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Essay

Futures dreaming outside and on the margins of the western world

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Abstract

In this article, we challenge the hegemony of western science fiction, arguing that western science fiction is particular even as it claims universality. Its view remains based on ideas of the future as forward time. In contrast, in non-western science fiction the future is seen outside linear terms: as cyclical or spiral, or in terms of ancestors. In addition, western science fiction has focused on the good society as created by technological progress, while non-western science fiction and futures thinking has focused on the fantastic, on the spiritual, on the realization of eupsychia—the perfect self.

However, most theorists assert that the non-west has no science fiction, ignoring Asian and Chinese science fiction history, and western science fiction continues to 'other' the non-west as well as those on the margins of the west (African–American woman, for example).

Nonetheless, while most western science fiction remains trapped in binary opposites—alien/non-alien; masculine/feminine; insider/outsider—writers from the west's margins are creating texts that contradict tradition and modernity, seeking new ways to transcend difference. Given that the imagination of the future creates the reality of tomorrow, creating new science fictions is not just an issue of textual critique but of opening up possibilities for all our futures.

> Science fiction has always been nearly all white, just as until recently, it's been nearly all male

(Butler as quoted in Ref. [1]).

Science fiction has long treated people who might or might not exist—extra-terrestrials.

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> Unfortunately, however, many of the same science fiction writers who started us thinking about the possibility of extra-terrestrial life did nothing to make us think about here-at home variation—women, blacks, Indians, Asians, Hispanics, etc [1].

Is all science fiction western? Is there non-western science fiction? If so, what is its nature? Does it follow the form and content of western science fiction, or is it rendered different by its own local civilizational historical processes and considerations? Has western science fiction moulded the development of the science fiction of the 'other', including feminist science fiction, in such a way that anything coming from outside the west is a mere imitation of the real thing? Perhaps non-western science fiction is a contradiction in terms. Or is there authentic non-western fiction which offers alternative visions of the future, of the 'other'?

1. Paradigms in science fiction

In Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction, Suvin argues there are three dominating paradigms of science fiction [2].[2] The first is the Asimov's technocratic, wedded to the notional universe of 19th-century science, from thermodynamics to behaviorism, man as subject and the universe as an object of cognition. The second model is the classical stateless socialist vision of utopia as shown in Yefremov's works; and the third is the cosmic/mystical spiritual technocracy of Lem [2].While Lem might be the most sympathetic to the non-west, all three paradigms dramatically miss the other—the role of family, of woman, of the spiritual. They are unable to account for the worldview of the other within the knowledge categories of the other. Indeed the nature of the west is such that the other has no identity except as a people to be colonized, developed or appropriated-to be mapped onto the body of the west.

African, Asian and women's identities often exist in other paradigms. First, they are concerned about their historical identity. Second, they are concerned about the collective, the family, as the individual here exists in a space alternative from the western version. Third, the spiritual, or the emotional, the softer side of what it means to be human is more important. This said, it is crucial to note that while there are deep structures, they are played out differently; it is in local specific conditions that structures are both created and expressed—it is history that creates identity. For example, in India and Islam, the historical struggle has been on the gendered nature of public and private space, while in the west, it has been between individualism and the collective, democracy and tyranny.

Yet most anthologies, encyclopedias and histories of science fiction take a universalistic view of science fiction and posit that non-western science fiction is non-existent. The authors they select are "nearly all white…[as well as]… nearly all

[2] For a website devoted to definitions of science fiction, see: http://www.panix.com/~gokce/sf—defn.html. The site states: Science fiction is really sociological studies of the future, things that the writer believes are going to happen by putting two and two together. Accessed, October 12, 2000.

male". In addition, it is often thought: how could it be possible for non-western societies to develop images of technologically advanced future societies since they themselves are pre-industrial, pre-modern? For example, although even in the least technologically developed societies, we see 'cyborgs' walking on prosthetic legs—their flesh-and-blood legs having been blown up by land mines-cyborg as a category which explores the future (man-in-machine and machine-in-man) has not been imagined, envisioned, or dreamed of in these societies.

There is no conspiracy at work, it is simply that the lenses used by science fiction writers are those given by deep cosmological codes, in this case, those of western civilization. Science fiction, which almost by definition challenges conventional paradigms, has been unable to transcend its own epistemological limitations.

In pre-modern societies, the imagination of the future has not played a part in creating a scientific-technological society, nor has it helped individuals prepare for it. Rather, technological and scientific futures come from outside with few warnings. On the other hand, societies that lead the way in scientific progress also lead the way in creating spaces where the consequences of that progress can be debated, in, for example, creating a public debate on the nature of science. Only writers in western countries, claims Davies "have had the luxury of being able to indulge in an orgy of debates over definition, form, and politics [of science fiction]"[3]. Thus, the current reality that Euro-American white authors dominate science fiction.

2. Utopia: past or future

Taking a paradigmatic view, to assert that science fiction exists only in the west is merely to favor one particular form of a much wider endeavor. Science fiction thus should not merely be about the technological as defined in forward time but the creation of plausible future worlds from a range of civilizational perspectives.[3] Science fiction is not just about debating the consequences of scientific progress. It is also about creating utopian or at least eutopian (the good not perfect) societies of the future. This utopian tradition, either in the form of utopias (positive visioning) or in the form of dystopias (warnings) is highly developed in the west. However, such a need for utopian visioning does not exist in societies that have decided that they have already lived their utopia. For example, in Islamic civilization, there is no central need for science fiction because the perfect world already existed, this was the time of the Prophet [5]. There was a perfect democratic state guided by *shura* (consultation) and there was a wise, perfect, leader who could unify society. The problem has been to re-achieve this state, not create other worlds. In Indian civilization as well, there was Rama rajya, the mythical kingdom of Rama, as well the time when Krishna ruled over Bharat (India) [6].

In African culture, as well, writes Mbiti, utopia exists in the past. Time recedes

[3] Discussion with Pohl over lunch, April 15, Seattle, Washington, Foundation for the Future symposium on Humanity in the Year 3000. See: www.futurefoundation.org. Also see Ref. [4].

toward the Golden Age, the *Zamani* period [7]. It is history then that has been and remained central. This does not mean these civilizations are not future-oriented but that the imagination of the future is based on recreating an idealized past [8]. Centuries of colonization have further influenced the central need to recover the past, as the past has been systematically denied to them (either completely erased as with African–Americans or given in a mutilated form as with western developmentalism, that is, as an inferior history that must be transformed). By recovering their own authentic pasts, these societies intend to articulate their own authentic visions of the future [9].

In 'Black to the Future', Dery asks: "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, and set designers—white to a man—who have engineered our collective fantasies" [10].

Given the reality of fractured societies, can science fiction created outside the west be truly alternative or is it more likely to remain a poor imitation of western science fiction? Is there any other alternative to diminishing the influence of American frontier science fiction except by creating even more violent and even more virtual future worlds?

Can non-western writers, who are often concerned not with utopias but with eusychias—the search for the perfect self—make any sense in the futures and science fiction field? How can cultures that see the spiritual not as exotic or compartmentalized but as the foundation of life, implicated in every packet of consciousness, begin a dialogue with societies imagined in mainstream science fiction, that are replicas of individualistic, secular American/western visions? Thus not only is the future constructed differently (it is past, cyclical, spiral or ancestor-based) but instead of focusing on society, it is the imagination of the perfect self—the enlightened being—that is central to the non-west.

3. The fantastic

Another reason why non-western science fiction has not developed as a separate arena of writing because in some cultures the 'fantastic' is part of daily life. Myth has not been separated from lived history. There is science fiction but broadly understood, with a different space, meaning and importance. For example, for Indian mystics, other worlds are realizable through astral travel, and aliens do visit the planet—to learn meditation from Indian gurus. Moreover, we are all aliens since we take birth in different planets each life. Krishna lives in *Vrindavan*, not heaven, but a real planet in the cosmos [11]. What are considered miracles by those in the west (bringing someone back from the dead, walking on water) are simple occult powers one gains from years of discipline. There are numerous millennia-old stories about

astral travel, aliens, repossession of souls/bodies, and even mechanical/artificial human beings.[4]

Star travel is a common topic in as diverse literary traditions such as the Chinese, Japanese, Australian Aboriginal, Iroquois (Mohawk) Native American and African. In the Chinese tradition there is a tale titled, 'Chang E Goes to the Moon' (by Liu An, 197–122 BCE [12]) in which a woman flies to the moon after she steals an elixir of immortality from her husband [12]. *Taketori Monogatari* is a 10th century Japanese "space fiction…in the genre of folklore" [13] and tells of the Princess Moonlight who first comes to Earth and then returns to the Moon [13]. According to Uemichi, her popularity and the desire people have for her "may eventually turn into a yearning for the better world (the lunar paradise) to which she returned" [13].

A creation story from the Wong-gu-tha (by Mimbardda and re-told by Josie Boyle) tells of two Spirit men (from the far end of the Milky Way) and seven sisters (stars of the Milky way) who were sent to Yulbrada (the Earth) by the Creator Jindoo (the Sun) to shape it. Woddee Gooth-tha-rra (Spirit men) made the hills, the valleys, the lakes and the oceans. Seven sisters beautified the earth with flowers, trees, birds, animals and 'other creepy things'. Six sisters returned to the Milky Way but one of the sisters fell in love with the two Spirit men, and so their special powers were taken away. Two men and the woman became mortal and they became the parents of the earth, made laws and the desert people (Aboriginal Australians) [14]. In the Iroquois tradition there is "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" [15] and in Africa, Mrs Onyemuru, ferrywoman at Oguta Lake, tells a story of Ogbuide, the Queen of Women who comes from the moon [16].

In technologically developed societies, spaceships have replaced golden chariots but desire and myth have remained foundational. Western literature and imagination—in terms of the fantastic—has moved from Earth, the mystical world and the past to the future. This desire for the stars eventually has transformed myth into the reality. It has entered public space, while in the non-west, tales of the mysterious, alternative worlds remain in private space, in the Indian tradition, as secrets revealed to the *chela* by the *guru*.

Alternatively, it can be argued that tales of space travel can, at best, claim to be "only as prototypical predecessors of science fiction because science fiction is a distinctly modern form of literature" [17]. Having said this, it is also important to note that while science fiction has becoming increasingly a popular genre all over the world, not only prototypical predecessors but also very early works of non-western science fiction writers are being forgotten or marginalized.

Thus, the history of science fiction is written almost exclusively from its Euro-American history. Indeed, even in two civilizations with their own indigenous roots, both Dingbo in China and Jamano in Japan testify that the development of contemporary Chinese and Japanese science fiction has been based on western rather than traditional stories:

[4] For example, the first known description of the 'robot' comes from fourth century China. See Ref. [12].

Japanese writers made their debuts deeply influenced by traditional western criteria of SF. Instead of creating their own worlds, they immersed themselves totally into the translated major works of Anglo-American SF. This is like moving into a prefabricated house; the SF genre has grown into out culture regardless of whether there was a place for it [18].

4. Non-western science fiction: creating alternative worlds

Such then is the blindness to tradition and the fascination with the west, that non-western writers do not use their non-western roots as a springboard for their creativity. It is crucial to remember that while conventional wisdom believes that it is Capek 'the man who invented robots' (the word robot derived from the Czech word *robiti* or *robata*—'to work' or 'a worker') [19] the 'robot' has been in the Chinese literary tradition since the fourth century.

In Zhan's "Tangwen" in *Lie Zi* (The Book of Lie Zi, written around 307–313) Yanshi a clever craftsman produces a robot that is capable of singing and dancing. However, this robot keeps on staring at the emperor's queen. This enrages the emperor who issues an order to kill Yanshi. But then Yanshi opens the robot's chest and the emperor beholds the artificial human [20]. Robot stories also appear in Seventh and 11th century China as well [21].

And while the Islamic tradition looks for its utopias in tradition, we have examples such as Hossain who wrote Sultana's Dream in 1905, a virtually unknown short story that is a predecessor of better known feminist fiction classics such as, for example, *Herland* (1915). Born in Pairaband, a village in what is now Bangladesh, Hossain was a "courageous feminist writer and activist who worked all her life to remove what she called the '*purdah* of ignorance'" [21]. Given that most utopian imaging is political it comes as no surprise that in Sultana's Dream, Hossain challenges the seclusion of women and their exclusion from political and economic life. In the far-off Ladyland, ladies rule over the country and control all social matters, while gentlemen are kept in the *murdanas* to mind babies, to cook, and to do all sorts of domestic work. Men are locked as they "do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief" [22]. You cannot trust those untrained men out of doors: it is unfair to shut in the harmless women and let loose the men, remarks sister Sara, Sultana's conversationalist from the other world. Women in Sultana's Dream have the difficult task of rebuilding all of society, which they do through education and science. In her utopia, Hossain builds the world without 'crime or sin', where science is used to service the society, where the Queen aims at converting the whole country into one grand garden, and where religion is based on love and truth. While Sultana finds herself in an ecotopia, the development of science is still seen as extremely important. The genius of this 'unusual story' lies in the transformation of an issue—*purdah*—to represent 'a whole range of patriarchal practices and ideas that shut out the possibility of another world, a world, … that could easily be realized if women were allowed to exercise the wisdom and skills they already have" [23].

Similarly, in Africa, in the continent locked in its 'past', Head creates through

her novels better worlds, for women, for migrants, for blacks and ultimately all people. In her fiction she has sought to construct "her vision of the ideal human society-tolerant, accepting, nurturing" [24]. This vision of a harmonious and tolerant society focused on agricultural cooperatives [25] is a far cry from Head's country of origin, South Africa during Apartheid. As a refugee in Botswana—having fled South Africa—she builds a vision of society where there is solidarity and cooperation between different genders, classes and races as an "antidote to the exclusion of tribe, race, class and gender that operates in Southern Africa" [26].

In Thai science fiction, we see in the film *Kawow tee Bangpleng* (Cuckoos at Bangplent, 1994, directed by Kaljareuk) [27], juxtaposition of the local Buddhist temple with the spacecraft. Writes commentator, Knee: "the image of an ancient statue of Buddha with the craft visible through windows behind it in particular stands as a striking and fertile emblem for the film, forcing a negotiation between Asian and alien, ancient and modern, static and mobile" [27]. The spacecraft sends out a beam that impregnates the local women. The children born are aliens. Over the length of the movie, writes Knee, it becomes clear that the goal is to take over the planet, since their home planet is dying. The local townspeople however remain sympathetic to the children since they have given birth to them and reared them. They are their's, alien notwithstanding. Local monks—who are psychic like the alien children—as well intervene when the police are about to attack the aliens, once a series of troubling incidents begin.

Knee adds, and this is crucial in this dialogue between alien and Buddhism:

> The monk continues to try to convince Somporn [the alien leader], however, of the importance of keeping his emotions in check, as well as of 'extending compassion' to others, along the lines of Buddhist teachings. Somporn generally scoffs at these suggestions but…nevertheless grudgingly agrees to let some of the youths use their alien powers to help the humans when floods threaten the town. As an indirect result of their exertions, however, the youths start to fall ill and die; an autopsy reveals that another physical difference—a lack of a spleen—has rendered them susceptible to earthly diseases. The aliens realize that the planet will not sustain their race and that the survivors must return to the ship; [the alien] Somporn now comes to appreciate the monk's message of empathy and bids him an affectionate farewell, as do the other alien children to their sobbing human parents, before ascending to the sky [27].

Concludes Knee: "The emphasis in *Kawow* then—very unlike that of most western science fiction films—is on local adaptation to rather than expulsion of the alien, which is met in turn by learning and adaptation on the part of the alien. This is made most explicit in the extensive scenes of interaction between the abbot and Somporn, the leader of the alien group and correspondingly the most recalcitrant, as well as the most disdainful of human habits and, more specifically, the Thai-Buddhist worldview" [27].

While this is partly about Buddhist notions of compassion, it is also intrinsic to some experiences of colonialism, of responding to othering by inclusion, instead of

continuing the process and becoming like the dominator. The way forward then becomes an understanding of our mutual mortality, human and alien.

5. Science fiction as a marginal genre

While there is science fiction in all cultures, it is only the west that has systematized science and fiction, made it into an industrial endeavor, and created a particular brand of literature called science fiction. Part of this process has been the privileging its own from of fiction and seeing the dreaming of others as irrelevant, as duplication/replica/extension (Japanese science fiction, *manga* and *anime*) or naive (feminist science fiction).

However, science fiction itself has also been a marginal genre. This marginality has allowed and been a cause of its ability to open spaces for thinking the unthinkable, and exploring unknown unknowns. The marginality of science fiction in society is in direct proportion with science fiction's radicalism. As a marginal genre, science fiction has explored ideas otherwise not cherished by the rest of mainstream/conservative society. In Russia/Soviet Union, science fiction has often allowed spaces for powerful social critique, for dissent. However, in different periods, Russian/Soviet science fiction served important social control functions: for example, to spread Bolshevism among the young, skilled, urban workers prior to the revolution or to support industrial Five Year Plans during the Stalinist era [28]. In American movies, as cinema technology advances science fiction is increasingly losing its 'edge' and becoming entertainment that seeks to reinforce nationalism and the power of the nation–state. Contrast the 1980's Blade Runner with the late 1990s Independence Day or Starship Troopers.

While packaging itself as a 'pure entertainment' American science fiction continues to serve social control functions. One is to prepare and de-sensitize the populace for the consequences of postmodern global capitalism. For example, the movie Gattaca, created as a 'what if this continues' type of scenario still serves the social function of supporting continued eugenic efforts (present since the beginning of the colonization) of excluding the different and creating a perfect (white) human being.

The other function is what Marx has called to 'dull the blade of class (and gender and minority's or postcolonial) struggle'. For example, movies like The Matrix, Deep Impact, Armageddon, Independence Day, Mars Attacks apart from using conservative and overdone man-the-hero-saving-the-world theme are there to teach us that we should be happy with our present (social) order as the future can be much worse. High-tech progress may lead to disaster. Catharsis and relief comes after the threat to our future-as-the-continuation-of-the-present has been successfully battled and defeated. The meteor, or the comet, or aliens, or artificial intelligence or any other 'Other' who threaten the powerful male elite (usually combining male scientists, brilliant male outcasts and government) are after combat defeated. Patriarchy, liberalism and statism win, claiming to have liberated all and everyone.

However, there are many levels to the discourses under operation. The Matrix, for example, can be read as a metaphor for our present lives and societies (focused

on material advancement) and as a call for the spiritual, in which the veil of ignorance is removed and enlightenment revealed, with all limitations seen merely as *Maya*, illusion (similarly to Contact). Yet these subtle spiritual meanings are drowned by the masculinist focus on power battles. For example, Reeves can be read as a smart-ass programmer within the western frame or from a non-western Tantric, Vedic or Buddhist frame as a *bodhisattva*, returning to liberate our selves trapped by technocracy and materialism. The medium becomes the message, massaging us into a light speed of violence. These movies certainly fail to become a tool that can "subvert the central myths of origin of western Culture with their longing for fulfillment in apocalypse" (Haraway, Cyborg Manifesto:175 quoted in Ref. [29]).

Yet another role current mainstream science fiction plays in American and subsequently global society is to 'other' difference. This is most often done by projecting difference onto the alien. Our terrestrial differences are not owned rather, they are exported into outer space (foreign space). The alien does not only help create our identity (in terms of the binary oppositions) but is also seen as a danger to us and should consequently be exterminated. The 'othering' of the difference can also be done through picturing the other in total submission. One example is The Handmaiden's Tale, a powerful feminist critique transformed into voyeuristic feast for patriarchal males and serving a similar social function as the pornographic, The Story of O. It also encourages us to think that our current patriarchy does not look that bad after all.

Yet another way in which the othering of the difference is done is by ridiculing the Other. One example is in the highest grossing movie in 1999, Star Wars: Episode One, The Phantom Menace. One can get a sense of the worldview of Lucas and others by simply analyzing the accents and sites of action. The Knights speak with western (a mix of British/West Coast American) accents (that is, in terms of today's categories of accents, no accent at all). They are the highest of humanity. The lowest are those who live on the planet Tatooine. They are made to look like Muslim Arabs. But they are just uncivilized and not to be worried about. The danger comes from the Trade Federation. They speak with a mixture of an East Asian and Eastern European accent, the twin dangers to the west-East Asia in terms of creating a new economic system, and Eastern Europe as the (orthodox, not reinvented) traditionalism of the west. And what of Africans and Islanders? They are, of course, not quite real, as in all mythologies, friendly natives, slightly silly, happy-go-lucky (in Star Wars, the Gungans, the underwater race on Naboo). Of course, this typology was denied by Lucas, as it should be, how could he see the air he breathes, fish cannot deconstruct water, and the west is unable to see the world it has penned. But while it appears that the mythic brilliance of the movie is that real evil comes from within, from the west itself, in the form of the desire for more power, the emperor (Senator and later Emperor Palpatine); this, however, ends up being a jingoistic concern with democracy, with the American way of life. Essentially it is a battle of democracy against despotism, with the good guys a mixture of Californian pop mysticism and true democracy, and the bad guys as foreigners and as those who engage in trade wars. The latest Star Wars installment, thus even as if it appears that it is venturing

into worlds far away, in fact, reinscribes present constructions of self and other, west and Non-west.

This analysis is not meant as a contribution to postmodern cultural critique but as a pointer of dangers ahead. Our collective imaginations become deadened as Star Wars becomes the naturalized form of science fiction. Other cultures see themselves as less, and either seek vengeance through religious extremism or create schizophrenic personalities in which they other themselves. Globalism continues it march onwards, reducing the possibility of alternative futures, particularly from others.[5] Current science fiction forgets that we are all migrants to the future.

Herbert's Dune (the recent TV/video release 2001 version as well as the earlier 1984 movie) appears to move away from this construction of the other, by empowering the freman, the others in the movie. However, at a deeper level, the other is either ridiculed or seen as the romantic warrior, the mystic—Orientalized. Removed from civilization, the freman are intimate with the desert, and develop a mystic bond with the spice. Their mystical power is countered to the technological prowess of the Emperor and the House of Harkonnens. And yet, they do not find their salvation through their own agency, but it is the 'white' Atredis (as Lawrence of Arabia has done on this planet) who comes and saves them. He does go native, however, taking the freman name of Muad'Dib. It is not in them to develop or be victorious it takes the overlord, the ruling class to provide freedom. Their 'humanity' is denied to them. And, their freedom does not transformed the structure of feudalism but continues class rule, however, it is now the kinder House of Atredis that will now rule. Thus, what appears as victory for the warrior and mystical freman is in fact a continuation of colonization. It is traditional linear macrohistory—The Orient cannot develop through its own creativity, it must be developed by the civilized. The style of speaking, the clothes all make clear that this is a battle within Europe (the emperor versus the Harkonnes versus the Atredis) with the freman (Bedouins) merely the backdrop to their cosmic intrigue. And nature—the worms—they are of course conquered by Muad'Dib Atredis. With nature conquered, the non-west liberated, the evil powers in Europe defeated—and the spice (oil) safe—humanity can once again prosper. The empire is dead. Long live the empire.

6. From space to high noon

Far more obvious is how Star Wars and other science fiction functions to 'push the western frontier'. Pfitzer claims that the most persistent myth in American culture, that of the frontier, has shown remarkable resilience since its firstly emerged in the 18th century [30].[6] In our times, what was once projected westward is now simply projected upward and outward [30]. "Western cowboys [are transformed] into

[5] For a web site devoted to the other, see: www.others.com.

[6] The animated film Toy Story is one example of how the similarity and tension between Woodie the cowboy and Buzz Lightyear is worked out.

space cowboys, high-noon gunfights into celestial shootouts, and frontier expansion into the politics of space ownership on the high frontier" [30]. Pfitzer concludes that such outdated frontier mythologies are doing American society damage: they do not help shape beneficial cultural self-images, bear little relationship to present realities and threaten to bind people too tightly to highly conventional, form-bound ideologies. He believes that new mythologies need to be considered, mythologies that will serve the culture better, especially those that "reverse exploitation and racism while prescribing more realistic avenues for public action" [31].

Some examples of how this is being done exist even in American society. For example, recent versions of the popular series Star Trek (Voyager and Deep Space Nine) challenges many of our old mythologies and given identities. And even more so is the work of African–American authors, for example, Delany and Butler.

7. Ways out

Labeled as 'the only African–American woman writing science-fiction' Butler's work challenges not only patriarchal myths, but also capitalist myths, racist myths, and feminist-utopian myths [32]. She also challenges "the binary oppositions of alien and non-alien, insider and outsider, masculine and feminine" [33], undoing the essentialisms of tradition and modernity. Butler's characters seem to face the same issue and dilemma: "they must force themselves to evolve, accepting differences and rejecting a world view that centers upon their lives and values, or become extinct" [34]. While in most science fiction the alien is seen as the (potential) destroyer of the human race, for Butler, aliens can save and improve the human race and also themselves. Cooperation is necessary, as often the only alternative is extinction. But the other is both external and internal. "The self and the other cannot exist separately. They are defined by one another, a central part of each other's identity"[35], and there is even the "desire for the alien, the other, for difference within ourselves" [36]. Butler's work seem to suggest that old mythologies that produce 'the hierarchies of center and margins, of colonizer and colonized, of alien and other, no longer provide an appropriate or adequate vocabulary with which to articulate the possibilities for change' [37]. In the words of Butler:

> Human Beings fear difference…Oankali crave difference. Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status. Oankali seek difference and collect it. They need it to keep themselves from stagnation and overspecialization…when you feel a conflict, try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference.

Butler quoted in Ref. [38]

8. The politics and futures of science fiction

"'Fantasies', of course, are never ideologically 'innocent' texts" [39]. But fantasies, including science fiction ones, can serve conservative ideologies that promote old divisions and interests of the dominant social/cultural/racial/gender group. Or they can serve ideologies, which would enable us all to move forward and create truly innovative future societies. Science fiction images do not merely reflect our current anxieties and desires. Through their powerful visualization they create the need for what is seen and encourage efforts to duplicate in the future, science fiction's déjà vu. The litanies of our lives crave for myths to give them meaning. In turn, myths help create future litanies, as either their extensions or their oppositions. Science fiction and how it 'others' us, how it continues a particular civilization's domination by assuming others do not have a science fiction or defining itself in exclusive terms (such that other cultures visions are merely the naively impossible) becomes part of the naturalizing discourse of domination. However, science fiction with its focus on creating alternative world, on liberating us from our own mythologies, limitations, plays a pivotal role in liberating us from our own slaveries.

9. The political-economy of imagination

If left alone, science fiction will continue its present role in supporting the cultural project of the only surviving 'Empire' at the beginning of the Third millennia (as time counted by the west).

Contemplating on the reasons for the explosion of science fiction and space fiction in our time, science fiction writer Lessing claims that this explosion is happening because "the human mind is being forced to expand" [40]. She further states that science fiction and space fiction writers must explore "the sacred literatures of the world in the same bold way they take scientific and social possibilities to their logical conclusions…[We] make a mistake when we dismiss [sacred literature of all races and nations] as quaint fossils from a dead past". The rich traditions of many people of the world will make such science and utopian fiction of the future enormously exciting. It will be able to express the voices of peoples silenced by hundreds of years of western monoculture, of world capitalism. Science fiction can be a medium for not only subversion but also for the development of the authentic futures.

Of course, authentic futures are limited by the nature of the market. For example, in Latin America "most science fiction is brief, embodied in short stories rather then in novels…[which]…is due to the fact that it is more feasible to publish short fiction than to publish longer stories, as the editorial industry as well as the market is limited" [41].

There is also a great danger of producing "fragmented and inconsistent images…from the modern and premodern eras…interwoven with new and surprising cultural elements" [42]—of becoming cultural and "literary imposters as New Age Pipecarriers for any and all of The Nations" creating colonizing visions that would surpass even the traditional ones.

Even lumping all non-western science fiction into one entity means submerging it into the category of 'the Rest' as defined by the Empire. It is therefore also important to remember that even within the category of 'the Rest' different others have different status, role and image being ascribed to them. The best science fiction undoes the defining categories it begins with.

Also, apart from 'responding' to dominant future images produced in the west as well as looking at possible prototypes or cultural predecessors, non-western science fiction writers need to fill in the empty spaces, create alternative histories and imagine past visions of the future as if they had been written.

Still the reality is that "Black Women do not have time to dream", argues Tlali and Ryan [43]. While we should look at the conditions that have prevented Black Women from dreaming, black women of today can reinvent these past future images for their foremothers. Some of those visions have been expressed in traditional cultures, some in past and present grass-root women's movements in the Third World; movements that are simultaneously challenging poverty, racism and colonization as well as gender subordination. While indigenous history has been often erased and the technocratic visions of tomorrow reign supreme it is never too late to rediscover one's own original direction.

10. Science fiction and the future of the other

Generally mainstream science fiction has not done so well writing the other, even though ultimately everything it is about is the other. This precisely because science fiction has largely become framed by one culture. And this is why it is important (while acknowledging the danger of being lumped into 'the Rest') to encourage the search, valorization, and publication of science fiction (in its broadest sense) around the world.

It is also important to see the future, science fiction, within the historical and cultural terms of other civilizations, not merely rescuing them within the dominant themes of the west, but also developing the process of an authentic conversation and dialogue about self and other; space and future; alien and human.

To do this we must rescue dominant science fiction from its own paradigmatic blinders, showing how it continues the project of one-culture hegemony. What must be encouraged is a dialogue of visions of the future and past across civilization, such that authenticity from each civilization can lead to a new universal of what it means to be human and not human.

This of course holds true not only for science fiction but also for futures studies (utopian studies, etc.) as well as scholarship in general. Nothing could be more important as we create a world for future generations for all of us. The desire to dream is the universal endeavor of us, humans, appearing all over the globe, even at the most unexpected places (for example, woman writing science/utopian fiction in Bangladesh at the very beginning of the 20th century). To culturally appropriate this desire and submerge into not only one genre, but also one history and a few themes is to deny the realities of our terrestrial past, present and future lives. We can dream otherwise.

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