb—the “rubble, people screaming, broken glass and blood, a torn-apart car” (265). By experiencing a “rememory” that links the photograph's eerie aftermath to the brutality at Tendeka's protest, Kendra is able to see beyond the moment to recognize the state's “complete overreaction to a peaceful protest” (267), and eventually the ways in which her own body is violently manipulated by state and corporate control.

Not long after the protest, and now wanting out of the sponsorship program, Kendra is murdered by Ghost, presumably because she is a potential threat to the company. While corporate governance appears to continue unconstrained, the deaths of Tendeka and Kendra defamiliarize the quotidian assumption that participation in global markets is inevitable. As Graham Murphy and Sherryl Vint argue,

perhaps one of the reasons cyberpunk seems both dated and paradoxically so relevant is that the ideological assumptions of neoliberalism have become as ubiquitous as information technology ... perhaps to such a degree that stories about [global capitalism and] its planetary triumph no longer strike us as futuristic. (xvii)

Even Mr. Muller considers participation in neoliberal practice and ideology inevitable, and, appalled by the protestors, asks, “What are they protesting anyways? Capitalism? As if there's an alternative” (265). Ironically, or perhaps appropriately, he lives in the notorious white-only area of District Six; coming from the wealthier half of the population, he sees no reason for change.

While, as Murphy and Vint suggest, the pervasiveness of neoliberalism may have rendered cyberpunk archaic by those privileged enough comfortably to assume the

continuation of global capitalism, in South Africa cyberpunk parallels the continued struggles of anti-privatization movements, which culminated in the establishment of organizations like the Anti-Privatisation Forum (now defunct) and grassroots township organizations that, discontented with increasing economic and social inequality, continue to protest state policies. Like Tendeka's opposition to being "disconnect[ed]" (38) from his cellphone and cut off from his access to capital, township movements emerged in the early 2000s as residents retaliated against their disconnection from water and electricity when they could not afford rising costs and were subsequently denied access to basic resources. Bond argues this "people power" has driven increasing pressure for decommodification and resistance to oppressive governance in the country.

Beukes's novel is sensitive to the complex manner in which the personal, public, economic, material, social, and cultural realms interact in South Africa. Without wishing to reduce the complexity of apartheid in South Africa to a series of explorations into ghostly matters, I would argue that *Moxylant* articulates an intricate web of hope, longing, and despair emerging from the struggles of a specific historical context. One could, perhaps, even call this melancholia—a loaded term in postcolonial theory and discussions of South Africa, but one which, following Ranjana Khanna, may be seen as describing an affect that allows colonial critique and "points the way toward a political future free of the failures of postcolonial states and misguided biopolitics" (Khanna). Beukes's characters are not perfect, and her futures are less than ideal, but they reveal the unsettling realities of those who continue to struggle with the often-invisible aftermath of repressive regimes. If, as Gordon argues, a "haunting is a shared structure of feeling, a shared possession, a specific type of sociality" that is "both tangible and tactile as well as

ephemeral and imaginary” (201), then South Africa’s continued struggles expose the underlying shadow of a country that continues to live with ghosts.

*Sleep Dealer* offers a different form of resistance beyond critique of neocolonial regimes of power by examining how global networks can also bring people together. The expansion of the Internet and World Wide Web as well as developments in information communication technologies are central to the emergence of transnational networks of power (Castells 1996), a point I have explored in most of my discussion of *Sleep Dealer* and its exposure of neocolonial frameworks so far. However, Memo’s relationship with Rudy also exemplifies the potential for a form of “counterpower” in the network society (9). In *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (2012) Manuel Castells argues that “mass self-communication provides the technological platform for the construction of the autonomy of the social actor, be it individual or collection, vis-à-vis the institution of society” (7). Castells sees this new form of communication as enabling not only the “process of sharing meaning through the exchange of information,” but also a “decisive sourc[e] of power-making” (6-7). Using technological metaphors reminiscent of cyberpunk, Castells identifies power as forming through the mechanism of connecting “programmers” with “switchers.” Programmers are those that have “the capacity to program each one of the main networks on which people’s lives depend (government, parliament, the military...etc.),” and switchers are those that formulate connections between the programmers to coordinate, establish, and enforce the structures and ideologies upon which power relies, such as “media moguls introduced in the political class, financial elites bankrolling political elites...academic institutions financed by big business, etc.” (Castells 9). For Castells, “counterpower” is

exercised “by reprogramming networks around alternative interests and values, and/or disrupting the dominant switches while switching networks of resistance and social change” (9). I argue that *Sleep Dealer* explores exactly this potential for counterpower by using nodes, specifically Rudy Ramirez’s nodes, to eventually retaliate against privatisation and militarisation of what should be social resources.

To begin, Memo and Rudy are linked through the very technology that kills Memo’s father and subject’s Memo to the exploitative conditions of the *infomaquiladora*. Interestingly, however, Memo’s connection to Rudy is enabled through the *artistic* use of nodes; namely, through Luz’s memories of Memo and her stories about him. Though she initially records these memories for monetary purposes, she also does so because she believes in the art of writing and the power of storytelling. For Luz, storytelling through her nodes permits her to bond with people. As she says, “I hate that there’s so much distance between people. The only thing nodes are good for is to destroy that distance...to connect us... to let us see” (*Sleep Dealer*). Thus, it is through her node work that Rudy discovers Memo and learns about Memo’s past life in Santa Ana del Rio. Connecting through nodes affectively moves Ramirez, inciting him to leave San Diego and his job in drone warfare. Rudy eventually helps Memo break the Del Rio Water dam, which has privatized water and led to drought below the dam in Santa Ana del Rio. Importantly, however, Memo and Rudy must work together to achieve this—in order to find common ground, Rudy has to first recognize that he wants to rectify his mistakes and listen to Memo, and Memo must be willing to use Ramirez’s knowledge (of the network) to suit his own purposes. Working through the boundaries that separate them, Memo and

Rudy work against capitalism's tendency towards increased divisiveness and competition.

Postcolonial sf such as *Sleep Dealer* exposes the immanent potential for utilizing the very tropes of sf to construct lines of flight from the genre's imperial logic. Hence, *Sleep Dealer* draws on the sf trope of robots used as labour in order to reveal how the same virtual networks which permit this exploitation also enable two characters to form an affective connection across cultural differences. For Martín Cabrera, this connection is important on several levels as "it proposes a much-needed transnational alliance between Chican@s and Mexicans [sic] in order to resist neocolonial capitalist exploitation and military control on both sides of the border" (595). Memo's Mexican background and Rudy's Chicano background exemplify the transnational effects of migration and how it renders certain bodies vulnerable under policies such as NAFTA which propelled Mexican migration to the US, while resulting in increased unemployment, poverty, and border control for those migrating from the interior to border regions in Mexico. Memo and Rudy's relationship thus pointedly highlights the various differences in transnational migration (from rural to urban centres as well as between Mexico/US). By doing so, however, Memo and Rudy's "south/north solidarity network" also avoids "any nostalgic return to a pristine national origin at the same time that it shows the vulnerabilities of the transnational system of capitalist exploitation" (Martín Cabrera 595).

Memo and Ramirez therefore also exemplify the ethical project that Bignall points out is crucial to a postcolonialism not founded upon imperial frameworks: they partake in the "the practice of an attitude of listening respect" (Bignall, *Postcolonial* 206) where desire manifests as a social interaction between two bodies that realize their power to

create more joyful, productive encounters. Both Memo and Ramirez recognize their situated differences as people from different sides of the US/Mexico border, but through attentiveness to their material differences and well as willingness to listen to other perspectives, Memo and Ramirez create common notions that result in their ability to act against Del Rio Water and support Memo's local community. Their act, in fact, represents the ways social production is "desiring-production itself under determinate conditions" (*Anti Oedipus* 29). Bignall argues that recognizing individual and collective desire as inseparable is critical as,

[t]his means that widely practised individual performances of a postcolonial ethos become actualised as the collective phenomenon of postcolonial society: the institutions, structures and modes of discourse and thought that make possible the public performance of a postcolonial ethos and, in turn, provide the context for the ongoing constitution of postcolonial subjectivity. (*Postcolonial* 207)

By constructing critical alternatives to the epistemologies of empire and by collectively building common practices towards alternate futures, Memo and Ramirez create a postcolonial mode of relation. In other words, their personal relationship and regard for one another's well-being (their postcolonial ethos) translates to larger, social postcolonial acts—Ramirez initially destroys the dam for Memo's family, but his act of kindness also allows Santa Ana del Rio to enjoy the river as a communal resource once again.

"Postcolonialism" in *Sleep Dealer* is therefore defined by the ways difference itself is seen as an *affirmative* relationship, created through the ability of disparate bodies to construct common notions towards more joyful, non-imperial practices of relationality. If postcolonialism is therefore the construction of an attitude, rather than simply critique, "[i]t is an attitude of friendly relation or sociability, which becomes sensible only in terms of collective participation" (Bignall, *Postcolonial* 206).

It is important to emphasize that the idea of a common notion here refers simultaneously to “practice” and “attitude” (Bignall, *Postcolonial* 206), meaning that postcolonial action and ethics exist hand-in-hand. It is through the act of plotting and enacting their plan against the Del Rio Water company that Memo and Rudy resist the tendency of neoliberalism to create competition and privatisation; instead, in a highly symbolic moment in the film, the drone that Rudy pilots to bomb the dam shoots a missile at the exact same spot Memo’s father had thrown a rock at earlier in the film. Using the forms of militarization that supposedly protect the dam’s water from being stolen, Rudy and Memo’s pasts come together at this moment in order to enact a “countermemory” towards creating new futures. Memo’s memory of his father is thus overlaid with a new memory that re-establishes common ownership of the water over a history of struggle against privatisation. Martín Cabrera, in an essay challenging Hardt and Negri’s notion of the commons, argues that *Sleep Dealer* posits that oppositional agency requires “a political decision to struggle from within the system” (595). I agree and would add to this only that it is a *collective* political decision that allows Memo and Rudy to succeed, and that collectivity is part of the value of Hardt and Negri’s notion of the commons. As Martín Cabrera points out, passive resistance (as perhaps Luz represents) is not enough; instead, the film emphasizes that “the potentiality of the commons can only be actualized when we actively disobey and when we actively ‘connect and fight’” (Martín Cabrera 602). Indeed, in *Sleep Dealer*’s closing scene Memo notes that he cannot return to Santa Ana del Rio, but “maybe there’s a future for me here, on the edge of everything. A future with a past...if I connect and fight” (*Sleep Dealer*). Memo’s comment suggests he sees the nodes as offering a form of counter-power

through which he might become a code “switcher,” if you will, by fighting and actively reprogramming the ways in which we connect with others.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* are both committed to viewing technology as embodied in order to disrupt epistemological frameworks that might contribute to the continuation of neocolonial regimes of power. Discussions of the global dynamic of technology can, for instance, elide the question of embodied difference and contribute to the construction of the bodies of people of colour as commodities and resources to be used. By focusing on how technology impacts people in diverse geographical settings, both texts resist theories of globalization that erase difference—either through their emphasis on the processes of informationalization or through depicting technologies as neutral platforms. To clarify, *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* do not suggest that a culture’s “local” environment and context is “fixed,” and that global networks disrupt this homogeneity. Rather, both texts draw attention to the ways in which we must be attuned to embodied difference when examining the intersection of technology and politics. Through careful forms of sociability, global networks can be transformed into more ethical encounters. Postcolonial science fiction such as *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* link diverse global socio-political struggles through their shared ethical commitments which include an emphasis on the materiality of information, an orientation towards mapping local struggles onto global movements, and a desire to foster alliances opposed to the logic of racialized capitalism. Just as Memo repurposes ICTs to fight back

against privatization, so too do *Moxyland* and *Sleep Dealer* appropriate cyberpunk technologies/themes to utilize sf's best critical tools while challenging the genre's colonial drive.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Transversal Politics and Ethics in Postcolonial SF

This chapter explores the ways “postcolonialism” in postcolonial sf can be seen as a transversal ethical framework which privileges difference while also remaining committed to shared political action. Through the work of Simone Bignall, Gilles Deleuze, and Nira Yuval-Davis, I offer a working analysis of how a transversal perspective can reveal the shared ethical stance that carries through and is a central quality of postcolonial science fiction. I take the term “transversal” from Yuval-Davis’s work on transversal feminist politics. Yuval-Davis notes that she first heard the term from Italian feminists in 1993, and that she has since borrowed it to express her emphasis on “universality in diversity” and her critique of identity politics (125). For Yuval-Davis, the productive potential of the idea of transversal politics lies in its “ai[m] to be an alternative to the universalism/relativism dichotomy which is at the heart of the modernist/postmodernist feminist debate” (125). The question of universalism versus relativism is also at the core of postcolonial sf where scholars such as Rieder point out the inherent problems of categorizing texts as “postcolonial” whether they are addressing the different contexts of settler colonialism or dependent colonialism. Postcolonial scholars have also long recognized the complex social reality of people of colour and the global South. Accordingly, any simplistic categorization of “postcolonial” texts and shared agendas should be problematized as attempts to create universal and homogenous generalizations. However, this does not mean that feminists, or in this case postcolonial sf, must resort to relativism either. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak, Yuval-Davis asks, “Are effective politics and adequate theoretical analysis inherently contradictory?” Spivak would say no, claiming that, “Deconstruction does not say anything against the

usefulness of mobilizing unities. All it says is that because it is useful it ought not to be monumentalized as the way things really are” (65). A transversal perspective can therefore help theorize the connections between different postcolonial political projects and make claims for seeing a unified resistance, but it must also remain attuned to the fact that such theorization does not paint a complete picture, nor is it representative of all postcolonial conditions.

Without falling into cultural relativism or conversely positing universal claims, transversality can help think through how postcolonialism functions as a political and ethical commitment. This is because transversality is a form of coalition politics where differences are recognized and given voice; transversality is attentive to the need of not perpetuating a logic of domination that silences certain voices in the act of privileging others (Yuval-Davis 126). As I will explore in more detail below, postcolonial science fiction can take from transversal politics the idea that the boundaries of a coalition “should be set not in terms of ‘who’ we are but in terms of *what we want to achieve*” (Yuval-Davis 126). In this chapter, I expand on Yuval-Davis’s notion of transversal politics by using Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of ontological difference to talk about postcolonialism. I offer an alternative understanding of “difference” to Yuval-Davis, who aims primarily to avoid the trap of falling into any form of essentialism. I do this more as a form of conceptual experimentation, however, in order to consider how difference might be formulated in alternative ways beyond the paradigm of universalism/relativism that Yuval-Davis critiques but continues to draw on. Thus, Yuval-Davis’s point about the importance of seeking coalitions that exist outside of this binary is still a central driving force of the analysis below. In particular her emphasis on

forming coalitions that are committed to a certain ethical stance—which is mindful of reiterating imperialist frameworks and formed based on the desire for mutual action—is central to the idea of postcolonial sf as being simultaneously attuned to a politics of location while sharing several points of commonality.

Much contemporary scholarly work in postcolonial science fiction, for instance, has divided postcolonial sf (even unintentionally) along material/discursive lines; scholars primarily focus either on the genre's investments in colonial discourse, or conversely on the historical economic and political struggles of the "Third World." However, divorcing questions of representation from the material circumstances in which narratives are produced (and vice versa) fails to acknowledge the ways in which the structures of colonialism operate in a bi-directional manner: epistemological frameworks affect and are simultaneously affected by specific material circumstances. This also means that colonial structures (aesthetic and political) manifest differently in various national contexts, though it is important to note that there are also still many points of commonality emerging from similar economic conditions or engagement in shared cultural productions like science fiction. Mapping out these differences while seeking points of convergence is crucial for moving beyond the framework of identity politics and cultural relativism. Thus, attempts to define what exactly "postcolonialism" or "postcoloniality" is in the genre will fail without positioning the term as a relational one (with shared interests) rather than a universal designation. Despite the challenges of defining postcolonialism, I argue for the importance of the term and for a way of understanding it as a transversal politics premised upon political solidarity, which is

established through the shared values of dialogue, “listening respect” (Bignall), a politics of location, and a commitment to establishing ethical encounters with difference.

### **Science Fictional Assemblages: SF, Postcolonialism, and Ethics of Relationality**

In this section I examine Geoff Ryman’s *Air: Or, Have Not Have* (2005) and Lauren Beukes’s *Zoo City* (2010) as exemplars of the way science fiction (sf) can provide a framework for creatively imagining and enacting a postcolonial ethics. While a number of other postcolonial sf texts might replace *Air* and *Zoo City*, I have chosen these two novels in particular because their thematic similarities are a consequence of shared generic images. Specifically, *Air* and *Zoo City* foreground the “fusion” of two characters and their altered embodiment in order to critique the violence and imperialism implied in western epistemological traditions that imagine the self as an essential, unified being. Differences in the socio-political critiques offered in Ryman’s and Beukes’s novels are due to the particular geographic regions that each text draws upon. *Zoo City* highlights the historical aftermath of apartheid in South Africa while *Air* offers a critique of the digital divide that defines the late twentieth, early twenty-first century expansion of information communication technologies. Despite their situated differences, I argue that both novels express similar ethical commitments as a result of the process by which they link critiques of the “self” with critiques of colonial structures. In doing so, *Air* and *Zoo City* outline the possibilities for a postcolonialism based on “careful forms of sociability” (Bignall, *Postcolonial*, 220) that emphasizes the effect of micropolitical relationships on the emergence of alternative macropolitical relations.

My argument is therefore two-fold in that it seeks to position *Air* and *Zoo City* as representative of the possibilities of postcolonial sf, while also contending that this unique subgenre offers a potential framework for thinking through the material/discursive divide that frequently characterizes postcolonial literary analysis. Texts that have been defined as postcolonial sf include, for example, works by Lauren Beukes, Amitav Ghosh, Nalo Hopkinson, Larissa Lai, and Ian McDonald. Recent scholarly work on these authors often replicates binary geopolitical structures, with one approach concentrating primarily on postcolonial sf's deconstruction of colonial discourse, while the other emphasizes the very real historical, economic, and political struggles of the "Third World." Despite this bifurcation, extrapolating from both these approaches one can say that a general quality of postcolonial sf is thus its focus on and exploration of "difference"—whether social, cultural, technological, or economic—in the historical aftermath of colonialism. By focusing on the question of difference, however, an important question emerges: how does a postcolonial sf (and its study) avoid replicating the structures of the colonial gaze? In other words, how does sf criticism negotiate an understanding of the "postcolonial" in which explorations of difference are not subsumed into the logic of what Graham Huggan calls "marketing the margins"?<sup>35</sup>

At stake in the discussion of a postcolonial sf, then, is whether discussions of cultural, ethnic, or social difference can occur in ways that do not risk appropriating subaltern identities or presenting idealized and mythologized "others." As scholars

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<sup>35</sup> In Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing at the Margins* (2001), Huggan identifies the tensions between what he calls "postcolonialism" as "loosely enabled oppositional practices" and "postcoloniality" as the commodification of postcolonial discourses and its "regime of cultural value" (6) in advanced capitalism.

attempt to define postcolonial sf, many of the questions which have plagued postcolonial theory arise: does defining postcolonial sf as a subgenre revert to idealistic/exploitative identity politics and contain its subversive potential? Can connections be forged between different global visions of sf, or does such a subgenre necessarily revert to a form of cultural relativism? Despite, indeed because of, these challenges, this chapter argues for the importance of exploring a notion of postcolonial sf that might be defined by shared ethics, attuned to both a material and discursive critique of colonialism. This approach hinges on the way *Air* and *Zoo City* redefine “difference” in a non-imperial light, thereby ultimately challenging the subject/Other dichotomy of the colonial gaze in sf. *Air* and *Zoo City* intersect with postcolonialism across three layers: first, by exploring ontological difference as it relates to postcolonial theory; secondly, by exploring how ethical encounters might be fostered through affective connections with others; and lastly, by considering how these ethical encounters simultaneously nurture social transformation. Thus, postcolonial sf can be understood as a “mode of awareness” (Csicsery-Ronay, “SF,” 387), or more specifically, as a strategy and a mode of relation committed to both critiquing colonial frameworks and assembling an alternative, non-imperial ethics of relationality.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> While I draw heavily on Istvan Csicsery-Ronay’s analysis of science fictionality as a “mood or attitude” (*Seven Beauties* 3), my discussion of sf as a mode differs slightly from Csicsery-Ronay’s, who contends science-fictionality is a mode characterized specifically by the hesitation between two gaps: “a historical-logical one” and an “ethical one” (*Seven Beauties* 3).

## Layer 1: Reconstructing Difference, Rethinking Bodies of Relation

*Air* and *Zoo City*'s exploration of ontological difference is key to understanding how both novels reframe the idea of the "Other," and is therefore also central to the way each novel challenges the structure of the colonial gaze in sf. *Air* focuses on Chung Mae, a peasant woman from Kizuldah, "the last village in the world to go online" (1). In the process of connecting to "Air" Mae becomes linked with the consciousness of her elderly neighbor, Mrs. Tung. *Zoo City* also focuses on a central female protagonist, Zinzi December, and is set in Johannesburg, South Africa. Zinzi is a recovering drug addict who—along with her "animal," Sloth—is hired to solve the kidnapping of a young pop-star. By portraying bodies as complex assemblages, *Air* and *Zoo City* contest theories of embodiment that envision subject-formation as a process generated through a negative dialectic. In sf, John Rieder identifies this antagonistic subject/object relation as the "structure of the colonial gaze" (7), which manifests in either overtly imperialistic stances towards alien others (as exhibited in the early sf of John Campbell and Edgar Rice Burroughs, for instance) or through depicting the tensions between human and nonhumans others as fraught but necessarily exploitative (as in Octavia Butler or C.J. Cherryh's writings).

It is through their physiological connections to other beings that Mae and Zinzi challenge theories of embodiment that consider the relationship between self and other as primarily antagonistic or possessive. Dialectical processes of transformation are problematic not only because they posit a necessarily aggressive relationship between difference and lack, self and other, but also problematic because they are ultimately driven by the desire to negate this difference (Bignall, *Postcolonial* 101-2).

Understanding desire as a process initiated through one's negative "lack" means that one's subjectivity can only be affirmed through the objectification and appropriation of others. Hence seeing the relationship between subjectivity and difference as premised upon dialectical philosophies means difference must be either suppressed or eliminated through unification, a direction which becomes ethically problematic for postcolonialism. Against the tradition of much western philosophy, *Air* and *Zoo City* imagine an alternative mode of being that foregrounds a non-dialectical process of becoming, a move that does not require the objectification or elimination of "Others." As philosophers whose work is principally concerned with non-dialectical thought, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari may help reveal the ways in which *Air* and *Zoo City* resist portraying ontology and subsequently identity as a stable, pre-determined essence.

A large part of *Air* and *Zoo City*'s critique of the colonial gaze arises from their portrayal of ontology itself as anchored in multiplicity and difference. Both protagonists thereby represent identity as a sort of cyborg figuration in which bodies function as a nexus of complex material and immaterial links to one's environment. Though Mae and Zinzi initially reject any connection to others because it hinders their capacity to function "normally" in everyday life, soon these physical connections (with *Air* and Sloth) force Mae and Zinzi to reconsider how they perceive their own selfhood, and later, how they understand their roles within the communities they are a part of. For instance, Mae discovers that "*Air*" is not just a technology but also a way of understanding embodiment as constructed through environmental dynamics rather than an individual quality only. Similarly, Zinzi comes to understand her physical connection to Sloth as evidence of the bonds that have always tied her to others, even prior to her "animalled" state. Ultimately,

Mae and Zinzi reveal that “a body’s structure is the composition of its relation” including its internal and external relations (Deleuze, *Expressionism* 218), and both characters come to see their bodies and selfhood as an already machinic assemblage. Mae and Zinzi’s physical connection to non-human others challenges the negative dialectic that characterizes most western philosophies of transformation, thereby also contesting transcendental definitions of what it means to be “human.”

Indeed, *Air* and *Zoo City* reject the universal claims of humanism by representing the body as an assemblage of constantly evolving and coterminous forces in which one’s body is only ever a “momentary body” (Rothfield 208). Mae and Zinzi’s transformations are therefore not about changing from the “human” to something “other”; instead, their physiological changes represent what Deleuze and Guattari call the expressions of a difference of force. For Deleuze and Guattari seeing bodies as a difference of force means recognizing how bodies are always in a process of becoming. This is because bodies express what they call the “double articulation” of virtual becoming and actual being. While the virtual has many definitions in Deleuze’s writings, here I focus primarily on the virtual as a plane of immanence characterized by constant change and varying intensities. Virtual content is conceived of positively as a “chaotic ground” (Bignall, *Postcolonial* 105) or force that is productive of complex being, and not negatively as a lack of reality or an absence that must be overcome (as much Lacanian psychoanalysis contends). Actual being arises from the differentiation of forms from this plane of immanence, in which difference is created by bodies that develop, or become actual, along divergent paths. Accordingly, incorporeal virtuality might be seen as the struggle of differing possibilities to become actualised and the inherent

forces/connections/possibilities that remain unexpressed. Importantly, the virtual and material act in concert, as there is no ontological difference between them. The relationship between the virtual and actual affirms difference precisely because this approach recognizes that bodies are always in a process of becoming.<sup>37</sup>

Like Deleuze and Guattari, *Air* and *Zoo City* posit that bodies are not stable, essential individuals; rather, the self is a constantly changing assemblage defined by an internal (virtual) difference as well as an external, actualised difference. Ryman's *Air* makes literal the double articulation that is the virtual and the actual in order to explore the ways in which bodies are already machinic assemblages and "identities" the result of complex shifting relations. For instance, it is primarily through the "coming of Air" (79)—and access to a virtual, global network—that Mae begins to think differently about her own selfhood and relationship to her community. *Air* begins by clearly identifying "Mae [as] the village's fashion expert" (1). With the arrival of Air's test run, however, Mae finds herself merged with a technology reminiscent of the world-wide-web but directly accessed through one's mind. Air has no material substance per se and can therefore only be explained by how it affects Mae, who describes *Air* as simultaneously intensely physical and yet also disembodied—both "an extra weight in her head like a load to be carried" (66) and "as if [a] balloon was pumping you up, filling you with air" (69). As Neil Easterbrook points out, Air "rides waves of central metaphors" (240), and indeed Air's intangible nature means that it can only be described in figurative language.

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<sup>37</sup> Due to limitations in space and the complex nature of Deleuze's differential ontology, the discussion here of the virtual/actual is necessarily truncated. Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* is an excellent introduction to understanding his theory of embodiment, as well as Michael Hardt's companion text to Deleuze's works, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (1995) and Laura Guillaume and Joe Hughes's *Deleuze and the Body* (2011).

What exactly is Air then? If Air might be understood as a science fictional rendering of the plane of immanence, it is appropriate that Air exists virtually as a force rather than a material place or thing. While Air is still a technology developed by the U.N. and Gates, its capacity to affect how Mae sees the world around her renders it a symbolic figuration which expresses the “difference internal to a body as it transforms over time” (Bignall, *Postcolonial*, 102). By physiologically connecting with Mae, Air also affects Mae’s internal composition or her relational becoming. Mae discovers Air’s capacity to effect change in those it encounters: “In Air, one mind occupied the same space as another. Stimulation of one imprinted brain correlated to increased activity in another” (207). This is not a fantastical example of “shared thinking,” as Mae notes, “One brain works in a way very different from another” (208). Rather, Air’s capacity to incite “increased activity” in the people or bodies it brings together reveals the ways in which “an existing mode [Mae in this case] always exists as already affected by objects in partial and particular relations” (Deleuze, *Expressionism* 244). That is, *Air* uses the language of technological systems to articulate the ways in which bodies already exist as a site of multiple connections. The coming of Air is therefore the emergence of Mae’s “awareness of one’s condition of interaction with others, that is to say one’s capacity to affect and to be affected” (Braidotti, “Ethics,” 136), what one might also see as an increased awareness of an ethics of relationality.

The new assemblage Mae forms with Air is neither technological nor material but is perhaps ethical in that it creates another way for Mae to nudge the world around her towards less violent, more affirmative postcolonial relations. She uses the information provided in Air to help her community, first by creating a thriving business and sewing

circle and secondly by helping her village survive the everyday challenges of life in Kizuldah and the torrential floods characteristic of their mountainous ecosystem. When the Kru (teacher) inside Air challenges Mae to embrace the possibilities Air opens up and to “[start] thinking in this new train” (69), Mae learns how to use Air to strengthen the other “bodies” to which she belongs: those of her family, friendships, and village. “Thinking in this new train” entails understanding being as already composite, a fact made all the more clear when Mae learns that “Mrs. Tung had been a traveler in Air. Before there was Air” (374). Mrs. Tung’s memories reveal the ways in which she also understood the multiplicity of being, and the transformative potential of seeing people in this light. This is why, for instance, a younger Mrs. Tung travelling in Air could “half see who this [child] Mae will be—oh, clever, yes, but not in any way that school can capture” (374). Mrs. Tung’s desire to “love” this potential in Mae into life (374) exemplifies the ways in which one is inevitably affected by external relationships, affirming the positivity and productivity of difference. For Mae, this means that that “we have always had Airlives” (310), and that “If we live in Air at all, then we have always lived there, from the beginning” (310). Seeing bodies/subjectivity as existing in partial and transformative states is more than affirming the old adage that change is inevitable (a potentially dangerous adage when taken to its imperial extreme)—instead, Mae learns that it is precisely because bodies are in a process of becoming that she is able to actively contribute to forming new, positive futures for her village.

*Zoo City* continues this project of seeing ontological generation as an ongoing and multi-dimensional process of collaboration rather than imperialistic aggression. While *Air* more clearly draws out the virtual/actual dimensions of bodies, *Zoo City* demonstrates

how recognizing bodies as relational constructs requires also seeing desire as a social force. According to psychoanalytic theory, desire is located within the individual person—for Deleuze, however, desire is both a produced, social mechanism and an affirmation that arises between disparate bodies as they are mutually affected. Deleuze's articulation of internal and external differences demonstrates how desire is constructed between bodies through the connections and affiliations they form. Desire is movement, metamorphosis, and the product of encounters that increase the power of bodies to act. For Deleuze, then, conceiving of desire as a social force means rejecting the very idea of "identity," as bodies are always in the process of assembling and connecting with others in new ways.

Just as *Air* enables Mae to better understand her connections to the world around her, Sloth enables Zinzi to begin to recognize the ways she simultaneously affects and is affected by the environment around her. In Zinzi's "Former Life" (37), she is depicted as having a certain amount of class privilege, and the nostalgia she often feels for her former life is really nostalgia for a return to this privilege and the "creature comforts of [her] parent's Craighall house with the pool and the gardener" (348). However, after her brother dies, Zinzi is unable to access this privilege because her body is visibly marked by the presence of an animal. Hence, it is only after Zinzi is placed in a specifically "racialized" position in this society—that is, it is only after Zinzi is animalled—that she begins to identify the detrimental effects of social inequality upon individual people. In the novel Odi Huron (a wealthy, white businessman) is also revealed to have an animal, but he is not publicly shamed in the same way because his access to money and resources means he can afford to hide his crocodile. The animalled of *Zoo City*, on the other hand

(as refugees and people of colour), are “visible” zoos, or those whose bodies are marked and criminalized by the public and who must work any job they can to survive as outcasts. Thus, race and class are intimately bound in the novel. As a visible “mark,” animals function in this society as a form of racialization, which identifies zoos as, “Murderers, rapists, junkies. Scum of the earth” (15). On a psychological level, this dehumanization is also a form of punishment, eventually internalized by zoos like Zinzi who claim that, “The truth is we’re all criminals” (15).

Zinzi’s internalized oppression and invalidation is symptomatic of processes of racialization in colonial relationships, a point Frantz Fanon eloquently argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). In “The Lived Experience of the Black Man,” Fanon examines a situation in which a black man admits to feeling guilt regardless of his innocence because ultimately “Sin is black and virtue is white” (118). The black man’s insistence on feeling guilty whether a crime has been committed or not is more than an expression of feeling inferior—as Fanon pointedly states, it is “a feeling of not existing” (118). A similar case could be made regarding the zoos of Beukes’s novel who feel blameworthy regardless of the circumstances that may have led them to acquire an animal. For instance, Zinzi repeatedly blames herself for her brother’s death, seeing this as an inevitable consequence of her drug habits. Internalizing the rhetoric of “sin” and criminality associated with zoos, Zinzi uses this as justification for all her behaviour—when she is confronted by Benoît over her email scams and selfishness, she argues, “I’m an addict! It comes with the fucking territory” (257). Zinzi is unable to see the ways material structures—such as the segregation and social alienation of zoos—are systemic factors that continue to position her as “a wretch” (Fanon 118), thereby simultaneously

enabling her to internalize this racialized oppression as deserving punishment for her innate depravity. In turn, this also affects Zinzi's ability to see beyond her own immediate feelings to acknowledge the pain she causes others. It is not until Sloth that Zinzi begins to recognize how an environment and one's relationship to others are critical factors in self-identification.

Zinzi's status as animalled is thus simultaneously a "curse" and "gift" (13); though she internalizes her supposed punishment, Zinzi's actual connection to Sloth becomes a vital and meaningful part of her life. This is because of the nature of their symbiotic relationship—Sloth's bond to Zinzi requires her to continually think about her capacity to affect him through her behaviours. For Zinzi this means a radical reorientation of the ways she understands her body and her connection to the world around her. If the technology in Ryman's novel is a web-like force that decenters Mae's notion of subjectivity and highlights the interdependence of internal and external relations, Zinzi's posthuman body joined with Sloth uses the concept of feedback systems to illustrate this interdependence. Like all of the animalled, Zinzi cannot be separated from Sloth because, "the feedback loop of the separation anxiety is crippling" (142). While this feedback loop functions negatively when they are separated, it also contributes to positive feedback and more reflective practices as Zinzi and Sloth must be accountable for each other's well-being. Notably, their feedback loop depends on Zinzi and Sloth's difference in order to produce active and reflective dialogue. Subsequently, Zinzi protects Sloth and learns to understand her impacts on his feelings and livelihood. Though one might argue Zinzi protects Sloth for her own benefit (if he dies so does she), Zinzi's life is mutually bound with Sloth's in a manner more akin to Donna Haraway's notion of companion species.

Their lives fall into a routine of co-habitation—when Zinzi can't see in the dark, Sloth guides her; when Sloth whimpers, Zinzi knows that he thinks something is wrong; and when Zinzi returns to her self-destructive habits, Sloth refuses to engage with her until she changes (265).

Most importantly, Zinzi and Sloth's relationship is a transformative one, as exemplified by the figurative language used to describe their relationship. Often depicted as a sort of posthuman machine in which Sloth "drives [her] like a Zinzi motorbike" (12), "squeezing [Zinzi's] shoulders like handlebars" (212), Zinzi and Sloth form a new assemblage that simultaneously transforms the way Zinzi views her own body. In the process of allowing Sloth to affect and direct her body—a "becoming-animal" if you will—Zinzi's connection with Sloth reveals that the capacity to be affected "is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 240). It is not only through feedback loops that Zinzi becomes more aware of her connection to others; it is also through cooperative action as a "pack" with Sloth that throws her sense of self into question. By recognizing that their relationship is mutually affective, Zinzi sees the ways in which her body and subjectivity are constantly evolving forces, as well as the ways more positive, productive relations might be developed. For instance, after a brief relapse when she is shunned by Sloth, Zinzi tries to begin the process of undoing the harm she has caused others, sending out warning emails to those who may be scammed through her boss Vuyo. Sloth's constant feedback and his ability to help her act in different ways show Zinzi that she can affect the environment around her in ways she had not previously considered. Thus, Sloth helps Zinzi begin the process of reversing her

internalized guilt by requiring that she recognize the structures that reinforce social prejudices as well as her own complicity in acting them through—not because she is innately immoral but because she had not seen the ways she could act otherwise until Sloth required her to take better care of the bodies she is a part of.

## **Layer 2: Affecting Others and the Question of Ethics**

It is crucial to see Mae and Zinzi's physicality as expressing the pluralism of being, rather than viewing them simply as individuals with multi-faceted personalities. This is because if ontology is seen as an assemblage, then, for Deleuze, the question of ethics is inextricably linked to being as we are always in the process of interacting with other bodies through partial connections, meeting them "bit by bit" (Bignall, "Affective" 88). Such connections determine the degree to which a subject is marked by their environment, and identifying these interconnections becomes crucial to reducing bad or harmful relations. Bignall contends that the ethical task for Deleuze is therefore the task of creating mutually joyful encounters, or encounters that affect both bodies in a way that increases their power to act and become active. In other words, an ethics attuned to bodily complexity,

entail[s] that one must not simply strive to unite with bodies that one perceives to be wholly sympathetic and similar, but more precisely with the sympathetic facets of diverse bodies that comprise one's social milieu... This ethics is therefore concerned with finding agreement, not by eliminating actual difference and privileging identity, but in the context of the actual diversity of bodies that express Being in infinitely multiple ways. (Bignall, "Affective" 89)

Encounters with others cannot always be controlled, and one cannot foretell the ways in which a body will be affected or how it will subsequently respond. However, as Bignall

points out, because bodies are comprised of multiple parts, the ethical challenge is finding the “bits” and ways in which mutual understanding can be reached such that new relationships are formed based on this agreement and affective relation.

By reimagining bodies as composed of internal and external relations, *Air* and *Zoo City* also reimagine an ethics based on nurturing “joyful passions” and increasing one’s “power of action,” a notion Deleuze similarly developed through his reading of Spinoza’s “common notions” (*Expressionism* 273-80). The development of common notions might be briefly summarized as the attempt to establish mutual understanding but it also entails the process of mapping out the historical context of disagreements in order to identify what structures and misunderstandings have led to such conflicts. Common notions thus “internally determine the mind to understand the agreements of things, as well as their differences and oppositions” (Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 276). Importantly, ethics for both Spinoza and Deleuze is not a question of espousing predisposed morals or judgements. Rather, the ethical question is an ongoing one in which the body navigates different encounters by enhancing its understanding and power to act through mutual comprehension and dialogue with others. Levi Bryant argues that this “ethics of the event” in Deleuze is characterized by “the question of the work of ethics [that] concerns not the application of a pre-existing rule to an existing situation, but rather how a collective is to be assembled or composed in light of the appearance of these strange new actors, these strangers, or how a new collective is to be formed” (29). Here one can see how Deleuze’s notion of differential ontology and ethics are interwoven, as both do not appeal to transcendental or pre-determined formulas.

*Air* and *Zoo City* perform the “work of ethics” in which “rather than thinking ethics on the model of judgment, it would be more accurate to think the ethical as a sort of construction or building” (Bryant 29). Confronted with changing bodies and communities, Mae and Zinzi must create sustainable futures that foster more “joyful passions” for their families and loved ones. In their new social, economic, cultural contexts, Mae and Zinzi are not guided by a moral process of doing “right” and “wrong,” but are instead depicted as working through the complex task of formulating new ways of living with a diverse group of people in their new environments. By working through developing new communities of practice, Mae and Zinzi perform a relational (and postcolonial) ethics, guided by a desire to collaborate with others through attentive listening, constant learning, and a willingness to change daily habits. Easterbrook identifies exactly this ethical dimension in *Air*, contending, “*Air* abandons the moral alibi, the claim that some universally transhistorical code or merely subjective whim grounds ethics...and turns instead toward useful, productive ethical engagements, built almost entirely from heuristic openness” (250). Indeed, Mae and Zinzi are placed in situations in which they must determine how to act in response to the changes they experience physically, socially, and culturally, and in such a way that makes both their lives and those around them more positive experiences.

Sloth is only the beginning of a series of related events that compels Zinzi to think about the ways in which her actions affect others and what an idea of “careful sociability” (Bignall, “Affective,” 79) might mean. As a fellow aposymbiot and Zinzi’s lover, Benoît also plays a large role in her life. When Benoît discovers Zinzi’s scam emails he asks her if she thinks about the impact she has on those she lies to and the pain that she causes

others as a result (including himself). Zinzi claims, “It wasn’t on purpose” and “It wasn’t to hurt you” (257), but Benoît responds by asking Zinzi, “Like your letters are not to hurt people? You don’t care about anyone else, Zinzi” (257). When Benoît reveals to Zinzi that her email “formats” appropriate the real life stories of people who, like himself, have seen their families torn apart by war and resorted to acts of violence to protect them, she is shocked at her own egocentricity. It is at this moment that Zinzi feels in her chest, “the poison flower [burst] open, an explosion of burning seeds. I imagine Mr and Mrs Barber experienced something similar whenever they finally realized that the bearer bonds were forged. It is the death of hope” (259). The Barbers are but one couple Zinzi has helped dupe, and though her role is limited to writing the initial emails to them, Zinzi sees that she is complicit in robbing the couple of their life savings and undoubtedly causing pain. Understanding how she has hurt Benoît enables Zinzi to claim responsibility for the ways she has also hurt others, destroying their “hope” of better futures.

Though this incident in Zinzi and Benoît’s relationship seems trivial, it is the catalyst in the novel for “a certain idea of careful sociability, which expands the realm of practical ethics beyond rights-based and state-mediated discourses of justice, to include *unmediated qualities of interpersonal relationship* as defining aspects of political and ethical life” (Bignall, “Affective,” 79; my emphasis). In an insightful move, Bignall uses Deleuze’s theory of embodiment to construct a notion of postcolonial agency that “incorporates a positive and creative role for ontological difference and gives rise to an ethic of joyful sociability based on material practices of self-awareness, listening respect and attentiveness to the other” (“Affective” 100). Arguably, what is most promising about Deleuze’s ontological vision—and the ethical project Bignall extrapolates from

this—is its articulation of desiring-production, which sees desire as a social force between two or more bodies. There is nothing “lost” in this vision precisely because desire is seen as produced through the affective connections formed in an encounter between two people. While these are not always joyful encounters, even sad ones can increase our power of action through sustained attempts to understand our relationship with others and why they might incite such reactions. As Bignall explains, this requires re-thinking the link between interpersonal relationships and political life.

Part two of *Zoo City* begins immediately after Benoît discovers Zinzi’s scam emails, and though the section opens with Zinzi’s relapse and return to “[r]ock fucking bottom” (265), in Zinzi’s most uncertain moment—relapsed, heartbroken, and upset with herself—she begins to reconstruct the ways she interacts with her environment. While in the novel’s first half, Zinzi is depicted as largely self-absorbed, in the second half of *Zoo City* Zinzi becomes increasingly self-aware, making connections between events taking place in her life and events taking place in the greater community of Johannesburg. This change manifests most clearly through the mysterious emails Zinzi receives throughout the novel—emails that include statements such as, “When you eat, you are eating things from planes” (38). Almost immediately after Benoît has expressed his disappointment in her and Zinzi has relapsed, she begins to question why she has received such strange emails, and what her role is in this unusual event. Initially believing that the emails might be “bad muti, a hack spell from a rival syndicate” (280), she wonders if they are instead desperate pleas for help and begins to see that it might be “victims sending [her] messages” (287) about their animal murders. Consequently, Zinzi discovers that the mysterious email about “eating things from planes,” comes from Patrick Serfontein

(294), a homeless aposymbiot whose shelter provided food donated from airlines. Zinzi's attempt to solve Patrick's murder leads her away from her self-destructive habits as she engages with her community in an effort to address a social injustice.

The mysterious email story-line seems tangential to the novel's primary narrative arch about Zinzi's hunt for the famous singer Songweza; however, it is important to note that it is not until Zinzi decides to investigate these brutal murders that she begins to participate in acts of care which involve no monetary gain. Following what Rosi Braidotti might call an "ethics of radical immanence," Zinzi is increasingly attuned to the dynamics of her environment. As Braidotti notes, such an ethical positioning is composed around the idea of "sustainability" which entails "a re-grounding of the subject in a materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical accountability for the environments s/he inhabits" ("Affective" 7). As a kind of politics of location, such an ethics sees an individual as co-extensive with her/his environment. Bryant offers a similar perspective by speaking of ethics as "a question of ethical ecology or the composition of collectives in response to events that buffet collectives" (29). Thus, Zinzi discovers that if she is "busy trying to dig [herself] out of the plague pit that's [her] life right now" (276), this also entails taking the effort to actively listen to others and attempt to understand her role in shaping the community around her. Being an aposymbiot makes clear to Zinzi the condition of being unable to escape the ties that bind her to others, and her responsibility in sustaining more joyful relations. In the end, though Zinzi says, "you don't get to choose the ghosts that attach themselves to you" (17) or the encounters into which one is thrown, Zinzi can be accountable for the ways she interacts with various forces in her life.

Like Zinzi, Mae's discovery of the "work of ethics" is gradual, and the beginning of *Air* primarily focuses on Mae's endeavours to further her own career and pay off her family's debts. Mae's self-interest, however, changes when she begins to develop a "question map." When Air first arrives, Mae decides to use her access to the new technology to develop her fashion business, creating a questionnaire to survey the fashion needs and wants of her village. As Easterbrook points out, Mae's question map is a critical turning point in the novel, as it exemplifies the ways in which "the most mundane sequence produces a most marvelous result" (250). This is because "mapping" becomes a crucial tool for Mae and her village, functioning on both a practical and ethical level. Pragmatically, the questionnaire enables Mae to survey the village's response to Air and gather knowledge about how each understands what exactly Air is. The written information collected in this survey enables Mae to receive government funds for assisting with building her school and business. However, Mae's question map also functions ethically, inciting collaboration and discussion amongst the villagers about how they will respond to the changes rendered by Air, and how they will collectively empower themselves in a rapidly changing future. Though Mae is the only one with constant access to Air, she uses her skill according to the needs identified by her village—helping Kwan with her Eloi website, for instance, and preparing her village for the technological challenges they will face.

As a central conceptual image, "mapping" thus reveals the ways in which Mae creates a network of support towards the common goal of strengthening her community's ability to survive and prosper. Interestingly, Air itself is described as a technology in which "formatting" entails "mak[ing] a complete map of minds, and that's what exists in

Air” (10). Constructing Air as a technology is therefore a project that requires discovering sustainable ways to link individuals with larger communities and to mediate social differences between individual cultures (such as Kizuldah) and global ones (such as the U.N.). Mediation between these two disparate bodies requires finding ways of interacting that are mutually beneficial and where one body will not overpower the other. Mae realizes that continuous negotiation is crucial to creating futures viable for all parties involved when she thinks about how “all our lives...are going to change” with the coming of Air, and notes that if her primary reason for constructing the questionnaire is her business, “the second is also to help the village to decide: What do we want to do for the future?” (76-7).

Mae’s question—“What do we want to do for the future?”—is never directly or completely answered, and for good reason. As Deleuze and Guattari contend, mapping itself is a project “entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real...[i]t fosters connections between fields...[and] is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification,” transforming and responding to the particular communities it represents (*Thousand Plateaus* 12). Mapping is therefore intentionally open-ended and always under construction as it responds to various social changes, such as the coming of Air. If “ethics is concerned with affective relations among bodies in a composite or collection, and those assemblages that fit together in such a way so as to *enhance the power of acting among the elements of the collective*” (Bryant 33; my emphasis), Mae’s ethical response to Air is the construction of a map, or communal project, that enhances her village’s capacity for survival. Though it is born out of Mae’s self-serving necessity, the question map

encourages active community involvement as Kizuldah must decide how to use *Air* in order to collectively create futures more attuned to their needs.

### **Layer 3: Social Transformation**

Constructing ethically accountable futures in *Air* and *Zoo City* therefore means addressing the contemporary historical relations that confine and limit the possibilities for communities to transform themselves according to their particular social needs. By identifying the ways internal and external relations affect a body, Deleuze and Guattari also insist that “[t]here is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other” (*Anti-Oedipus* 28). If desire is produced through the relationship between multiple bodies, not only does this support the notion of an intrinsic ethical dimension to all social relations, it also maintains that “social-production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions” (*Anti-Oedipus* 29). In other words, desiring-production is interdependent with and develops out of social-production. For instance, *Zoo City* links contemporary racial segregation and xenophobic violence against refugees to the colonial logic of apartheid in South Africa. Thus, despite the end of apartheid nearly two decades ago, Beukes’s novel highlights the ways in which xenophobia is actualised through social structures that continue to segregate “foreigners,” confining them to “*Zoo City*,” a metaphorical “quarantine camp” (99). Similarly, Ryman’s novel addresses contemporary debates about the digital divide in the global South, offering perspectives on both the dangers of technocultural globalization and a view of the enduring resilience of those so

often labelled “have nots.” By directly addressing these contemporary issues, both novels suggest that social transformation of material, macropolitical structures is required in order to also eliminate the epistemological habits that justify their continuation. Read together, *Air* and *Zoo City* perform the dual project of critiquing macropolitical structures and constructing micropolitical resistances, a project that scholars such as Bignall see as vital to postcolonial endeavours.

Though *Zoo City* appears to focus primarily on Zinzi’s personal growth, significantly, this personal development is a response first and foremost to the conditions of the world in which she lives. *Zoo City* is a place where, “you do what it takes, you take the opportunities” (346) to survive because being shut-off from the rest of Johannesburg means that “a dead zoo in *Zoo City* is low priority even on a good day” (11). The segregation of aposymbiots in *Zoo City* is the outcome of material practices supported by social prejudice, resulting, for instance, in the banning of zoos from certain public establishments or from wealthier housing communities. As Zinzi notes, “[i]t was inevitable I’d end up in *Zoo City*. Although I didn’t realise that until after the fifth rental agency had sneered over their clipboards at Sloth and told me they didn’t have anything available in the suburbs” (61). Forced out of economically wealthier communities, aposymbiots also face limited job options and access to public resources. Police and security guards, for example, are often “animalists” (99) who primarily serve the interests of non-zoos and wealthier gated communities. Beukes’s novel therefore clearly critiques the continuation of material structures that regulate boundaries that continue to isolate the “other,” a critique which is undeniably linked to the aftermath of apartheid.

*Zoo City*'s very form critiques the ways writing, media, and language contribute to the dehumanization of certain peoples—the novel is interspersed with journalistic writing, scientific publications, and online documentary film reviews that all claim to understand the real difference of aposymbiots as “non-human others.” As previously noted, aposymbiots are racialized bodies, and their constant mistreatment in the novel exemplifies the ways in which people of colour continue to be “marked” and exploited under regimes still invested in colonial epistemologies and racialized practice. One newspaper reporter, for instance, describes a theft which involved “gangsters [who] had a lion with them,” noting that it, “[m]akes me wonder if we don’t need a pass system for zoos after all!” (35). The association of zoos and aposymbiots with apartheid’s pass laws is clear, but Beukes’s novel also links such xenophobia to other similarly destructive ideologies, “[b]ecause who knew there was a caste below untouchable?” (99). In an interview with *Clarkesworld* magazine, Beukes puts it succinctly:

*Zoo City* is...about the burden of the past, guilt and redemption, magical spirit animals inspired by myth that may be the devil on your back or the guardian angel on your shoulder or the spirits of your ancestors manifested in furry form, about inner city slums and refugees and what society does with—and to—our outcasts. *Zoo City* is set right now in the dilapidated slums of Johannesburg. (Jones)

Recognizing the affinity between “outcasts” and “our” role in the everyday choices we make as part of these segregating systems is what makes *Zoo City* a particularly compelling novel. While *Zoo City* is not unique in its critique of the continuation of racialized policies and practice in South Africa, it is exemplary in its ability to tie a materialist critique with advocacy for the construction of less violent and more sustainable futures. Accordingly, *Zoo City* ends with a simple act of kindness—as Zinzi

drives off to find Benoît's family, the reader is left pondering this event and what exactly "care" means in our relationship with others.

*Air* is also deeply invested in the politics of global change, examining what changing technological contexts might mean for communities outside of global economic centers. Foregoing the judgement on whether or not technological expansion is "good" or "bad," Ryman's novel asks what new relationships will emerge from our technological connections: will these new relationships be beneficial and positive for all affected? If they aren't, what relationships or social relations have been fostered such that harm and suffering occur instead? These are critical questions for the coming of Air, and while supposedly "Air...would make everyone a Have" (191), as Mae points out to her international friends, Air only exacerbates the scarcity of resources available to Kizuldah. In *Air*'s mundane world, technological information is an invaluable resource and not all countries or communities have equal access. Furthermore, while Air promises to be a useful tool, because it is forced on Mae's village with little communication or concern for cultural consequences, Air becomes instead an invasive and dominating technology. Angered by this lack of communication and care, Mae asks her friend Bugsy Harris, an editor from the U.S., "Can you help me by telling your powerful friends that those who are as dependent on you as children, should at least be asked what we want done to our heads?" (234). Without access to information about the coming of Air, Kizuldah is thrown into a crisis, and Air's arrival is often juxtaposed with images of imperialist invasions from Mrs. Tung's memory. Air's arrival is therefore also a moment that makes clear the divisive effects of unequal technological access.

Technology is thus presented as a social structure that solidifies the differences between Karzistan and other countries, functioning as a boundary separating the “information haves and have-nots” (9). Such separation and difference is seen as detrimental, as a lack if you will, which positions Mae and her village as somehow deprived, dehumanized, and without the skills privileged by the global North and more technologically wealthy countries. Mae is infuriated by the label of “have-not,” arguing, “I’m sure that it is a good thing. I am sure the people who do this think they do a good thing. They worry about us, like we were children... We don’t have time for TV or computers. We face sun, rain, wind, sickness, and each other... But how dare they? How dare they call us have-nots” (19). While Mae notes that it is precisely the values privileged by the global North—access to info, money, business—that produce the concept of a have-not, she also makes clear Kizuldah’s capacity to survive change. If, under the state of advanced capitalism, information is a resource capable of further ghettoizing certain communities, Mae commits to learning how Air works in order to level the inequalities that others have created for her.

Importantly, therefore, Ryman’s novel refuses to represent Kizuldah’s residents as victims, focusing instead on the ways Mae’s community learns to re-build itself in the process of responding to shifting global environments. Part of this challenge entails figuring out the cultural differences and misunderstandings that arise because, “[i]t assumed so much, this machine—that you understood what the signs meant, that you could read, that you could guess what lay behind each door or each word” (55). Even though “technologies are not culturally neutral” (Escobar 68) and the U.N. format does not take into account these cultural and economic differences, Mae acts as a mediator

whose sustained effort to understand the ways both communities (Kizuldah and the world of Air) function enables her to produce creative solutions to the quandaries posed by Air's arrival. For instance, while Air uses the image of an owl to connote "education," in Karzistan the owl represents death; hence, villagers become scared of learning about Air when confronted with this symbol. Mae must "[ask] them to call me Madam Owl, so that they would come to think in a different way about the owl" (124) and in this way provides a very local and specific social adjustment.

By "cultivating awareness of the virtual existence of things" Mae comes to "[understand] that the actual is never given, but is in fact produced in a movement of becoming" (Bignall, *Postcolonial*, 112). In other words, recognizing the qualitative difference between the virtual and the actual also means recognizing that actual reality contains the possibility of being constructed otherwise. Thus, when Air is forced upon Kizuldah, Mae states that if change is immanent and "everything dies," the "only thing [she] can do is help it be reborn, so we can survive" (158). Mae works to create connections between her village, the government, and people like Buggy in order to actively reshape Kizuldah's relationship with Air towards communal and non-imperial collaboration, renewing Kizuldah's political agency. Mae is not, however, the only character that learns to negotiate Air—Kwan, the women of her sewing circle, and indeed the whole village eventually participate in the struggle to shape Kizuldah's future. Indeed, one could say Mae enacts a postcolonial agency, which "opens onto the concrete task of performing non-imperial interpersonal ethics as well as the strategic material transformation necessary for the expression of postcolonialism as a collective social ethos" (Bignall, *Postcolonial*, 207). Just as Zinzi's relationship with Sloth enables her to

engage differently with the world around her, Mae's experience in *Air* enables her to imagine new ways of using *Air* against the very structures that imposed it on her. Mae and Zinzi trace the conditions that confine them in order not only to critique but also to resist partaking in the same logic, beliefs, and practices that perpetuate relationships founded on domination and subservience. By fostering more equitable relationships, Mae and Zinzi work towards the creation of materially sustainable futures defined by collaboration, care, and new definitions of community.

Texts such as *Air* and *Zoo City* ask questions about the junctures we will face as we “[walk] together into the future” (*Air* 390). For example, what do we need to do so that tomorrow is not characterized by the violence against others we exhibit today? And how can we create new visions of a “postcolonial” future that will materialize into more ethical practice? Without providing easy answers or truisms, *Air* and *Zoo City* offer both hope and hesitation as their protagonists step into the uncertain futures of tomorrow, carrying nothing but a commitment to shaping more responsible encounters with the families and communities they are a part of. By explicitly foregrounding these questions in sf, both novels transform science fiction's world building into a *strategy of postcolonial experimentation* that strives to understand the complexity of problems facing diverse global communities. While this analysis has examined the ways *Air* and *Zoo City* share similar ethical projects, another strategy for outlining their postcolonial potential might entail tracing the relationship between Mae and Zinzi as women of colour. My focus on the question of ontological difference and interpersonal ethics draws out only one aspect of the complex internal/external relations that define communities. However, sharing the desire to construct an understanding of “postcolonialism” also means that

ultimately both novels critique structures that solidify and exploit difference—whether this is through the epistemological frameworks valued in western philosophy, the practices of multinational corporations (like Air), or through the persistence of colonial relations (such as the prejudice against zoos). Postcolonial sf therefore asks its reader to participate in a similar project by remaining attuned to both the perils of globalization and the promises of transnational collaboration.

### **The Promises and Perils of Global SF Film**

Viewing postcolonialism as premised upon a shared ethical commitment is central to reimagining the truly productive potential of postcolonial sf. Rather than seeing the genre as yet one more way capitalism appropriates and resells difference by marketing the margins, postcolonial sf can be seen as the manifestation of a collective ethos, or desire, to imagine lines of flight from the colonial logic that binds us. For example, while genre scholars generally acknowledge that “genres are not inert categories shared by all...but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations” (Altman, *Film/Genre*, 101), discussions of postcolonial sf also need to consider the risks of attempting to define postcolonial sf as specifically “non-Western” science fiction, thereby erasing the socio-political complexity of texts such Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer*, which oscillates between the boundaries of the global North and South. As I examined in chapter four, the film’s critique of migration and labour is specific to the context of the Mexico/US border and NAFTA, but *Sleep Dealer* also expresses affinities with migrant workers in the global South generally whose raced/gendered social positions render them

particularly vulnerable to the exploitative frameworks of neoliberal capitalist regimes and anti-immigration racism. *Sleep Dealer* thus has much in common with a film such as Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2010).

If *Air* and *Zoo City* are exemplary of the ways postcolonial sf confronts readers with the question of how we understand difference, *District 9* is exemplary of the potential for postcolonial sf film to affectively produce these questions through spectacle. Through *District 9* I explore two main tensions, or risks, generated through postcolonial science fiction film: the first tension occurs when film reproduces the colonial gaze, and the second tension occurs when spectators must negotiate between their affective responses and the film's historical context. As a visual medium, postcolonial sf film, perhaps more so than literature, risks objectifying and commodifying difference. Postcolonial sf that I have explored thus far, however, emphasizes the importance of historicizing national, social, and cultural difference in order to avoid replicating sf's tradition of erasing difference in its representation of the future. In the remainder of this chapter I examine how postcolonial sf film—because of its visual medium and international distribution—presents a unique case in which the colonial gaze of sf is directly performed, and challenged, through the viewer's engagement. To do so, I will first examine how sf's "spectacle" offers the potential to foster affective connections, particularly through the ways generic conventions (such as the trope of the alien other) are utilized within global contexts. Using genre in this way, however, also risks dehistoricizing the material realities and locations that films, such *District 9*, draw on. As films move through different social contexts and are marketed to a wide range of people, spectators must negotiate the gap between the extrapolative futures presented onscreen

and the contemporary realities such films reflect upon. This gap (or as Csicsery-Ronay calls it, a “hesitation”) is clearly evident in sf literature through Suvin’s notion of cognitive estrangement; however, it is also expressed (albeit slightly differently) in film as what may traditionally be defined as the hesitation between affect and cognition, or spectacle and narrative in film. The gap between contemporary realities and unknown futures is where genre becomes both a particularly useful tool and a potentially restricting lens.

Using the film *District 9* as a representative test case, this section will explore the gap that characterizes the promises and perils of postcolonial sf film. I argue that it is the spectator who must navigate the tension between the affective and the historical as part of a form of “careful sociability” (Bignall) demanded by many forms of global sf. In *The Address of the Eye* (1992) Vivian Sobchack argues that spectators “[share] cinematic space with the film but must also negotiate it, contribute to and perform the constitution of its experiential significance” (10). *District 9* makes explicit the ways spectators are implicated in the performance of the film’s logic. However, despite its very dystopian overtones, *District 9* also expresses a utopian hope for change through its capacity to foster “affective” encounters, or assemblages, between spectators and the screen. Affect here is not the same as emotion; rather, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick affect can be considered the “complex interleaving of...causes, effects, feedbacks, motive, long-standing states such as moods and theories” (104). Affect is “troubling and has a utopian potential because it always exceeds and escapes the emotions by which we reduce and misname it” (Bould, *Science* 71). *District 9* incites this sort of affective response in that it is simultaneously engaging and yet troubling in its representations of racial difference.

Because of these tensions, *District 9* forces the spectator to navigate the film's allure through "careful forms of sociability" attuned to both the film's significance in terms of genre and in terms of racial and national histories.

To briefly summarize the plot of *District 9*: the film revolves around an alien space ship that stops above the city of Johannesburg. When the aliens are released from the ship, they are treated as refugees and segregated in what is known the eponymous District 9. Called by the derogatory name "prawns," the aliens are treated with little regard. A large corporation known as MNU, or Multi-National United, acts as a mediator between the aliens and humans. In reality, however, MNU is more interested in obtaining alien weaponry, and as a sociologist interviewed in the film states, the "temporary holding zone [becomes] militarized and soon [a] slum" (*District 9*). The alien slum alongside the film's use of "real" interview footage of people who are unhappy with the alien's presence in their country clearly invokes the history of xenophobia against refugees in South Africa. The film itself is presented as a mockumentary (following Blomkamp's earlier short on the subject, "Alive in Johannesburg"), though this verité style reverts in the second half of the film to a blockbuster action flick. *District 9* focuses primarily on Wikus Van De Merwe, an officer for MNU assigned to manage the relocation of the aliens to new districts. Wikus becomes "infected" during the assignment and soon discovers he is slowly transforming into a prawn himself.

As *District 9* reveals, the "promises" of a global sf lies in its potentials to use the vocabulary of science fiction to relate to global concerns—specifically, *District 9* uses the trope of alien others as satire, critiquing racist ideologies and practices that persist today. The epitome of this critique is presented in the film's beginning when an

interviewee states, “If they [the aliens] were from another country we might understand, but they’re not even from this planet at all” (*District 9*). The irony here, of course, is that historically refugee camps and townships in South Africa have succumbed to very similar fates as the fictional District 9. Mass relocation, poverty, xenophobic violence, and abuse are not fictional stories only but the realities of colonial regimes and their aftermaths. The aliens, then, are a clear representation of “difference” (I resist claiming they represent “black” identity for reasons that I will unpack below).

However, *District 9* does more than simply “represent” xenophobia by utilizing the full potential of sf film and its history of spectacle. Like many films about bodily mutations (such as David Cronenberg’s *The Fly*, for instance), *District 9* foregrounds the grotesque transformation of Wikus’s body. The prawns are constructed in the tradition of the abject in horror films—they are slimy, dark, tentacled, crustacean-like characters. On screen and off, we are forced to confront their alienness and difference. As Andrea Hairston points out,

As audience members feel revulsion for these vomit-inducing creatures, we are forced to confront the human tendency toward xenophobia...The Prawns are a graphic embodiment of our subjective perception of those we consider Other. The [film’s] plot is a satiric depiction of how we, a universal we, behave toward reviled Others (331).

As spectators, our horror at alien bodies is presented as a symptom of the same logic in which raced bodies are constructed as animalistic and dehumanized.

Importantly, *District 9* uses *spectacle* to implicate the viewer as the film’s satire hinges on the viewer’s response to grotesque images and their subsequent self-reflection. *District 9* is therefore an example of what Steven Shaviro calls an “affective map” which

“do[es] not just passively trace or represent, but actively construct[s] and perform[s], the social relations, flows, and feelings that they are ostensibly ‘about’” (*Post Cinematic* 6). That is, *District 9* is not just about xenophobia—through its use of verité and mockumentary conventions and through its use of grotesque imagery, *District 9* performs and implicates the viewer in the very ideologies it critiques. Initial disgust at the alien bodies that leak black fluids, grow their young in the dead bodies of cows, and have a fondness for cat food, has to be mediated through the film and spectator’s self-reflexivity.

Wikus’s transformation is therefore all the more horrifying and grotesque since it not only depicts the leaky boundaries between human and non-human bodies, but also because it disrupts the boundaries between film and spectator. Wikus digs teeth out of his mouth, pulls decaying fingernails off himself, and sprouts black thistle-like skin, but what is most disturbing is that the anomalous and abject organism he represents cannot be contained by the film screen. As spectators, we are drawn into the narrative logic of the film, a spatial and mental transgression that reveals the ways the grotesque “infects” the viewer. By using the grotesque and sf, *District 9* disrupts boundaries between screen and spectator performing the critique of racist ideologies and continued divisions between self and other. This is the “promise” of global sf. By using sf’s generic vocabulary and its inclination towards spectacle, sf has the ability to both draw in viewers and encourage self-reflexivity.

However, despite *District 9*’s satiric inclinations, it also risks dehistoricizing the contexts from which the film draws on. For instance, Wikus’s transformation can be read as a sort of “going native,” which turns his bodily transformation into the symbolic image of the “other” and a one-sided representation of raced identities. By focusing on a white

protagonist's transition to the "other side," the film's engagement with racist ideology focuses primarily on critiques of the colonial gaze, or, more specifically in this case, a white gaze. Wikus's transformation as a white man is therefore not an exploration of racial difference but a representation of the "ways which blackness and poverty are painted through a prejudiced white gaze" (Jansen van Veuren 573). As satire, this is a critical perspective that the film draws heavily on. As sf and Hollywood blockbuster, however, the dichotomous representation between white and black identity, and the metamorphosis to "going native," is an over-simplistic engagement with the very complex dynamic of race in South Africa. For instance, refugees in South Africa are often treated differently according to where they are from—recently, Somali refugees in particular have been the target of incredibly violent xenophobic attacks in South Africa.

Furthermore, though the film does not explicitly draw on historical fact, the separation of aliens in *District 9* hearkens back to the very real urban laws implemented under apartheid including the *Group Areas Act* of 1950. The effects of this act can still be felt today in the segregation between wealthy urban areas and the shanty-towns that continue to lack reliable access to basic resources including water and electricity. In addition to the separation of districts and townships, the film's constant reference to "sex with the alien" (*District 9*) is not just due to fear of miscegenation but undoubtedly a reference to the *Immorality Acts* and *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* in South Africa

that prohibited interracial sex between whites and non-whites and remained in effect until 1985.<sup>38</sup>

Much of this socio-historical context, however, is lost in the film's simplification and stereotypical depiction of two "races" pitted against each other. As Mocke Jansen van Veuren argues, "The film is unable, within its own vocabulary, to deal effectively with the black body" (573), and I would add to this, unable to deal effectively with the more complex dynamics that shaped race relations in South Africa, including the economic motives of segregation and the tensions between different refugee groups in Southern Africa. The representation of the Nigerian gang in the film is an explicit example of the manner in which the film fails to present a more nuanced engagement with ethnic, religious, and cultural tensions within Africa. Symbolically the aliens come to represent a vague "non-white" identity, but the film explicitly points out one specific national identity as cannibalistic, violent gang members. The film, in fact, makes sure to note that it is Nigerians that are associated with the scams, interspecies prostitution, and illegal weapons trade in *District 9*. By referring to this gang collectively as "the Nigerians" and failing to offer any positive representation of a Nigerian outside of the gangs, the film appeals to stereotypes about Nigerian 419 scammers and reduces a diverse nation of people to a singular, homogenous group of criminals. The film thus fails to offer a more nuanced representation of historical tension between Nigeria and South Africa that is the result of competing economies, xenophobic attacks against migrants, disagreement over Nigeria's history of military rule and South Africa's history of

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<sup>38</sup> These laws were amended to have "non-whites" include not just blacks but South Asians and "coloured" people. Communities that were racially integrated were often discursively constructed and represented as "diseased, unhygienic slums" (Marks and Bezzoli 268).

apartheid, and more recently competition between the two countries over a permanent African seat on the UN Security Council.

Ultimately, the depiction of Nigerians and the lack of more diverse representations of black identity in the film are subject to the same critique: while the film engages with the general question of racist ideologies—how we are scared of and do not understand difference—it fails to articulate how apartheid functioned through a complex network of social, legal, and economic structures which are specific to a South African context. This is one of the dangers posed by global sf for audiences attempting to work through a film’s meaning—global sf risks erasing the specificity of national settings when the use of generic spectacle obscures how exactly genres function differently in other national contexts. Specifically, the film’s use of the grotesque (what I previously cited as offering potential for critical investigations of difference) is also the very factor that presents challenges for global audiences approaching films like *District 9* solely through the lens of genre, as *District 9* focuses heavily on spectacle while detracting from historical critique.

When reading global sf texts, then, much negotiation occurs between the spectator and screen, as audiences must navigate the tension between historical context (like the explicit mention that the alien space ship lands over Johannesburg and not New York or Tokyo) and sf’s use of spectacle. Accordingly, like *Air* and *Zoo City*, films such as *District 9* require a form of “careful sociability.” As previously mentioned, Bignall defines careful sociability as an ethics of relationality, “which expands the realm of practical ethics beyond rights-based and state-mediated discourses of justice, to include unmediated qualities of interpersonal relationship as defining aspects of political and

ethical life” (*Postcolonial* 79). While Bignall discusses the notion of careful sociability primarily in relation to previously colonized regions, I argue this ethical approach to engaging in non-imperial and self-reflexive discussions is crucial to the experience of films such as *District 9* which confront the viewer with unresolved feelings and questions about our complicity in xenophobia. *District 9* requires audiences to consider their own situated locations as well the location in which the film takes place, and the points of commonality or difference that link both social positions.

As scholars such as Shaviro argue, films might therefore be best taken as “events” that generate “cinematic affect” (*Post Cinematic* 23). Tracing the affective capacities of the film event is not so that we can ultimately discover a “truth” or a moral; rather, Shaviro contends that viewing cinema as an affective event is “an approach [that] is affirmative and transformative, rather than critical or evaluative: it evokes the capacity of the cinematic apparatus to produce and multiply ‘lines of flight’ instead of dwelling on its role in confirming and enforcing oppressive standards and ideologies” (*Post Cinematic* 24). The ideas that viewers form by negotiating the gap between genre and history does not just produce empathy or a cosmopolitan celebration of difference—rather, it produces ongoing analyses of the ways certain people and bodies continued to be marked as exploitable and disposable.

For instance, in thinking about the film’s problematic use of the alien trope as representative of difference, one cannot ignore the ways the film (however superficially) also links the racialization of bodies to their economic value. When Wikus is taken in after his “transformation” begins, the MNU doctor notes that Wikus’s body “represents hundreds of millions, maybe billions, of dollars’ worth of biotechnology” (*District 9*). As

the film's introduction notes, alien weaponry presents a lucrative market for armaments manufacturers. Because Wikus's transformation enables him to use alien weaponry, he is thereby reduced to a "tool" just like the prawns in *District 9*, or the dehumanization of Mexican cyberworkers turned robots in *Sleep Dealer*. Though the film fails to highlight the diverse communities of refugees and the varying townships in South Africa, it does, interestingly, portray how a global capitalist market is reminiscent of colonial logic in its exploitation of certain bodies and peoples for the sake of increased profits.

*District 9* is problematic in its "white man crossing over" narrative—but it also leaves many unresolved feelings that require the spectator to work through various ways of how we are to understand the aliens, Wikus's relationship to them, and our relationship to the film. A film spectator engaged in carefully negotiating these tensions performs a certain mode of awareness akin to Bignall's notion of postcolonial ethics. Thinking about science fiction film in light of this hesitation and negotiation between history/genre, and affect/cognition, may help illuminate not just the limitations of global forms of sf but the promises and potentials of utilizing genre as a critical tool in transnational contexts.

## **Conclusion**

*District 9* is not the only science film to deal extensively with the question of difference—in fact, sf frequently engages questions about sexual, racial, or cultural difference primarily through the figure of the alien.<sup>39</sup> However, postcolonial sf such as

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<sup>39</sup> There are a number of scholarly works that examine how the figure of the alien in sf represents various forms of difference, including, for example, Jenny Wolmark's *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (1994), Patricia Melzer's *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*

*District 9* is unique in that it represents the consolidation of a “constellated community” (Altman 160) in the genre that is particularly attuned to deconstructing sf’s engagement with colonial frameworks and imagining postcolonial alternatives. Rick Altman defines a constellated community as a group that “cohere[s]...through repeated acts of imagination” (161) as spectators imagine that they participate in a larger generic community. Genres are therefore inevitably affected and shaped by fan communities that imagine themselves as part of a greater social network, and who share in mutual enjoyment, experience, and knowledge of genre texts. Constellated communities are generated through elective affinity and brought together by “[n]ot only industry discourse, but critical language, passing comments and chance encounters [which] provide the reference points that permit genre fans to imagine—perhaps unconsciously—the absent community with which they share a particular taste” (161). Postcolonial sf brings together a community that ‘shares in the particular taste’ of politicizing sf and utilizing the genre as a tool for social critique. It is important to note, however, that unlike Altman’s suggestion that constellated communities might be formed unconsciously, postcolonial sf is formed *consciously* through the collective efforts of authors, fans, and scholars who aim to deconstruct sf’s participation in reiterating colonial ideologies. As a generic community, it is through sf’s *lateral communication*—or its “exchanges between viewers of the same film or fans of the same genre” (Altman 162)—in the form of online discussions (such as RaceFail09) and scholarly theorizations that postcolonial sf finally consolidates as a genre.

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(2010), and Elana Gomel’s *Science Fiction, Alien Encounters, and the Ethics of Posthumanism: Beyond the Golden Rule* (2014).

Altman's notion of constellated communities points to how genres such as postcolonial sf can function as a transnational network that brings together a diverse group of people. Postcolonial sf such as *Air*, *Zoo City*, and *District 9* bring together reading communities and spectators who are interested in using sf's conceptual tools towards the creation of non-imperial social relations. Accordingly, postcolonial sf is not just defined by its generic qualities, or by the ways it redresses sf's reiteration of colonial tropes—postcolonial sf is primarily defined by the constellated community it serves. Altman points out that genres do not come into being only “when a body of texts shares a sufficient number of semantic or syntactic elements”—rather, this “*production-driven definition* needs to be matched by a *reception-driven definition* recognizing that genres do not exist until they become necessary to a lateral communication process, that is until they serve a constellated community” (162). Texts such as *District 9*, despite its many problems, are indicative of a community's need for new ways of talking about sf and for imagining a particular kind of sf that could challenge racist and imperial paradigms. As I examine in more detail in the conclusion of this dissertation, the term “postcolonial sf” thus comes to represent the consolidation of a way of reading and engaging with sf texts shared by a community of authors, fans, and scholars.

## CONCLUSION: Towards Postcolonialism as Process

In the introduction to this study, I suggested that in thinking about what unites postcolonial science fiction as a genre, scholars have been torn between two main approaches: one approach concentrates primarily on how the genre deconstructs colonial discourse, while the other approach emphasizes how postcolonial sf points to the very real economic and political process of decolonization in the global South. Scholars such as Jessica Langer and Eric D. Smith similarly acknowledge that a divide between discursive and materialist approaches presents a challenge to defining postcolonial sf as a genre, and is symptomatic of the challenges faced by postcolonial studies in general. Where a discursive approach to postcolonialism privileges questions of identity and epistemology, a materialist approach emphasizes the need to remain cognizant of local and material anti-imperial resistances. As scholars attempt to define postcolonial sf, many of the questions that have plagued postcolonial theory thus arise: for instance, does constructing the idea of a “postcolonial” genre revert to idealistic/exploitative identity politics? Or as Graham Huggan might ask, does postcolonial sf market the margins? Furthermore, can connections and affinities be forged between different global articulations of sf, or does the subgenre necessarily revert to a form of cultural relativism? The bifurcation between discursive/material approaches is therefore problematic not only because it complicates how we understand postcolonial sf but also because it highlights what is at stake when discussions of postcolonialism must choose between affirming difference through identity focused approaches, or choose instead to maintain a collective sense of agency against imperial violence in diverse geopolitical contexts.

I see two main reasons why scholars have struggled to define postcolonial sf, and why discussions of the genre have replicated the discursive/material divide of postcolonial theory. First, there has been more emphasis on *deconstruction* in scholarly work on postcolonial sf and thus more focus on the genre's critiques of colonialism. This is a necessary and important project; however, it also fails to address how the subgenre emerges through the material practice of a community of scholars, fans, and authors who are actively engaged in *constructing* futures (science fictional and otherwise) which are premised upon non-imperial, more equitable forms of relation. Furthermore, the emphasis on deconstruction is symptomatic of a second, and perhaps primary, reason theorizations of postcolonial sf are often problematic: attempts to theorize the genre remain complicit with colonial epistemological frameworks by privileging dialectical philosophies of transformation grounded in the negativity of difference. Under dialectical frameworks, difference is seen as "lack" or negation, and must be therefore suppressed or eliminated in the desire towards unification. Bignall eloquently argues that dialectical philosophies of transformation in Western philosophical traditions replicate the very binary structures postcolonial theory attempts to re-think. Bignall notes that

the model of dialectical process is problematic from a postcolonial perspective, since the trajectory is driven simultaneously by difference conceptualised negatively as lack or opposition, and by the desire to negate this difference in the movement towards unity and recognized presence. (*Postcolonial* 100)

Thus, constructing postcolonial thought on the traditions of Western epistemology—which are founded upon necessarily antagonist relations between self and other—only continue to perpetuate imperialistic tendencies. For postcolonial sf this means that the genre is caught between the problematic space of affirming cultural difference while

attempting to avoid replicating a colonial gaze and marginalizing this “other” form of science fiction.

In chapter five of this dissertation I suggested that one way of understanding what unites postcolonial sf is its commitment towards fostering mutual understanding and non-imperial interpersonal ethics. Against the tradition of pitting discursive approaches to postcolonialism against materialist/Marxists analysis, Bignall, in an insightful move, uses Deleuze’s theory of embodiment to construct a notion of postcolonial agency that “incorporates a positive and creative role for ontological difference and gives rise to an ethic of joyful sociability based on material practices of self-awareness, listening respect and attentiveness to the other” (“Affective” 100). For Bignall, through the conscious practices of “self-awareness, listening respect and attentiveness to the other” emerges a common commitment, or attitude, towards fostering collective understanding and non-imperial interpersonal ethics conducive to creating the postcolonial ethos necessary for less violent, more equitable futures. I view postcolonial sf as participating in these postcolonial practices of “self-awareness” and “attentiveness to the other.”

The idea of postcolonialism as an attitude is not necessarily ground-breaking, and similar arguments can be found in the works of such diverse scholars as Gayatri Spivak, Rey Chow, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Paul Patton. The alliance of postcolonialism and science fiction, however, is one that has solidified as a cycle in the genre only fairly recently, and it is an alliance that deserves careful consideration. Texts such as *Air* and *Zoo City* perform such a vivid postcolonial ethos specifically because they are science fiction. By mediating the boundaries of the real and the speculative, the present and the future, postcolonial sf dismantles the regulatory fictions of colonial

practice while creating space for dialogue about what a postcolonial ethos might look like. Smith articulates a very similar point in his recent study on the genre, noting, “Postcolonial SF is, in this sense, *simply ‘the attempt to think a material thought’* within the alienating enclosures of global capital on the one hand and the corollary aestheticization of the political on the other” (195; my emphasis). As *Air* and *Zoo City* exemplify, postcolonial sf brings to the foreground sf’s generic capacity to critique the present while constructing visions of an alternative future defined by more “careful forms of sociability” (Bignall, *Postcolonial* 220).

Postcolonial sf is thus a way of exploring what postcolonialism means without, as Haraway says, the “risk of lapsing into boundless differences and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connections” (161). Indeed, the subgenre emerges out of a reading community’s response to similar desires and goals, revealing the ways in which postcolonial sf is a strategy of reading, writing, and ethical relation. Before concluding we might return to the question posed at the beginning of this dissertation: how does sf explore “postcolonialism” and difference without being subsumed into the logic of the colonial gaze? To answer obliquely, the question itself is part of the process of enacting “careful forms of sociability” and characteristic of the desire for a non-imperial “mode of awareness” (Csicsery-Ronay 387) which distinguishes this emerging subgenre. The potential and importance of exploring a notion of postcolonial sf therefore lies not in defining yet another marketable subgenre—it is not a matter of *what* postcolonial sf is but rather what it might *do* and what it is capable of *giving rise to* in the process of working through the perplexing conditions of life in the twenty-first century. In an encouraging indication of this development, thinking through the potentials of

postcolonial sf is not only symptomatic of a wider discourse surrounding diversity in the genre, it also realizes the emergence of communities of practice (between authors, fans, and scholars) concerned with the material rights and ethical relations of a growing, global community.

The emphasis on creation, constructing common notions, and collectivity is significant for understanding not only postcolonialism as process, but also for considering the ways postcolonial science fiction is a strategy of postcolonial experimentation. Authors, fans, and scholars alike use the conventions of the genre to actively *create* the conditions of postcoloniality. Thus, scholars of postcolonial sf must themselves be attuned to the dangers of reiterating a colonial gaze in their analysis of the genre. Specifically, by conceiving of desire as the actualisation of concrete relations (as per Deleuze and Bignall), one sees that a concrete definition of postcolonial sf is not only impossible but undesirable. In other words, postcolonial sf can be viewed as an assemblage generated from specific generic qualities and their reception by a particular reading community—thinking of the subgenre as an assemblage recognizes the importance of postcolonial sf’s formal qualities as well as the possibilities inherent in using these texts in new and creative ways. Confining the body of postcolonial sf to a set of textual qualities prevents the creative potential of the genre from developing new ways of understanding postcolonialism beyond its material/discursive and global/local divides. Accordingly, one of the reasons postcolonial sf might be particularly useful is for its ability to produce new ways of understanding postcolonialism, reorienting old frameworks that have confined the possibilities for merging postcolonial theory with democratic practice.

As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, several sf authors are already part of this communal project towards exploring what “postcolonialism” means in the twenty-first century. So far, the genre has brought together authors, fans, and scholars from such diverse contexts as South Africa, Canada, the United States, India, and Japan to name but a few places from which communities have engaged with the idea of postcolonial sf. As I examined in chapter two through my reading of *Evolution’s Shore* and *Kirinya*, Ian McDonald is one example of an author whose work addresses the complexities of globalization while remaining committed to a nomadic politics of location. His novels frequently take place in the global South, ranging from Kenya in *Evolution’s Shore*, to India in *River of Gods* (2004), and Turkey in *The Dervish House* (2010). When asked in an interview about his use of so-called “Third World” settings, McDonald responds,

I’d use the expression “Third World” only in the sense that I include Northern Ireland as a Third World country: a society of two significant social groups that have been set against each other by historical engineering; a skewed economic infrastructure based on the public sector, with a highly economically significant samurai elite (the RUC)...a post-colonial process of disengagement that failed half-way through; physical marginalisation...the sense of cultural inferiority that forces both social groups into re-engineering of their cultural tropes ...My point is, there’s more dynamic for change in “Third World” societies than in the West.  
(Gevers)

His use of non-Western settings is not cultural appropriation (as he is sometimes criticized for) but rather insightful critiques of the complex dynamic and force between the global North and global South.

Similarly, Geoff Ryman’s development of “mundane” sf is a project that attempts to imagine new ways of living in the world, and thus also new ways of engaging with sf’s

imperial past. Ryman's mundane/postcolonial fusions, in fact, provide a line of flight from the fantasies of disembodiment that plague cyberpunk. His work therefore often emphasizes the importance of materialist, postcolonial critiques. The mundane movement specifically differs from traditional notions of sf in the "dream" that it strives towards. Ryman identifies the "mass market SF" dream as one of escape, of leaving earth, the body, and death behind. The mundane movement, however, does not buy into this dream. Instead of partaking in typical sf tropes, mundane sf includes, "no FTL [faster than light], no FTL communications, no time travel, no aliens in the flesh, no immortality, no telepathy, no parallel universe, no magic wands" ("Take the Third"). It is a movement

not just about a near future, but also a far future, one in which there are new wonders to take the place of the old ones...a future in which things really change...These new humans won't be us... They will not be us because they value different things, speak differently, think differently, and respond differently in emergencies. ("Take the Third")

Mundane sf is specifically grounded on Earth, focusing on the social, cultural, and ontological changes that may occur in an increasingly technological world. *Air: Or Have Not Have* is often raised as an example of Ryman's mundane sf movement, as it reflects his belief that technology is a constantly changing force of human relations, and that technoscientific development will contribute to the emergence of a "Fourth World" if we do not recognize the colonial frameworks implicit in our ideologies of progress. As I explored in chapter five, and as Vint and Bould argue, *Air* "explores issues of cultural specificity and hegemony," addressing "the transformative effects of information technologies and economic globalisation on human social existence, but it significantly decentres the perspective of Western, technological elites" (*Routledge* 197).

McDonald and Ryman have very different perspectives on the type of sf they write. Their projects, however, share the same desire to imagine the world differently, and to find a space in an increasingly technoscientific empire in which to engage positively and ethically with different subjectivities. This space of constructivism is produced primarily through the image of the “future” human in their novels, thereby also reorienting how sf constructs the image of the posthuman “other.” Specifically, McDonald’s *Chaga* series ends with the vision of an alien infested future, and Ryman’s *Air* ends with the birth of a “monstrous” child of the future who is born blind and physically altered. These future beings are different ontologically and epistemologically because they represent the emergence of new postcolonial notions in each novel. Regardless of how future humans are presented in the McDonald and Ryman’s texts, all characters are required to exhibit the kind of listening respect essential to non-imperial relations—survival in these futures is determined by the ability of communities to construct postcolonial relations with different people and beings. Furthermore, by creating characters attuned to the discursive, material, and historical exploitation of “difference,” McDonald and Ryman challenge sf’s complicity in reiterating colonial ideologies. Thus, McDonald’s and Ryman’s work actively seeks to construct an understanding of the postcolonial “which then opens onto the concrete task of performing *non-imperial interpersonal ethics* as well as the *strategic material transformation necessary* for the expression of postcolonialism as a collective social ethos” (Bignall, *Postcolonial*, 207; my emphasis). As these authors exemplify, postcolonial sf is therefore attuned to both the genre’s internal tropes, and the ways in which authors, scholars, and fans are also accountable for creating a collective, postcolonial ethics.

What further distinguishes contemporary postcolonial sf from texts previously engaged with questions of cosmopolitanism is postcolonial sf's ability to oscillate between the historical realities of specific geographic regions (as Beukes does in South Africa or Rivera in Mexico) while imagining their possible futures. These futures are hardly perfect, but they reveal transformation as immanent and commitment as necessary towards shaping more ethical futures. In the recent endeavor to define postcolonial sf a wide variety of authors have been put forward as examples of the subgenre, including Ursula K. Le Guin and Robert Heinlein. While Le Guin may certainly exhibit a cosmopolitan ethics in her work, particularly in the Hainish Cycle, Le Guin does not explicitly draw on specific historical settings in the ways authors such as McDonald (in the context of Kenya or Turkey), Beukes (in South Africa), or Vandana Singh (in the context of India) do. Postcolonial sf film is also a growing field with films such as Wanuri Kahiu's short *Pumzi* (2009), Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009), Edwards's *Monsters* (2010), and Damir Lukacevic's *Transfer* (2010). These authors and filmmakers exemplify a shift in the genre, where authors and filmmakers consciously use the discourse of science fiction to engage with both the local singularity in which texts are produced while simultaneously recognizing the commonality of "our plural collective planetary condition" (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 126). By reassembling the genre's conventions, postcolonial sf challenges sf's complicity with colonial ideologies and their troubling reiterations in the contemporary contexts of empire.

If postcolonial sf is a body of texts composed of complex, rhizomatic parts functioning in concert as strategy of resistance, then postcolonial sf has much in common with Hardt and Negri's "multitude." Hardt and Negri define the multitude as "internally

different, multiple social subject[s] whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what [they have] in common” (*Multitude* 100). The project of the multitude is premised upon the openness and willingness of diverse communities to communicate, collaborate, and commit towards a common political process (*Multitude* 106). Bignall notes that while Hardt and Negri’s definition of what the multitude might look like is fairly vague, evidence of the emergence of the “common” might actually be seen in the political standpoint of postcolonialism and attempts to outline this collective social practice (*Postcolonial* 207). I see postcolonial sf as a concrete example of collective social practice where a subgenre has emerged from a sense of shared ethical commitment amongst a diverse group of writers, scholars, and fans alike. Postcolonial sf creates a space for dialogue about what postcolonial relations might look like, and for several of the authors explored here, this means not only critiquing the continuation of colonial frameworks, it also entails “a common commitment to creating the mutual understandings and the social conditions that reflect, develop, reinforce and support the idea and the attitude of postcoloniality” (Bignall, *Postcolonial* 207). The importance of exploring a notion of postcolonial sf therefore lies not only in diversifying the genre; rather, the importance of the genre lies in its ability to realize the emergence of communities actively engaged in giving meaning to “postcolonialism,” and thus actively engaged in constructing the conditions for more ethical relations and material practice in our collective, global future.

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