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POSTCOLONIAL UTOPIANISM

Edited by

Lyman Tower Sargent

Bill Ashcroft

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Introduction: Spaces of Utopia



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The rise of Utopian studies in the twentieth century through a combination of Marxist thought and science fiction is well known and well documented. What is less known is the utopian dimension of postcolonial studies, generated by the various utopian visions of pre- and post-independence writers. Like 'utopia,' the term 'postcolonial' has been the source of endless argument, but postcolonial theory may be defined as that branch of contemporary theory that investigates, and develops propositions about, the cultural and political impact of European conquest upon colonized societies, and the nature of those societies' responses. The term refers to post-invasion rather than post-independence, it identifies neither a chronology nor a specific ontology – it is not 'after colonialism' nor is it a way of being. Post-colonial is a way of reading – a way of reading the continuing engagement with colonial and neo-colonial power. The utopian direction of postcolonial thought, the irrepressible hope that characterised postcolonial literary writing in particular, is therefore the newest and most strategic direction of this reading practice. Yet it remains vestigial. Apart from Pordzik's ground breaking *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia* (2001) and essays by Ashcroft (2007; 2009a; 2009b) and Sargent (2010) and the burgeoning topic of non-Western utopian traditions, (Dutton, 2010), little has been written on this field. This may be due to an insistent and binary oppositionality in postcolonial studies, a binarism that overlooks the powerful transformative agency of postcolonial creative producers (see Ashcroft 2001).

Although postcolonial readings are not necessarily (or even often) Marxist, the importance of Marxist thought to postcolonial utopianism rests on two factors: its dominance of contemporary utopian theory in general; and its robust theorizing of

utopian thought apart from any teleological vision of utopia. The influence of Marxism is also well documented in anti-colonial discourse where the idea of political utopia has long been acknowledged in decolonization rhetoric. The pre-independence utopias of soon to be liberated postcolonial nations provided a very clear focus for anti-colonial activism in British and other colonies. But this appeared to come to an abrupt halt once the goal of that activism was reached and the sombre realities of post-independence political life began to be felt. The postcolonial nation, a once glorious utopian idea, was now replaced in the literature, particularly in Africa, by a critical rhetoric that often landed authors in gaol. But gradually, for instance in Africa through writers such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong or Ben Okri, and latterly women writers such as Chimamanda Adiche, Sade Adeniran and Unomah Azuah, post-independence despair has been giving way to broader constructions of future hope.

For postcolonial utopianism, as for most contemporary utopian theory, Utopia is no longer a place but the spirit of hope itself, the essence of desire for a better world. The space of utopia has become the space of social dreaming (Sargent, 2000: 8). For Fredric Jameson ‘practical thinking’ everywhere represents a capitulation to the system. “The Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is” (Jameson, 1971: 110-11). Postcolonial literatures forcefully extend this transformation beyond Thomas More’s *Utopia*: any economic dimension in the myth of Aztlan in Chicano culture, for instance, or the Rastafarian myth of return to Ethiopia is purely contingent, although Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*, despite its dominant theme of independence, certainly qualifies as a major example of a radical economic anarchism. But economic projections aside, postcolonial writing is suffused with future thinking, with a utopian hope for the future, a belief in the reality of liberation, in the possibility of justice and equality, in the transformative power of writing and at times in the potential global impact to be made by postcolonial societies. The distinctive feature of this utopian thinking is the importance of memory in the formation of utopian concepts of a liberated future.

There is a certain irony in the existence of postcolonial utopianism today since the colonialist ethic present in *Utopia* – which was founded by King Utopus subduing the indigenous inhabitants of Abraxa – was extended in the eighteenth century by the literary

imagination of various kinds of colonial utopias. James Burgh's *Cessaes* (1764), Thomas Spence's *Crusonia* (1782), Carl Wadstrom's *Sierra Leone* (1787), Wolfe Tone's *Hawaii* (1790), Thomas Northmore's *Makar* (1795), and Robert Southey's *Caermadoc* (1799) were all utopias established in isolated regions of Africa, the Caribbean, South America, or the Pacific, with a blithe absence of moral qualms about setting up a colonial utopia on someone else's land. These were necessarily distant utopias of defined and bounded geographical space, ambiguous precursors of the *national* utopias that were to give a vision of a postcolonial liberation. It is arguable that imperialism itself, particularly in the project of the *mission civilatrice*, is driven by a utopian impetus every bit as ambiguous as these precursors'.

Postcolonial utopian thought now gains much of its character from its problematic relationship with the concept of the nation, a concept that once generated visions of a post-independence utopian future. It has been said that Imperialism's major export was identity: a phenomenon previously unformulated by most colonized societies but forged in the heat of political resistance. However arguable this might be, the most widespread political and geographical export of imperialism was certainly nationality. According to J.A. Hobson in his influential *Imperialism: a Study*, "Colonialism, in its best sense," by which he meant the settler colonies, "is a natural overflow of nationality." But "When a State advances beyond the limits of nationality its power becomes precarious and artificial." (Hobson, 1902: 8. Quoting Seely "Expansion of England", lect iii)

A nationalism that bristles with resentment and is all astrain with the passion of self-defence is only less perverted from its natural genius than the nationalism which glows with the animus of greed and self-aggrandisement at the expense of others. From this aspect aggressive Imperialism is an artificial stimulation of nationalism in peoples too foreign to be absorbed and too compact to be permanently crushed. (11)

Hobson's complaint was that empire-bred nationalism undermined the possibility of a true internationalism. Partha Chatterjee, on the other hand sees nationalism as a blow against true decolonisation, because these countries are forced to adopt a "national form" that is hostile to their own cultures in order to fight against the western nationalism of the colonial powers (Chatterjee, 1986: 18).

Nationality and nationalism and their failed visions of independence are fundamental to the study of postcolonial utopian thinking. The national form, if we continue

Chatterjee's terminology, generated a species of decolonising utopianism at odds with the cultural vision of the societies themselves, particularly with the dimension of the sacred and forms of cultural memory. The concept of the nation, or at least the nation state, has been robustly critiqued in the field because the postcolonial nation is marked by disappointment, instituted on the boundaries of the colonial state and doomed to continue its oppressive functions. Postcolonial utopian vision takes various forms but it is always hope that transcends the disappointment and entrapment of the nation-state.

The Ambiguities of Utopia

Wherever utopias occur, three key contradictions emerge: the relation between utopias and *utopianism*; the relation between the future and memory; and the relation between the individual and the collective. The dialogic ways in which postcolonial writers and thinkers negotiate such ambiguities create a distinct form of cultural and political hope. It is this negotiation and resolution of such ambiguities that demonstrates the utility of postcolonial utopianism.

Utopias and Utopianism – Form and Function

The function of utopianism is the energizing of the present with the anticipation of what is to come. For Bloch, utopias are pipe dreams. Without utopianism, however, we cannot live. We can see this confirmed in the fact that all “achieved utopias” (Third Reich, Stalinist Russia, the Cultural Revolution, neo-liberal Capitalism) including the utopian achievement of postcolonial independent states, are degenerate, or failures (catastrophic failure in the case of Zimbabwe) or outright swindles. But despite these failures and the ambiguous relationship between utopias and dystopias, *utopianism* remains necessary.

Primarily, everybody lives in the future, because they strive... Function and content of hope are experienced continuously, and in times of rising societies they have been continuously activated and extended (Bloch, 1986: 4).

To emphasise this Bloch explicitly separates utopianism, which he sees as a universal human characteristic, from utopias, which, as playful abstractions, are pointless and misleading – a parody of hope.

Postcolonial hope has an interesting place in this ambiguous relation between utopias and utopianism because it produces utopias that rarely have *location* but have a particular and very often sacred *form*, a form describable by Ernst Bloch's term *Heimat*. For Bloch, art and literature have a significant utopian function because their *raison d'être* is the imaging of a different world – what he calls their *Vorschein* or “anticipatory illumination.” The anticipatory illumination is the revelation of the “possibilities for rearranging social and political relations to produce *Heimat*, Bloch's word for the *home* that we have all sensed but have never experienced or known. “It is *Heimat* as utopia... that determines the truth content of a work of art.” (Zipes, 1988: xxxiii). *Heimat* becomes the utopian form in postcolonial writing that replaces the promise of nation. It may lie in the *future* but the promise of *heimat* transforms the present.

Heimat occupies an important space in postcolonial writing, one that blurs the conceptual boundary between utopia and utopianism. The distinction between form and function, or product and process is a long-standing discussion in utopian theory but the spiritual concept of home or *heimat* may turn form into function in interesting ways. For example Caribbean utopianism is most familiarly situated in Rastafarianism with a vision of return to Ethiopia, and the nation features hardly at all in discussions of Caribbean arts or sport. Neither does the African past represent utopia, rather the memory of Africa in Caribbean writing is seen as something that can transform the present with a vision of the future.

One of the most striking examples of the political utility of utopia can be seen in the Chicano myth of Aztlan. The Chicano version of utopian thinking, the Aztlán myth, proved to be a surprisingly resilient weapon in the Chicano political arsenal because it so comprehensively united ethnicity, place and nation. It differs from other postcolonial utopias because it combined the mythic and the political so directly: on one hand it was a spiritual homeland, a sacred place of origin; on the other it generated a practical (if impossible) goal of re-conquering the territories taken from Mexico. But this union of sacred and political proved to be its secret power. Aztlán, the Chicano utopia, became a focus for Chicano cultural and political identity and a permanent confirmation of the possibility of cultural regeneration. For a people dwelling in the cultural, racial and geographical borderlands, Aztlan represented its national hope, the vision of liberation.

The utopianism of indigenous peoples in settler colonies is one that exists categorically within yet beyond the nation and manifests itself in a form that blurs the boundary between utopia and utopianism, as well as condensing the linearity of past present and future into a cyclic vision of place. There is a beautiful description of this in Alex Miller's *Landscape of Farewell* when the narrator goes with an Aboriginal man to visit his ancestral country, which was still 'the country of his Old People.'

The Old People, indeed, suggested to me another way altogether of looking at reality and the passage of time than my own familiar historical sense of things, in which change and the fragmentation of epochs and experience is the only certainty (2007: 233-4)

The Dreaming is perhaps the archetypal demonstration of the infusion of the present and future with the hope of a mythic past, a fusion of time and place, because the Dreaming is never simply a memory of the past, but the focusing energy of the present.

In literary versions of postcolonial hope there is a vision of *heimat* in either a geographical region, a culture, a local community, a racial identity, conceived in a disruption of conventional boundaries, a dynamic operation of memory, and most often a sense of the sacred. All of them blur the boundary between utopia and utopianism because *Heimat*, which is not the nation, locates this genre of postcolonial utopianism.

Memory and Utopian Futures

A second area of ambiguity in utopian thought – the relation between memory and the future – is deeply relevant to postcolonial writing. While utopias are often set in the future, utopianism cannot exist without the operation of memory. In such transformative conceptions of utopian hope the In-Front-Of-Us is always a possibility emerging from the past. The polarity between past and future often seems insurmountable in European philosophy. For Plato, says Bloch, 'Beingness' is 'Beeness' (8) and he admonishes Hegel for whom the concept of Being overwhelmed *becoming*. The core of Bloch's ontology is that 'Beingness' is 'Not-Yet-Becomeness': "From the anticipatory, therefore, knowledge is to be gained on the basis of an ontology of the Not-Yet" (13).

The two things abolished in Oceania in Orwell's *1984* are memory and writing and when we see the function of memory in postcolonial utopianism we understand why: memory is not about recovering a past that was present but about the production of

possibility. In the sense that memory is a recreation, it is not a looking backwards, but a reaching out to a horizon, somewhere 'out there'. In traditional postcolonial societies the radically new is always embedded in and transformed by the past. It does this through what Eduard Glissant calls a 'prophetic vision of the past,' an access to cultural memory that defines the future outside of any prescription provided by national history (Glissant, 1989: 64). Indeed postcolonial utopias are characteristically those that 'remember the future' but memory also operates in postcolonial utopianism in very subtle ways, almost always driven by something we could call the energy of the sacred.

The past in general and memory in particular become central in postcolonial utopianism through the prevalence of what may be called the Myth of Return. All colonies appear to generate myths of return and they take on forms dictated by culture and history. The dominant version in Indian writing, for instance, is the redeployment of Hindu myths in contemporary literature. From Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), to Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) the past is allegorically deployed in literature to re-conceive a utopian present. The Indian literary transnation is perhaps most identifiable in its 'transnational' character while still retaining a sense of 'India.' Indeed the exuberant vibrancy and hybridity of South Asian writing in writers such as Rushdie, Mistry, Tharoor and Ghosh has had an extensive global impact. Yet again, it is an exuberance grounded in the memory of a utopian cultural past and a strikingly resilient transcendence of the boundaries of the nation.

African utopianism, on the other hand, reverts either to an historic sense of pharaonic identity or embeds a sense of cultural 'Africanness' in a mythic consciousness that extends beyond any particular nation. The later novels of Ayi Kwai Armah are particularly engaged in the recovery of an African classicism in the appropriation of Pharaonic Egyptian culture to African history. Most commonly associated with the work of Chiekh Anta Diop in the 1970s (Diop, 1974), it is adopted enthusiastically by Armah in the novel *KMT: in the house of life*. Ben Okri on the other hand generates a utopianism through an exuberant language that provides a richly utopian view of the capacity of the African *imaginaire* to reenter and reshape the modern world. It is not merely a hope for African resurgence, but a vision of Africa's transformative potential.

The return to the past in this form of postcolonial utopianism comes not from the atavistic desire to retrace the path of history, that is, it is not so much dominated by a concern with time, as with an overwhelming concern with place. Stephen Muecke remarks for instance,

In outback Aboriginal communities strangers arrive who ask the Aborigines, 'Why do you do as You do?' ... the answer was, and is, 'Come back tomorrow and I'll take you to a *place* that is important to us' (Muecke, 1997: 84)

In this respect place absorbs and signifies time in the way a word embodies its referent, and the two are interchangeable in the Dreaming. The key form of indigenous utopianism is the continual cycling of an ancient past within the present. Similarly, in much postcolonial writing the *idea* of utopia can be an image of possibility in place. This 'place' may not be location but the metaphoric site of freedom itself. Postcolonial utopianism is therefore grounded in a continual process, a process of emancipation without teleology. The present is the crucial site of the continual motion by which the New comes into being, the In-Front-Of-Us is always a possibility emerging from the past. In traditional postcolonial societies the radically New is always embedded in and transformed by the past.

One of the most common, and popular, demonstrations of this is the limbo dance, a performance of slave history, which re-enacts the crossing of the Middle Passage in a continual reminder of memory, survival and cultural resurrection. As Kamau Brathwaite puts it

Limbo
Limbo like me
Long dark deck and the water surrounding me
Long dark deck and the silence is over me (Brathwaite, 1969: 35)

The dancer goes under the limbo stick in an almost impossible bodily contortion, emulating the subjection of the slave body in the journey across the Atlantic but rising triumphant on the other side. The performance of memory is a constant reminder of a future horizon, a 'return' that performs each time the 'rising' of the slave body into a future marked not only by survival but also by renewal, hybridity and hope.

While the limbo performs the act of historical and cultural memory, the woman in Grace Nicholls' "One Continent / To Another" finds memory embodied in the unborn child

From the darkness within her
from the dimness of previous
incarnations
the Congo surfaced
so did Sierra Leone and the
gold Coast which she used to tread
searching the horizons for lost
moons (Thieme, 1996: 582)

There is perhaps no better figure of a future inspired by memory than the unborn child. But performed or embodied, memory becomes a profound orientation to the future.

The myth of return transformed into the horizon of future identity sums up the most important cultural effect of slavery and slave-descended populations in the Caribbean. For if there is no return, there will be no rescue. And so, gradually, this region has developed some of the most profoundly transformative concepts of cultural living: hybridity, creolization. Kamau Brathwaite is one of the most thoughtful celebrants of Caribbean transformation and in the poem “Islands” we see this affirmation of the hope for a different future in a way that reveals the

Looking through a map
of the islands, you see
that history teaches
that when hope
splinters, when the pieces
of broken glass lie
in the sunlight,
when only lust rules
the night, when the dust
is not swept out
of the houses,
when men make noises
louder than the sea's
voices; then the rope
will never unravel
its knots, the branding
iron's travelling flame that teaches
us pain, will never be
extinguished. The islands' jewels:
Saba, Barbuda, dry flat-
tened Antigua, will remain rocks,
clots, in the sky-blue frame
of the map. (Brathwaite, 1969: 20)

The poem is a celebration of transformation: from displacement to a place humanized by its occupants; from exile to hope; from the grim history of sugar production to the possibility of beauty. This Caribbean – this ‘place’ – is not More’s utopia (nor the dystopia it might seem to the observer) but the location of the spirit of hope. Hope for Brathwaite, the kind of hope that sees a future grounded in, but not imprisoned by memory, is not an optional choice for the West Indian, but a necessity. It may be an ambiguous necessity – earlier in the poem he says the butterflies “fly higher / and higher before their hope dries.” But in a performance of Ernst Bloch’s conviction, that hope, that anticipatory consciousness, is fundamental to human life. History teaches, says the poet, that when ‘hope splinters’ then ‘the iron’s travelling flame will never be extinguished’ – the rope of historical enslavement and oppression will never unravel its knots. The hope for the region is the hope of a vibrant cultural complexity and creolization, a hope often belied by the grim realities of politics, but a necessary hope best imagined by its poets and writers.

I and We

It is perhaps no accident that the first modern dystopian novel was Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*. The relation between the individual and the collective continues to be one of the most vexed issues in utopian thinking because while the equality of the individuals in the collective is a fundamental principle of utopian thought, the collective is always inimical to individual fulfilment. The mobilization of society for the betterment of all, for the ‘common good’ is virtually indistinguishable in utopias and dystopias. In utopias it is assumed that the improvement in life will automatically ensure the cooperation of the individual in the perfection of society. In dystopias the fulfilment of the individual is always denied as a condition of a collective utopian dream. Individuality seems an unlikely player in visions of socialist utopias because it is so evocative of the kind of bourgeois self-fashioning nurtured by capitalism. However, the danger inherent in the destruction of individuality occupies a very prominent place in nineteenth century thought, one extended by Ernst Bloch in his allusions to Marx.

What happens when we look beyond the social collective to the cultural? Does this begin to resolve the tension between I and We? Again, the Caribbean is an interesting

example here. The first consequence of a society that has no roots, which has been transplanted in a massive diasporic movement, is the drama of subjectivity itself. The point of departure for Caribbean literatures has been to write the subject into existence, with its master theme the quest for individual identity. For for Aimé Césaire, the subject is not privileged but simply the site where the collective experience finds articulation. This is reminiscent of the ‘collective subject’ invoked by Guatemalan writer Rigoberta Menchu in her book *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (1983). The tension between the individual and collective in postcolonial writing is often resolved in such acts of dynamic identification. In Edouard Glissant, and Césaire, we find that the decentred subject is central to the poetics of the cross-cultural imagination. Such a subject is relentlessly drawn back by the urgency of resistance, the material effects of the colonizing process into identification with the cultural collective. As Derek Walcott puts it in *The Schooner Flight*:

I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
And either I’m nobody or I’m a nation (1979: 8)

In a situation where the group is ignorant of its past, resentful of its present impotence, yet fearful of future change, the creative imagination has a special role to play. For it is the creative imagination that can focus the collective imagination, provide an identity for a subject that is dis-articulated and dispersed. Importantly, it is in writing that a collective memory must be invented; it is in writing that the myth of return is projected into the future.

The way in which the ‘space’ of utopia combines geography and culture with the vision of possibility is beautifully represented in the concept of Oceania, in which the utopianism of the Pacific islands manifests itself in an intercultural and embracing collective consciousness. The history of this region differs greatly from that of the Caribbean. Here the indigenous people maintain a continuous connection to an Oceanic past, in contrast to the slave society’s severance from an African homeland. Yet both resolve the distinction between ‘I’ and ‘We’ in a regional consciousness. In the Pacific this led to the utopian formation called “Oceania,” an ingenious redefinition of the significance of islands that had seemed tiny, insignificant and marginal. For Epeli Hau’ofa, rather than “islands in a far sea” says they could be regarded as “a sea of islands”. In Albert Wendt’s words

So vast, so fabulously varied a scatter of islands, nations, cultures, mythologies and myths, so dazzling a creature, Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope—if not to contain her—to grasp some of her shape, plumage, and pain. (Wendt, 1976: 49)

Oceania is not only itself the name for a utopian formation, but of a particular attitude to time within which the Remembrance of the Past becomes a form of forward thinking that embeds itself in a vision of the achievable – achievable because it has been achieved.

The ambiguities inherent in utopia are explored, blurred and perhaps resolved, within postcolonial literatures by an anticipatory consciousness that lies at the core of its liberatory energy. But the question still arises: How can utopian thinking operate if it has no vision of utopia? One answer is that all utopias are critical. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it: ‘Any utopianism worth the name must engage in a significant polemic with the dominant culture’ (1976: 47). The different manifestations of this genre are nearly always at least an implicit critique of state oppression of one kind or another. Another answer is provided in Ernst Bloch’s philosophy: the utopian impulse in human consciousness does not rely on utopia as a place (unless we understand the space of freedom as a metaphoric place). Rather the dynamic function of the utopian impulse is a dual one: to engage power and to imagine change. In Bloch’s thinking nothing accomplishes this better than literature, which is inherently utopian because its *raison d’être* is the imaging of a different world. Place becomes central, not as *utopia* but as the site of transformation, the location of identity, and the generation of a utopian idea – one Bloch calls *Heimat*. Such literatures tend to resolve the ambiguities of hope. The tension between memory and the future is resolved by their constant and prophetic interaction in the present. And the ambiguous relation between ‘I’ and ‘We’ is resolved in literary approaches to a different form of insurgent, or communal identity, imagined beyond the colonial inheritance of the nation. The utopian function of postcolonial literatures is therefore located in its practice as well as its vision – the practice of confronting and transforming coercive power to produce an imagined future. Even in that most brutally repressed colony of our times – Palestine – the pen might yet throw most light on the future.

The essays gathered in this issue occupy a threshold space between the fields of postcolonial and utopian studies. Whether uncovering unexpected directions in

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postcolonial regions such as Africa or the Caribbean (Pordzik and Kesler), extending the examination into Francophone postcolonialism (Dutton and Ransom), exposing the ambiguous situation of the heirs of the *girmit* indenture embracing the American Dream (Jain), or investigating the utopian spaces of the indigenous occupants of settler colonies (Hardy), they all push the envelope of both the postcolonial and the utopian.

Ralph Pordzik addresses the utopian dimension of a Zimbabwean writer whose reputation has grown rapidly since his death. Dambudzo Marechera is a unique and uniquely difficult figure in African literature, whose short-lived career has arguably had an enormous impact on African literature as a whole, breaking the iron grip of realism in the African novel and paving the way for writers such as Ben Okri and Kofi Awoonor. As Pordzik points out, Marechera is “post-national and post-Western in every possible way,” although he categorized his own writing in terms of Bakhtin’s formula of the Menippean. Most people would not see Marechera’s bizarre, chaotic, violent and ribald writing as utopian, but Pordzik sees it as such because it is “productive and volatile beyond common expectation... it plunges into the unknown.” Building on Michael Serres’ notion of the parasitic, Pordzik offers the proposition of the parasite as postcolonial utopist, demonstrating the ways in which the postcolonial can extend the concept of the utopian in new directions.

While continuing the focus on Africa, Jacqueline Dutton emphasizes the important dimension of Francophone postcolonial studies. While postcolonial theory emerged from English departments, often those that had previously examined ‘Commonwealth Literature,’ its relevance to Francophone Iberophone and Lusophone literatures became immediately apparent although the development of postcolonial analysis in these literatures has been spasmodic and often contested, as Dutton reveals in her introductory discussion. Therefore her examination of Francophone African literature and film is doubly (or triply) significant, not only showing the relevance of Francophone postcolonial studies but also extending them into their generic and utopian possibilities. She offers a comprehensive analysis of African science fiction film and an illuminating account of Abdourahman A. Waberi’s critical dystopia *In the United States of Africa*

Amy Ransom continues the exploration of a Francophone postcolonial utopianism from French Canada and Quebec, citing its postcolonial credentials in its double

colonization and the situation it shares with other settler colonies as both colonizer and colonized. Ransom focuses on some of the productions of the science fiction movement in Quebec, in particular an exhaustive account of Esther Rochon's six volume *Les Chroniques infernales*. This work reverses heaven and hell in a fascinating play on the concept of the utopian and in particular the contrast between a static (dystopian) heaven and an open-ended, constantly changing hell, a reflection of Darko Suvin's utopia of "societies in process, straining to come into being and open to change." Rochon's work gets to the very heart of the ambiguous relationship between utopia and dystopia, revealing the dystopian dimensions of the achieved utopia and the paradoxical requirement for progression and change, of what Ernst Bloch calls the 'Not Yet' in the utopian.

Corina Kesler places postcolonial utopianism in the broader context of non-Western utopian traditions seeing connections in the oppressed groups seeking not a geographical space, but a 'when' (uchronia or intopia) of mythical, or mystical time. She asks important questions such as: How does a Ghanaian, Nigerian, or Indian imagine utopia? How many of their projects' precepts are borrowed from the colonizer's utopian theories and practices, and how many are their own? How much of the native culture is recovered in these accounts? She begins an answer with a brief comparison between Shakespeare's and Césaire's *The Tempest* and continues with a discussion of some of the works of Ben Okri, Amitav Ghosh and Kojo Laing to show the interplay of language transformation and generic disruption in the postcolonial utopian project.

Anupama Jain examines a different kind of utopian ambiguity in an examination of the implications and consequences of a project called Guyanese Opportunities. This targeted ethnic Indians who had emigrated from South America, and revealed both an ongoing investment in the American Dream and a return to earlier imperialist fantasies about new worlds. The imperial project itself was comprehensively utopian and the utopianism of colonized peoples often develops in a way that subverts the utopian ambitions of the civilizing mission. Both forms speculate on a different future, one by extension, the other by liberation, and this distinction makes all the difference in postcolonial utopianism. Jain's examination of the term 'Indian' in the U.S. "reinforces how utopianism and postcolonialism... are intractably conjoined by the palimpsestic

histories associated with the New World.” As an unforeseen chapter in in South Asian engagement with the American Dream Guyanese Opportunities reveals the possibilities and paradoxes of postcolonial utopian discourse.

Karl Hardy addresses King Utopus’ treatment of the indigenous inhabitants of Abraxa before it became renamed Utopia to dwell on a different kind of ambiguity – the process of *indigenizing* undertaken by the settler society. This is a process, as is the settler society’s sense of being colonized by imperial power that differs greatly between the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand or as Hardy suggests, the situation of Palestinians. Nevertheless he endorses a move that positions indigenous peoples at the centre of utopian studies, a process of ‘unsettling’ the settler population. Ultimately he seeks a “re-articulation of utopia as a means of accountability to settler colonial critique and the efforts of Indigenous peoples and their allies to reconstitute an unsettled society.”

We might continue to hope that the investigation of postcolonial utopianism may ‘unsettle’ the received ideas of both fields. The idea of utopian thinking is still contested in postcolonial studies by those who remain locked into a binaristic view of colonial (and now global) resistance as simple oppositionality. Utopianism may further demonstrate the transformative agency of formerly colonized peoples. Utopian Studies, on the other hand, might welcome the spaces of utopianism beyond Western modernity, and Kumar’s assertion (1987: 19) that Utopia is not universal might need to be modified by a closer study of non-Western traditions. In short, postcolonial utopianism offers to extend the horizons of both fields.

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Not in the African Image: Utopia, Dystopia and the Politics of Destitution in the Fiction of Dambudzo Marechera



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*"Where nothing is, everything is a deal."*¹

1. The Unhoused Condition of the Contemporary African Writer

African literary criticism today is a minefield of complex attitudes and opinions, a no-go area for every critic anxious to contribute to an exciting debate affecting at least two generations of committed writers. One of the major battles fought in this area has involved the clash between a traditionalist or *realist* view of African literature and one that subscribes to an experimental and open approach, highlighting notions such as the carnivalesque and the grotesque (see Veit-Wild, 1997, 2005) and techniques foregrounding the value of openness, hybridity and radical "aesthetic distancing" (Bhabha, 1994: 147). The conflict has been sifted through a series of renewals and setbacks and may still be regarded as unresolved. Many critics of African writing today seek to evade the strict polarizations of the previous generation along with the ideological and aesthetic limitations of a debate they regard as forced upon them by a mentality no longer their own.

The case of Marechera is interesting for the new impetus it has afforded the cultural debates in this respect. His works have come to indicate the power and the plight of a new literary art in Africa that finds itself stumbled upon a 'rhizomatic² cultural connectivity – an art that has divested itself of the unifying "African image" (Marechera, 1990: 84) talking the masses into a restrictive ideology of ethnic nationalism. Not every observer of the African literary scene was pleased with the mannerisms Marechera

introduced into literature, however. According to one critic, his writing merely yielded “dwarfish, confused, morally sapped fictional absurdities [...] forged from the creative imaginations of European novels, depicting lives spiritually exhausted by their insatiable, morally barren cultures” (V. G. Chivaura, quoted in Primorac 2006: 41). Even after his early death in 1987, his works were criticized for their ‘Euromodernism’ and their lack of a more affirmative or partisan understanding of the efforts in the African ‘postcolony’ (see Mbembe, 2001) to come to terms with the structural problems incurred during decades of (post)colonial violence.

A common denominator in all these assessments of a difficult writer is that they refuse to consider the utopian dimension at work in his fiction. Marechera’s power to ‘desacralize’ uniformly folkloric images of Africa is acknowledged but never seen as pertaining to a distinct tradition of utopian remodelling inspired by post-independence literature in Africa.³ It will be my task here, therefore, to associate Marechera’s literary powers with the idea of a ‘parasitic’ utopian art – an art of writing that differs considerably from conventional explorations of a ‘country in the mind’, breaking through the one-way-road of utopian or speculative extrapolation and fabulation, the pattern of the world as it is and the world as it might be. In fact, its potential lies precisely in its capacity to “interrupt” a given “system of exchange” (Harari & Bell, 1982: xxvi) and in the intensification created by new, as yet untried relations and combinations taking place in a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas and meanings. Two related concepts will come in handy to make a case for a particular brand of utopian writing formed under conditions of prolonged suffering and privation. First, the concept of *destitution*, commonly defined in terms of an extreme want of resources or the means of subsistence. This concept may be employed to elucidate Marechera’s complex ways of gathering a large variety of sign and discourse patterns into a permanently unstable fictional context. Following Steven Connor, who defines destitution within the frame of a cultural philosophy of “doing without” (Connor, 2000), a state of precariousness or ‘non-membership’, I shall analyse the framing circumstances shaping the encounter of disparate worlds in the African writer’s experimental fiction. How does he turn the supposedly ‘neutral’ space or medium of the written text into a symbolically rich yet also

disruptive communicative channel, and in what respect can this intervention be considered utopian?

Cast in the terminology of French science historian Michel Serres, Marechera is a cultural parasite⁴ or “interceptor” (Serres, 1982: 11), an alien or demon, the “fly in the ointment” (Connor, 2002) making possible communication between Africa and the west. Here the second concept comes into effect. Many current models of interculturality involve a rather static configuration of ends and connections, and frequently take as a starting point the idea of a dialogue between discrete stations or positions. In Serres’s model, what lies between or frames the elements of the communicative situation is itself asymmetrical and volatile, however, an unstable ground or milieu enabled to block or hamper the free flow of information. His focus is thus on the text or medium as a kind of *third- or interspace*, a concrete milieu rendering possible but also impinging on the actual exchange between cultures, codes and meanings.

In Marechera’s writing, the cultures or codes in question couldn’t be more different: the one producing and processing and pretending to give and provide, the other depleted and indigent, a site of paralysis and decomposition left to bleed dry by despotic rulers ancient and new. Marechera seems to draw a perverse yet stimulating kind of gratification from his role as parasitic messenger between these systems. His narratives are shot through with images, modes and aesthetic effects developed or found elsewhere and transformed en route through a highly fluent and eventful literary medium – western art, existential philosophy, Beat literature, and much more; ideas and modes he adopted when starting his career as a black émigré student in Oxford and London. For Marechera, these modes and ideas appear to be like bodies “without organs” (Deleuze/Guattari, 1984/2004: 9) – arrays of meanings that confront the binary terms of the situation they are set in by constantly randomizing them. Renouncing any fixed indigenous or oral-folkloric resource-base, his narratives connect freely to other textual ‘bodies’, tapping other cultures’ and traditions’ ‘organs’ and parasiting off their circulatory systems. The aesthetic achievement of Marechera’s multiply shifting texts is thus built, paradoxically, on the experience of lack *and* the acknowledgement of it within a ‘potent’ destituting movement. Such a concept of writing is utopian in that it is productive and volatile beyond common expectation; it puts into effect meaningful options beyond the narrative

exploration of future worlds shaped by either violence or peace because it is totally ignorant of the direction or outcome of its speculations. It merely takes and accepts or utilizes what it happens to find or hit upon: ‘where nothing is, everything is a deal.’ Structurally dependent on a state of lack or “being without” (Connor, 2000), it plunges into the unknown, indicating the desire for a new multitudinousness and a form of connectivity and textuality tempting in its almost complete lack of ideological closure and organization.

2. *Black Sunlight* or, the End of the Parasitic Chain

Marechera’s work is post-national and post-western in almost every sense of the word. He disengages himself from the sterile gesture of African nationalism and its mythopoeic cultural framework; he acknowledges poverty and loss as formative power or agency but is quick to make clear there is no negative experience which can be counted on to stay put as forever limiting him or his writing.⁵ Every single one is free to commence productive relations with its actual environment, other (negative) forces, modules or systems; each contains multitudes within, is structurally “full of itself” (Connor, 2000). Christian, the protagonist of Marechera’s novel *Black Sunlight*, at one point observes how music “atomised the emotions, and rearranged them in strange haunting patterns” (Marechera, 1980/2009: 27). During a violent attack of the state police he thinks of “all those shop windows. A mere brick would shape them into beautiful random patterns” (107). Quite obviously, the reader is meant to recognize in him a character who perceives opportunities where others identify only subtraction or shortfalls. Christian regards humans as “furnaces of an eternal present” (72), their bodies rendering every touch or injury in terms of other areas of human experience. As writer and photographer, he “engraves” pictures through a “panorama of multitudes spontaneously disintegrating, igniting each other” (59). He argues it is “not the other side” that he wants “but only the process towards it” (72). “To write as though only one kind of reality subsists in the world,” he concedes, “is to act out a mentally retarded mime, for a mentally deficient audience” (79). In short, Christian is mainly interested in employing the *noise*, the annoying sounds – the clamour, disturbance and tumult – produced in any given system of exchange or communication.

It would understate the case if one remarked that clamour and tumult are in no short supply. *Black Sunlight* is set in an unidentified African state of the near future, in a post-independence dystopia of murder, violence and death.⁶ Events are presented in a stream-of-consciousness technique of narration, which makes for a very original and worthwhile reading. Very often a flick or spontaneous notion, created on the spur of the moment, is sufficient for a new narrative course to be taken: like a book opened at random, with the finger pointing to a particular word or phrase. The sudden thought or notional flash thus produced interrupts the one-way-relation between host and parasite (i.e. between producer and produced, donor and beggar, oppressor and victim, writer and recipient, etc.), breaking into strange bits the overall mental or perceptive norms and patterns many readers have grown accustomed to. The medium or text, meant to arrange and simplify, to bring random events into a consecutive and linear order or argument, proves inert and harnesses linear communication instead.

A critical analysis of the organizing conceptual image of 'black sunlight' may help clarify the novel's technique of shaping forms or instances of creative parasitic communication. As I understand it, the oxymoron is a correspondent part of Joseph Conrad's notorious metaphor of alienation, 'heart of darkness'. The first-person narrator in *Black Sunlight* refers to it several times: "I willed my heart of darkness to stop wheezing horror – horror. It was too quiet. [...] It was hot and sick and thorny" (11).⁷ The choice of words is more than apt: for what else could one expect to find at the centre, deep in the *heart* of darkness, if not black sunlight? Something is needed to illuminate even this gloomy private cavern, a small or "random element" that "transforms one system or one order into another" (Serres, 1982: 21). But there is more to it. As metaphor, 'black sunlight' distinctly mediates a western *and* African frame of referentiality. Conrad's metaphorical heart of darkness is cramped, molar, self-involved and self-consuming. Where others may hope to find a site of emotional rescue, its creator sees only a small, cold, black knot – the vicious colonizer's fist. Marechera's image is more congenial, gaining its power from the African experience of sunlight galore. It sets a space-filling and rampant presence against Conrad's experience of passive acquiescence, the utter bleakness in the hearts and minds of his characters ("...black sunlight reminded me of the sudden and huge meals which I would, after bouts of starvation, stuff greedily

into my system...,” Marechera, 1980/2009: 8). It is also a remarkably powerful and impressive anti-type – a complementary symbol at once contradictory and rich in implications; it forces into a context, along with the terms, the various imperialist connotations accompanying them and thus shapes an ambiguous trope in which the different associations “need one another to complete their meaning” (Empson, 1930/1947: 5). Moreover, it epitomizes a stunning interplay of sparkling rays of meaning instead of a gloomily persistent and inward sense of the terrors of imperialist claustrophobia. It illuminates the site, which is the text, from within; it is no end point. Black sunlight tracks erratically through the chapters, reappearing in different contexts and thus representing what might be called a critical disjunction across different semantic layers. In some cases, the trope is used to refer the reader to the narrator-protagonist’s confused or ‘paranoiac’ state of mind (Marechera, 1980/2009: 7, 91, 129), in others it refers to a madly violent African chief (8) or dubious revolutionary alliance calling itself the “Black Sunlight Organisation” (118) responsible for terrorist action.

Whether or not a fixed or unified meaning is imaginable at all, the text refuses to lay bare. In a central passage, however, the image is appropriated to describe the narrator’s complex emotional relationship with his life partner Marie, blind from birth. Simple dyadic terms, such as self/other, inside/outside and light/dark are transcended by the writer laboriously translating them into a new narrative paradigm and the ‘shared’ intersubjective milieu of the polyphonic text coming with it:

There were days when I knew that all my feeling for her was bound up with that fragile shell of blindness, that fragile, unseeing self-contained dome. And I knew then that were I to wake up and find myself at last in that dark rotunda, crucified, dangling from chains and chords fixed to the uppermost sightlessness in her, then – I would be free. Free of sunlight and the nights, free of all the senses, free of all the thoughts, the vision of a visceral fate. (41)

For Christian, to be thus in the dark, without illumination, is somehow to get rid of the bonds of race, culture and education, the whole binary system of meaning-making. He does not seem to be aware at first of the fact that he depends on the paradoxical image of black sunlight to articulate the very idea of absence and silence. The readers, as it were, are left in the dark as well, for the text’s variously scattered meanings are difficult to collect and make sense of. But it is not quite the same. Acknowledging Christian’s sense of embitterment and hopelessness, they may still recognize in the work the intervention

of textuality as a relational third, the deeply felt need for a cognitive framework that collapses the one-sided and dismal relation between dark/light, inside/outside and enables fresh contact and exchange between disparate factions to take place. Christian and Marie's stressed-out life involves transgressive erotic bedroom games that strike the reader as at once uncanny and liberating; in these, they try to upset the categories and norms inherited from the preceding generation:

The first night, I had put out the light but she slipped from my grasp and escaped from the bed. It was pitch dark. [...] I groped for the light switch . [...] This was her game. This was her own kind of basic experiment. [...] Where was she?

'Marie?'

I shivered. She was in her own black sunlight. (42)

Representation alone enables the coming-into-being of a third space. The accredited one-way-relation, according to which the one is inside, participating, sharing the pleasures of light, comfort and warmth, and the other remains outside, disempowered on a bleak and desolate heath like King Lear, is not validated by this piece of writing, surreal and violent, in which the signifiers work as messengers or interceptors disrupting the never-ending chain of binary relationships. Or, put another way: given the density of the narrator's play with words and the various shades and hues of meaning, it is next to impossible to determine who is inside and who not, or what the opposition black/white is supposed to express in this context anyway. Marie's blindness appears to bestow upon her a kind of inverted power, a sense of selfhood and integrity the protagonist, himself a black African (or so one is invited to suppose), is desperately in need of. The many different versions of 'black sunlight' he encounters, the true 'essence' of destitute post-independence Africa, refuse to be appropriated and turned into a meaningful whole: "As if I had become astonishingly blind and Marie had begun to radiate with unseen insights" (55).

Eventually, the semiotic disruption is made complete by the text's many references to western literary sources. Thus, the relation between the two protagonists is depicted as a "marriage between heaven and hell [...] a fusion of darkness and light" (42) that serves to intensify the Blakean 'hellish' affirmation of otherness at stake here. In view of the broad canvas of images appropriated and reused, one could go so far as to say that Marechera sucks, quite deliberately, the host culture's textual legacy like a vampire. Almost

frivolously, he palters with the subversive notion of the parasite or joker – it can be found everywhere in his writing.⁸ But as the above scene also shows, his characters very frequently do not ‘share’ their author’s simple enthusiasm. Christian would like nothing better than to simply disappear and be silent, but the text always returns him to the many-layered world he inhabits. New and demanding relations never cease to invade his private space and time, and Tennyson’s ambiguous image of revolutionary power – the famous “Kraken” – is brought to the fore to explore the protagonist’s fears and hesitations:

That exquisite refutation – how I hoped for it! But then I would turn and toss and see another shameless dawn rise from the east and know that such an overturning, such a providence, however close to the surface it lay would never, like the kraken, creep out of the sea into my life. (41)

As an individual Christian cannot act; like Eliot’s timid Prufrock, he is ensnared, captured by the violence and stagnation of the social machinery around him. The Kraken rising from its depth could change all this; turning the inside out, it would show that everything in life has a “reality in excess of that of which it is deficient” (Connor, 2000). Of this, however, Christian wishes to know nothing. Black sunlight, for him, means to be shut out, to be in the paradoxical situation of an “insider, silhouetted against the black blinding sunlight” (129).

Yet for the reader the metaphor has come to represent something different, has in fact become a perfect instance of semiotic relationality as such, a manner of connecting, across semantic levels, various meanings. The metaphor no longer has a fixed or single meaning, therefore, a meaning the narrator-protagonist could claim to be in control of. In the words of the philosopher of science, it is now an “operator,” not a “monad” (Serres, 1982: 224). It is effective in the “plural” (21) and abounds with semantic features activated in different circumstances; it freely connects to every single scene, every detailed, depicted action. (The trope is indeed used at least once in every chapter.) “Black sunlight,” then, is a powerful and radiating symbol – its broken, inconsistent logic embodies light in its function as medium and milieu, a bright and dazzling force, moving about freely, being in the third position everywhere it reaches, above and beyond the objects it mediates. Sunlight, in the physical world, has the power to relate objects; it makes the viewers or interlocutors involved perceive the things they talk about in the first

place. Black light, then, is a rare yet volatile medium bringing to mind the fact that what facilitates communication frequently can become an obstacle to it as well.

3. Textual Aleatorics: Parasitic écriture in Marechera's *Black Insider*

This may sound half-baked or difficult to grasp at first. But then so is the problem: how can a postcolonial writer escape the totalizing epistemology of the binary, the logic of oppositions, of always being either host (= master) or guest, i.e. slave to his environment? "It seems to be a permanent condition of my state," Christian says, "that I should periodically attach and detach myself to the wandering humanity out there and call each attachment a profound and living thing" (Marechera, 1980/2009: 130). Marechera's protagonist is a parasite himself, and well he knows; he "plays a game of mimicry" (202), plays not at being another but at being the same. *The Black Insider*, one of three narrative precursors of *Black Sunlight*,⁹ and only published posthumously, recounts the story of how the African writer discovered his exclusion and aspired to escape this fate by becoming a nomad who pitches his camp directly among the enemy's frontlines, by making his environment, step by step, identical to the cultural 'tissue' of his host.

Black Sunlight was written at the suggestion of a publisher who wished the African *enfant terrible* to produce something more conventional and appealing to the global readership. In fact, he wished a novel firmly on the side of the host's interests, i.e. the book market, the audience paying for literature, the publisher's net income. Contrary to that, *Black Insider* has remained a peripheral and hieroglyphic text, rough, unfinished, and madly driven to act the part of a parasite slowing and deflecting the intercourse between the 'host'/'guests', masters/slaves, etc. Like its successor, the short novel is set in an indeterminate future "cindered by the shock and concussion of the comet that blasted us in that old twentieth century" (Marechera, 1990: 31). Its place of action is a former Faculty of Arts building in Africa now offering refuge for a group of intellectuals and artists who seek to escape from an unspecified war going on outside. Their various conversations center on the issue of African identity and the nature of art, with the protagonist arguing that the African image is merely a mask, a trite and superfluous symbol of chauvinistic authority. In formal terms, the narrative is modeled on

Boccaccio's *Decamerone* (1349–53), with “the plague outside and the storytellers inside” (89). The narrator, a young academic, clarifies the case:

All I know is that at one stage it was us blacks against the whites. But somehow or other things had suddenly become complicated and it was no longer a black against white chess game. It was more like a kaleidoscope in which every little chink of colour in the shaken picture was fighting every other little chink. News agencies could not keep track of the alliances and counter-alliances, the neutrals and the non-aligned, the ferocious and the hyperferal, etc. Meanwhile, the cities were rotting, becoming mass graves in which there were tiny pockets of plague outbreak. (24)¹⁰

What the reader encounters at this point is a characteristic feature of the parasitic chain, with two parties bound in an asymmetrical situation, a tie or stalemate. Masters, in this violent place, have bred counter-masters, producing local crowds of supporters. Blurred boundaries, irregularities and multiply mobile poles, interests and moral directives, are the consequence; they dominate the text, cutting across simplified structurings of discrete parts and solids.

Like swamp or minefield text and narrator-protagonist lie between irreconcilable systems, with whole chains of signifiers thrown into the “whirlpool of the aleatory” (Serres, 1982: 233). It is curious to note that Marechera somehow appears to be indebted to the French philosopher's ideas for he develops his own theory of the intercepting third in a late or neo-colonial context which parasites off the thinker's intuitions and endows them with a new purpose. Thus he writes, commenting another literary work: “‘There is nothing here but illusion, and one calamity after another.’ The experience is not unlike that of one *organism* living on and at the expense of another” (Marechera, 1990: 33). And, in more detail:

The parasite is entirely dependent for food upon our minds. [...] Apart from such ectoparasites as bugs, like fleas, mosquitoes, leeches, and vampire bats [...] there are endoparasites which actually live permanently in our minds. The latter are also known collectively as ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘history’ or ‘civilization’. There is a definite degree of tolerance established between host and parasite; each becomes adapted to the other. It is not to the advantage of a parasite to cause serious harm to its host, as thus it is likely to suffer itself. (33)

In a next and related step, Marechera introduces the issue of language. More forcefully now, his narrative ventures to drive a wedge into the literary system it parasites off, deviating from the western norm of linear representation. Since many passages are entirely unrelated in terms of logical or symbolic coherence, parading events, digressions,

speeches, etc. with no visible connection to the main narrative, one might easily argue that *The Black Insider* moves rather freely along the “graph of substitution” (Serres, 1982: 226). It establishes its very own chain or mode of signification and connection, and along this symbolic chain isles of meaning, relation and continuity appear one hasn’t perceived before:

Language is like water. You can drink it. [...] You can flow to the sea in it. You can evaporate and become invisible with it. [...] The height of sophistication is actually to channel your water through a system of pipes right into your own lavatory where you shake the hand of a machine and your shit and filthy manners disappear in a roaring of water. Being water you can spread diseases like bilharzia [sic! *bilharziosis*] and thought. (Marechera, 1990: 34)

Water makes another marvellous parasite, a unique milieu framing a form of existence and yet shaping and impinging on it in its very own way. In this respect, it is like language indeed, the powerful “web of words.” Language flows into fiction, breeding heterogeneous contexts and formats, setting the erstwhile roots in motion, transplanting forms, images, and practices, etc. The only certain thing about fiction, Marechera writes, is the “damage” it does, the “devastation” words “bring to the minds of men and children.” Random interventions, we understand, the *fluidum* of interrelation, can change whole worlds: “One good scratch and the sky bleeds visions” (36).

It is getting clearer now that Marechera is looking for a new strategy of intervening in the given channels of post-colonial and post-exilic discourse; and Serres’s *Parasite* provides a viable and excitingly fresh model for this venture.¹¹ Like the eternal intermediary or interceptor in Serres’s study, *The Black Insider* operates on various levels, always working towards the ultimate linkage of structure, text and experience by randomizing patterns of thought and ensembles of meaning. The host’s milieu (i.e. its major productions, the English language, English literature, etc.) constitutes the environment and provides niches for the parasite’s survival. Here he collects and admires his booty, the results of his incessant pillaging and scavenging. Disrupting the found system of exchange and equivalences, he constantly forces it to new levels of complexity and interaction. What the narrative thus amounts to is a strong plea for parasitism as a survival strategy for the ‘new’ African, rejecting any kind of fixed territorial or ideological assignment, any firm station or even sociocultural “locus of enunciation” (Bouriaud 34):

Oh, black insider! We should have turned at that corner where the crucified man pointed the way. At that corner where Chaka washed his hands in blood. At that corner where the road to Kampala leads to Buchenwald. At that corner where black learned man in disgrace sink their differences with the rest. But we will drive through to the independent countries where lucid minds shatter thick through windscreens. Where original thoughts veer and crash into ancient lamp-posts. (Marechera 1990: 74)

The cautious note of hope and confidence given in the “independent countries” is shattered in the defeatism of the subsequent terms. But the thread is resumed again later on, having passed through several stations in the graph of substitution and troubling or transcoding the messages passing unimpeded between different maps and domains. And so it continues; sending and giving around, receiving and passing on, always appearing to ask: “what things are between whom” (Serres, 1982: 229)? Meaning in the *Black Insider* always fluctuates, turning the text into an intermediary who first charts and then digs over entirely the terrain between mutually hostile or exclusive parties. Nothing is left as it is: if language and the existing code systems can indeed be thought of as “circulating quanta of energy” (Connor, 2000), then Marechera’s style of writing must indeed be seen as a very effective interruption of blocked circulation in intercultural discourse: it dares indulge the dream of a “paradise of participations between host and parasite, inhabitant and milieu” (*ibid.*), rendering a viable alternative for the lives of social multitudes, a way of the world in which error and distortion are not seen as faults but as opportunities, destituting moments containing multitudes of chance surprise. *The Black Insider*, in this respect at least, is a postcolonial utopia (Pordzik, 2001); it injects turbulent new perspectives and formulas, freely intercepting *all* the relations between *all* the linguistic and experiential spaces. It never stops, never dares reduce cultural or racial otherness to simple contradiction. It captures all the flows, infests the invariant ground of model-making and abstraction with its own scenario of interchange and agitation.

4. The Parasite as Postcolonial Utopist

Science historian Michel Serres comments on the ideal condition of utopia, the “poverty of the system of harmony,” in the following way: “I fear that harmony is only a heavy fol-de-rol for minds that crave only repetitions. [...] If our work and sciences were exchanges, they would leave masterpieces in the world at the height and splendour of their intelligence” (Serres, 1982: 127, 217). It does not automatically follow from this

that we need no longer meddle with utopia as a concept or political strategy. But maybe the utopian is to be looked for in different places, in other epistemologies: “The world around us, in us, victoriously defends itself against this stupidity [the utopian, i.e.] with the miraculous torrent of the unexpected.” Or: “Noise destroys and horrifies. But order and flat repetition are in the vicinity of death” (127). This means we must learn to prefer the noise, the crossover passage or path itself, to the established fact – the stable spot or locus, the end of the series. In this view, the ideal zone of the utopian is only a neutral, un-demarcated space to be filled with life and meaning, a spectre, an either/or, master/slave, provider/receiver relation where free-floating desire constantly needs to be educated (cf. Levitas, 1990: 7) in order to produce workable results. But in a place where no steady state is imaginable, where the viscosity of exchange processes can be used to inject new formulas and modulate the cultural flow, utopia may indeed be achieved in a different way – as a cluster of intermediate forms, a “pathological growth” of “flights, losses, holes” (Serres, 1982: 12) inspiring the desire to carry on, to multiply affect, fluctuation, disorder. It may be produced as people (or messages) go along, with interceptors trying hard to divert whatever is carried along the beaten tracks of utopian idealism.

This, naively remonstrative or ‘altermodern’¹² as it may sound as first, holds particularly true for the African postcolony where far too many of these unifying processes have proved faulty or fatally deficient in some way in the past. Marechera, representing a younger generation, wishes to preserve Africa as a zone of semiotic activity and reconfiguration instead of a “silence-divining wasteland” (Marechera, 1990: 103). His target is different, though, from writers such as Ben Okri and Kojo Laing who seek to counter western clichés of Africa on the basis of a sustained dialogic engagement with the legacies of their indigenous cultures. He is not a utopian reformer but a parasite, trickster or cyborg; he partakes of the host’s meal, as it were, consumes the ‘rotten fruit’ from the colonizer’s table. It is not a stigma, though: the words moving to and fro between him and his host’s culture mark the shape of interrelations he wishes to secure. It is a relation of parasitic exchange and randomization, one active despite the “greater Western optic” (Jamal, 2010: 16) it is subject to, governed by “writers in a state of mind of disillusion, disenchantment and dismay” and violently rejecting the nation-state’s

“irrational fear of contamination” (Marechera, 1990: 94, 95). Darko Suvin, I remember, once highlighted utopia as being simply a “verbal construction” (Suvin, 1979; quoted in Sargent 2010: 6). This means that utopia isn’t that far away at all – as the African poet was quick to point out himself: “Suddenly the other side of the world is only an alphabet away” (Marechera, 1990: 36).

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Notes

¹ I came across this aphorism – translated from the German – in a memorable article addressing the political troubles in newly founded South Sudan. The actual source is unknown but it was used as a caption in a glossy brochure that came with the German weekly *Die Zeit* (2011).

² The term is Deleuze and Guattari's; they describe the rhizome as a structure that establishes “connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles” (Deleuze / Guattari, 1987: 8). For the issue under examination here, it is important to understand that the rhizome has no specific origin, genesis or centre, that it resists the idea of a beginning and end and ceaselessly opens itself towards new available spaces.

³ On the place and function of utopia in the African literary context see Simonse (1982), Nnolim (1983) and Pordzik (2001: 144–53, 161–63). The issue of utopia has come to the fore only recently, as the following statement by Charles Nnolim shows very clearly. “The issue is that, because of the way we were enslaved and colonised, we are too timid to write about others; we are too timid to talk about the future. The white man writes what we call fortuitous literature and science literature. We don't have science literature in Africa. Science literature projects time in the future and starts out to solve the problem.[...] But what African writers do is to look backwards to when our grandfathers were this and that, all the Timbuktu greatness, and we have not been able to look into the future; and it is affecting our governmental plans, because if you don't look into the future, you won't reach out” (quoted in Akubuiro 2010).

⁴ The term may appear awkward at first but it has to be kept in mind that the concept of noise or static in modern information theory is translated as *parasite* in French.

⁵ African intellectuals overrate the power of the avant-garde movements of the 1950s and 60s when they argue “it [i.e. independence] was there. We were not deceived about that” (Armah, 1968/1988: 85). The experience of uneven social and economic development on the continent gives the lie to this proposition. The intellectual elites never prevailed over the depredations and dispossessions of the colonial past; they never arrived ‘anywhere’. Marechera is very clear about this: “I caught myself thinking how can we and the likes of us ever presume to lead the multitudes out there, thousands of miles away, who day by day eke out a sordid existence [...] Whatever we did would always be scraggy at the seams” (Marechera 1990: 63). But Marechera's tragic case also shows why this failure to prevail may now be converted into a vantage on behalf of the younger generation: since they never arrived in the post-independence dreamland, they will not have to suffer the same paralyzing trauma of being contained by the ideological mantraps of a uniformly realized version or promise of the ‘ideal life’. Never seriously called upon to represent their respective communities beyond the artificial public spaces of their neo-colonial law-givers, they cannot go astray in their appropriation of the patterns and meanings circulating in the worldwide arena of discourses and the media. It may sound naïve or even cynical at first sight but it is fair to argue that destitution, in this context, need no longer be regarded as the state of being ‘short of’ some or other object, commodity or sign, but as a new condition of ‘freedom’ that substitutes for the initial one, opening into a domain of connectivity and exchange no longer defined by the lack or loss ordinarily assigned to it.

⁶ *Black Sunlight* is not the first dystopia to be published in Africa, however; similar works began to appear in the 1970s already. Several of these can be classified as dystopian on account of the ways in which they imagine fictional or future dictatorships that are mostly veiled representations of real nations. Texts in the genre include Wole Soyinka's civil war novel *Season of Anomy* (1973) and Nurrudin Farah's trilogy *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1983). All three are set in a fictional dystopian Somalia in the 1970s ruled by a fictitious General based on Dictator Siad Barre (1919–95). Some novels are sensitive to cultural perspectives derived from African mythology; one of them is Ali Mazrui's *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* (1971) which is set in the afterworld, called After-Africa, and is centered on the tragedy of the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo who died in the Biafra war. Magical realist or carnivalesque reworkings of the topic can be found in Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods* (1996) and Kojo Laing's *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars* (1992). For a reading of these see Pordzik 2001: 144–52, 161–2.

⁷ For other passages referring to Conrad, e.g. in the earlier *House of Hunger*, see Marechera (1978/2009), 37, 41, 48–49, 74–75. It is crucial to note that Marechera's novels are consistently marked by wordplay involving the fragility and artificially exclusive oppositionality of white/black imagery.

⁸ See, for instance, the following passages: “Darwin noted that elongation of the growing apex of either a shoot, or a root, did not take place in a straight line but pursued a spiral course” (132); “... as Menander said, chance decides matters better than ourselves” (134).

⁹ The other two versions, both of them missing, are entitled *A Bowl for Shadows* and *The Black Heretic*; for details see Veit-Wild (1990: 11).

¹⁰ The commentary refers to Thomas Middleton’s play *A Game at Chess* (1624), characters of which include a “White” and a “Black King,” representing the colonial powers of Spain and England, respectively. The play addresses the negotiations over the proposed marriage of English Prince Charles with the Spanish *Infanta* Maria, i.e. it dramatizes the issues of fusion and synthesis underpinned by ideological separation – a parallel that can hardly have escaped Marechera.

¹¹ Unfortunately I have not been able to find any evidence for a direct influence on Marechera’s works of Serres’s philosophy. Written in 1980, Serre’s *Parasite* was first translated into German in 1981; an English version followed in 1982. *The Black Insider* was written in 1979, however. It remains a possibility, though, that Marechera came into contact with Serres’s earlier and related philosophy through other sources during his stays in London and Oxford.

¹² The term is Bourriaud’s; life in the postmodern matrix, he argues, has turned all individuals into outcasts, “semionauts” subject to a global exilic condition (Bourriaud, 2009: 53). His alternative centres on the model of the ‘radicant’, a term derived from biology. It refers to roots ‘in motion’, their being planted in multiple and varied environments. Radicants are able to divest themselves of their original roots without taking damage. Transferred to the discourse of art and cultural exchange, the metaphor implies the denying the origin any absolute value, subscribing instead to the constant transplanting of experiences, forms and sets of codes.

Flipping the script on Africa's Future

In the United States of Africa

by Abdourahman A. Waber



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Postcolonial utopian literature is an emerging field of scholarship focusing on utopian and dystopian writing by people who have been affected by the imperial process. As witnessed in the spread of postcolonial studies as a discipline, there has been differential uptake of the "postcolonial" as a defining parameter in various countries and institutions, with France being notably absent from the fold. Outside France, much critical work on the cultural politics and writing from the former French colonies is located in "Francophone" studies rather than postcolonial studies. This article seeks to bridge that divide, contributing a Francophone angle to the debate around what postcolonial utopianism means and how it influences our understanding of the use value of utopia in contemporary globalised societies.

To examine effectively the relationship between Francophone and Anglophone postcolonial utopianism, I will briefly trace their development along parallel paths that lead to the current situation. I will then turn my focus to the African context, providing an overview of contemporary Anglophone and Francophone imaginary representations of Africa's future before taking up the case study of Abdourahman A. Waber's exemplary critical dystopia,¹ *In the United States of Africa*.² In this way, I hope to elucidate not only the principal tropes and strategies employed in a particular postcolonial utopia, but also identify some cultural specificities of Francophone African postcolonial utopian traditions.

It is a problematic task to elaborate an understanding of postcolonial utopianism in literatures in French when there has been little uptake of the term "postcolonial"

either historically or in the current intellectual climate. North American universities led the way in fostering individual researchers in postcolonial studies from all over the world to develop and debate theories and processes for challenging dominant (western) ways of thinking. Australia, New Zealand and India, together with the United Kingdom, Africa and the Middle East have all produced significant contributors to postcolonial studies. Most of the key texts are written in English, although foundational writings on power and violence by Michel Foucault and Franz Fanon came from French intellectual traditions. Apart from the work of a handful of dedicated scholars, including Jean-Marc Moura and Marie-Claude Smouts, postcolonial studies has not been embraced as a discipline in France, and is indeed profoundly refuted as an option in a recent article by Jean-François Bayart (2011). This should not prevent us from thinking about Francophone postcolonial utopias – there are now Francophone postcolonial journals and research networks in the United Kingdom that support this terminology. However, it is important to consider alternative terms when searching for examples of scholarship and literature in non-Anglophone cultural traditions.

Aside from the fundamental disconnect between Francophone and postcolonial terminology, there are two other major reasons why it is very difficult to locate critical work on Francophone postcolonial utopias and futuristic fiction. Firstly, the quantity of utopian and futuristic texts published by non-metropolitan Anglophone authors far outweighs the number of publications in this genre by non-metropolitan Francophone authors. The second reason goes some way to explaining the first. There are significant impediments to the distribution and recognition of Francophone postcolonial writers in France, which is the main Francophone literary marketplace, due to Paris-centric traditions in publishing and prizes. The recent *littérature-monde* movement in France and its accompanying manifesto aim to open up new ways of thinking about French language literatures, attacking the Parisian stronghold that elevates the Nouveau Roman and the psychological novel above writing that is “open to the world” – such as “world literature” – in a traditionalist hierarchy of literary values.³ Whether or not one espouses these views, it is clear that expectations for non-metropolitan Francophone authors are limited to either picturesque images of exotic landscapes and traditional cultural heritage or narratives that dwell on the misery and horrors of war, female subjugation, AIDS, immigration or other depressing aspects of

France's former colonies.⁴ Therefore, those who write about a non-traditional utopia, futuristic themes or science fiction are not necessarily going to be widely read in France, and consequently will probably not find a mainstream French publisher, but may be published in a smaller press. If they are somehow published in French, and in the unlikely event that these books are translated into English, this would probably be done by American academics who publish with small academic presses resulting in expensive editions that end up in university libraries rather than mainstream bookstores. The result, of course, is limited quantity and distribution of Francophone postcolonial utopias in both French and English.

Given these circumstances, it is unremarkable that most of the publications relating to postcolonial utopianism examine Anglophone literatures. Lyman Tower Sargent has been leading the charge, identifying major threads in various "national" literatures, such as the tendency towards dystopian projections prevalent in certain cultures (Australian and South African). His contributions to dictionaries and volumes, including *Thinking Utopia: Steps into Other Worlds* (Rüsen *et al*, 2005), and his chapter on "Colonial and Postcolonial Utopias" in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Claeys, 2010: 200-222) underscore the urgent need to reconsider the neglected past of postcolonial utopias and their important future in the field of utopian studies.

The fact that one of the world's leading theorists in Postcolonial Studies has turned his attention to utopianism is a telling sign that the field is on the move. Bill Ashcroft is currently Professorial Fellow for an Australia Research Council funded project entitled "Future Thinking: Utopianism in Post-colonial Literatures" which examines the critical function of creative writers in their society's imagination of the future. Ashcroft focuses on the prevalence and power of hope, ideas of liberation, self-determination and future possibility in postcolonial literatures. His recent article, "The Ambiguous Necessity of Utopia: Post-Colonial Literatures and the Persistence of Hope" (2009) privileges Fredric Jameson's notion of utopian ambiguity that keeps hope alive for the possibility of a better world while stubbornly negating the current reality (Jameson, 1971: 110-111). For Ashcroft, this ambiguity is central to developing plurivocal utopian expressions in the postcolonial context:

The particular ways in which post-colonial writers and thinkers negotiate such ambiguities create a distinct form of cultural and political hope. The forms of utopianism emergent in post-colonial writing – a utopianism almost completely devoid of utopias – gesture toward a resolution of utopian contradictions dialogically (Ashcroft, 2009: 8).

Ashcroft avoids the trap of binaries, recognising that diversity in creative practices employed by postcolonial writers allows them to forge specific links between past experience and future imaginary in their utopian texts:

The tension between memory and the future is resolved by their constant and prophetic interaction in the present. And the ambiguous relation between “I” and “We” is resolved in literary approaches to a different form of insurgent, or communal identity, imagined beyond the colonial inheritance of the nation. The utopian function of post-colonial literatures is therefore located in its practice as well as its vision—the practice of confronting and transforming coercive power to produce an imagined future (*idem*, 13).

It is Ralph Prodi’s *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia* (2001), that is the foundation stone for this new research field, drawing our attention to the “particular genre that has been neglected in the course of the revision process initiated in literary criticism: the utopian novel and its related literary forms” (Pordzik, 2001: 1). Pordzik contends that postcolonial utopias defy generic and cultural boundaries in ways that break with western utopian traditions to promote “epistemological otherness” (*idem*, 130). The resulting texts resemble globalised heterotopias, transcending national and western models in their fictions of the future. In its emphasis on the “post-western” utopia – going beyond the western traditions – Pordzik’s study suggests new ways of reading the contemporised and hybridised postcolonial utopia at the endpoint of the evolutionary process away from the West.

Postcolonial writing on alternative futures therefore allows authors to explore the past, present and future of their communities from a particular postcolonial cross-cultural point of view (*idem*, 156). Far from expressing a utopia that corresponds to traditional ideological norms, including social realism, systemic closure, static political principles, and a belief in reason, technology and social progress, postcolonial utopian texts are more organic in their creativity, seeking a radical otherness in a differentiated evolution of the community. These texts present fictional worlds that place imagination over reason – sometimes resembling magical realism – attesting to a “broader transculturation process within which the different writers can position their own particular views of race, gender, and identity with regard to futurity” (*idem*, 164).

A typical example of this writing, such as Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s People*, would in fact appear dystopian, with a critique of the colonial society, and potentially also paint a negative picture of the post-colonial society that has been installed.

However, after interrogating the status quo, in most cases a glimpse of utopia will sparkle through the gloom to indicate the path towards better transcultural and transnational futures. The tragic proportions of much western dystopian writing are therefore replaced by spaces of hope (*idem*, 130). The “fiction-making” aspect of the utopian novel (as opposed to the socio-political criticism) is integral to this process, as this is the only sphere in which the imaginary of the ideal can be fully extrapolated as an alternative reality.

Pordzik’s argument seems to falter slightly when he supports the recognition of a “global culture” that produces “transnational fictions which, although their stress is on difference and diversity, consolidate the multitude of narratives they draw on in a strikingly new and coherent representational contract” (*idem*, 117). The sway towards reducing the specificity of historical experiences and political struggles in postcolonial writing, with an all-embracing sweep across Anglophone literatures demonstrates an underlying tendency to establish more binaries (western imperial/postcolonial), just as the *littérature-monde* movement has done between Francophonie and *littérature-monde*. The aim of this article is to go beyond such binaries to highlight the way in which postcolonial utopias are obliged to cross the colonial-postcolonial divide not only once, but twice. In most utopian theory to date, not only are the generic parameters of utopia based on western traditions, but the conceptual content is also related to western models of order, justice, desire and hope.⁵ Part of the project in reconsidering the role of postcolonial utopias must therefore be to unpick the stitches that tie utopia so tightly to western paradigms of form and content, and to understand the diversity of specific traditions that inform their creators, as well as the ways in which they contest the binaries imposed upon them.

Writings on utopias within Francophone discourses are even less abundant than in Anglophone studies. It is true that references to Francophonie and utopia are made in the same breath, such as in Raphaël Confiant’s call to action:

Pour une utopie francophone. Le monde ne va pas sans utopies. C’est là le moteur des énergies intellectuelles. L’utopie francophone doit s’inscrire résolument dans la créolisation et dans la diversalité. [Towards a Francophone utopia. The world doesn’t work without utopias. Utopia is the motor of intellectual energies. The Francophone utopia must be resolutely inscribed in creolisation and diversity]. (Confiant, 2004: 251).

And fellow Martinican writers Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau invoke the

need for utopia in their recent address to Barack Obama: “l’utopie est ce qui manque au monde, le seul réalisme capable de dénouer le noeud des impossibles” [utopia is what is lacking in the world, the only reality capable of untying the knot of impossibilities] (Glissant, Chamoiseau, 2009: 35).

Francophonie and utopia are together inspiring a few academic studies, such as a special number of *Alternative francophone: Pour une francophonie en mode mineur* [The Francophone Alternative: Towards a Francophonie in a Minor Key] on Francophonie as utopia,⁶ and the 2010 Francophone Postcolonial Studies network conference entitled “Between Utopia and Dystopia: The Afterlives of Empire”.⁷ However, this work is far from the forensic examination of the Anglophone postcolonial utopias currently being undertaken by Sargent, Ashcroft and Pordzik. It seems more like a merging of the terms Francophonie and utopia to express a metaphorical ideal institutional entity, or sometimes the reverse, a chimera...

Insightful readings of Francophone Caribbean literary texts as utopias do exist, including Saskia Schabio’s chapter on Edouard Glissant, “Peripheral Cosmopolitans: Caribbeanness as Transnational Utopia?” (Schabio, 2009), and there are a few other studies of utopianism in the work of individual authors like Patrick Chamoiseau and Gisèle Pineau.⁸ But even the dedicated panels and round tables at recent Utopian Studies Society (Europe) and Society of Utopian Studies (North America) conferences have not unearthed hidden scholarship or researchers in the field of Francophone postcolonial utopias. There remains a considerable amount of work to be done on the rich body of postcolonial utopias from African traditions, both in English and in French.

Nicholas Brown’s study of *Utopian Generations* is the most comprehensive account to date of the intertwined influences of postcolonialism and utopianism in contemporary African writing. His central thesis is that what brings modernism and postcolonial African literature together is their disposition toward Utopia. Embedding the utopian impulse as the centerpiece of his original framework for interpreting world literature results in a new paradigm for considering African postcolonial literatures in particular, and underscores the urgency of thinking about these texts as challenging or projecting the future. Brown examines the future of utopian generations in his final chapter, prefaced by the statement that “perhaps the longing of the texts examined here will turn out to be prophetic after all” (Brown 2005: 34). It is

therefore clear that the futuristic thrust of many African postcolonial literatures is of primordial importance for recasting a broader vision of utopia for the future.

“AFRICA IS THE FUTURE” is a t-shirt campaign initiated in 2004 by Nicolas Premier and Patrick Ayamam to promote new ways of thinking about Africa and its place in the world.⁹ But this mantra extends far beyond a t-shirt campaign. It can be applied to new trends in global investments with China’s ever-growing interests in Africa, creative projects in music such as “Africa Express” promoting meetings and collaboration between African and British musicians,¹⁰ as well as literary phenomena that attest to Africa’s important contribution to new writing in English and French, with writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Marie Ndiaye and Alain Mabanckou. The teleological aspect of the expression may be extrinsic in this instance, but it can also be intrinsic when thinking about goal-oriented African postcolonial utopias.

It seems that in order to present a positive picture of Africa in literature, film or other creative narratives, the future must be evoked, given that contemporary scenarios are overburdened with the difficult social, political, economic and cultural factors at play. Present-day settings for alternative societies tend to fold into dystopia fairly quickly, or present the struggle of a few brave souls against the dystopian society that surrounds them.

The elision of Africa with the futuristic impulse is evident in emerging movements such as Afrofuturism, which proposes an aesthetic that subverts the dominant paradigms dictating the use of technology and science in society. One of the first critics to use the term was Mark Dery in his 1995 essay *Black to the Future*¹¹ with the following description:

Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture – and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future – might, for want of a better term, be called Afrofuturism.

The opening paragraph of Dery’s essay crystallizes the dilemma that we face in trying to impose western generic categories such as “utopia” or “science-fiction” on “non-western” cultural products.¹²

Hack this: Why do so few African-Americans write science fiction, a genre whose close encounters with the Other – the stranger in a strange land – would seem uniquely suited to the concerns of African-American novelists? Yet, to this writer’s knowledge, only Samuel R.

Delany, Octavia Butler, Steve Barnes, and Charles Saunders have chosen to write within the genre conventions of SF. This is especially perplexing in light of the fact that African-Americans are, in a very real sense, the descendants of alien abductees. They inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done to them; and technology, be it branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, or tasers, is too often brought to bear on black bodies.

This leads to the key question:

The notion of Afrofuturism gives rise to a troubling antinomy: 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?

The answer is yes, but there is clearly a manipulation of the western models and tropes to make science fiction and futuristic expressions fit the African(-American) way:

African-American culture is Afrofuturist at its heart, literalizing [William] Gibson's cyberpunk axiom, "The street finds its own use for things." With trickster élan, it retrofits, refunctions, and willfully misuses the technocommodities and science fictions generated by a dominant culture that has always been not only white but a wielder, as well, of instrumental technologies.

From the examples provided by Dery and others, it is clear that Afrofuturism is more closely identified with African-American practitioners, rather than Africans living and working in Africa. Furthermore, Dery privileges reference to examples from popular culture (New York graffiti artist and B-boy theoretician Rammellzee), art (Jean-Michel Basquiat paintings such as *Molasses*), and music:

Afrofuturism bubbles us from the deepest, darkest wellsprings in the intergalactic big band jazz churned out by Sun Ra's Omniverse Arkestra, in Parliament-Funkadelic's De. Seuss-ian astrofunk, and in dub reggae, especially the bush doctor's brew cooked up by Lee "Scratch" Perry, which, at its eeriest sounds as if it were made out of dark matter and recorded in the crushing gravity field of a black hole ("Angel Gabriel and the Space Boots" is a typical title).

There are nevertheless several examples in English and French of Afrocyberpunk and Afrofuturism in film and literature, coming out of Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon and South Africa, so there is no reason why the ethos of Afrofuturism should not be applicable to African postcolonial literary utopias as well.

Cameroonian filmmaker and writer Jean-Pierre Bekolo Obama taps into this trend in his book *Africa For the Future: Sortir un nouveau monde du cinéma* [Bringing out a new world of cinema] (2009) and futuristic film *Les Saignantes* [The Bloodettes] (2005). The text traces the author's return to his village and reconnection with an old lady whose very existence calls everything about the modern world into question:

Cela faisait des années que personne ne m'avait plus parlé comme cela. Je suis bouleversé, ce n'est pas tant l'histoire que sa manière de l'intégrer dans son récit "épique" y incluant ma vie actuelle, le cosmos, les morts, les vivants, la technologie, une Afrique que je n'ai pas connue, une voix millénaire... Je suis "touché", je me sens bizarre. [It had been years since anybody had spoken to me like that. I'm overcome, it's not so much the story but her way of integrating it into her "epic" tale and including my current life, the cosmos, the dead, the living, technology, an Africa that I didn't know, a millennial voice... I am "touched", I feel bizarre] (Bekolo 2009, 14).

He can only reconcile the two disparate worlds by finding a way to pass on this experience to others: by relating the past, present and future stories intertwined through the images and narratives of cinema.

La question que je pose est comment cette technologie pourrait-elle me permettre de transformer l'expérience du cinéma en celle que j'ai vécue avec la vieille? Le nouveau média me donne-t-il par interactivité ce bras qui me permettrait de renouveler ce geste de salutations avec la vieille? Quelle différence entre l'utopie et le rêve ici? Une seule. La vieille de mon village est à la fois écrivain, actrice, journaliste, philosophe, poète, historienne, scénariste, mère, politique (...). Elle demande de toujours réinventer son discours pour prolonger le rêve. [The question that I ask is how could this technology allow me to transform the cinema experience into what I've just lived with the old lady? Does new media with its interactivity give me that arm which would allow me to renew this gesture of salutations with the old lady? What difference is there between utopia and dream here? Only one. The old lady from my village is writer, actress, journalist, philosopher, poet, historian, scriptwriter, mother, politician (...) She's always asking to reinvent her orations so as to prolong the dream]. (*idem*, 16)

With the technology that is currently available to him, the contemporary filmmaker can still only offer a static, closed representation of the experience – a constructed *utopia*, whereas the old lady can continue to recreate an eternally changing experience, integrating the old and new in a dynamic flow of the traditional *dream*.

Bekolo treats the question of Africa's future from many different angles in this book – linguistic, aesthetic, technological, cinematographic, economic, American, European, interplanetary, educational and ecological. In a powerful chapter towards the end, "La répétition du futur" [Rehearsal for the Future], he contests the western perspective on Africa as a primitive, passéist cradle of human civilization. Like the Afrofuturists and the t-shirt campaigners, he sees the need to recast Africa as the future:

S'il ne fait aucun doute pour personne que l'Afrique c'est le passé, les origines de l'humanité... l'idée du futur semble incompatible avec l'Afrique. Ainsi chaque fois qu'on parle de l'Afrique c'est pour évoquer son passé, ses traditions, ses cultures, ou alors son présent avec ses conflits, ses misères, sa corruption et ses dictatures, mais jamais l'Afrique ne symbolise l'avenir. [If there's no doubt in anyone's mind that Africa is the past, the origins of humanity... the idea of the future seems incompatible with Africa. And so every time someone speaks about Africa it's to evoke her past, her traditions, her cultures or else her present with its conflicts, misfortunes, corruption and dictatorships, but never the Africa that symbolizes the future.] (*idem*, 140)

The vision that Bekolo presents for future Africa is based on the model of a school, drawing heavily on utopian tropes of education, work, community, equality and order across all sectors of society, but the underpinning element of Bekolo's utopia is the force of dynamic futurism:

Une répétition du futur s'imposerait donc dans toutes les sphères de la société autour d'une structure incontournable, l'école. Il s'agit d'envisager une société où tout est école. Une école ouverte installée au coeur de chaque communauté où tous sont à la fois enseignants et élèves, parents, enfants, actifs, retraités, paysans, citoyens, diaspora, étrangers, locaux... Une école où tout est savoir, à commencer par les connaissances dont nous avons besoin pour améliorer notre vie quotidienne, santé, hygiène, alimentation, habitat, traditions, apprentissages, transport, administration, droit, technologies quotidiennes... Une école qui "construit" de manière permanente une culture de l'anticipation, de la prévention, de la speculation et de l'organisation pour tous au sein de chaque communauté. Une tâche dans laquelle tous seraient impliqués non pas comme dans le cadre d'un "emploi" mais plutôt dans le cadre d'un "travail" comme travaillent toutes les mères de famille dans leurs foyers. [A rehearsal for the future would therefore impress itself in all spheres of society, based around one inescapable structure: the school. It's about envisaging a society where everything is part of the school. An open school set up in the heart of every community where everyone is teacher and student, parents, children, active people, retirees, peasants, citydwellers, diasporas, foreigners, locals... A school where everything is knowledge, from the skills that we need to improve our daily life, health, hygiene, nutrition, housing, traditions, apprenticeships, transport, administration, law, everyday technologies... A school that "constructs" on an ongoing basis a culture of anticipation, prevention, speculation and organization for all within each community. A task that would involve everyone not as a "job" but more like "work" as housewives and mothers work.] (*idem*, 141)

While not as clearly articulated as the future utopia of Africa in his book, the brave new world that Bekolo presents in his futuristic film *Les Saignantes* does provide scope for hope, especially for African women. Set in Yaoundé in 2025, the two female prostitute-protagonists are strong and sexy and have access to supernatural powers to combat the corrupt political elite who are the main clients for their favours. When one of these political leaders (the SGGC) dies in the middle of a sexual act, the women are left with a body to get rid of and it ends up being consumed as meat. It is a stylish sci-fi erotic thriller that has a political message as well as a philosophical undercurrent traversing the narrative, brought to the fore with inter-titles such as "Yaoundé 2025 and nothing much had changed."

Les Saignantes is one of a clutch of recent science-fiction films from Africa that are slowly making some impact on the otherwise sparsely populated territory of black science fiction cinema. Another Francophone African example is Beninese actor and filmmaker Sylvestre Amoussou's *Africa Paradis* (2007). Set in 2033, this film draws on established utopian tropes of pan-Africanism and inversion that we will also observe in Waberi's *In the United States of Africa*. It shows how the alternative reality of the United States of Africa has made it just as hegemonic, unjust and corrupt as the

United States of America (and by extension the entire western world) is perceived to be. The film presents the plight of two “third world” French nationals (Olivier, an engineer and Pauline, a schoolteacher) trying to get a visa to leave their miserable existence to start a new life in Africa. Unsuccessful in their visa applications, they go to a people smuggler and end up getting caught and incarcerated in a transit camp for deportation. Olivier escapes and Pauline starts working as a maid for an African Deputy sympathetic to the idea of increasing European immigration to Africa. She begins a relationship with him and then runs into Olivier who is now an illegal alien and has been keeping a low profile. Pauline decides to stay with the African Deputy and marry him while Olivier is deported. The narrative is familiar but the script has been flipped in the future according to Amoussou.¹³

The Anglophone African arena has produced two highly publicised science fiction films in recent years. Kenya’s first foray into science fiction cinema, *Pumzi* (2009), is a short film (20 minutes) written and directed by Wanuri Kahui. Her film is set in the near future, 35 years after the “water wars” have torn the world apart. Nature is extinct – the film’s byline is “The outside is dead”. The central figure, Asha, is a museum curator in one of the contained communities set up by the Maitu Council in East Africa. She receives a mysterious box in the mail containing soil, and when she plants an old seed in it, the seed germinates instantly. Asha breaks out of the community to plant the seedling despite the efforts of the controlling Council, and sees for herself what Nature has become.

Niyi Akinmolayan’s “Nollywood”¹⁴ film *Kajola* was released in 2010, following much hype around its budget¹⁵ and excited anticipation about the country’s first CGI film.¹⁶ In the year 2059, after a second civil war, Nigeria emerges as a totalitarian state with dramatic differences between living conditions in derelict mainland Lagos as compared to the Island, where the mega-rich and powerful reside. “Kajola” is the Yoruba word for commonwealth, the name given to the rebels’ plot to take over mainland Lagos and rebuild it to the standard of the Island. The government’s corruption and lies baffle even the police chief who is supposed to enforce their will. The official synopsis ends with the phrase “TOMORROW IS TODAY”. Naturally enough, there was resistance to the subversive message that blatantly accuses Nigeria’s current ruling class of exploitation and corruption. Unsurprisingly, *Kajola* was pulled from all of the major cinemas within days of its premiere, and has never

really been given much of a season in Nigeria. However, reactions of those who *have* managed to see the film are incredibly damning, citing appalling production, poor acting and disjointed narration. Even the CGI is disappointing.¹⁷

Kajola is not the only one of these films that has been slammed by critics and the public. Both *Les Saignantes* and *Africa Paradis* have received mitigated responses and have certainly not enjoyed financial success or even cult status. On the other hand, *Pumzi* was shown at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and has been better received, perhaps due to its environmental message and less ambitious technical production. Kahiu is apparently considering expanding *Pumzi* to feature length.

Various interviews, blogs and websites go some way towards explaining these discouraging reactions, contextualising the popular debate on African science fiction cinema, and asking questions like “Is Africa ready for science fiction?” and “Should Africans do science fiction?”. Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu’s e-interview with Nollywood director Tchidi Chikere reveals a pessimistic perspective for African postcolonial futuristic film:

Science fiction films from the West are failures here. Even Star Wars! The themes aren’t taken seriously. Science fiction will come here when it is relevant to the people of Africa. Right now, Africans are bothered about issues of bad leadership, the food crisis in East Africa, refugees in the Congo, militants here in Nigeria. Africans are bothered about food, roads, electricity, water wars, famine, etc, not spacecrafts and spaceships. Only stories that explore these everyday realities are considered relevant to us for now.¹⁸

And the documentary by Franco Sacchi, *This is Nollywood* (2007), contains an interview with famous Nollywood director Chico Ejiro who states that Nigerians do not make SF films.¹⁹

There are signs, however, that African science fiction’s ship may be on the cinematic horizon. Since the South African science fiction thriller *District 9* (2009) was nominated for multiple Academy Awards, and earned US\$37 million in its opening weekend, several other science fiction films have been slated for production. Nnedi Okorafor’s award winning novel *Who Fears Death* (2010) has been optioned for a film by Kisha Cameron-Dingle, to be directed by Wanuri Kahiu, and is being described as “Lord of the Rings in Africa”. Cameron-Dingle is also developing *Tok Tokkie*, a futuristic Cape Town ghost thriller written by Jenna Bass. The 2011 Arthur C. Clarke Award winning novel *Zoo City* by Lauren Beukes set in an alternative cyberpunk Johannesburg of the future has also been picked up for production by Helena Spring. Watch this space...

Given the dearth of films produced in this category until very recently, it is understandable that there is very little research available on this area. Adilifu Nama's *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (2008) provides fascinating insights on token figures, racial paranoia, and exotic otherness through studying representations of blackness in mainstream science fiction cinema, contributing to understanding why there may be resistance to black investment in this filmic genre that does not immediately offer a positive space for development of African stories. The special issue of *African Identities* (May 2009) on "The Genre of Science Fiction and the Black Imagination", edited by Sandra Jackson and Julie Moody-Freeman, offers a thorough scan of black Anglophone science fiction, dating from W.E.B. Dubois to Nalo Hopkinson and beyond, but there is only one article on film and nothing on Francophone African science fiction writing.

Futuristic Francophone literature from Africa may not have such a long or rich heritage as its Anglophone cousin, but one of the first African post-colonial novels to be widely distributed and read in French was in fact a critical dystopia by Ahmadou Kourouma: *Les Soleils des indépendances* [The Suns of Independence] (1968). This award-winning novel is set in the future in a fictitious country, the Côte d'Ebènes (Ebony Coast), parodying Kourouma's homeland of the Ivory Coast. The essence of the novel is the tragic demise of the utopian dream of independence through decolonization into a dystopian nightmare of degradation and ruin. The main character, Fama, is a Malinké prince who is the last of his line, and condemned to poverty and dispossession. Although he finds brief happiness after seeking out his roots and reconnecting with his cultural heritage, he is eventually arrested for apparently plotting to assassinate the President and dies in the arms of his wife without producing any heirs to the lineage. Another example comes from Senegalese writer, director, producer and political activist Ousmane Sembène, who made ten films and wrote ten novels, including *Le Dernier de l'empire* [The Last of the Empire] (1981), set in Senegal about 20 years after Independence (1960). It provides a scathing critique of Léopold Senghor, so-called Senegalese democracy, Negritude and neo-colonialism. It is similar in tone to Kourouma's dystopian future, with equally evident allegories of current or recent politicians and their mismanagement of the decolonization process and the shift in power. Both texts focus on single African

nations and their predicament – they are not pan-African, nor do they envisage a more positive or unified future for Africa.

As the title suggests, the pan-African movement comes into play in Abdourahman A. Waberi's much more recent novel, *In the United States of Africa*, (2006). The concept of the United States of Africa is not new. It was championed by Marcus Garvey, the African American activist, publisher, journalist, founder of the Black Star Line and Back-to-Africa movement in his 1924 poem that begins: "Hail! United States of Africa-free!" and has persisted throughout the twentieth century with various attempts to take action through the Pan-Africanist movement, especially the Fifth Congress in Manchester in 1945 with W.E.B. Du Bois and Patrice Lumumba, and then the Organisation of African Unity was founded by Kwame Nkrumah and Haile Selassie, the forerunner to the African Union. In theory it would now unite 53 countries, over 1 billion people, speaking 2000 languages. Muammar Gaddafi brought the idea back to the table in 2007 and again in 2009 when he presided at the meeting of the African Union in Ethiopia. The African Union aims to build a united and integrated Africa by 2025. The United States of Africa has also been the subject of a BBC award winning play entitled *Eternal, Forever* by John Rugoiyo Gichuki, in 2006. It is set in 2410, and based on the premise that in the next 400 years, Africa could surpass its rivals and become the dominant global power. Although we have a similar scenario to the one that Waberi paints in his novel – published in the same year, Rugoiyo Gichuki's play does not really incorporate the paradigm of inversion that we see as a main feature of Waberi's work.

The technique of reversal, inverting the accepted prism through which the world is viewed, is the strategy favoured by Waberi. It is characteristic of both utopian fiction – especially eighteenth century examples such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Voltaire's *Candide* – and African American abolitionist discourses, such as those pronounced by David Walker and Reverend Henry Highland Garnet on Africa as a "land of light" with the "brightest of futures", whereas Europe was a "land of darkness". Reversal therefore has a double relevance and reference in Waberi's utopian novel that depicts a futuristic world in which Africa is the centre of enlightenment and North America and Europe are wastelands of primitivism, misery, war and suffering. Imaginary precedents for this inverted paradigm can be seen in Jean Renoir's obscure 1927 short film *Charleston Parade* in which an African

explorer arrives in Paris in 2028 to find it derelict and inhabited by a primitive Charleston dancer and an ape, as well as Amoussou's *Africa Paradis*.

In *In the United States of Africa*, Waberi combines pan-Africanism and inversion to produce his alternative future for Africa and the world, but it is not the land of light his precursors desired. Instead, this critical dystopia uses the projected image of Africa's future to provide a challenging yet humorous satire of the current world order that places Africa well below Europe and North America on the scale of political, economic and cultural development. Reversing the hierarchy, Waberi describes Africa's world domination, her exploitation of migrants from the poorer war-torn nations of Europe and the US, and the ethos and infrastructure that allows Africa to maintain a hold over her own peoples as well as those who might question her integrity from the outside. The sustained and detailed descriptions of the history and achievements of the United States of Africa and the protagonist's various voyages through Africa and the degraded slums of Paris demonstrate how discourses shaped by power are perpetuated and how art, literature and love may reduce the racial, religious and regional divides of the world.

The protagonist has two names – Maya and Malaïka – to emphasise the split identity that she must negotiate as an immigrant from the poorest and most violent regions of France – Normandy – having been at war with Brittany for centuries. At a young age, she is taken from her homeland by a compassionate African doctor on a humanitarian mission to live in Asmara, the capital of the United States of Africa. She is adopted into the doctor's wealthy, cultivated yet tragic family – the childless “mother” is suffering from a terminal disease – that nurtures her artistic talent and her confidence to make her way in the world, despite her disadvantage as a white migrant. Maya-Malaïka's fictional trajectory and experience echoes that of many real African migrants to Europe, though the familial and social support that she enjoys in Asmara removes many impediments to success and protects her from much of the racism and prejudice that most migrants suffer. Waberi himself has known a similar line of flight. He left his birthplace of Djibouti City in 1985 at the age of 20 to study English literature in France, subsequently working as an English teacher in Caen (Normandy) while writing short stories, poetry, and a successful first novel in 1997, *Balbola*. His career has been a slow-burner, his ten books and various other publications garnering

literary prizes and fellowships, as well as a conference in his honour in Barcelona in 2010. But his path has certainly not been as smooth as Maya-Malaïka's.

Set in an indeterminate future, the novel is structured by four journeys that represent the protagonist's itinerary through exile and immigration ("Voyage to Asmara, the Federal Capital"), artistic practice ("Voyage to the Heart of the Studio"), roots ("Voyage to Paris"²⁰) and belonging ("Return to Asmara"). In this way, Waberi underscores the significance of travelling as a reflection of the centre-periphery dichotomy, emphasizing its influence through inversion. As Aedín ní Loingsigh points out, although political and economic circumstances present the world as divided, literature and art have the power to challenge the geopolitical barriers by circulating beyond borders (ní Loingsigh, 2011: 79). It is also important to note that the travel narrative allows the novel to transcend the misery narrative, opening up a space for humour and parody, as we also see in writings by Alain Mabanckou and Marie Ndiaye.

"Return" is word used not for Maya-Malaïka's trip to France to see her birth mother, but more revealingly, for the final journey back to her adopted homeland. The possibility of electing one's own "home" is stated from the beginning of Waberi's novel: "Le lieu de naissance n'est qu'un accident; la vraie patrie, on se la choisit avec son corps et son coeur." (Waberi, 2006: 25) [One's place of birth is only an accident; you choose your true homeland with your body and your heart.] (Waberi, 2009: 10). There are many reasons why the protagonist assumes an African identity, rather than a European one.

Firstly, there is deliberate dissimulation of Maya-Malaïka's origins until almost halfway through the novel. Although we might suspect it earlier, we don't even know that she is white until a beggar whispers to Mariette, the Norman newspaper vendor:

Elle sort d'où cette fille, elle n'est pas comme les autres? Elle a la teinte pâle du calcaire. (Waberi, 2006: 121) [Where's that girl from? She ain't like the other ones. Her skin's white like limestone.] (Waberi, 2009: 60)

We learn later that Maya-Malaïka's own awakening to her difference comes abruptly during childhood games with neighbours and cousins, inspiring a creative impulse born of rage at this injustice and sense of alienation:

Tu avais une peau couleur de lait. Une pâleur d'albinos. Cette évidence, tu te l'étais cachée longtemps à toi-même (...) Un nouvel alphabet s'est fait jour devant tes yeux cet après-midi là où tu as découvert ta différence. Tu as jeté sur le papier tes premiers mots (...) Tu seras désormais brûlée par le mystère des origines, la lente montée de ton corps équivoque, l'approche presque tactile de la mort. Tu te sentit aussitôt étrangère à toi-même. (Waberi,

2006: 164) [Your skin was white as milk. Pale as an albino. You had hidden this obvious fact from yourself for a long time (...) A new alphabet dawned before your eyes that afternoon, when you discovered your difference. You set your first words to paper (...) From now on you will be burned by the mystery of your origins, the slow growth of your troubling body, the almost tactile approach of death. You immediately felt estranged from yourself.] (Waberi, 2009: 84-85)

It is through literature and art that Maya-Malaïka manages to overcome estrangement, using her powers of perception and sensitivity to otherness to enrich her creative expressions, all the while benefiting from belonging to the dominant cultural paradigm. This is Waberi's most positive message in the novel, fulfilling the ideal that cultural contributions can come from any individual, regardless of race, but it is nevertheless clear that cultural authority is needed for success. It must also be a second reason for aligning herself both physically and psychologically with an African cultural powerbase.

A third justification for Maya-Malaïka's rejection of her European origins is the fact that she has no access to any linguistic or cultural heritage from Normandy or France, reminding us of the "Stolen Generations" of indigenous Australians who were removed from their roots and people by government and church authorities wishing to give them a better life. Unlike many of these victims of estrangement from kin and country, Maya-Malaïka is not interested in learning the language or understanding her past, and has no intention of returning to France once her pilgrimage is completed and her guilt is appeased by paying off a young man, Titus, to watch over her mother. She can't reconnect and she doesn't want to anyway.

What does this example of successful migrant integration tell us about Waberi's vision of Africa's future? Is Maya-Malaïka's story a recipe for hope in the real world, and if so, for whom? Perhaps it is for the narrow tranche of Africans who adopt or are adopted into European culture. But what about the masses of migrants, like the Swiss refugee Yacouba the carpenter, whose fatal plight opens the novel, are either abandoned to exploitation or investigated endlessly? The first chapter of *In the United States of Africa* is a tirade against the flow of migrants into Africa:

Vous n'êtes pas sans ignorer que nos médias remettent en selle les stéréotypes les plus méprisants et les plus odieux qui remontent au moins à Mathusouleyman! Ainsi, les nouveau migrants propagent leur natalité galopante, leur suie millénaire, leur manque d'ambition, leurs religions rétrogrades comme le protestantisme, le judaïsme ou le catholicisme, leur machisme ancestral, leurs maladies endémiques. En un mot, ils introduisent le tiers-monde directement dans l'anus des Etats-Unis d'Afrique. (Waberi, 2006: 20) [Surely you are aware that our media have been digging up their most scornful, odious stereotypes again, which go back at least as far as Methusuleiman! Like, the new migrants propagate their soaring birth rate, their centuries-old soot, their lack of ambition, their ancestral machismo, their

reactionary religions like Protestantism, Judaism, or Catholicism, their endemic diseases. In short, they are introducing the Third World right up the anus of the United States of Africa.] (Waberi, 2009: 8)

It is an ambiguous situation, with the fictitious United States of Africa seeming as irresponsible and inegalitarian as its real “Euramerican” counterparts. Through the reversal of fortunes, Waberi uses the dystopian narrative of an unenlightened alternative future to criticize both the status quo and any new world order based on the same principles.

However, as Lyman Tower Sargent, Raffaella Baccolini, Tom Moylan, and others have defined it, the critical dystopia is not devoid of hope for the future, providing pathways to a better way of being in the world through exemplary positive figures or situations.²¹ Evidently Maya-Malaïka’s success story in literature, art and love represents the optimistic utopian enclave in this dystopia, but there is inherent hope in so much of the narrative, if we strip back the inversion to its inspirational essence. Revealing examples of these foundational sources of African wisdom and talent thread through the novel as intertextual references, from Bob Marley’s “Wake up and live”, to Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Césaire and Marvin Gaye. There are also integrated sites of homage, such as the “Frantz Fanon Institute of Blida” or the “Avenue Ray-Charles”.²² All of these identifiable references point to Waberi’s recognition that the emancipatory acts and writings by black cultural leaders have shaped Africa’s present. But had their talents been channelled by the dominant global order of the United States of Africa, can we really imagine that Bob Marley might have written the same protest songs or that Frantz Fanon would have come to prominence in his defence of the “wretched of the earth”? Would Nelson Mandela be President of the most powerful country in the world, as Waberi would have it?

Whether or not these references amount to an “effect of reality” as theorised by Barthes (1968: 84-89), they certainly add to the abundant and clever detail that makes us laugh at the United States of Africa, and the United States of America at the same time. Equally amusing are the “imaginary zones of identification” (Moura, 2010: 33), which align the new African hegemony with well-known western consumer brands, such as McDiop burgers, Hadji-Das icecream and sleekly styled Nka furniture for every household. Finding the humour in this dystopian future also opens up spaces of hope that elevate the author’s satirical wit over grim predictions of suffering and exploitation.

From where else does hope spring? Aedín ní Loingsigh argues that travel, or mobility, is part of the fluid process of defining the future in Waberi's novel, even though it is only available to a privileged few:

(...) the challenge for African writers is to remain aware of this privilege, to continue to relativise its significance in relation to other forms of mobility, and to determine whether the concerns, hopes and fears of the global world correspond to the local worlds they leave behind (ní Loingsigh, 2011: 86-7).

The narrator's cynical approach to transcribing travel might raise questions about its importance to the protagonist, but that does not necessarily mean that all travels (or utopias) are illusory. Maya-Malaïka hesitates to follow Titus into the smells of garlic and the promise of "mummy" and the resultant musings unveil the fate of those who overdo the travel and do not claim a country, nor find a utopia:

Ce n'est pas loin, te dit-il. Une bonne affaire nous attend au coin de la rue. Tu ne sais comment prendre ce mot "affaire", très élastique sous toutes les latitudes mais tu n'a pas de temps à perdre pour les élucubrations, tu n'es ni touriste, ni ethnologue, encore moins un de ces écrivains qu'on dit voyageurs et qui sillonnent la planète en quête d'utopies, d'oasis célestes et d'histoires à dérober. Ils ont, quant à eux, déjà sanglé leurs bagages, contourné l'horizon, repris la route. Plus tard, ils casseront des verges sur le dos des sédentaires et des prédicateurs de tout poil. Ils n'ont pas de pays. Ils n'ont que des mots, des territoires et des hommes à chérir en traversant ces mêmes territoires. (Waberi, 2006: 220) [It's not far, he tells you. Around the corner there's a good deal, just waiting for us. You're not sure how to take the expression "good deal." It can expand and contract, depending on the latitudes. But you don't have time to waste in senseless imaginings; you're neither a tourist nor an ethnologist, still less one of those so-called travel writers who traipse all over the planet in search of utopias, heavenly oases, and stories to steal. As for them, they have already packed their bags, gone round the horizon; they're back on the road. Later, they'll break rods on the backs of sedentary people and preachers of all shapes and sizes. They have no country. They care only about words, territories, and men as they travel through these same territories.] (Waberi, 2009: 115)

The fact that Waberi has cast Africa's future in this reverse mould, activating alternate histories, such as the Ethiopian invasion of the Balkans, and establishing harmony across African languages, cultures and politics, unified in the Washington-styled east coast capital of Asmara, means that there is hope for Africa. His diagnosis for the future is not promising if western models of efficiency, capitalism and hierarchy are maintained, but by criticising them in this fictional dystopia, the author implicitly suggests that we must look to other "non-western" models to imagine a better future for anyone, not just Africa. And with the recurrent references to black leaders of the past, present and future, it is clear that we should look more closely at their messages for making a better world.

In this way, Waberi's novel *In the United States of Africa* informs our thinking about Francophone African futuristic utopias and by extension, about postcolonial

utopian literature in general. Imaginary Africa's only hope for salvation is new cultural and artistic inspiration from her migrant populations who can also remind Africans of the need for love and compassion. Surely then, the utopian genre must be regenerated by postcolonial authors and cultural practitioners who can remind the west of its own responsibilities to hope and dream of a bright new tomorrow.

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Notes

¹ Consensus around the notion of critical dystopia is lacking, but the meaning I attribute to the term here follows Lyman Tower Sargent's definition in "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited": "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than con temporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the Utopian genre" (1994: 9). Tom Moylan's assessment of critical utopias in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* also informs my reflections, as "a space for a new form of political opposition, one fundamentally based in difference and multiplicity but now wisely and cannily organized in a fully democratic alliance politics that can talk back in a larger though diverse collective voice and not only critique the present system but also begin to find ways to transform it that go beyond the limitations of both the radical micropolitics and the compromised centrist 'solutions' of the 1990s" (2000: 190).

² A note on translation in this article: I will refer to *In the United States of Africa* using the English title, but will provide quotes from the original French novel, *Aux Etats-Unis d'Afrique*, as well as the published English translation. Other texts quoted in French do not exist in English translation, and therefore I have translated them myself.

³ The manifesto entitled "Pour une littérature-monde en français" was published in *Le Monde des livres* on 19th March 2007 and can be read in French at <http://www.etonnants-voyageurs.com/spip.php?article1574> (accessed 21 January 2012), and in English: "Toward a 'World-Literature' in French", translated by Daniel Simon in *World Literature Today*, March-April, 2009, 54-56.

⁴ *Vide infra* the passage quoted from Bekolo, 2009: 140, on this subject.

⁵ I have questioned the exclusive western heritage of utopia at length in an essay "Non-Western Utopian Traditions" (Dutton, 2010: 223-258).

⁶ <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/af/issue/view/457>, Accessed 24 January 2012.

⁷ Conference information and program: <http://www.sfps.ac.uk/conferencestudy-days/annual-conference-2010/>, Accessed 24 January 2012.

⁸ See for example Poiana 2008, and Thomas 2008.

⁹ See <http://www.africaisthefuture.com/>, Accessed 26 January 2012.

¹⁰ See <http://www.africaexpress.co.uk/>, Accessed 26 January 2012.

¹¹ All references are to the online version of the essay <http://web.archive.org/web/19991023003219/http://www.levity.com/markdery/black.html>, Accessed 20 January 2012.

¹² For a more in depth discussion of this dilemma, see my chapter on "Non-Western Utopian Traditions" (Dutton, 2010: 223-258).

¹³ See also Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi's article "Cognition's Warp: African films on near-future risk" (2009) for a postcolonial reading of *Les Saignantes* and *Africa Paradis*.

¹⁴ Nollywood is Nigeria's burgeoning film industry that, like Bollywood, is creating its own industry marketplace away from Hollywood

¹⁵ It was the most expensive film ever produced in Nigeria (130 million naira).

¹⁶ CGI: Computer Generated Images

¹⁷ <http://www.radiopalmwine.com/cinemas-pull-the-plug-on-the-movie-kajola/>, Accessed 28 January 2012.

¹⁸ <http://www.nigeriafilms.com/content.asp?contentid=5651&ContentTypeID=20>, Accessed 28 January 2012.

¹⁹ Cited in Osinubi, 2009: 273.

²⁰ The title of this chapter in the French text is “Voyage au cœur de Paris” [Voyage to the Heart of Paris], echoing the previous chapter title and intimating an emotional attachment to Paris, the protagonist’s absent mother.

²¹ For further information on critical dystopias, see Sargent 1994, and Baccolini and Moylan 2003, 1-12.

²² In this dystopian inversion, there are no more women hailed for their contributions to knowledge, society, or culture than there are in today’s real world.

New Maps of Hell: Postcolonial Utopia and Esther Rochon's *Les Chroniques infernales*¹



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Kingsley Amis titled his well-known study of the dystopian bent in post-WWII science fiction, *New Maps of Hell* (1960). This expression applies quite literally to Québécois writer Esther Rochon's (b. 1948) multi-volume novel, *Les Chroniques infernales* [The Hell Chronicles] (1995-2002), which envisions a new geography for hell, imagining it as a series of worlds under contract to mete out punishment in manners appropriate to the crimes being expiated there. While its first volume, *Lame* [Blade/The Soul] (1995), begins with an appropriately dystopian vision of the hells, the subsequent books describe their protagonists' efforts first to transform one of the hells into a utopian space, then to aid the indigenous peoples of another hell to develop a more reciprocal relationship with their condemned immigrant souls. *Les Chroniques infernales* concludes in its final volume, *Sorbier* [Mountain Ash] (2000) with the protagonists' visit to paradise, revealing the astonishingly dystopian aspects of heaven.

This essay explicates Rochon's attempt to reverse heaven and hell, demonstrating how it represents a postcolonial utopia as Ralph Pordzik has defined it in *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures* (2001). I initially examine how the series' visionary protagonist, Rel, transforms the fictional hells into a postcolonial utopia. Then I describe how a particular hell, the land of Sargade, embodies the notion that the true utopia is a work in progress, and not a finished product. And, finally, I reveal how the novel critiques Western notions of heaven in its depiction of the paradise Anid and refuses closure through a utopian vision of apocalypse in its final volume. First, though, I shall briefly

situate Rochon's work within the context of utopian writing from French-Canada/Québec, and *Les Chroniques infernales* in the author's oeuvre.

Scholars like Guy Bouchard (1985; 1988; 1993; 1994; 1995), Jean-Marc Gouanvic (1988; 1985), Sharon Taylor (2002), Jean-Louis Trudel (1995; 2000), and Nicholas Serruys (2008; 2010) have demonstrated the significance of utopia and dystopia in proto-science fictional and contemporary SF texts from French Canada and Québec. Because of the province's unique history of double colonization and the ambivalent position of its historical majority French-speakers as both colonizer and colonized, envisioning a better state of affairs and warning about how bad affairs could get if not changed has played a central role in the Québec imaginary since the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Coinciding exactly with a major francophone drive for self-determination and Québec's subsequent bitter conflicts with federal and other provincial governments to obtain constitutional recognition as a distinct society, the contemporary francophone science-fiction movement in Québec (SFQ) which developed in the 1970s and 1980s has demonstrated a continued engagement with the discourse of utopia/dystopia.

A founding member of SFQ "en tant que mouvement littéraire, en tant que projet collectif, en tant que milieu culturel structuré [as a literary movement, as a collective project, as a structured cultural milieu]"² in the words of fellow founder Daniel Sernine (1988: 42), Esther Rochon is also one of its most prolific and most respected writers, peer only to Élisabeth Vonarburg. She has won Québec's Grand Prix de la science-fiction et du fantastique four times, more often than any other writer. At least two doctoral dissertations (Sauble-Otto, 2001; and Taylor, 2002) and an excellent article by Miléna Santoro (1997), examine precisely the utopian/dystopian aspects of Rochon's early work. Because only one of her novels, *The Shell* (1990; trans. of *Coquillage*, 1985), has been translated, however, she remains almost completely unknown in the dominant Anglo-American SF and utopian studies circles. Her first trilogy of novels, which I discuss in detail elsewhere (Ransom, 2009: 66-81;138-48; 195-97), engages in the description of a utopian society, the altruistic land of Catadial, which Rochon explicitly connects to the Buddhist belief in the utopian land of Shambhala.³ First published in 1985, *L'Espace du diamant* [The Space of the Diamond], nonetheless asserts one of the most significant criticisms of literary utopias: that if they have become perfect and do not change, then they must become stagnant and thereby lose that perfection, a trait often (albeit incorrectly) seen as

definitive of utopia itself.⁴ Like the feminist open-ended utopias of Ursula K. Le Guin and Doris Lessing examined by Naomi Jacobs, Rochon's utopian writings "overcome narrative stasis through ambiguity, contradiction, fragmentation, and hetero/*tropia*, which counter the centripetal forces of reason, design and coherence" (Jacobs, 1989: 110-111).

Rochon's utopian discourse reflects the evolution in theories of the literary utopia developed after the publication of Ursula K. Le Guin's—a writer whose work has many affinities with that of Rochon—ambiguous utopia, *The Dispossessed* (1974). Rochon's first trilogy, collectively known as the *Cycle de Vrénalik*, named after the Vrénalik Archipelago, its central fictional geographic location, exhibits the traits of the open-ended utopia outlined by Bülent Somay (1984) and Darko Suvin (1974; 1982) and/or the critical utopia outlined by Tom Moylan (1986; 2000) (Ransom, 2009: 138-48; Taylor, 2002). Her utopian discourse evolves even further in the more recent series, *Les Chroniques infernales*, a mature work published in a Québec that has come to grips with the crushing failure of two Referenda for Sovereignty and which is now often referred to as "post-national" but which, at the same time, has realized most of the cultural goals set for itself in the 1960s as a distinct French-language society. As we shall see in the analysis that follows, Rochon's "new maps of hell" overturn the seemingly natural association of hell as dystopia established by Dennis Rohatyn (1989), thus envisioning a world-turned-upside-down in which hell becomes a utopian paradise and heaven a dystopian hell.

Hell as Utopia, Rel's project of reform for the world of the *Anciens enfers*

The first volume of Rochon's *Les Chroniques infernales* introduces its eponymous central female protagonist, *Lame*,⁵ who has been condemned to the dystopian world of the hells ruled by Har. His son Rel first appears as an ineffective, yet fascinating hermaphrodite with whom Lame falls in love. In the second volume, *Aboli* [Abolished] (1996), aided by a newcomer named Fax (whose identity is later revealed as that of Taïm Sutherland, the hero of Rochon's Vrénalik Cycle), they undertake together the complete renovation of one of the hells, which they now refer to as, *les anciens enfers*, the former hells. Such was, of course, this world's devastation as a hell that its renewal resembles a project of terraforming and, as they succeed, Rel's reforms expand to the other worlds that constitute the new hells. Before I undertake a more detailed examination of how Rel turns hell into a utopian

space, let us recall the traits of the classic utopia⁶ typified for many by More's original text: it exists in a remote, clearly circumscribed geographical space, access to which may be restricted; it describes the socio-political and cultural traits of a society coded as somehow better than that of the reader (some would say even perfect); and, its citizens live harmoniously and communally, with all their physical needs met. This utopian society typically recalls a visionary leader who, most often, founded it by fiat in a distant past.

Rel as Visionary Leader

Rel, explicitly qualified as a "un visionnaire [a visionary]" (S 140; S 198, 199-200), one of "ces réformateurs utopistes [these utopian reformers]" (So 266), clearly fits the bill as a founder of utopias. He represents the "utopian" in its colloquial sense of hopelessly idealistic, as he admits: "[l]ibérer les enfers est une tâche impossible; c'est pourtant la seule qui ait un sens [liberating the hells is an impossible task; but it's the only one that makes sense]" (S 136). Putting an end to millennia of terror, Rel's visionary leadership recalls the classic literary utopia's trope of the founding father. Unlike King Utopos, or even B. F. Skinner's Frazier, the founder of *Walden Two*, both of whom created their utopias and then disappeared in a sense, Rel's vision continues to be open-ended, a position that may constantly "évoluer [evolve]" (O 54). By the end of the first part of *Aboli*, Rel can assert that "[l]es anciens enfers forment un territoire avec son autonomie, ses coutumes, sa joie de vivre [the former hells formed a territory with their own autonomy, customs and lust for life]" (A 76). The better society has been created as in a classic eu-topia; however, progress continues as new challenges must be addressed.

Rochon's depiction of Rel's vision as one that evolves avoids another narrative pitfall of the classic utopia identified by Gary Saul Morson (1981: 83) and Chris Ferns (1999: 4; 13-14): the idea that the utopian society appears in the text as fully formed, created by fiat by a utopian leader at some point in time prior to the beginning of the text's narrative. Rochon breaks with the classic utopia precisely because her hell chronicles recount *the very process of becoming* a utopia and she depicts that process as ongoing and unending, a trait identified with the contemporary, open-ended utopia by Darko Suvin (1982: 83-84) and subsequently with the postcolonial utopia by Ralph Pordzik (2001: 16-20). And while the redevelopment of the former hells reflects many aspects of the classic utopia, it is clear that this is a

society in progress rather than a static site of perfection. Rel's very assertion that from a hellish place of violence and suffering, "[o]n est redevenu un monde normal [we have become a normal world]" (A 22), indicates through its very banality that the former hells are not to be taken for a utopia. Rel's own vision for his land, renounces both a museum-like preservation of the past and a static perfection for the future. While his allies from other worlds—without whose agreement to send their damned elsewhere he could never have achieved his program of radical change:

Auraient bien aimé faire des anciens enfers une sorte de lieu exemplaire, de paradis souterrain à saveur de musée du "plus jamais" [...] [i]l ne tenait pas à y attirer des touristes ou les écoliers des visites guidées. Il voulait assurer une présence au plus profond du monde, mais une présence qui s'affirmerait d'elle-même.

[would really have liked to make the former hells a sort of exemplary site, an underground paradise with the "never again" feeling of a museum (...) he did not want to attract tourists or school children on guided tours. He wanted to ensure a presence of the world's most profound depths, but a presence which would affirm itself on its own.] (A 4-5)

Rel's position invokes both a general postmodern, postcolonial phenomenon and a situation specific to Québec. He does *not* want his reformed hells to become a monument or museum to be toured as a reminder of past horrors in the hope that these will not happen again, in the vein of the Holocaust memorials, the Rwandan memorials of the genocide, or the museum at Hiroshima, because he realizes the inevitable trivialization that ultimately will occur with the touristification of such sites. He also eschews, as did many Québécois, a sort of "folklorisation" of his homeland, in which quaint elements of the past are preserved and displayed superficially. His land should be a living land, no longer a land of the dead.

The meliorative aspect of Rel's program appears clearly in his overall desire to eliminate the principal of suffering as an end in itself. Still, Rel must solve the problem of what to do with all of those condemned because of criminal and neglectful actions during their lives, who must make some sort of retribution. Rel thus sends those in need of redemption to locations which have evolved into higher forms of being-in-the world than that of the power relation. In Rel's new hells progress is ongoing; the various societies involved must constantly evaluate and reform their systems, a process consistent with Peter Fitting's description of the new feminist utopias—those labeled as open-ended by Suvin and others—as "societies in process, straining to come into being and open to change" (1985: 157). Progress is assessed at the individual level as well, since Rochon's Buddhist philosophy enters the fiction, with the concept of the karma acquired in this life influencing the location of one's

rebirth in the next (Powers, 2007: 76; 114; 348).⁷ Similarly, in *Les Chroniques infernales* assignment of place in the next life is based on whether or not progress has been made in the past: “Le destin nous ramène souvent aux circonstances de nos échecs. Pour qu’on puisse transcender l’erreur [Destiny often brings us back to the circumstances of our failures. So that we can transcend the error]” (So 99).

Les Anciens enfers as insular society

Superficially, once they have undergone Rel’s program of moving the hells elsewhere, the *anciens enfers* conform to the classic utopian model. Their geographical space, referred to as “un monde clos [a closed world]” (O 4), appears insular, bounded by a sea and separated from the external worlds above by a cement dome. Access is clearly limited; one can arrive only by dying or by operating secret, technologically sophisticated “porte[s] inter-mondes [inter-world portals]” (A 125). A network of tunnels, one of which leads up to Montréal, provides a third avenue of egress. Indeed, Rel’s kingdom has become so insular that a new arrival shocks Lame. This tall, red-bearded man, given the name Fax because his appearance resembles that of a message sent on the machine of that name, comes from afar with vague recollections of a previous life. Like Raphael Hythloday, Julian West or even William Weston (the protagonists of More’s *Utopia*, Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*), he is the outsider through whose eyes the reader will discover the utopian society.

For Fax, the former hells represent, literally, paradise. He describes being drawn after death toward the Edenic green emanating from its direction, “Je me suis réveillé, vous savez, et j’ai aperçu du vert, bien éclairé, loin. Que c’est beau ce vert-là! [I woke up, you know, and I saw green, well lit, far away. That green is so beautiful!]” (A 16). It also becomes immediately clear that, rather than a criminal sent here in error (“Je serais un damné, expédié par erreur à l’ancienne adresse des enfers? [Am I a damned soul who has been sent by mistake to the hells’ former address?]” [A 13]), this man is one of the just, “le juste” (A11; So 101), sent to the land still only known as “les anciens enfers,” but now transformed into a utopian paradise: “puisqu’il était au paradis [because he was in heaven]” (A 61).

This insularity gradually unravels, however, as the *anciens enfers* increasingly develop into a viable society. While the former hells represent an enclosed, isolated space, they also remain connected to the outside world, and their boundaries, as well

as their relationship to the surrounding worlds, remain vague and fluid. First, the very plurality of the hells⁸ at once undoes the Western, Christian notion of a single Hell, while at the same time recalling Dante's many-leveled Hell in *The Inferno*. Rochon's slippery terminology further undermines a precise geography for the fictional universe of the *Chroniques infernales*. On the one hand, the term "underworld" appears consistently applied to the former hells and its inhabitants, "ceux d'en dessous [the people from below]" (A 8), and its mores are referred to as "[l]es coutumes d'en dessous [the customs down below]" (A 53). The shared consensus world of the reader appears as being above, but also exterior to the former hells; in particular, Montréal figures explicitly in the text, especially in the last volume, *Sorbier*. These "mondes extérieurs [external worlds]" (A 82; O 7), however, may shift in shape, or be "filtered" by the mysterious *juges du destin* [judges of destiny] and are then referred to as the "mondes saugrenus [weird worlds]" (A 63). Furthermore, in the later volumes of the *Chroniques infernales*, the fictional universe of Rochon's Vrénalik cycle also figures among the "real" worlds above, with an ontological status analogous to that of Lame's former home, Montréal.

This strategy of blurring the boundaries between the real and the fictional appears in other postcolonial utopias, according to Ralph Pordzik, in which "[t]raditional constructions of reality are thus destabilized, leaving the reader with a suggestive and beckoning array of alternative interpretations which elude any ultimate certainty" (32). The location and relationship to "reality" of the various worlds, which have now become the new hells and which appear as neighbors to the former hells, remain elusive. This includes the "land of Sargade"—discussed in more detail later—which serves as the "cold hells" after Rel's reconstruction of the *anciens enfers*, and which seems neither to be quite as exterior, outside, or "real" as Montréal and Vrénalik. Other "worlds"—Rochon chooses this term rather than the more overtly science-fictional term "planets"—appearing in the saga include the "limbes de réhabilitation," a limbo of rehabilitation located across the sea from the former hells; Anid, a "paradis" where Rel spent his previous life; as well as a number of other paradises described in the final volume, *Sorbier*.

The indeterminate geography of Rochon's hells reflects the convention of the classic utopia which, to sustain the illusion of verisimilitude while it invented a fictional site, remained vague as to the hidden paradise's exact location on the map. At the same time, this geographic ambiguity undermines the closed, insular quality of

the classic utopia, in which the visitor's arrival appears as a completely unique and isolated event. In the reformed hells, individuals eventually do come and go on a regular basis, and, indeed, the entire third volume, *Ouverture* [Opening/Overture] (1997) explores the idea of finding an opening in order to get out, but also back in again. On another level, this openness (which contrasts perhaps with the world of Vrénalik, for which a drawn map was published) necessarily allows Rel's reforms to bleed out and affect other worlds beyond his own realm of the *anciens enfers*.

By undoing the initial insular quality of the reformed hells through the narration of their opening up and out onto other worlds, Rochon implicitly responds to another frequent criticism of the classic utopia as a closed, ostensibly "perfect" society: that life in utopia would be boring. Since perfection seems necessarily to imply no change or productive, progressive activity, not only would the literary utopia be boring for its characters, it risks being boring for its readers since without change or conflict, it would lack any narrative momentum, as critics like Gary Saul Morson assert (1981: 83). Thus, theorists like Somay (1984), Suvin (1982) and Moylan (1986; 2000) see the literary development of the open-ended utopia as a response to this criticism. What is at stake with this open-endedness is, of course, the issue of closure. In her discussion of feminist theory as utopian thinking, Lucy Sargisson asserts that contemporary feminist utopias precisely eschew both closure and perfection as representing an exclusionary form of thinking, which ultimately "privileges sameness and oneness and favours self over other" (65). For Sargisson:

The conceptualization of a perfect utopia represents a confinement or enclosure. Moreover, this conceptualization, thus understood, represents an apparently inescapable move of exclusion. Once a definition is established, that which lies outside of its boundaries can be read as "not, not included, not that thing defined." (1996: 89)

Although Rochon does not explicitly identify herself as a feminist, as Sharon Taylor observes (2002: 11), the writer adopts the feminist utopia's rejection of perfection and closure as exclusionary strategies that deny the development of difference. Instead, Rochon depicts an imperfect society in process, advocating for the acceptance of difference, traits which Pordzik identifies with the postcolonial utopia (2001: 16, 47).

The undesirable nature of a perfect, static, unchanging utopia appears clearly in the terms of Fax's tenure in the former hells: as one of the just, rewarded with paradise, he has a right to "une vie intéressante [an interesting life]" (A 31). Indeed, Rochon's key characters confirm the commonplace that the classic utopia is

“ennuyeux [boring]” (O 120), as Lame admits some might find her home in the *anciens enfers*, which has become a utopian land of peaceful corngrowers! Even Rel, its founder, seeks outside stimulus as his favorite activity is to “parler avec ailleurs [talk to elsewhere]” in his impressive communications room (O 121). While Lame finds the former hells beautiful and remains content there, her husband is not. Suffering from a form of burnout, Rel needs rehabilitation therapy to restore energies drained by all the demands made upon him not only in his own realm, but also by the new hells seeking his advice. Through *Ouverture*, as its title suggests, the goal becomes to find an opening, a means of leaving this hell-utopia of his own construction. Reminiscent of the pre-Quiet Revolution⁹ artistic movement, Refus Global which asserted the need for Québec to open up to the outside world, the admission appears clearly that an isolated utopia cannot be fulfilling to all and that contact with the outside world is necessary for renewal and to jumpstart inspiration.

Les Enfers as Political Utopia

As observed elsewhere of the *Cycle de Vrénalik* (Ransom, 2009: 143-45), Rochon appropriates elements of the classic utopia’s description not only of a better or ideal society, but also that of a better-run *state*, an element important to those like Ligeia Gallagher (1964: n.p.) or Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick (1952: 253) who would see Plato’s *Republic* as one of the first utopian texts. Again and again, the language of politics, policies, and the prerogatives of statecraft pepper the six volumes of the *Chroniques infernales*. Not only do the conclusion of *Lame* and the first section of *Aboli* describe Rel’s seizure of power as a coup d’état and the establishment of a new nation, they do so in dialogue with specific elements of Québec’s political history. Indeed, the “ex-infernaux” are referred to as both a “peuple [people]” and a “nation” (A 3; 4), key terms in arguments for Québec’s sovereignty, particularly as Jacques Brossard—himself the author of a utopian-dystopian multi-volume novel, *L’Oiseau de feu* (1989-1997)—articulates these in relation to the United Nations’ definitions of rightful demands for self-determination in his treatise *L’Accession à la souveraineté et le cas du Québec* (1976). Sarhat Taxiél, a former *sbire* under Har, asserts that even during that autocratic régime, “[l]’enfer était notre patrie [hell was our fatherland]” (S 32). Political imperatives repeatedly impact the lives of individuals: “[d]es considérations diplomatiques” prevented Har from allowing his wife and son (Rel) to return to a happier life in the land of the Sargades (S 38); and, after his reforms, Rel

cannot personally go to the enfers froids “[p]our des raisons politiques [for political reasons]” (O 5).

As the developing nation of the former hells debates the desirability of opening up to the outside worlds in the series’ third volume, *Ouvertures*, various devil’s advocates, so to speak, raise politically-based objections. In concession, Rel offers to take precautions to protect “[l]es gens d’ici” (O 228)—a Québécois-coded expression for “the people from here”—from both the standpoint of “la défense nationale [national defense]” (O 227) and that of public health (“Et puis, ils ont des microbes [And, well, they have germs]” [O 227]). As their leader, however, he remains a policy-maker, but he does so in a manner distinct from that of his father. For example, when he implements a policy (“politique”) to allow the repatriation of the sea-gull like giant birds of the cutting hells to their original homeland of Vrénalik (Or 7), he makes clear that the use of power should occur only “dans un climat de respect mutuel [in a climate of mutual respect]” (Or 16). Some express concern that Rel will now develop his own imperialist project: “aller à la conquête du monde des vivants [to conquer the world of the living]” (S104). He expresses the impossibility of this action: “Mon pouvoir est réel [...]. Par contre, il m’est impossible de pénétrer dans de nouveaux territoires [My power is real (...). On the other hand, it is impossible for me to penetrate into new territories]” (S137). Indeed, his very name and title indicate that while he is king, he is an open-minded one: “Rel [...] c’était un acronyme [...]. Roi à l’esprit libre! [Rel... was an acronym... King with an open/free mind!]” (S 39). Rel’s open mind clearly correlates with the notion of the hells as an open-ended utopia.

Les Anciens Enfers as Better Society

Another issue of concern that critics such as Fredric Jameson raise when considering the classic utopia is the question of upon what criteria does one base a utopian society (2005: 142-45)? That is, should the better society guarantee justice, freedom, provision for physical needs, happiness? Is the utopian society a just society, a free society, a happy society? In a bizarre manner, hell, as Rochon envisions it in the *Chroniques infernales* represents a utopia, if justice—rather than happiness—is taken as the sole criterion for betterment. For even in the old régime under Har, hell is the only place, it appears, “où règne la justice [where justice reigns]” (A 129). The executioner is perhaps the only happy person in the *enfes froids*, because of his faith in the *juges du destin* (A 205) and his knowledge that he, at least, carries out justice

(A 130). Clearly, the question is much more complex, and Rel articulates his worldview as a:

vision du monde dont je serais l'un des artisans. Un monde juste, sans cruauté et sans superflu; un monde brillant comme un lame; un monde pur, dont les habitants, peu importe leur forme ou leur occupation, posséderaient la droiture; un monde profond enfin, où l'esprit libre s'élancerait dans n'importe quelle direction, tandis que la parole et le corps pourraient suivre sans entraves. Il s'agit du monde où nous sommes vivants, aujourd'hui. [vision of the world of which I would be one of the artisans. A just world, without cruelty or the superfluous; a world as brilliant as a blade, a pure world where its inhabitants, whatever their form or occupation, would possess **righteousness**; finally, a profound world where the free spirit could expand in any direction, while speech and the body could follow without hindrance. I'm talking about the world where we are alive, today.] (S 198)

Justice, rectitude, freedom, all of these inform Rel's vision.

It is important to note here, though, that simply making a better society, or rather improving upon an existing society through reform measures, however, is not viewed as sufficient to the utopian by Ernst Bloch and Karl Mannheim who assert that utopian thought must be revolutionary (Levitas, 1990: 194). Although he frames his vision through a discourse of reform, “engagé dans l'acte de tout transformer [engaged in the act of total transformation]” (S 196), Rel effectuates nothing less than a revolutionary action which forces a paradigm shift on the hells and the worlds around them. In spite of his assertion that “[i]l faut travailler avec la situation telle qu'elle est [one must work with the situation as it is]” (O 61), and the qualification of “[s]a révolution [his revolution]” as “l'absence de révolte [the absence of revolt]” (So 109), Rel's accession to power, explicitly qualified as treason to his father, Har (A 3), represents a coup d'état. Although the coup is legitimated through the appropriate ceremonies, his father, mother and their followers, all burn on a great wheel of fire, as does their capital city: “Arxann entière flambe. Fin d'une époque [All of Arxann is in flames. The end of an era]” (A xiii). Rel ends a régime in which his father “faisait régner la terreur [made terror reign]” with “l'abolition immédiate des enfers sur le territoire [the immediate abolition of the hells on this territory]” an act he qualifies as “[l]e meilleur coup de toute ma vie [the best thing I've done in my whole life]” (O 139). The last expression carries a double entendre in French; a commonplace best rendered in English with the neutral term “thing,” in the original, the term *coup* refers literally to a “blow,” the same word found in *coup d'état*. Rel thus further underscores the significance of his revolutionary act.

Utopia as a Work in Progress: The Case of the Land of Sargade as the “Cold Hells”

The society typically described in the classic utopia appears as a communal one, a figure that Rochon also employs in her depiction of reforms occurring in the land of the Sargades, who had agreed to accept some of the damned displaced by Rel’s reforms in the *anciens enfers*. However, after the arrival of the damned—depicted as immigrants, with the Sargades described as *autochtones* [autochthonous peoples/natives]—the locals developed a completely segregated lifestyle, avoiding these newcomers at all cost. So serious appears this division, a clear form of apartheid, that at the end of *Aboli*, the judges of destiny issue an ultimatum to the Sargades that “autochtones et damnés devront se connaître et coopérer, c’est tout [the damned and the autochthonous peoples will have to meet and cooperate, that’s it]” (A 202). So great is the utopian impulse in Rochon’s imaginary universe that even when transformed into the cold hells, the utopian hopes that “un autre monde était toujours possible [another world was always possible]” (O 10), and that “c’était un enfer encore améliorable [it was a hell that could still be improved]” (A 155), prevail in the land of Sargade. Indeed, under the aegis of Rel’s daughter, Aube, these two groups evolve a relationship so close and communal that these *enfers froids* may have become an ambiguous utopia, in the way that Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), as satire, is ambiguous (Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., 2008: 126; Ferns, 1999: 3; Gallagher, 1964: n.p.).

As postcolonial utopia, *Aboli*’s depiction of the new cold hells in the *pays de Sargade* as less successful than other worlds’ implementation of Rel’s reforms can be read universally as allegory for the colonial-postcolonial situation. It also functions specifically as national allegory, if one reads the Sargades—who have historically remained in their homeland, tending to eschew either immigration or emigration/exile (Or 12)—as a figure for contemporary Québec. On one level, the damned first resemble the urban homeless endemic to Montréal, in spite of its harsh winter, conditions mirrored in Sargade’s newly arctic climate. On another, the colonial allegory depicts the arrival of the damned as similar to that of underprivileged, Third-World immigrants, with the Sargades viewing their own society as a First-World model: “[v]isiblement, ces gens-là se prenaient pour des flambeaux de civilisation [those people visibly took themselves for the torchbearers of civilization]” (A 105). As in “real” world host nations, an endemic, anti-immigrant prejudice develops in the

period prior to Rel's reforms; this deeply ingrained anti-hell form of racism leads to fears on the part of the autochthonous Sargades that their agreement to accept the damned will negatively impact the nation's level of civilization. Even a relatively liberal speaker fears that if his fellow Sargades embrace the presence of the hells on their territory, rather than try to repress and ignore it, "on sera moins civilisés [we will be less civilized]" (A 166). Indeed, before the interventions of Lame and later Aube, the *pays de Sargade* as new *enfes froids* resembles nothing less than an apartheid society, so deep is the division between the native Sargades, the immigrant damned, and the *sbires* [henchmen] and robots who have arrived from the former hells to take care of the latter (A 132).

Rochon's postcolonial discourse does not treat this issue, though, in a simplistic manner. Reflective of the polyvalence of the postcolonial allegory, which, in the words of Marie Vautier "disallows an us/them critique" (1998: 214), it reverses the poles of South African apartheid (or even the segregation of the US pre-integration South). Rather than an immigrant minority which separates itself from a ghettoized indigenous people, as the indigenous minority, the Sargades seek to isolate themselves from the immigrant majority of the damned, as the exterior of their modern apartment buildings become "colonisées par des glaces vivantes et douloureuses [colonized by living, suffering ice cubes]" (A 168). The climate of the formerly temperate land of Sargade transformed into the new *cold* hells clearly likens it to the northern climates of Québec, for which cold, snow, and ice have become geo-cultural signifiers of its own specificity. *Aboli* describes the Sargades as "les autochtones froids [the cold natives]" (A 79), exhibiting an affective coldness which actually likens them to the freezing damned whom they shelter in exchange for certain material benefits, but whom they refuse to accept and integrate into their society. While their ancestors had agreed to the terms of Rel's contract, contemporary Sargades come to see their presence as an "outrage" (A 103), doing their best to ignore completely the existence of the damned, literally shutting themselves up inside their buildings.

This isolation represents a coping mechanism. With the coming of the hells, the Sargades underwent a major system change which occurred so rapidly that they have not had time to adapt to it. In spite of the reality of dramatic difference all around them—the loss of their clear blue sky, constant cold and hordes of damned souls clustered on every exterior surface (A 112-114) —they have remained the same in

fundamental ways. Not only is the Sargade homeland now “un monde muré contre l’extérieur [a world walled off from the exterior]” (A 105), this insular society has also become alienated from, dispossessed of its own territory. When Lame invites Séril Daha to travel outside the compound of buildings, he reveals that he doesn’t have a good map and doesn’t really know it; paradoxically, “cela demeurait étranger aux autochtones [it remained foreign to the natives]” (A 119-120). To obtain a decent map, they have to consult the guest worker *sbires* [henchmen/ executioners], functionaries charged with meting out the punishment of the damned. When the Sargades sought refuge from the newcomers inside its buildings, they effectively ceded the world outside to them. While on the one hand, Rochon’s ambiguous mapping of the fictional universe of the hells reflects what Graham Huggan identifies as “a [postcolonial] resistance to the notion of cartographic enclosure and to the imposed cultural limits that notion implies,” Rochon’s precise use of the map trope—in particular, its loss and recuperation—participates in what Huggan identifies in other Canadian and Australian writers as “a desire [...] not merely to decentralize, but also to reterritorialize, their increasingly multiform cultures” (1995: 408).

This situation in the land of the Sargades recalls Québec’s ambiguous status as a non-nation or as a self-proclaimed nation that is not a state, as well as of the Franco-Québécois as both colonizer (of New France) and colonized (by the English after the Conquest of 1760). Séril Daha, a liberal Sargade who eventually becomes a revolutionary advocate for the damned, asserts that as a limbo—its status prior to the installation of the *enfes froids*—it was not a “real” world (A 147), implying that now it is even worse with the assertion that “[d]ehors, c’est l’enfer [outside, it’s hell]” (A 118). With the relativism typical of the postcolonial subject, Lame sees it as “vrai [true]” (A 165), expressing her sense of belonging as a hellion: “Je viens de l’enfer. Dehors, c’est mon pays [I come from hell. Outside, it’s my land]” (A 118). If we recall her origins in life as a Montréaler and the Québec specific coding of the phrase “mon pays,” the title of a very popular song by post-Quiet Revolution era singer-song writer Gilles Vigneault which foregrounds the province’s wintry climate, the allegorical equation of the Sargades to Franco-Quebeckers appears clearly. Like the *Québécois de souche* [old stock Québécois], as ethnic French-Canadians are often referred to, the Sargades fear losing their national heritage (A 167), receive television programming in translation (A 112), and use snowmobiles to get around outside the bounds of the city’s public transportation system (A 120, 122).

Rel sends his daughter Aube, aided by another character, Tchi, to mediate the deteriorating situation between the Sargades and the frozen damned. They argue that times have changed and so, too, must the Sargades. Aube asserts that “ces autochtones si brilliants [...] ils utilisaient tous nos cadeaux pour s’isoler davantage et tisser des liens factices avec des mondes extérieurs qui n’ont rien à fiche de savoir qui ils sont [these brilliant natives (...) used all of our gifts to further isolate themselves and to create artificial connections to the worlds outside who don’t give a damn about who they are]” (A 201). She thus lays bare their pretensions of making connections to the exterior worlds, echoing a nationalist Québec’s efforts at creating direct alliances with France and elsewhere, establishing a foreign policy of its own apart from Canada’s in order to affirm its case for statehood (see Bastien, 2007). Tchi simply states that the Sargades must let go of their nostalgia, pastiching the tropes of Québécois nationalist discourse and its invocation of the ancestral home: “Le fameux pays de leurs ancêtres n’existe plus. Ils sont aux enfers froids, et depuis un bout de temps [The famous land of their ancestors doesn’t exist any more. They have been the cold hells for a while now]” (A 206). Similarly, as French-Canadians have expressed futile longing for New France and the era of their ancestors, eulogized in Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, père’s novel, *Les Anciens Canadiens* (1863), they, too, must face the reality of that loss and adapt to new conditions.

Some, like Lame and Séril Daha, the Sargade artist whose worldview she helps to radicalize, desire change. Change will not come, however, without resistance from some quarters. Because of his sympathy for the guest-worker *sbires* (A 128), Séril Daha receives threats from conservatives in his society (A 158). Ultimately murdered for his role in raising consciousness among his people about the plight of the damned, Daha also expresses sympathy for those who have attacked him. Refusing to name his assailants, he simply explains that they are victims, too:

parmi ceux qui souffraient le plus de voir des enfers sur leur territoire [...] plutôt des petites gens pour qui le ciel bleu, ça compte. [...] Victimes de leur absence d’imagination et de leur entêtement, mais victimes quand même.

[among those who suffered most to see the hells moved onto their territory (...), mostly little people for whom the [now absent] blue sky counts for something. (...) Victims of their own lack of imagination and their stubbornness, but victims all the same.] (A 176).

Rochon addresses her own compatriots here, like Séril Daha, she understands the difficulty of accepting change, while at the same time she advocates for accommodation through her depiction of the pitifully abject damned who eventually

come to appear human, intelligent, capable of mercy, and, eventually, of self-affirming action (A 178-179).

Indeed, Rel's ideology, at such odds with that of his father, has been informed by the fact that as an infant, he was saved by a damned soul in the original cold hells (A 182), revealing the damned's ability to transcend the stupor typical of their state.

Evidence of sentience recurs after Daha's assassination, as the damned assemble around him, gazing with pity upon his body lying in Lamé's arms. When the *sbire* Sarhat Taxiél refuses her exhortation to act, to force the Sargades to improve the conditions of this subaltern class dwelling in their land, the damned themselves finally act (A 182). After Daha's death, they distribute and consume every last ounce of his flesh, every drop of blood from his body. This act of communion results in an epiphany, as the damned waken from their usual torpor to express "leur joie de ne plus avoir les yeux bouchés par la neige [their joy at no longer having their eyes plugged with snow]" (A 103) and descend *en masse* upon the city (A 184-87).

Seeing the approaching hordes of the damned, the Sargades fear violence, and Sarhat Taxiél qualifies this spectacle as "horrible" (A 188). In contrast, his former colleague Tchi, now an inhabitant of the *anciens enfers* with Lamé and Rel and thus a participant in the utopian project, describes it as "réjouissant [joyous]" (A 188). The damned do not harm the Sargades, but the latter can no longer repress or ignore their existence, as clusters of damned souls now occupy city buildings and follow the Sargades wherever they go. The damned merely observe, since "[l]es gens font ce qu'ils veulent mais avec un millier de témoins [people do what they want, but with a thousand witnesses]" (A 190). Their omnipresence, though, functions as a collective conscience and faced with this non-violent, but impossible to ignore, demand for recognition, the Sargades must accept change.

Indeed, the new cold hells eventually become a model of how different groups in a pluralistic society can live together in peace and harmony: the Sargades "avaient fini par accepter de voir en eux [les damnés] des partenaires plutôt que des intrus, adaptant leur mode de vie en conséquence, ce qui semblait diminuer leur aigreur au profit de leur ingéniosité [In the end, they accepted seeing them (the damned) as partners rather than intruders, adapting their way of life in consequence, which also seemed to diminish their bitterness to the benefit of their ingeniousness]" (S 59). As an open-ended, postcolonial utopia, Rochon's hells thus outline the process of accommodation required in contemporary Québec if the heritage of racism implied in

ethnic nationalism¹⁰ is to be overcome and instead an attitude of accommodation embraced, like that proposed by the 2008 Bouchard-Taylor Report for the province's Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences.

After the Sargades have learned to live harmoniously with the damned, the image of Séril Daha, the man who triggered the radical change leading to their integration, undergoes a revisionist makeover. This “âme révolutionnaire [revolutionary soul]” (A 138), condemned during his lifetime, then seen as “un martyr national [a national martyr]” (S 149) by progressives soon after his death, eventually becomes the Sargades' “héros national [national hero]” (O 25). Once again, change for the better occurs through a revolutionary paradigm shift, “un changement de gouvernement [a change of government]” (A 214), like that effectuated by Rel to end Har's régime, as his daughter Aube assumes power in the *pays des Sargades*. While Lame fears that the Sargades, whose “fibre patriotique [est] assez développée [patriotic fiber (is) well developed]” (S 60), will see this as an affront, since “[l]es autochtones ont une tradition de démocratie [the natives have a tradition of democracy]” (A 206), this intervention instead restores justice and reverses the dystopian situation. And yet, this correction toward eu-topia remains only temporary in Rochon's ambiguous postcolonial utopia.

While scholars typically credit Ursula K. Le Guin with coining this term in the subtitle of *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (see, for example, the essays in Davis and Stillman, 2005), the Utopian society described by Thomas More in *Utopia* does not necessarily represent what More himself would find eu-topian, that is better than his own. As critics from J. H. Hexter (1952: 174) to Fredric Jameson (2005: 32-33) have observed, the original literary model of utopia performs a critical function, reflecting upon the author's contemporary world as much as, or even more so, than representing his vision of an ideal society. Likewise, in *Ouverture* (a volume whose very title rejects the concept of the closed, perfected utopia), although a revolution has occurred, and Rel's platform of altruism has been carried out to the fullest by his daughter Aube, the prevailing living conditions in the land of the Sargades would certainly not appear as “better” to the reader living in the shared consensus world of the author.

At this juncture, the Sargades have now overcompensated in the measures they have taken to integrate the damned. They have completely remodeled their once

closed-in buildings, creating fully communal living spaces. Inside each apartment, space has been cleared to accommodate the clusters of the adoring, but needy souls that hover around each individual Sargade. For example, formerly galley-style, individual cooking areas have been opened up to provide such space, so that “les damnés observaient les étapes de la préparation du repas au lieu de vivre l’angoisse d’être séparés de leurs autochtones. [...] Tout se faisait en public, que ce soit aller aux toilettes, faire l’amour ou même peindre [the damned observed the stages of preparing meals instead of living the agony of separation from their natives. Everything was done in public, from going to the toilet, to making love or even painting]” (O 27).

The tone of the narrator’s description remains positive and this communal lifestyle imitates the Buddhist ideal of negating the individual and his or her needs and desires in favor of altruistic impulses including the communal life of the renunciate (King, 2009: 15-16; Ling, 1979: 49-59; Powers, 2007: 38, 295-98). Furthermore, the situation presents itself as beneficial to both groups involved: “[l]es uns comme les autres avaient commis des fautes, pour se retrouver coude à coude, solidaires, ce qui tenait du miracle [both had committed errors in order to find each other, elbow-to-elbow, in solidarity, which was something like a miracle]” (O 31). Nonetheless, Rochon’s use of hyperbole in the depiction of the communal, nearly symbiotic life of the Sargades with the damned satirizes the absurdity of some forms of communal living found in the earnest literary utopia, reflecting an irony reminiscent of More’s own.

Although great progress has occurred in many of the reformed hells, the class/race conflict has not been fully resolved between the different groups who must coexist within the context of the often violent justice system of the hells. For example, in the “enfers du pal” (hells of impalement), in which the naked damned have been impaled upon wooden pikes, the locals offer them water, read to them, play music, and “murmuraient des encouragements personnels [murmured personal encouragement]” (O 48) to ease their suffering. The *autochtones* (the people native to the land before the arrival of the damned) have thus come to care for the immigrant damned. They now, however, consider the *sbires* (henchmen/executioners who are essentially guest workers who have moved here from the *anciens enfers*) who must impale new arrivals and ensure that the damned continue to suffer (for such is the justice of their penalty), as “êtres de second classe [second class beings]” (O 51).

Thus, even in the reformed climate of mercy and understanding, new forms of prejudice develop.

Indeed, in the context of a hell in which some individuals do care for others (as opposed to what prevailed under Rel's father where *all* either suffered immensely or meted out violent torture), the *sbires* themselves have come to feel brutalized by their tasks. They resemble nothing so much as colonizers who have read Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) and have realized that the alienating, brutalizing effect of their violence affects not only the damned, but themselves as well. Rel—who, having successfully turned hell into heaven in the *anciens enfers*, continues to function as a visionary leader in his new role as a consultant, listening to the various complaints and finding solutions—proposes that the two groups in the hells of impalement alternate duties in tours of two years each. As he does so, he points out two things. One, he asserts that although the two groups differ genetically, they are really similar:

Les sbires, pour la plupart, sont descendants de gens de mon pays, sbires là-bas quand l'enfer y résidait. Donc sbires et autochtones sont d'origine différente, soit. Par contre, vous êtes tous adultes responsables et polyvalents. Chacun pourrait faire deux ans la bonne âme et deux ans le sbire, alternant ainsi jusqu'à la retraite.

[The henchmen, for the most part, descend from people from my land (the former hells) who were henchmen when hell existed there. Therefore, henchmen and natives are different; so be it. However, you are all responsible, multi-talented adults. Everyone could do two years as a good soul and two years as a henchman, alternating thus until retirement.] (O53)

In this fashion, Rel parries in advance any essentialist, racist arguments about the henchmen's natural violence. However, the leader remains sensitive to the abject nature of the violence necessary to serve justice upon the damned, admitting that “[l]e travail que vous faites [...] est indigne d'un être vivant qui se respecte [the work that you do (...) is not dignified for a self-respecting living being]” (O 54). He therefore offers the henchmen an out, the second option of returning to their “pays d'origine [homeland],” the *anciens enfers*, to become corn farmers (O 55).

Over time, undeniable progress has been made in all of the eight new hells, revealed during a tour conducted by Rel and Lame in *Ouverture*. Above all, in these worlds that used to be a literal hell, an ethic develops which espouses the need to treat all, human and animal alike, with dignity and respect. Again and again, across the six volumes of the *Chroniques infernales*, Rochon demonstrates that utopia is never perfect and that it always remains open-ended, in process. The impermanent nature of the hells, worlds subject to the cycle of life and death, appears clearly in this homage paid to Rel and his revolutionary action:

Celui qui avait été le dernier roi des enfers, juste le temps qu'il faut pour les abolir sur son territoire, refusant de renouveler les contrats qui gèrent l'horreur, utilisant toute la puissance de sa volonté de nouveau souverain pour porter un coup fatal à des millénaires de terreur. [He who was the last king of the hells, with just enough time to abolish them on his territory, refusing to renew the contracts that manage horror, using all the power of his will as a new sovereign to strike a fatal blow to millennia of terror.] (O 173)

Rel's assignment does not, however, simply end with revolutionizing the way of life both in the former hells and in the new worlds to which their functions have been re-assigned. He learns that he has been charged by the judges of destiny to go beyond the merely revolutionary and enter the realm of the millennial, planning the end of the worlds of hell.

The End of the World as We Know It: Rel as Planner of the Apocalypse

A millennial vision, the notion that the existing order must be completely destroyed before the new can be installed, represents a pivotal element in some utopian thought (see for example, Fortunati, 1993; Kumar, 1991: 6-11). Rel's vision and charge reflects this millenarian spirit as Rochon's utopia will be as open-ended as possible, concluding with the ultimate ellipsis, the end of the world. Indeed, his very task will be that of "le planificateur de la fin du monde [planner of the end of the world]" (So 72). Having succeeded in his project of reforming the hells so that a number of these societies may be labeled as utopian, at least in their vision and conception as altruistic societies, the *juges du destin* charge Rel to develop a plan for the end of the world in the fifth volume, *Or* [Gold/So] (1999) (Or 193). Ordered to "effectuer les simulations et les calculs relatifs à la fin du monde [effectuate the simulations and calculations relative to the end of the world]" (So 41), Rel nonetheless develops his program with a utopian horizon in mind. His notion that "[i]l fallait permettre à chaque monde de mûrir, pour donner à ses habitants tout son potentiel de lieu d'épanouissement de la sagesse, avant qu'il ne soit détruit [it was necessary to allow each world to mature, in order to give its inhabitants all the potential of a space for the development of wisdom before its destruction]" (So 4) aims for nothing less than the attainment of nirvana,¹¹ a utopian state of transcendence. Just as Ernst Bloch equates the "principle of hope" to the utopian, so Rel's plan for the end of the world appears as "une vision funèbre mais majestueuse, et non dénuée d'espoir [a funereal, but majestic vision, not bereft of hope]" (So 180). The end of existence, the millenarian apocalypse, presents itself here as an ultimate liberation in keeping with Rochon's Buddhist philosophy, which seeks to shed all ties

to this world and seek nirvana (Or 209-210). As the narrative comes full circle at the end of *Sorbier*, reaching the “fin de règne [end of the reign]” of Rel (So 324), it asserts that true “liberté [freedom]” (So 331) is yet to come. As she addresses the question of paradise, in keeping with the postcolonial, which interrogates the Western master narratives (Vautier: 1998, 25), Rochon performs nothing less than a major critique of the concept of “paradise”/utopia as it is known in the Western—Jewish and Christian—traditions in the final chapters of *Sorbier*.

Heaven as Hell: The Critique of Anid

The reader first learned of the existence of “paradis [paradises]” in the system of worlds developed across the *Chroniques infernales in Secrets* [Secrets] (1998), when Rel revealed that he had spent a previous life in a world known as Anid (S 18). Categorized as a paradise, happiness and altruism form its basis: “Un monde incroyablement riche en possibilités, fait pour qu’on y soit heureux, et qu’on fasse rayonner le bien et le bonheur le plus loin possible [A world incredibly rich in possibilities, made for happiness, so that one could radiate goodness and happiness as far as possible]” (So 87). In the cycle’s last volume, *Sorbier*, Rel appears near death, exhausted by his revolutionary and consultational efforts in the former and the present hells. His companions Lame and Fax/Taïm Sutherland accompany him on a search for refuge since he has since been banished from the hells as a result of his overly zealous, utopian plan for the end of the world. At this juncture, a rogue judge of destiny, one who disagrees with his colleagues’ sentencing Rel to banishment, takes the prince of the former hells and his entourage on a tour of various paradises in search of a habitable world.

This device allows Rochon’s characters to interrogate the notion of paradise itself, again engaging the question: “Upon what basis should a utopia be founded?” As with the hells, “[i]l y a des paradis pour tous les goûts [there are paradises for all tastes]” (A 28). Some of these mirror the land of Cokaygne, a “paradis primitif, où on se vautre dans les plaisirs en attendant d’être forcé de redescendre vers le Malheur [primitive paradise where one wallows in pleasure waiting to be forced to return to unhappiness]” (So 346).¹² Others, where one “jouit d’omniscience, de puissance, de bonheur et de toutes sortes d’autres bidules amusants [enjoys omniscience, power, happiness and all other sorts of amusing baubles]” (So 308), focus on the mental and spiritual. Rochon’s satire of descriptions of contemporary consumer culture as utopia

appears in *Lame*'s dismissal of this image of utopia as frivolous, superficial shams. For her, a true paradise is one where she can be "utile [useful]" (So 351). Already in *Lame*, the redemptive value of work appeared clearly, as her tasks allowed the *Chroniques*' heroine to resist the fate of most of those condemned to the *enfes mous*, that of giving in to all sensory impulses and becoming a complete and literal larva.

In addition to *Anid*, the text specifically names only two other paradises: *Catadial* and *Shambhala*. As *Sorbier* knits together the two fictional universes of Rochon's SFQ sagas into one complex whole, *Catadial*, the utopian land of the *Vrénalik Cycle*, reappears (So 298). This nation had helped the *Asven* settle in a new homeland in exchange for the then living *Taïm Sutherland*'s assistance in opening itself up to the world. With his help, it left the unhealthy isolation of the classic (but inauthentic in Rochon's view) utopia, a prerequisite to its fulfillment of an altruistic mission of helping other lands, achieving the status of an authentic attempt at utopia, "un pays qui allait bien [...] ce paradis. Chacun y avait sa place. Les talents pouvaient s'y épanouir. Une partie de l'énergie de chacun était délibérément consacrée au bien être de tous [a land where things went well (...) this paradise. Each had his or her place there. Talent could flourish. Part of the energy of each was deliberately consecrated to the well-being of all]" (So 283-284). In addition to the reference to her own imaginary universe, Rochon invokes the real-world legend of Tibetan Buddhism's paradise, *Shambhala*, by equating it with *Catadial*. Indeed, *Lame* states that "[l]e *Catadial* [...] s'appelle *Shambhala* dans le monde d'où vous venez [Catadial is called *Shambhala* in the world that you come from]" (So 353). In this manner, however, she further undermines the boundaries between legend and reality, a tactic associated with the postcolonial utopia, whose relationship to mimetic realism remains ambiguous, according to *Pordzik* (2001: 16-17).

What occurs in *Anid*, however, represents Rochon's most scathing critique of the classic utopia as stuffy, pompous, and ultimately discriminatory, a stance reflective of *Sargisson*'s evaluation of closure in the literary utopia as a measure taken to exclude difference (63-65). Upon their arrival, *Rel*, *Lame*, *Fax* (accompanied by the spirits of two Sorcerers from the *Vrénalik* novels, the *Dreamer Shaskath* and *Ivendra*¹³), appear initially impressed by this paradise, which—as their guide *Zyine* explains—is "une université céleste, un lieu de formation, d'où nos diplômés partent accomplir divers travaux [a heavenly university, a site of education, which our graduates leave to accomplish various works]" (So 346). While this sort of school for angels at first

appears to align with Rochon's vision of a Blochian utopia of work and self-fulfillment, its entrance standards belie its asserted "souci d'égalitarisme [concern for equality]" (So 346). When Lame expresses the desire to take courses here, she is told "[l]es cours qu'on offre ici, il n'est pas évident que vous puissiez les suivre [it's not necessarily obvious that you could take the classes offered here]" (So 349).

In particular, Rel's former mentor Vayinn, reveals his scorn for all of the members of their group: he mocks the sorcerer Ivendra's desire to merge with Rel (who has been revealed to be none other than the model for the Asven Ocean-god Hatzlén of the *Vrénalik* novels; So 348); he disrespects the judges of destiny, disparaging their lack of decorum as being "[t]rop stridents, si vous voyez ce que je veux dire [too noisy, if you know what I mean]" (So 349); and when Lame reveals her origins as a former *damnée*, his laconic "Je vois [I see]" (So 351) implies the prejudices he holds against her kind. Subsequently, Vayinn particularly singles out Lame for discrimination. Offended, she presses him for answers: "Sommes-nous vraiment inférieurs? [Are we really inferior?]" (So 350). He responds: "Tout dépend de vos aptitudes [It all depends on your aptitudes]" (So 350). She accuses: "Ou de votre bon vouloir? Ou de notre pouvoir de négociation? [Or on your good will? Or on our skills as negotiators?]" (So 350). This exchange, like so much of the *Chroniques infernales*, as we have seen, reflects the socio-historical context in which it was written; it invokes a lingering rancor resulting from the failure of negotiations¹⁴ surrounding the repatriation of Canada's constitution from Great Britain in the 1980s and early 1990s, and Québec's request for recognition as a "distinct society" within it.

The character of Vayinn plays devil's advocate, of a sort, as he puts into play a discourse that questions Lame's multicultural, postcolonial outlook, an outlook reflective of Rochon's own. Representative of the conservative Westerner, intent on preserving privilege and the status quo by controlling the canon and educational programs, he reveals his own racism at the same time. Full of contempt for a race he sees as no more than vermin ("[l]es infernaux, à ses yeux n'étaient peut-être que des microbes [those from hell, in his eyes, were perhaps nothing more than germs]" [So 360]), Vayinn lambasts Lame for her lack of "vénération pour vos ancêtres ou vos maîtres [veneration for your ancestors or your masters]" (So 364). This attack also codes him as representative of the old-guard ethnic French-Canadians who wish to preserve the traditions of the ancestors, like Lionel Groulx, who entitled his

historiographical landmark, *Notre Maître le Passé* [Our Master, The Past] (3 vols; 1924-1944). Vayinn despises her eclectic philosophy and culture:

Vous vous imaginez que Montréal, c'est la patrie de créatures sulfureuses telle que Baudelaire ou Lovecraft. Vous êtes incapable de faire la différence entre un simple poème ou un conte, et un véritable énoncé philosophique sur la nature du monde. Vous mêlez tout! En plus, vous utilisez votre interprétation du bouddhisme pour justifier votre peu d'intégration sociale. [You think that Montreal is the home of such sulphuric creatures as Baudelaire or Lovecraft. You are incapable of seeing the difference between a simple poem or a story, and a real philosophical statement on the nature of the world. You mix everything up! What's more, you use your interpretation of Buddhism to justify your social deficiencies.] (So 365)

In this passage, Rochon scrutinizes her own literary and philosophical underpinnings, either recalling or imagining the type of criticism that would have been leveled at her work by members of a conservative Québécois intellectual élite. The influence on her work by the iconic American horror writer, H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), appears clearly in works such as *La Rivière des morts* (2008) and “Les Murs d’Inquanok [The Walls of Inquanok]” (2004) which pay explicit homage to the master from Providence. She couples such pulp inspiration with a love of France’s greatest nineteenth-century French poet, Charles Baudelaire. Poems from his landmark work, *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), are both cited directly and paid implicit homage throughout the *Chroniques infernales*, but particularly in its final volume *Sorbier*, which reprints “L’Homme et la mer” (1857) in epigraph and to which Lame refers explicitly (21-22; 68; 228; 267-68). Rochon explicitly mentions the poet in her acknowledgments (415). Finally, the attack on Buddhism and her quiet, unassuming, probably timid personality appears to directly target the series’ author as much as its female protagonist. Under such scrutiny, Lame wonders outright, “où ils étaient, en fait. Au paradis ou ailleurs? [where they were, anyway. In paradise or somewhere else?]” (So 360).

Left to reflect upon the “violence de ce qu’ils venaient de vivre [violence of what they had just experienced]” (So 368), Lame contrasts Vayinn’s self-righteous elitism with the surrounding peaceful productivity of the Anid countryside. In the end, Rochon’s satire backtracks somewhat as Vayinn’s assistant Zyine makes amends with Lame, and Vayinn alone bears the onus of this violence, representing the corruption entailed in the exercise of absolute power. Vayinn’s prejudicial discourse, “Nous avons tout de même un certain standing, vous savez [we have a certain standing to uphold, you know]” (So 351), is attributed to him alone, not to all of Anid.

The novel's resolution, which obliquely reveals Vayinn's corruption¹⁵ and establishes Rel in his place, resembles the Voltairean principle of the *paradis terrestre*,¹⁶ the earthly paradise, as Rel pronounces: "C'est un paradis à ma mesure, un lieu d'apprentissage, où l'on apprend comment mener une existence valable [It is a paradise built to my measure, a site of apprenticeship where one learns how to live a valid existence]" (So 392). The Blochian value of work and the progressive nature of the critical utopia combine here for the ambiguous open ending posited by Suvin (1982). Lame's lampoon of the stereotypical image of heaven adds fuel to Rochon's bonfire of the classic utopia and contributes to this ambiguity:

Le ciel [...]. Je m'attendais à être plongé dans des états d'esprit transcendants, entouré d'une beauté parfaite, au-delà de ce que l'esprit peut concevoir, pour jouir d'une incomparable félicité. D'un coup, j'aurais dépassé ma mesquinerie pour toucher au sublime. [Heaven (...). I was expecting to be plunged into transcendent states of mind, surrounded by a perfect beauty, beyond what the mind could conceive, to enjoy an incomparable happiness. In one moment, I would have overcome my pettiness to touch the sublime.] (So 392)

Ironically, Rochon's fantasy novel exposes the "fantasy" elements of the Western/Christian conception of heaven/paradise/utopia—the perfect world into which one suddenly enters to have fulfillment granted. Lame then outlines the "realistic" ways to arrive in paradise, a means which requires, though, use of one's subjective, internal, imaginary resources. The idea of an objective paradise with an external reality (like that of God's heaven in Christian doctrine) is a myth; the only way to reach paradise is through the inner journey—an attitude of that aspect of Buddhist teaching which asserts that Shambhala can only be attained through meditation (Bernbaum, 1983: 205-06). Lame realizes that:

la beauté, la perfection, la transcendance, apparaissent en fonction de l'état d'esprit désintéressé qui ne les recherche même pas, et se manifestent en rapport avec lui, sans qu'il soit nécessaire de leur créer un environnement protégé, puisqu'il s'agit d'une expérience personnelle, qui dépend du degré d'ouverture que chaque conscience entretient avec tout le reste. Ce qu'il s'agit de faire, c'est de créer des incitatifs.
[beauty, perfection, transcendence, appear as a function of the disinterested state of mind which doesn't even seek them, and which manifest themselves in relation to it, without it being necessary to create a protected environment for them because it's a question of a personal experience, which depends on the degree of openness that each consciousness carries on with the rest. What you have to do, is to create incentives.] (So 392-93)

Still, in keeping with the open-endedness, Rel asks Lame: "Avoue que quelque chose t'ennuie ici [Admit that something bores/annoys you here]" (So 393). She admits that this paradise, with all of its mythical wonders, "tout ce clinquant [all this glitter]" (So 393)—as ever, Rochon knows not to take her fantasy too seriously¹⁷ adding such self-referential and self-deprecatory comments—does not, for Lame, fit

with Rel's image as a prince of darkness. In the end, a sense of harmony appears necessary, the *gouffre* of the pit in balance with the paradise.

Cultiver son jardin

Finally, recalling Voltaire's conclusion to *Candide* (1759) and the famous refrain of what one should do in the best of all possible worlds, "we must go and work in the garden" (Voltaire, 1947: 144) Lame moves into Vayinn's house of horrors¹⁸ (once those, of course, have been moved out) and cultivates a garden featuring all of the plants of her Montréal. In a prime location she includes, a *sorbier* [rowan tree or mountain ash], Taïm Sutherland's totem tree. Vayinn's former assistant and their guide through this "flawed utopia" (Sargent, 2003: 225), Zyine, now revealed to be a force of good, reinforces the Marxist tendencies of Rochon's utopian thought. She asserts that "Anid, c'est pour les mordus du paradoxe et des méthodes sophistiqués pour être au service des êtres [Anid is for those bitten by the bug of the paradox and sophisticated methods for serving others]" (So 398); the original phrase "au service de," is immediately decoded by the reader of French as indicating a literary movement's Marxian goals, such as Surrealism and its offshoot Situationism. Being simply "at the service of" other beings, the ultimate goal is to live altruistically, unselfishly, detached, but decidedly to LIVE, and not just to be happy in the superficial illusion of fulfillment provided by the Cokaygne of the senses or the mind. As Lame says to Rel: "tu voulais tant que les gens deviennent vivants [you wanted so much for people to become alive]" (So 395), a theme also found in Rochon's short story "Devenir vivant [To Become Alive]" (1988), which provides the back story for Rel's stay in Anid, explaining how he got his acronymic name ("Roi à l'Esprit Libre [Open Minded King]"), as well as describing Vayinn and Zyine earlier in their lives.

The refrain "la fin du monde [the end of the world]" (Or 29) begins to appear frequently in the series's penultimate volume, *Or*, after Rel and Lame notice cracks in the concrete dome above the reformed hells. Rel realizes that "[c]es fissures dans la voûte étaient liées aux tensions géocosmiques du commencement de la fin du monde [...]. C'était la première fois qu'il voyait un signe concret de l'usure accélérée de l'univers [these fissures in the vault were linked to the geocosmic tensions caused by the beginning of the end of the world (...). It was the first time he saw a concrete sign of the accelerated wearing down of the universe]" (Or 30). Rel then retreats to

Vrénalik to elaborate his plan; his desire to maximize the utopian effects even of a plan for the end of the world earns him the displeasure of the Judges of Destiny. As author of the apocalypse, Rel nonetheless designs a program through which as many worlds as possible will experience a Golden Age prior to extinction (378). He explains to Vayinn that “quand tout va mal, chacun a accès au meilleur de lui-même. [...] dans l'imminence de la fin des temps, les gens éprouveraient un sentiment d'urgence suffisant pour prendre leur société au sérieux [when everything goes badly, each individual has access to the best of himself. (...) in the imminence of the end of time, people would feel a sense of urgency sufficient to take their society seriously]” (So 378-79).

After having achieved the best of all possible ends of the world, *Sorbier's* final pages leave the reader only with a state of affairs that predicts or augurs the happy ending, the nirvanic union, set forth in Rel's plan:

Tout cela présageait du reste [...] pour que la fin du monde ne soit pas qu'une histoire de souffrance, de mort et de chaos, mais quelque chose de plus, comme un hymne, pour que l'injustice ne demeure pas impunie, mais soit reconnue dans ses débordements et se fonde comme de la cire, comme un corps douloureux se transforme en lumière profonde.

[This all presaged the rest (...) so that the end of the world would not be a story of just suffering, of death and chaos, but something more, like a hymn, so that injustice would not go unpunished, but be recognized in its excesses and melt like wax, like a suffering corpse transforms into profound light.] (So 413)

Rochon's open-ended utopia thus ends with a profoundly poetic invocation of the millennial destruction of the universe. In keeping with the open-ended utopia she has written this fictional universe of Vrénalik/ *les enfers* remains open as her most recent novel, *La Rivière des morts* (2007), also participates indirectly in this imagined community.

It is perhaps not coincidental that *Sorbier*, published in the year 2000, appeared at the début of a new millennium, as Fredric Jameson observes in his recent intervention on the topic of utopia, *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), “the increasingly popular visions of total destruction and of the extinction of life on earth” (199). *Les Chroniques infernales* participates in the general apocalyptic concerns of the turn of the millennium, and in the postcolonial utopia's desire to undo Western imperial civilization. It also reflects the very specific realities of a particular, postcolonial, postnational society, that of Québec, with its heroine from Montréal and her direct engagement of Canada's predominantly French-speaking province's colonial and postcolonial history (see Ransom, 2009: 163-67), as well as its allegorization of

Québec society in the episode on the land of the Sargades as the new cold hells, discussed above.

In the end, Rochon's quasi-mystical vision of utopia appears most in line with that of Ernst Bloch.¹⁹ In *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918, 1923) and *The Principle of Hope* (1952-1959), as well as a number of essays collected by Jack Zipes under the title *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (1988), Bloch affirms the revolutionary role of the arts in humanity's ability to project alternate possibilities of reality, a principle he called *Vor-Schein* "anticipatory illumination" (Zipes, 1988: xvii). Furthermore, Bloch represents an important, early proponent of the open-ended nature of utopia (Geoghegan, 1996: 40; Hurbon, 1974: 54). Not only does the general project of Rochon reflect the idea that science fiction (often called *anticipation* in French) can anticipate a new, better reality, we see in Rel's vision several more concrete Blochian principles at work, including the philosopher's "personal ethics of the *aufrechter Gang*, the upright gait" (Zipes, 1988: xxvii), along with the generally Marxian values of the right to unalienated labor and the role of collective agency as a prerequisite to individual fulfillment (Zipes, 1988: xx). As Rel asserts already in the first volume of the *Chroniques infernales*, "If everyone conducted himself with rectitude, the hells would, perhaps, disappear" ("Si chacun se conduisait avec droiture, les enfers disparaîtrait peut-être;" L 46). Following the role of art described by Bloch as pre-appearances of the utopian, Esther Rochon uses her science-fiction writing as:

a laboratory and also a feast of implemented possibilities [...] whereby the implementation and the result occur in the manner of founded appearance, namely of a worldly perfected pre-appearance. In great art, exaggeration and fantasizing are most visibly applied to tendential consistency and concrete utopia. Though whether the call for perfection [...] becomes practical even only to a small extent and does not merely remain in aesthetic pre-appearance is something which is not decided in poetry, but in society. (Bloch, 1986: I, 216; original emphasis).

The postcolonial utopia envisioned in the six volumes of *Les Chroniques infernales* critiques the notion of perfection often perceived as inherent in the classic Western literary utopia, and reverses and revises Western notions of heaven and hell, in part through the application of Buddhist notions of these. In the end, this fantasy world offers a deformed, yet still clear, vision of the possibilities for Québec to learn from its past oppression in order to develop new systems of recognition and accommodation in order to serve as a model of a better pluralistic, postnational society for others.

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Notes

1 A slightly abridged version of the first section of this essay was presented at the Society for Utopian Studies conference held at Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, October 20-23, 2011. I allude to the following analysis in *Science Fiction from Québec: A Postcolonial Study* (Ransom, 2009: 152), but only now do I develop it fully here.

2 All translations from the French are my own; translations of novel titles that are not italicized indicate that the work in question has not been published in translation. Citations from the various volumes of *Les Chroniques infernales* will refer to the following abbreviations, presented in order of publication, L = *Lame*; A = *Aboli*; O = *Ouverture*, S = *Secrets*, Or = *Or*, So = *Sorbier*.

3 Shambhala is "a mythical kingdom hidden behind snow peaks somewhere north of Tibet", from which "according to prophecy, a future King of Shambhala will come out with a great army to destroy the forces of evil and bring in a golden age" (Bernbaum, 1980: 4). Textual and verbal accounts describe Shambhala as a utopian land of enlightenment and physical plenty hidden from the rest of the world in a manner similar to the fictional Shangri-la of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (Bernbaum, 1980: 3). Different traditions view it variously as an *actual*, mappable location hidden in the mountains, or as a *figurative* image, a metaphor for enlightenment, a location reached through meditation (Bernbaum, 1980: 205-06).

4 See for example, the Wikipedia definition of utopia as "an ideal community or society possessing a perfect socio-politico-legal system" ("Utopia"), or *The American Heritage Dictionary's* definition of More's island as "a seat of perfection in moral, social, and political life" (1975: 1411).

5 It should be noted that her name is pronounced with a short a, and not like the English word "lame." Rochon offers an interesting play on words here, invoking the obvious allegory with her heroine's name referring to *l'âme* (the soul), but also to her ultimate strength, her critical force as *lame* (the blade of a knife).

6 By the "classic utopia," I refer to what Peter Fitting also terms "the older, systematic, planned utopias" (1985: 157), that appeared prior to the perceived evolution of the literary genre into the more "open-ended," "ambiguous," or "critical" utopias which began to appear in feminist utopian novels in the 1970s. Judith Shklar uses the term "classical utopia" to refer to a similar form of literary utopia, but she already begins to see its decline "almost two hundred years ago" in the nineteenth-century utopias like those of Bellamy (1965: 270).

7 It is also worth noting that, like Rel, legend says of Siddhartha Gautama that in "one of the Buddha's past incarnations [...] he was born in the most torturous hell" (Powers, 2007: 36).

8 These include the *enfers mous* (the soft hells, in which the cycle opens in the first novel, *Lame*), the *enfers tranchants* (sharp hells), the *enfers à pils* (piked hells—which feature impalement like that perpetrated by the medieval Wallachian champion of Christianity and model for the fictional Dracula, Vlad the Impaler), the *enfers chauds* (hot hells), and even the *enfers plastiques* (plastic hells).

9 This phrase refers to a period of great social, political and economic change in Québec, technically coinciding with the 1960-1966 term of provincial premier Jean Lesage and his Liberal party's program of reforms, which sought to liberate Québec from federalist hegemony in the political arena, anglophone hegemony in the cultural arena, and the Catholic Church—which largely controlled the educational, social services and health systems—in the social arena. Many young technocrats and government officials involved in Lesage's programs eventually left the Liberal party to opt for a more nationalist, even sovereigntist platform during the rest of the decade. These include René Lévesque, engineer of the first Referendum on Sovereignty-Association in 1980.

10 Then provincial prime minister and head of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois, Jacques Parizeau's oft-cited quotation blaming "le vote ethnique" (the ethnic—as in not French-Canadian—vote) for the failure of the 1995 Referendum on Sovereignty represents a most obvious example of this heritage that Québec nationalists, the provincial government, and the PQ itself have consistently worked to counter as early as the 1980s.

11 In Buddhist thought, nirvana represents the spiritual goal for all practitioners, though few will attain it. Sallie B. King defines it as "enlightenment and wisdom" (2009: 15), freedom from the illusion of *samsara* and the bootless desires of *dukkha* (2009: 15-17).

12 Although most visions of Cokaygne, like Bruegel's painting or the American folk song "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," depict only the sensual pleasures of this make-believe world, Rochon's qualification of these pleasures as fleeting remains in keeping with Harry Levin's observation that "the Middle English poem on the Land of Cockaigne is an ironic satire on the idleness, the luxury, and the lechery of the monastic establishment" (1966: 310).

13 The former uttered the original curse that imprisoned the Asven people on their Archipelago because of the *hubris* of their imperialistic leader; four hundred years later, Ivendra led Taïm Sutherland to find the statue of the Ocean God which, once broken, freed the Asven from their curse, allowing them to leave for the mainland, enter the flow of time, and eventually re-settle in the new homeland offered them by Catadial. (See Rochon, *L'Aigle des profondeurs* [2002], *Le Rêveur dans la Citadelle* [1998], *L'Archipel noir* [1999] and *L'Espace du diamant* [1990 ; rev. as *La Dragonne de l'Aurore* [2009]).

14 And probably explicitly references a Jean Dion story which allegorizes this moment titled "Base de négociation" (1992) (see Baker, 1994; Ransom, 2000).

15 Not only did Vayinn bribe the Judges of Destiny so that in *Ouverture* Lame would wrongly be kidnapped by the ants and turned into their larval home (So 383), after his exposure "d'instruments de torture et de livres de magie noire, du jamais vu sur Anid [instruments of torture and black magic books, never seen on Anid]" and "quelques pauvres victimes [a few poor victims]" (So 410) were found in his home.

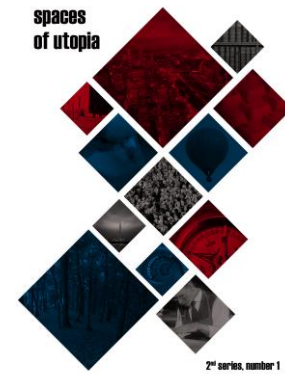
16 Harry Levin views the conclusion of Voltaire's *Candide*—to which we refer below—as an expression of "the continuance of Adam's pursuit" (1966: 312), the creation of an earthly paradise in the Garden of Eden. Voltaire referred on several occasions to the notion of the *paradis terrestre*, not only in his description of Holland in a 1722 letter (*apud* Van Sypetyyn, 1726), but most notably in the oft-cited *mot*, "Le paradis terrestre est où je suis" ("The earthly paradise is where I am;" Voltaire, 1736).

17 This sense of humor also appears in the teachings of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1984: 32), one of Rochon's acknowledged "masters" (*Sorbier* 416).

18 See note 15.

19 A brief discussion of the Blochian aspects of Rochon's work was first presented by me as "Anticipatory Illumination in Science-Fiction Sagas from Québec," at the Scholarly Colloquium in conjunction with Anticipation: World Convention of Science Fiction held in Montréal, August 6-10, 2009.

Postcolonial Utopias or Imagining 'Brave New Worlds': Caliban Speaks Back



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"this is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to speak to you"

bell hooks¹

I have recently completed a doctoral project that focused on lesser-known utopian expressions from non-Western cultures such as Romania, the pre-Israel Jewish diaspora, and postcolonial countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and India. I hypothesized a causal relationship between the conditions of oppression and expressions of utopia. Roughly: the more a people, culture, and/or ethnicity experience physical space as a site of political, cultural, and literal encroachment, the more that distinct culture's utopian ideas tend to appear in non-spatial, specifically, temporal formulations. Under the pressures of oppression, the specific character of an ethnic group/individual, having been challenged within a (often national) space, seeks not a 'where' (utopia), but a 'when' (uchronia or intopia) of mythical, or mystical time. And it is there, or rather, then, where oppressed groups give the utopian impulse expression, and define, protect, and develop their own identity. To support this hypothesis, I examined in detail texts like Mircea Eliade's *The Forbidden Forest*, Sergiu Fărcășan's *A Love Story from the Year 41,042*, Bujor Nedelcovici's *The Second Messenger*, Oana Orlea's *Perimeter Zero*, Costache Olareanu's *Fear*; Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*; Kajo Laing's *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars*; Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery*; and *The Zohar: The Book of Splendor*, and practices like the Sabbath in Classical Kabbalah and the Păltiniș Paidetic school in Romania. Unlike the canonical Western examples, my selections from various non-hegemonic nations and cultures can be seen not to have ceased the

pursuit of identity which drives classic utopian literature, but to have adapted it to those contingencies suffered by non-dominant, invaded, and/or colonized peoples.

I selected specific structural, linguistic, and narrative content elements of these works to capture particular moments in the large-scale move from space to time, while mapping this (often forced) emigration of a particular people's utopian imagination onto the relevant historico-political contexts which shaped it. Cartographical evidence, archival research, and fieldwork strongly suggest that non-Western utopian traditions (Romanian, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Indian, and Jewish mysticism) deploy temporality, metaphysical speculation, introspection, irony, punning, and censor-avoiding subterfuge to a degree, and in ways, which differ greatly from the more canonical cases.

In this essay I will evidence the elements that lead to the inclusion of the three postcolonial utopian examples in the extended study that generated my doctoral project. These three case studies were chosen because they shared a common colonizer, i.e., the British Empire from which they gained independence roughly about the same time: India in 1947, Ghana in 1957, and Nigeria in 1960. Although geographically distant, and linguistically not closely related, they deploy similar narrative techniques, ideological content, and approaches to identity formation (both ethnic and national) that result from the migration of the utopian impulse to its alternative, non-spatially based forms. Written from the perspective of the colonized, the postcolonial utopias analyzed below challenge the colonizer's previous representations of their local characters as subservient, inferior, savage, and, consequently, in need of the white man's civilizing hand. Nigeria's Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods* (1995), Ghana's Kojo Laing's *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars* (1992), and India's Amitav Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Delirium, Fever and Discovery* (1995) are different from the classical examples of the genre. In their accounts of specific, non-hegemonic utopian expressions they favor and deploy linguistic innovation, temporal, and psycho-analytical translocations to address and tailor their specific utopian desires. As a form of resistance, when using the "language of the oppressor," Okri, Laing, and Gosh maneuver it in such a way as to express, in its strangeness of syntax, diction, or deployment, a re-appropriation of agency and the right to manifest their peoples' dreams of independence, nationhood, and utopia. As they represent a rather complicated and variegated category, an extended analysis of these New English Literatures utopian analogues is necessary

here before I proceed with textual analysis and case studies comparisons. I will start by evidencing some of the differences between these examples and those produced within the utopian canon

In *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures* Ralph Pordzik noted that these utopian analogues deploy an expanded repertory that includes “linguistic diversity, lack of unity, inconclusive agency, and willful representation of fantastic chronotopoi” (Pordzik, 2000:18). This repertory is then used to appropriate the language of the oppressor and populate the postcolonial landscape with metanarratives different from those of the previous British master. In addition to experimenting with the tropes of the genre and the language of the previous colonizer, they have to spatially relocate the utopian paradigm. Because such novels are still inspired by the Western idea of locality, they have to “discover” new lands and islands for their imagined communities. Accordingly, the spatial utopeme is purged, or decolonized and deterritorialized of its Western utopian associations. Geography is re-appropriated and the postcolonial utopian locale moved away from the South Seas islands, and the dark, savage continents favored in the canonical examples. As they have no other virgin lands or terra incognita onto which to project their spatially based new communities, postcolonial writers revisit their own contested space and impose on it alternative realities, or *uchronias*, or use them as the locales for culturally-relevant *intopias*. Reclaiming the space, via renaming it, or re-mythologizing it with deities and heroes from their pre-colonization past enables them to place the colonized and the colonizers on more equal and dialogue-inducing ground. The final results of such imagining exercises are postcolonial narratives that belong to the category of – what progressive theorists of the genre like Fredric Jameson and Michel Foucault called *heterotopias*, or spatially overlapping, and occasionally interacting paradigms. Evidently, they incorporate dialogical and ontological variants much more nuanced in their choice of content and form than the classical stalwarts of the genre.

In most cases, this need to understand one’s role in the subaltern relationship goes beyond a realistic presentation of the re-imagined world. Additionally, the subconscious –and its vast riches and potentially dangerous unknown– becomes a new source to be explored to better understand one’s past condition and the means to overcome it. These postcolonial corrections, visibly performed on the geographical and literary environs, produce new narratives and/or dramatically change existing

histories. For writers like Okri, Laing, and Ghosh reclaiming the text is then also a method of interacting with the history previously written by the colonizers and populated—via fictionalized accounts—with subaltern images of the colonized justifying the master’s civilizing efforts. Ultimately, their works address timely questions of nationhood, identity, and futurity in hybrid works whose complexities have been acknowledged by writers like Salman Rushdie and theorists like Homi Bhabha. As such, these postcolonial hybrid works do not propose fixed, rigid utopias, but compose open models that enable the readers to create their own visions of a better society. Needless to say, this is a complicated and arduous affair: the utopian writing is done in/from/about a hybrid geographical, historical, cultural, political, and social space.

So, when approaching the Western utopian genre, New English Literatures writers do so aware of their own history of suffering perpetuated by its tropes; they are, naturally, less likely to engage in reductionist, or dialectical, representations of the “other” as a traditional ontological foil. Instead, they represent the two (or more) interacting communities polyphonically, dialogically, and closely engage with complex issues like memory, identity, agency, and historical and cultural heritage recovery. The writers whose works make the subject of this paper, Ben Okri, Kojouhar Laing, and Amitav Ghosh employ folkloric, mythical, and mystical tropes to recover specific ontologies denied existence and perpetuation in the historic time claimed by the oppressor/conqueror. They take the utopian paradigm to its next level by subsuming its critical and evaluative potential to issues pertaining to *both* the colonized and the colonizer and pose several important questions: How does utopia, a quintessentially spatial and Western project transfer in the contested space of the ex-colonies? How does a Ghanaian, Nigerian, or Indian imagine utopia? How many of their projects’ precepts are borrowed from the colonizer’s utopian theories and practices, and how many are their own? How much of the native culture is recovered in these accounts? And, finally, how is the native language and that of the oppressor used when these “Calibans” are ‘speaking back’?

Pordzik answered some of these important questions in his seminal work on postcolonial utopias when he analyzed, among many other postcolonial examples, the works of Okri, Laing, and Ghosh. He noted that

the alternative world depicted [therein wa]s quite different from the one writers such as William Morris, H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, Burckes [sic] F. Skinner (*Walden Two*, 1975), and Ernest Callenbach (*Ecotopia*, 1977) had in mind when they were depicting the citizens

of their peaceful, just, and benevolent future World State(s). While the latter employed a narrative mode of representational realism based on causal relations and a highly ordered succession of events in order to convey a future compatible with their readers' conception of history and identity, much recent utopian fiction offers the view of a world in which fragmentation, discontinuity, and ambiguity determine the course of action and the striving of the protagonist/reader to make sense of what he or she is given to understand is constantly undermined by the introduction of new perspectives and points of reference that cannot be integrated into a meaningful whole (*idem*, 3).

Analogous utopian narratives are then born from this "clash" between the different discursive modes: "fragmentation, discontinuity, and ambiguity" to which Pordzik refers.

Hybrids of the local dialects and the language of their oppressor, they make excellent use of allusions, puns, and irony: they evidence the need to use such tropes as writing between the lines to signal the inability of the utopian canon's toolbox to deal with complicated postcolonial issues. Accordingly, when finally given a chance to retort to the colonizer's version of utopia, the colonized speak back to the British, change their language, its syntax, and grammar, and boldly insert local dialects and paradigms into the narrative fabric of the postcolonial utopia. In doing so, they succeed not only in adapting the utopian paradigm of the oppressor to their specific cultural conditions, but also in protesting against their continuous dependence on "the oppressor's language."

To illustrate some of these differences between Western and non-Western utopias, and to better understand Okri's, Laing's, and Ghosh's utopian analogues to be discussed in the second part of this paper, it is necessary now to look at two "classical" examples which set, in their respective Western, non-Western cultures, the standard of representation of, and reaction to, the colonial balance of power.

What follows is a necessarily brief comparison of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Aime Césaire's *A Tempest*. Césaire's French version, written in 1969, was a "translation" of Shakespeare's 1611 play. It was also an adaptation, a retelling of the classic story from the point of view of the colonized/oppressed. In Shakespeare's version, Caliban's name, the anagram of the word "can(n)ibal" generated negative connotations that did not encourage the audience's, or the posterity's sympathy for the character nor, for that matter, for the fate of the people he represented. Miranda's famous exuberant lines in the original play,

O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
That has such people in't! (Shakespeare, 1997: 3102).

speak both of the dangers of idealizing the colonizing process and of her innocence. Despite her being highly educated by her father, she is ignorant of human nature, and the roles she and her father play in the subjugation of the natives. The world inhabited by Miranda and the rest of the European characters is “new” only to them. Their leveling narrative presupposes itself grafted on a tabula rasa. The same world is “old” and home to Caliban: yet, he does not have the tools to create and sustain a narrative strong enough to rival that of his masters. Moreover, he is, from the moment contact is made, in a disadvantageous position: he expresses himself in a borrowed medium/language.

In Césaire’s dramatic version, Caliban reacts violently to this intrusion: his ire is evident in the ways he abuses Prospero’s language in an attempt to make space for his own language and reality. His mission is not easy: reconstructing his cultural history from the master’s disparate, disproportionate, and disparaging accounts of his people is a tricky, complex, and lengthy process. He undertakes it willingly, systematically as he formulates his own version of a “brave new world.” In the process, he is also challenging and changing the very tropes of the canonical utopia.

Césaire’s Caliban, while still a slave, is not deformed, and does not attempt rape like his predecessor did. In fact, in an interesting turn of events, Césaire dismisses the Miranda character entirely and makes his tempest focus on the correction of the relationship between the two male protagonists. He makes the enslaved native highly eloquent and assertive: Caliban sounds like a well-educated man who uses this oratorical talent to converse with, and challenge, his oppressor by deploying both the foreign language, which he has mastered, and his native tongue, which he grafts into the “official” language of his island. Exemplary of this oratorical preference is the dialogue he has with Prospero, The savage hybridizes the oppressor’s language when he tells his master that he refuses the inherent yoke that this medium of communication represents:

Caliban: Uhuru!

Prospero: What did you say?

Caliban: I said, Uhuru!

Prospero: Mumbling your native language again! I’ve already told you, I don’t like it. You could be polite, at least; a simple “hello” wouldn’t kill you.

Caliban: Oh, I forgot... But make that as froggy, waspish, pustular and dung-filled a “hello” as possible. May today hasten by a decade the day when all the birds of the sky and beasts of the earth will feast upon your corpse! (Césaire, 2002: 17-18).

What this passage illustrates is the immediate need of many postcolonial utopian writers to recover their displaced native language in order to reconstruct their historical past and draft their peoples' future. This necessary action creates conflict not only between the languages of the colonizer and that of the colonized, but also between their cultures, ideologies, and utopian tropes. Conversely, in the above passage, Caliban deconstructs the very mechanisms through which he and his people were enslaved: he points out the selective teachings, the cultural and linguistic erasure, the prohibition and/or thwarting of local identity formation, etc.

When Prospero tells Caliban that he gave him education and knowledge, the latter replies that the linguistic training he received had been solely for the purpose of making him understand and carry out the orders of the master:

In the first place, that's not true. You didn't teach me a thing! Except to jabber in your own language so that I could understand your orders: chop the wood, wash the dishes, fish the food, plant vegetables, all because you're too lazy to do it for yourself. And as for your learning, did you ever impart any of *that* to me? No, you took care not to. All your science you keep for yourself alone, shut up in those big books. (*idem*, 18-19.)

This contrast between the discursive arsenal of the West and the feeble defense by its colonies is showcased in the above dialogue between the scientifically-minded Prospero and the poetically-reflective Caliban. The latter's pressing need, and his express desire to address and correct the technological and economical disparity imposed on him in the past is common to all cultures that experienced this colonizing process. Scientific and technological advances of the Western world made spatial conquest and the colonization process possible and enabled the inception of literary and applied "utopias." The empires and the powerful nations they engendered used these advantages to take over and transform the land and space of the new worlds. The latter, without such resources, resisted the takeover with less offensive tools: poetry, mythology, mysticism, locally specific word and situational play.

There are additional tropes of colonial and anti-colonial discourse in this revised dialogue between Prospero, the bringer of civilization (language, science, education, religion), and Caliban, who is expected to reinforce his status of inferiority by being thankful for them. Defiant and poetic, Caliban accuses Prospero of damaging his beloved island with the technology he used to defeat the locals. Caliban mirrors here Césaire's own view, i.e., "Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific

knowledge”(qtd. in the Introduction to the Play, 2002: xvi) when he waxes poetically the cause of black freedom:

Sycorax. Mother.
Serpent, rain, lighting.
And I see thee everywhere!
In the eye of the stagnant pool which stares back at me,
through the rushes,
in the gesture made by the twisted root and its awaiting thrust.
in the night, the all-seeing blinded night,
the nostril-less all-smelling night! (*idem*, 18-19)

Because he cannot retort with scientific prowess, Caliban replies with poetic verve. The duel is unequal.

As an additional gesture of independence, Caliban changes the name he was given by his master with one of his choice. The author, through its character, pays homage to one of his most illustrious contemporaries: Malcolm X. Because of this deliberate association, “X”, Caliban’s new name, is not the appellative of “a man without a name” as he claims in his debate with Prospero, but that of a representative personality in the fight for equal rights and the ending of segregation worldwide.

Call me X. That would be best. Like a man without
a name. Or, to be more precise, a man whose nam
has been stolen. You talk about history... well, that’s
history and everyone knows it! Every time you summon
me it reminds me of a basic fact, the fact that
you’ve stolen everything from me, even my identity!
Uhuru! (*idem*, 19-20)

Prospero, of course, resists these efforts and offers Caliban/X a list of other potential names, all with derogatory connotations, which the latter refuses. The master used to call his slave whatever he wanted, and have free reign over his life, possessions, and land. The slave, in turn, outgrows this subaltern condition and bursts with desire to break his chains and exercise his own self-defining and imagining powers.

With these two clashing narratives, Césaire intersects Ariel’s, a spirit in the original play, a mulatto slave in the postcolonial version. Ariel maintains his clairvoyant abilities: he sees that the colonization game dehumanizes *both* players. Césaire and Ariel’s solution is to make Prospero aware of his unjust actions, prevent Caliban from taking revenge on Prospero, and establish a dialogue between the two parties wherein more equal, co-dependent relationships can be established. Ariel’s preferred choice to Caliban’s impending violence is conscience.

This later dialogue between Caliban and Ariel is emblematic of the inherent dissent between the colonized themselves who disagree on the nature of the

corrections and their delivery: violence, or diplomacy. Caliban is bent on hurting Prospero, and doing whatever is necessary to regain control of the island. Ariel is an idealist who believes that, by exposing Prospero to the terrible conditions of the colonized life, he would experience a paradigm shift. He tells Caliban:

Listen to me: Prospero is
the one we've got to change. Destroy his serenity so
that he's finally forced to acknowledge his own injustice
and put an end to it [...]
I've often had this
inspiring, uplifting dream that one day Prospero, you,
me, we would all three set out, like brothers, to build a
wonderful world, each one contributing his own special
thing: patience, vitality, love, willpower too, and rigor,
not to mention the dreams without which mankind
would perish. (*idem*, 27-28)

Césaire's Ariel wants to build a better, even "wonderful" world in which relationships between those involved in its making are equal.

This dialogical way of building "a brave new world" is fraught with perils and challenges. The inertia of past relationships is a reminder that the co-imagining process, in its novelty and complexity, will take a long time to find its parameters and unfold its postcolonial potential. The Caliban/X and Ariel narrative needs to be constructive and cognizant of the fact that "Prospero's" departure will not be followed by immediate ethnic cohesion and economic and political success. In the vacuum of power following this departure, competing local interests and emergent ethnic voices previously leveled by the colonial metanarrative will demand representation and manifestation in any forms of imagining of the postcolonial utopia and nation.

For this to be possible, however, the colonizer needs to undergo similar epiphanies to those espoused by Ariel. Precluding the making of Ariel's "wonderful world," Franz Fanon acknowledged, was the possibility of violence. He opined that, in fact, the colonizers, or the group he categorized as "the other species" has the bigger challenge:

National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: Whatever may be the headings used or the new formula introduced, decolonization is always a violent process.... The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and compelling, in the consciousness of and in the lives of men and women who are colonized. But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the *consciousness* [my emphasis] of another "species" of men and women: the colonizers. (qtd. in the Introduction to the Play, 2002: xvi)

In other words, while both major players, the previously colonized and the previous masters, have to adapt and change in order to participate in the changed reality, the

former by ascending to the neutral point of encounter, the latter by abandoning the hegemonic paradigm. Out of the two, the colonizers have the harder job. Before anything else they have to come to terms with and admit their own agency in the abuses imposed on the “others.” They also have to learn to interact with their victims in a neutral space from which mutually, non-exclusive heterotopian realities could be enacted.¹

When addressing these complex changes of consciousness and lengthy processes of identity formation within their own cultures, Okri, Laing, and Ghosh created characters and situations that illustrate both the promises and conundrums of the postcolonial utopian novel. Nigerian Ben Okri’s masterly constructed *Astonishing the Gods* (1992) illustrates how specific oppressive conditions—such as a black people’s enslavement and omission from history books—could force their utopian desires to turn inward and focus on psychological, cultural, and personal investigations of the hegemonic-subaltern condition that defined their existence. Okri details the travels of an unnamed character who, in the manner of the utopian genre, comes upon an island and goes through an initiatory experience. He meets a community of invisibles and is shown around the beautifully landscaped, peaceful, illuminated place and is impressed with the majesty of the city, its marble buildings, and its overall feeling of peace and prosperity. The character—who is, himself, invisible—is intrigued by this locale and society and feels that he should stay and learn their secrets. He feels that before he could move forward and create his future, he needs to understand his past:

He was born invisible. His mother was invisible too, and that was why she could see him. His people lived content lives, working on the farms, under the familiar sunlight. Their lives stretched back into the invisible centuries and all that had come down from those differently coloured ages were legends and rich traditions, unwritten and therefore remembered. [I]t was in history books that he first learnt of his invisibility. He searched for himself and his people in all of the history books he read and discovered to his youthful astonishment that he didn’t exist. (Okri, 1996: 3)

This invisibility, we find out at one point in the novel, is not one of the body, but one of historical absence. The narrator and his people are invisible not because they cannot be seen, but because, to their rulers, they did not matter beyond their function as work force/slaves. As subalterns, they did not deserve to be mentioned in imperial history books.

At first glance, Okri’s postcolonial utopian novel closely follows a Western utopian pattern: there is a voyage, the traveler arrives at a novel place where he encounters a benevolent people and is shown around by a gentle, patient guide. In this

seemingly paradisiacal place, he arrives at a deeper comprehension and appreciation of human nature and becomes aware of the possibility of different relationships between people:

There was harmony and spring everywhere. There was a difficult joy and a difficult light in the early heroic days. There were no hierarchies. Each person was an equal participant and creator. All worked to the rhythm of the most haunting music, a music full of sorrow and rich with hope. Together they built their towns and hamlets, their palaces and villas, their avenues of angels, their infinite libraries, their exemplary universities. There were no distinction between people, none high, none low, and men fed children while women constructed temples. There was suffering and a profound vision on all their faces. (*idem*, 130)

No complex plot drives this postcolonial novel. Not that the genre itself, in its classical form at least, is characterized by thrilling twists and turns. Yet, in the canonical examples, when the two societies are compared and contrasted to each other, a certain tension builds between the two societies. In this intopian postcolonial example, the tension, as the adjective indicates it, is born within the character and so is the critical estrangement generated: although he travels, the real changes happen within before they can manifest in visible reality.

The character becomes aware of his primary role in the quality of the relationships he develops along the way. His desire to understand what engendered this society and the mechanism that produced “palaces and villas, ... avenues of angels, ... infinite libraries, ... exemplary universities”, (*ibidem*) turns inward to gauge his own agency in the making of reality. In the process, by assignment, design, or personal choice, he experiences doubt. His guide tells him at one point that he has been expected, that he has an important role to play. Yet, the character has to find his own way, and learn to manifest his own reality, one which should benefit everybody else on that island. In the process he learns to control his own urges and impulses, even the most primary ones, as when he is visited by a most beautiful woman whose advances he refuses. Her presence and many of the other things that happen to him change not his outside reality, but his inside one. When the mysterious guide uses riddles, parables, and paradoxes to explain complicated concepts to him he has to remain alert, ask questions constantly, and maintain an increased state of consciousness. This way of interacting with one’s surroundings and circumstances is exactly what Fanon talked about as being required of those involved in the process of decolonization.

It is an arduous task, as the inner transformation is quite intense. Okri’s character, for example, feels overwhelmed at how quickly his thoughts become reality and he

goes from being the object of history to being the maker of his own and, with others, the co-maker of his community and the world's history. He has become the sole master of his destiny and history and, his guide tells him, the burden of knowledge and of action rests solidly on his own shoulders. Such power and agency need to be applied correctly to avoid the mistakes of the past. His guide is adamant about this as he tells him at the beginning of his initiation: "Whatever you see is your personal wealth and paradise. You're lucky if you can see wonderful things. Some people who have been here see only infernal things. What you see is what you are, or what you will become" (*idem*, 135). The back and forth dialogue is part of the character's initiation; his frustration is obvious as he is constantly asked to consider the implications of his decisions. He is, understandably, both empowered and overwhelmed with the task at hand.

Having earned command of his thoughts, he sees both the invisible and the visible, both the already materialized and the myriad potentialities in flux. He learns that the visible city he came upon when he landed on the island was just a dream meant to deceive the eyes of (weaker) men. Reality, in fact, is that which he creates and destroys constantly. By doing this never-ending work of creation, he learns that nothing is static, eternal, or complete, and finally understands the nature of his people's invisibility. He also learns to appreciate how they overcame it: by periodically exiting linear history and revisiting defining moments and events of pedagogical importance from their past. When breaking free from their comfort zone, they learned critical skills that prevented them from repeating mistakes, and empowered them with the agency to change the status quo. This process of exiting history and accessing moments of cosmic importance is what enables the 'invisible' people in Okri's novel to realize their own agency in shaping the world around them. In this case, agency manifests instantly: the manifested society and locale is utopian if people's thoughts and actions are elevated, considerate, and noble. Alternatively, they are dystopian, if their creators' thoughts are dismal, selfish, and destructive.

This ontological fluidity points out at an important difference between Western and non-Western utopias, clearly evidenced in this postcolonial novel. Instead of having a static, embalmed locale, and a well-cemented status quo, this society and its citizens stand under the imperative of consistent and conscious self-reflection and change. Here, the invisibles' society could move from utopia to dystopia in the blink of an eye depending on changes in their thought patterns. To have an ultimately

enjoyable and enduring utopia, they have to co-create it, constantly, actively. This learning through suffering theme, the waking up and owning to one's own historical power suggests that prolonged historical suffering has changed the writer, the characters, and the peoples they represent. It made them aware of the complex causes of their predicament and their role in addressing and correcting it. These insightful ruminations outline what Pordzik inspiringly called, by way of borrowing his colleagues' ideas,¹ an intopian process.

Ghanaian Kojo Laing's *Major Gentl and the Achimota War*, on the other hand, is a linguistic and ideological tour de force, detailing the conflicts on the ground, post colonizer departure. The plot is complex and difficult to comprehend, the language used is convoluted, innovative, and fantastic. Many of its narrative elements defy spatial, temporal, and narrative logic. The novel intrigues and captivates through its linguistic bravado, its superbly crafted irony, the barbed comments on the vicarious ideas of the colonizers, and on their understanding of the differences between "rich countries and poor countries" of the world. The story takes place in the year 2020, in Achimota City and, instead of chapters, is divided in "zones." The continent and the rich countries of the first world had dumped language in Africa and abandoned the black continent to its own devices. The region of Accra where these wars take place is the battleground for much more than physical combat. The Achimota city, the only one surviving a terrible war, has been, for decades, engaged in battles with both European and local enemies. In detailing the warring parties and pointing out their many similarities, Laing challenges the idea of strict dichotomies between the continent of Africa and Europe, the latter's rigid systems of values and beliefs, and its white European citizens' desire to maintain clear racial and cultural demarcations between white and non-white peoples. He uses surrealistic techniques and magical realism to point at the ridiculous claims of a future Europe trying to keep its "others" at bay. Laing has the main character, Major Gentl, who has been leading the many battles against the faraway "ethnically-pure" Europeans, fight his biggest one against a local foe, a speaking carrot millionaire. In this Sisyphean quest, Major Gentl's troops include an eclectic mix of Roman soldiers, speaking bugs and elephants, shadows, and here and there, the occasional realistic character.

In addition to the surrealist atmosphere resulting from the presence of these characters, the Ghanaian writer also changes the parameters and the dicta of canonical utopia. He uses inventive puns, inspired paradoxes, and countless philosophical

riddles that make his novel a challenge to read. Not only is the plot multilayered and, from page to page, the characters shifty in their alliances, but the presence of a carrot as an important protagonist requires that the readers undertake a significant paradigmatic shift to accept the equal participation of a vegetable in the otherwise human driven story. Regardless, the carrot character provides comedic relief even as he proceeds to act as a despicable agent of discontent throughout. Laing's use of the English language unsettles its syntax and diction, and redeploys it in poetic format to introduce the unusual characters and events. Customary utopian tropes like humor, irony, puns, speaking non-human characters, etc., are deployed in unusual ways. As if these innovations and aggressions upon both the utopian genre and the English language were not enough, Laing makes necessary the consultation of a non-English word glossary. The following extended passage shows just how much he departs from both the tropes of the utopian genre and how intent he is to make his reader engage in the co-creation of narrative meaning:

Pogo, the carrot millionaire, had a fast-yard laugh for difficult situations of this nature, a laugh that would blow both his wife and his girls off course if they happened to be standing in roughly the same place. Pogo was kind and cunning to all, amassing his wealth through carrot-inspired intrigues, through wars, delicate helicopters, his own beautiful Kwahu scarp-sharp thighs, and bright eyes that didn't need one beam from anyone else's power. Pogo was rich enough to have his own lights. But his wife Delali, who was growing more and more fond of bananas and less and less of carrots, was getting worried because she often found herself daydreaming about Major Gentl. No reason, just that his gentleness grew beside her breasts; and for this she would often give the sign of the cross in the shape of her husband's *pioto* [glossary consultation discloses that "*pioto*" means "*pants*"]. Sometimes Pogo would be so sensitive that all the carrots around him would be sliced with the pervading subtlety; and it was in one of these moods that he had built a beautiful miniature building that he installed in one of the few filthy old-fashioned gutters, so that he would feel the paradox blowing over him with the bad whiff.... He wore robes around which grew songs of praise, so that you could not blame him if he didn't want to listen to his own innate modesty. Horses and helicopters brought his breakfast in the mornings. (Laing, 1992: 11-12)

Beside the unusual reality it presents: helicopters delivering breakfast, carrots "sliced with pervading subtlety," robes that send out songs of praise, and so on, the novel forces the reader to pay special attention to alternative linguistic sounds, spellings, and culturally-specific puns.

The above passage contains words from Ga and Hsua languages and shows the same intent to hybridize the language of the colonizer with one's own that Caliban expressed in Césaire's *A Tempest*. The excerpt above and the entire story, for that matter, could not be properly understood without consulting the end glossary on the use of which Laing himself insisted, in the preface to the reader. Resounding Ghanaian words ("agromentous"—"playful," "Ataame"—"God, Good God!"),

“abusuapanyin”–“the head of the family”), or funny ones (“fikifiki”–“sex,” “logologo”–“intercourse”), and numerous synonyms (“Ataame” and “Ewurade,” both of which mean “God, Good God!”) point at the bounty and beauty of the local languages, very likely unknown to most Western readers. These multi-lingual entries require that the readers consult the end glossary, repeatedly, as without them the meaning of the story cannot be fully grasped, and the local flavor and color cannot be truly experienced. Thus, intentionally, the reading of Laing’s novel is a process that requires more than following the plot, page after page. The reader also needs to learn words in several local Western African languages and is thus brought to the text. By engaging with it via repeated glossary consultations, s/he is familiarized with the non-Western composite cultures of Ghana. This authorial choice to make the reader engage with the text, and encounter complex native linguistic and cultural elements on their own “turf,” demands that the non-Ghanaian reader leaves a certain comfort zone and meets this account of the utopia of “the other” on its own terms. As such, despite its evident and intentional departures from the canonical format of the paradigm, Laing’s novel performs the estrangement function that characterizes the utopian genre.

This estrangement is necessary to evaluate the situation on the ground; it is no coincidence that Laing chose war and never-ending battles as the background for his novel. The borders of modern Ghana, previously a British colony known as the Gold Coast and famous for its cocoa production, do not overlap (by far) with the country’s ancestral land. After the departure of the Europeans, this fact created enduring conflicts with the neighboring countries attempting to recreate their own ancestral borders. Major population exchanges and mutual expulsions of citizens challenged both the coalescing of a stable Ghanaian identity and the political balance in the area. Several (bloodless) military coups and assassinations later and the constant change of political power between the Convention People’s Party and the National Liberation Movement, the country’s two most powerful parties, greatly debilitated the first Western African colony to gain its independence from the British. After the latter’s departure, oppressive conditions on the ground endured and, now perpetuated by autochthonous rulers, continued to challenge the time-intensive and spatially-dependent practices of imagining the nation, and/or imagining it as utopia. In these conditions, literary accounts such as Laing’s address and alert the local readership as much as they do their international audience. Through its changed content and form,

Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars signals the presence of oppressive conditions that affect not only its message, but the means of its delivery to the audience.

If Ben Okri, the Nigerian writer, challenged and complicated the agency of the colonized in the creation of utopia and Kojo Laing, the Ghanaian writer, engaged the reader in cultural and linguistic study, Indian author Amitav Ghosh addressed, in his *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Delirium, Fever, and Discovery*, the exclusion of his people from the history of scientific discoveries recorded in British specialty books. His novel addresses the same conflict showcased by Césaire in his play, *A Tempest*. In Césaire's work, Caliban accused Prospero of withholding scientific knowledge from him so that his resulting ignorance justified his continuous enslavement and provided the basis for his subaltern condition. Within the multilayered plot of the British-Indian version of this conflict, Ghosh constructs a space where the situation could be remedied, and the balance corrected in such a way that India's involvement in scientific research is acknowledged. The main character, Murugan, searches relentlessly for historical evidence that his ancestors had been interested and heavily invested in scientific discoveries long before, and continued to so under, the British colonial rule.

The narrative account of Murugan's quest is complicated, and like Laing, Ghosh challenges established, Western, modes of literary construction. He works with shifting puzzle pieces: characters, historical situations, cultural allusions, and the interactions between the colonizing British and the multi-ethnic population of India seem to follow no particular logic, no specific narrative order. The reader is constantly unsettled by the changes and apparent discrepancies in the plot. The main story is repeatedly interrupted by theological and magical discourses, and the intervention of new characters. Even the main character seems to be confounded by the constant geographical translocations and his immersion in the alternative realities he needs to visit in order to accomplish his redemptive, scientific mission. Murugan, like Okri's nameless character, has to recover the unrecorded stories of his people and rewrite a history that incorporates both colonizer and colonized and better represent what he calls the "whole new story."

So, in his travels, Murugan is keen to uncover the rich spiritual universe of India, the enduring traces of its pre-colonial past, and the indigenous contributions to the British discourse of scientific discovery. The conflicting relationship between native Indian mythos and colonizing Western logoi is told by recounting past abuses and

inequities at the hands of the British. This need to recuperate identity defining, and agency enhancing, key historical moments is reflected in Murugan's poignant introspections about his individual fate and his desire to have his life, and that of his people, count. He asks two of his female friends to "write him in" the history of India when the time is right:

'Promise me that you'll take me across if I don't make it on my own.'
Urmila's eyes widened. 'Make it where?' she said
'Wherever.'
She laughed out loud, throwing back her head. 'I don't know what you are talking about.'
'But promise me anyway,' Murugan insisted. 'Promise you'll take me, even if they want you to leave me behind?'
'Why would anyone want to leave you behind?' said Urmila. 'You're the only one who knows what's happened, what's happening. You said yourself that someone had gone to a lot of trouble to help you make connections.'
'That's just the problem', said Murugan. 'My part in this was to tie some threads together so that they could hand the whole package over in a little bundle some time in the future, to whomever it is they're waiting for.'
'And how do you know it's not you they've been waiting for?'
'It can't be me', said Murugan flatly. 'You see, for them the only way to escape the tyranny of knowledge is to turn it on itself. But for that to work they have to create a single perfect moment of discovery when the person who discovers is also that which is discovered. The problem with me is that I know too much and too little.' (Ghosh, 1997: 253-254)

What this extended passage shows is that Murugan, like Okri's nameless character, refuses to remain 'invisible,' especially when this condition is not one resulting from *not* being interested in the process of scientific inquiry, but one of intentional omission by the colonial authority.

Additionally, this specific scene brings to light another difference between Western and non-Western utopias. Not only does the colonizer control knowledge, and the colonized crave to participate in its production, but the two have, historically, approached the process from disparate vantage points. Traditionally, the West engaged in epistemically fruitful, rational discourse, which other cultures favored more mystical approaches to understand the world and process its realities. However, when confronted with the inequity resulting from not being able to co-participate in the Western discourse of knowledge and power, the subaltern, here Murugan, attempts to gain equal admittance to the scientific discourse and use it for the benefit of his own people. This is not an easy task as he—and the emergent nation he represents—has to achieve a few other important and difficult things in the process. What makes his quest important is the timeliness of the endeavor. What makes it difficult is the situation on the ground, one which is best illustrated by the difference between Western and non-Western modes of imagining utopia and the nation. The Western paradigm details the compare and contrast encounter of two communities,

one of which is well established, fully-coalesced, and politically, economically, and culturally operational and strong. The encounter with the other community is told from this community's perspective which, most of the time, is cast in a positive light and represented as superior to its foil. In the non-Western paradigm, it is the yet to be defined community that, while proceeding with the comparative and contrastive exercises of the genre, has to also attend to self-definition and self-evaluation.

In Ghosh's novel, this process of identity formation and scientific appropriation is helped along by the late revelation of what exactly the Calcutta chromosome is. The last scenes of the novel introduce several new characters, who turn out to be reincarnated heroes, or alter egos of the main character: famous intellectuals and artists not credited for their work in the past. They have all been, and continue to be connected to each other, the history of the land, and that of the world despite the fact that none of them, or any of their accomplishments, figured prominently in colonial history books. When the various pieces of the narrative puzzle finally fall into place, India's colonial history is written over by these recovered scientific episodes. The Calcutta chromosome is, after all, a gene that makes reincarnation possible. This continuity, through reincarnation, of gifted Indian individuals allows them to continue building ethnic and nation identity, a process that had been denied to them by repeated historical disruptions on the ground.

This concept of incarnation, which in Ghosh's novel allows the characters to recover agency from the British colonizer, is also revelatory of an important intra-ethnic/national inequity that sets up the stage for a twist in my major argument. I have stated that this project is about proving that conditions of oppressions by a foreign other or the same are responsible for the resulting expressions of utopia. In my doctoral project, I have shown that this was, indeed, the case in communist Romania, dispersed localities inhabited by ethnic Jews, and West African and Indian colonies of the British Empire. Now, I want to look a bit more closely at the equation of power within India, more specifically, at the oppressive conditions generated by the still extant caste system, founded on principles of selective merit and incarnation. This complex caste system within the Indian nation points out another potentially undermining factor in the creation and maintenance of "imagined communities" like the nation. After gaining its independence from the British in 1947, India experienced continuous religious strife, which has since caused several territorial re-arrangements and partitions. The year of its independence India lost two major territories. They

soon became independent polities themselves: Bangladesh and Pakistan. And while India's deeply entrenched democratic practices prevented internal turmoil (like that experienced by the other ex-British colonies already discussed in this paper) from throwing the country in economic disarray or bend it under military rule, it failed to address many other internal problems, like the caste system, which is one of the most prolific generators of inequalities within the nation. Faced with the needs and emergent ethnic narratives of many other minority groups, speaking thousands of languages and dialects, the democratic system has managed to stunt possible upheavals and generate a national narrative sufficiently strong to enlist the co-participation of most such groups.

Still, this intra-cultural hierarchy in India highlights the fact that my original argument might be in need of a major revision. Before naming it, I would like to revisit the logical trail that brought us to this crossroad. We have observed that certain situations are not culturally specific: utopian aspiration is universal, as is discrimination, oppression, racism, and sexism. We have also noticed the recent emergence of non-Western, utopian analogous narratives and practices that showcase the ways to maintain ethnic and national identity amid historical chaos. We will now add that these conditions, which were specific to these groups in the past, are, in the twenty-first century, the plight of many. The same travails await both previously thought of as Western and non-Western groups as they attempt to ensure their ethnic and national survival amid great geo-political and economic shifts. The shifting of populations on the ground, and the fluctuation of national borders on the political map of the world are mirrored by similar, fluid, and composite phenomena in the ways narratives of imagined communities are created. Consequently, as both utopia and the nation are imagined in more complex ways and are shaped at the intersection of various media (film, literature, internet, music) from within and from outside cultural borders, the differences that might otherwise jeopardize the engendering of such projects seem to find solution in the shared need for unity and identity, while sharing a diminishing spatial resource. In other words, the Calibans, the previously oppressed, are not alone in their quest for a "brave new wonderful world." The Prosperos, the ex-masters, have fully— and responding to Ariel's wish, *consciously*— entered the co-imagining process of this shared, if complicated, world.

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Postcolonialism & Utopianism: “Real” Indians in the New World

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Recently, in a course concerning “Literature of the Americas,” some of my students were surprised and even shocked to read about the cruel mistreatment of non-Europeans described in letters written by Christopher Columbus. This led them to re-examine tales of bold exploration undertaken by a heroic underdog who succeeded where all others failed, in a seemingly classic example of the American Dream, of determination and perseverance being rewarded by triumph in the “New World” utopia. Students were fascinated that a historical figure had been latterly rendered heroic and worthy of a national holiday, despite mixed renown in his own era and epistolary evidence of his inhumane attitudes concerning those he often pejoratively called “natives.” This pedagogical anecdote implicates multiple contemporary (trans)national narratives that can be tracked back to fifteenth century European sea voyages resulting in the colonization of North and South America. The problem with these narratives, however, is that often it can be difficult to separate fact from fiction, history from mythology, or actuality from wishful thinking. As we learned in my classroom, a failure to question dominant historical narratives results in misleading impressions of past events and people. Achieving a more credible understanding of cultural icons such as Columbus actually requires recognizing multiple narratives in dialogue rather than uncritically accepting a prevailing interpretation.

Herein lies a central preoccupation of both utopianism and postcolonialism, two *counter*-discourses of futurity that co-evolved with Western modernity and its historically shifting versions of imperialism and capitalism. In addition to theorizing about the utopian and the postcolonial independently of one another, as I do below, it is also useful to map the now-mutually influential relationship between these two (at first, perhaps seemingly unrelated) modes of analysis, for example by attending to

contemporary symbolism associated with the American Dream which has, over time, come to be most connected with the United States. Doing so exposes how very strongly visions of a New World continue to shape global possibilities, politics, and communities centuries after landfall in what we now call the Americas.

To demonstrate such a claim, this essay describes a recent neo-Americanization program that strikingly illuminates the shared ground of utopianism and postcolonialism. The case in point is a unique local initiative that began in the early 2000s in upstate New York called “GuyaneseOpportunities”¹; the program targeted ethnic Indians who had emigrated from South America, revealing an unpredicted intersection of discourses about “natives.” Indo-Guyanese identities are rather hard to categorize, resulting as they do from systems of indenture between the 1803s and the early 1900s in the colony the British called “Guiana.” Due to limited familiarity with the particular postcolonial conjunctures and in unacknowledged reaction to certain myths about racial-ethnic minorities, GuyaneseOpportunities sought out ethnic Indians who emigrated from Guyana to the U.S., consequently reviving and reifying belief in America as a meritocratic utopia. GuyaneseOpportunities thereby exposed the ways in which immigration to the United States simultaneously represents on-going investment in the utopian American Dream *and* the return to earlier imperialist fantasies about new worlds, which engendered distinctive (post)colonial identities that are being re-defined once again in the U.S.

I. Imaginary Worlds: Utopias, Nations, (Post)Colonies

European voyages of so-called discovery from the late fifteenth century onward were symptoms of an emerging modernity and global capitalism that inspired significant epistemological reassessments when diverse groups of people first came into contact with one another in what would become the Americas. Not only were individuals motivated by curiosity, adventure, acquisitiveness, moral superiority, or conquest, but they also dreamt of *terra nova* or a *tabula rasa*, images of which were so prevalent in letters and other documents crafted by figures like Columbus. The opportunity to begin anew, to shrug off the seemingly implacable problems of corrupt Old World societies, to assert one’s own will on the world—these were irresistible lures for all manner of people, including the rich and the poor, persecuted as well as proselytizing religions, those with intent violent or peaceful. The motivating

preoccupation with newness ushered in an age of conversion on many interrelated levels, including social, economic, religious, ideological, and agricultural. In this context of pervasive exploration and colonization, Thomas More's fictional representations of his society in *Utopia* contributed to a dynamic transcultural dialogue. As Antonis Balasopoulos describes it, the early modern utopia was one of "parallel encodings of political, ontological, and epistemological crisis at the beginning of the sixteenth century" revealing a "shift of perspective that radically transform[ed] the import of legible or visible signs" (Balasopoulos, 2006: 124, 128). Balasopoulos describes how, after explorers' started mapping new geographies, the symbolism of the New World accreted to such great dimensions that the possibility—even the necessity—of reinvention and rejuvenation became central values of the evolving hegemonic world order.

Utopia, or "no place," was a fictional conceit employed by More, following Plato and others before him, to populate an imaginary geography that can be read as a tool for critiquing his actual society. In his text that commingles fiction and fact (for instance, implying that the narrator Hythloday is a traveling companion to an actual European explorer, Vespucci, and fictionalizing the author himself), More depicted a supposedly "wise and good" (More, 1991: 40) place called Utopia, leaving future generations of readers around the world to puzzle out his neologism. Since More's publication of *Utopia*, many thinkers have joined him in theorizing about what "good place" humans might actually be able to create. And these stories always have the potential of altering the "real," since truly compelling utopias rarely stay contained between the covers of a book. In a prominent example, B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* inspired dozens of intentional communities in the 1960s and 70s. Although most of these are no longer extant and the majority of Renaissance utopias have long been forgotten, More succeeded in providing a formal precedent for an author to propose a fictional community (either utopian or anti-utopian) that acts as a mirror in which a reflected society can discern facets of itself.

My working definition of utopianism—based on influential scholarship including Ruth Levitas's encyclopedic overviews and Peter Stillman's description of thought experiments—is a set of processes in varied forms that test previous practices and offer opportunities to speculate about a different future, just as New World imagery has long reflected. I argue that these utopian theories represent competing

historiographies with distinct variations that necessitate active, ongoing deconstruction. Utopianism can therefore aid in exposing how master narratives, even or especially those that bespeak authority and tradition, are often disastrously untrustworthy. A utopian strategy for confronting this is similar to what Jacques Derrida called “epistemological liberation” (Derrida, 1998: 83), which means learning from the unchangeable past while *re*-interpreting that past and imagining the future more creatively. Each version of utopianism responds to specificities of time and place, which define the parameters and possibilities for newness.

In conjunction with “nation,” “utopia” thus represents a dominant narrative emerging from modernity that has had no less significant an impact on contemporary ideologies. Indeed, the same sets of phenomena inspired both the political form and the narrative genre. In *Utopia*, More entertained criticisms of sovereign and church, which had direct relevance to his own circumstances; he joined many of his contemporaries in thinking not only about alternative practices but also about potential new state forms for testing those alternatives. The novel anticipated some possibilities for sociopolitical collectivity that have since become normative since, from models of ideal communities like More’s, new nations as well as national identities emerged. Utopianism thus allows for a clarification of defining logics of citizenship, or what Benedict Anderson describes as “narratives of identity” (Anderson, 1991: 205). This phrase is from Anderson’s seminal *Imagined Communities*, in which he attends to the related projects of modernity and nation-building in terms of the motivations driving their formation as well as the imaginative work that contributes to their cultural persistence. In a related analysis influenced by Anderson’s, in *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*, literary scholar Phillip Wegner notes that the narrative utopia is “a uniquely modern literary genre” (Wegner, 2002: xv) that serves “as both a way of telling and of *making* modern history” because “there has been a continuous exchange of energies between the imaginary communities of the narrative utopia and the imagined communities of the nation-state” (*idem*, xvi, emphasis added), pointing out that the real world and our narratives about it are always in dynamic dialogue. As Wegner writes, for example, More’s work envisioned “a radically new and deeply spatialized kind of political, social, and cultural formation: that of the modern nation-state” (*idem*, xxii). Indeed, not just nation-states but *nationalism* and utopianism have

been intimately connected and mutually informative ideals. Like utopias, nations are constructed through strategically plotted narratives and customs that enable particular politics of belonging, even though the nation has become “the increasingly naturalized expression of both the space and the subjectivity of modern history” (*idem*, xxii). Noting the similarities between national (or imagined) and utopian (or imaginary) worlds reminds us that, rather than being representations of essential group similarities of race, ethnicity, religion, origins, etc., nations are instead sets of stories that have been deemed meaningful and representative by some but which nonetheless often arouse earnest debates among citizens.

Always already contested spaces, the nations eventually established through European utopianism in the New World or elsewhere often proved unsustainable, in part because of resistance from colonized groups, leading to the contemporary postcolonial era. Without rehashing both productive and often frustrating debates about how best to parse the concept of postcolonialism, it is important to specify my usage in this analysis: “postcolonial” signifies historical moments after colonization ends (which are admittedly more suitably described as being “neo”- rather than “post”-colonial), heterogeneous anti-imperialist strategies, and the scholarly context in which interested parties continue to disagree about how to define terms such as subaltern, cosmopolitan, or progress. As with my definition of utopianism, my working definition of postcolonialism focuses on singular opportunities for unpacking binaristic logic and a commitment to being skeptical about inherited truths, thus possibly the epitome of critical thinking. For example, Henry Schwarz summarizes that postcolonialism “works to make [the politics of dominance and the] relation of unequal power more visible with the goal of ending it...in this sense [it] is the radical philosophy that interrogates both the past history and ongoing legacies of European colonialism in order to undo them” (Schwarz/Ray, 2000: 4). For scholars, postcolonialism has therefore named processes of *de*-centering the methodologies, assumptions, and superiority of empire, not only through anti-colonizing activism but also through focused critiques of colonial discourse.

Furthermore, postcolonialism’s entanglement with utopianism seems to have been inevitable. As Bill Ashcroft writes, “a colonial utopia, in which civilization, prosperity, and amenity are established, a utopia regulated by the ordering power of a higher civilization, is absolutely fundamental to imperialism’s discourse of self-

justification.” If the motivation for colonization is cast as a “belief in a ‘better’ world,” then this story of the relationships between diverse communities implies noble idealism. In response, competing narratives that serve a different “utopian function” (Ashcroft, 2007: 413) are represented by anti- and postcolonial (e.g., cultural) nationalisms which envision resistance to colonial rule as heroic idealism. A number of postcolonial studies scholars have contributed to an interdisciplinary dialogue about such narrative traditions and gestured to the mutually defining relationship between utopianism and (post)colonialism. For instance, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge theorize that postcolonialism calls attention to the “impossible absent standard” represented by the imperial center, in response to which the peripheries seek out suitable narratives of their own construction (Mishra/Hodge, 1994: 276). And Padmini Mongia focuses on those ways in which postcolonial theory represents “a rethinking of the very terms by which knowledge has been construed” (Mongia, 1997: 5), just as I posit utopianism does.

Recently, reading postcolonialism and utopianism as anti-hegemonic counter-discourses, Ashcroft and Ralph Pordzik have focused on tracing other underlying correspondences between the two theoretical stances. For instance, Ashcroft identifies in postcolonial engagements with utopias and utopianism “a distinct form of cultural and political hope.” He describes such postcolonialism as “a utopianism almost completely devoid of utopias” that “gesture[s] toward a resolution of utopian contradictions dialogically” (Ashcroft, 2009: 8). Ashcroft suggests here that the stereotypically static and ahistorical utopia associated with classical Western narrativity is replaced in the postcolonial context with an open-ended conversation about what hope means for specific groups as well as for larger (national) collectives. In *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures*, Pordzik focuses on allegories of national identity by postcolonial writers, tracing twofold effects: one, “faith in a progressive idea of history bringing about liberation” and two, the need for “an enabling cultural myth” that might afford paradigms for genuine belonging. Defining utopia as a “literary form that has always advocated for the best possible form of government” (Pordzik, 2001: 2), Pordzik portrays this imagined state not as a material construct but as a “program of interrogation and dehierarchization” that potentially enables a “quest” for a truly *postcolonial* future. Invoking a number of classical literary genres,

Pordzik concentrates on how the utopian tradition is particularly relevant to postcolonialism.

Another important guide in mapping overlapping territory between utopianism and postcolonialism, Robert J. C. Young interprets a variety of political and intellectual positions in terms of their contestatory motivations. Rather than seeking a commonality of purpose or style, Young instead emphasizes the degree to which instantiations of postcolonialism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are varied, even contradictory. He invokes the concept of montage to describe the layered histories of sites of long-term imperialist influence, describing representations that are made up of disparate parts irreversibly connected together to render a unique design in which the components nonetheless maintain a distinct presence. Young writes that “Postcolonialism claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being” (Young, 2003: 2), citing what is a recognizably utopian theme in More’s genre-inspiring text. Young emphasizes the types of critique affected by postcolonialism in specific when he further argues that it “names a politics and philosophy of activism” which, by challenging inequality, “continues in a new way the anti-colonial struggles of the past” (*idem*, 4). The most suggestive aspects of Young’s analysis include his interpretations of postcolonialism as “turning the world upside down” (*idem*, 2), as intervention, and finally as a challenge to established privilege and power—all of which recall the dramatic transformations in worldview encoded in the early modern utopia, as described by Balasopoulos.

Partly because they potentially disrupt various binaries that pervade post-Enlightenment rationalist thinking, postcolonialism and utopianism therefore both represent active ideological problem-solving particularly in relation to shifting meanings of “nation.” This is because the interplay between processes of naming a nation(s) and policing its boundaries, metaphorical and actual, results in a lack of certainty that both postcolonial and utopian stances have exploited in order to imagine a different, ideally better, future than dominant narratives might assume. Other parallels between postcolonialism and utopianism include an emphasis on deconstruction and rethinking the status quo, a history of contested definitions and seemingly ambiguous implications, as well as strong doubts about “on the ground” applicability. More correspondences between utopianism and postcolonialism are

made manifest upon closely reading recent trends in Indian immigration to the United States.

II. Who is “Indian” in America?

The ambiguity of the term “Indian” in the U.S. context reinforces how utopianism and postcolonialism—themselves dynamic and hybridized processes—are intractably conjoined by the palimpsestic histories associated with the New World. Among stories that have since been over-written but not without dramatic lasting consequences, Columbus infamously misnamed the inhabitants of the Americas whom he encountered on his voyages to what he presumed to be India. Late twentieth century immigration to the U.S. thus represents an arresting irony, such that India *is* located in America in the form of diasporic Asian communities taking advantage of imperial legacies in order to relocate to the alleged land of opportunities. And so travelers to the Americas today find “real” Indians inhabiting these realms, in that the geographical name has precedence, as compared to those groups often currently described as “Native Americans.” The alleged jewel in the crown of the British Raj, the territories of the Indian subcontinent were historically attractive acquisitions, in terms of colonial resources and markets, but also because of some notions of “culture” that inhered to “Indianness” and which contribute to assumptions about model minorities in the U.S. In previous scholarship, I critiqued such stereotypes for being based on faulty assumptions of authenticity related to racial, ethnic, or national categories (Jain, 2011: 204-10). We must acknowledge instead that shared historical origins in the subcontinent are now represented by a diversity of contemporary identities, inevitably rendering it unpredictable “how to be” South Asian¹ anywhere in the global diaspora, including in the United States. The elusiveness of so being and naming is further emphasized by the use of the term “Indian” in the United States to simultaneously reflect historically, geographically, and culturally distant groups of people in the Americas and in Asia.

(East) Indians in the U.S. today are very different kinds of “natives” than the groups encountered in the Americas by colonizers like Columbus. Subsequent to major immigration reform after World War II, about two million South Asian diasporans from the Indian subcontinent have settled in the United States. The hemisphere to which they relocated has been radically transformed, not least in terms

of information availability, technologies, and worldviews, from when early European voyagers communicated their utopian fantasies about the Americas to their contemporaries. However, echoes of those voices are still audible because, in the intervening centuries, different individuals and communities have revived New World the dream of plenty and possibility.

South Asians participate in this continuing story and there is much to be learned about what *they* have discovered in America at the turn of the twenty-first century. For instance, along with a shared history of having had to “gain” Independence (and Partition) from the British Empire, South Asians are counted as a minority in the U.S., a status that is arguably analogous to being colonized in terms of racialized hierarchies and assumptions about who truly belongs in America. This positionality is crucial to recognize even though, in contrast to other immigrant groups, South Asian cohorts relocating to the U.S. after 1965 are often characterized by high educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and “privileges” of being formerly colonized by the British, such as contemporary knowledge of the lingua franca (i.e., English) and some familiarity with the “West” given its indelible historical influence on South Asia. This degree of privilege is not common for South Asians in certain other sites of diaspora (including Guyana) and U.S. South Asians also differ from their predecessors who usually relocated as part of the Raj, both within and outside of systems of indentured servitude. Among diasporic communities throughout the world, from North America to Africa to the Caribbean, it must be acknowledged that South Asian professionals migrating from the subcontinent to the U.S. between the late 1960s and the 1990s are often considered to be the very “model” of good minorities.

In sharp contrast to these usually middle-class cohorts, Indo-Guyanese communities are descended from a labor force that was imported to South America by the British after the abolition of the slave trade but whose experiences of exploitation remained nearly identical to the slaves whose former quarters they sometimes came to occupy. Currently there are between two and three hundred thousand Guyanese residing in the U.S., descended from those Indians servants and African slaves. However, most Americans have little familiarity with Indo-Guyanese communities because of their simultaneous categorization as U.S. American, Indian, South American, and Caribbean. In the early 2000s, having become aware of this unique

community via a group of Indo-Guyanese residents from Queens, NY, who were potentially interested in relocation, Mayor Albert P. Jurczynski of upstate Schenectady envisioned reversing the economic downturns that had been affecting his small city for decades. In appeals to Indo-Guyanese families to tour the city, Jurczynski emphasized the supposedly higher quality of life and demonstrably cheaper real estate that Schenectady would assist hardworking newcomers in acquiring. His blandishments that his city could “make the American dream happen” (Personal interview) persuaded enough people that Schenectady soon experienced the migration of thousands more Indo-Guyanese immigrants. The implicit invitation was to relocate geographically in order to get more for one’s money as well as to rise—at least symbolically—in social status, because they were *perceived* to be ideal immigrants since they were of Indian ethnic origin.

As counterpoint to many current calls to limit immigration in the U.S., GuyaneseOpportunities efforts were supportive of certain newcomers to Schenectady, even as they sometimes rested upon similarly problematic assumptions concerning cultural differences, work ethics, and what I call the “racial economics” of assimilation (Jain, 2011: 108-16). Repeating the phrase “It’s a free country,” Mayor Jurczynski seemed genuinely convinced that “the system we have is good for everybody” but advised that “some people are better at making it work than others” (Personal interview). The Mayor appeared to judge suitability based on the model minority status he granted to Indo-Guyanese immigrants, who are in actuality quite distinct from South Asians who immigrated directly from the Indian subcontinent after 1965 often in response to professional recruitment and who may deem themselves to be assimilatory successes in the U.S. Jurczynski’s “free” connotes not only the ready availability of abounding resources but also allegedly limitless latitude to make one’s own decisions about how to thrive in a “salubrious” New World, as Columbus described it. However, just as Columbus’s “discovery” of the Americas reflected willful neglect of previous or concurrent inhabitants, so did GuyaneseOpportunities seek alternative settlers to the already present ethnic minorities (such as other Asian, African, and Latina/o Americans) who were deemed by some in Schenectady to be incapable of “making it work.” History might therefore be said to repeat itself but, this time around, the “Indians” were considered to be akin

to intrepid European explorers who would maximize New World possibility and create their own utopian society through hard work.

III. “American” Dreams in a Postcolonial World

Asian Indian communities descended from nineteenth century colonial “coolies” were locally cast as ideal twenty-first century immigrants *only* because the narrative of the American Dream speaks to global colonial legacies as well as to the utopianism long associated with the New World. Narratives about infinite opportunity in America date back to glowing praise such as that which Columbus conveyed in correspondence to his monarchs; he described a territory that was “very fertile, “green and flourishing” and, in fact, “thriving.” He deemed it both a “victory” and a “gift” that he could claim this “great and salubrious” land with its abounding riches (Qtd. in Castillo and Schweitzer, 2001: 24-25). Such vocabulary foundationally informed enduring utopian themes in global imaginaries; for instance, the words emphasize growth and prosperity, expansive and opportune geographies, as well as readily accessible resources for those with the will to claim them. In one elaboration of this theme, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur famously advised in his late eighteenth century *Letters from an American Farmer* that Europeans would be awed that “we have no princes for whom we toil, starve, and bleed; we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be (. . .) This is an American” (Qtd. in Castillo and Schweitzer, 2001: 498-500).

Two centuries later, confirming the influence of immigrant utopianism such as Crèvecoeur’s, historian John Truslow Adams concluded that America was broadly believed to offer a uniquely “rich and full life” (Adams, 1937: 415). Giving new currency to the concept of “the American Dream,” Adams described “unhampered” and “unrepressed” (*idem*, 416) immigrants from dystopian Old World origins relocating to a New World that they could fashion as they wished. Close to a century after Adams influentially imagined the United States in this way, all the “blank spaces on the earth” (Conrad, 2006: 70) seem to have been filled in and there are no new lands to discover. Rather than European nations staging long-standing competitions for dominance through imperial activities in the Americas and elsewhere, at the turn of the twenty-first century, they are (at least officially) a Union. Meanwhile, Empire today is perhaps best represented *by* the New World in the form of the United States,

which has co-opted many of the world's resources, including the moniker "America," and which often represents itself as leading "the free world." Anthropologist Sarah Mahler points out that there is a good deal of evidence to refute the optimistic rendering of America as utopian, but this does not seem to prevent each new group of immigrants from banking on the American Dream (Mahler, 1995: 83).

However, the land of opportunity has not forwarded credit to all groups equally and it must be remembered that welcoming Guyanese immigrants to Schenectady was never inevitable. In fact, collectively, South Asians relocating to the U.S. have found their relationship to the utopian dream of America shaped by an uneven history of hails to and tactics for being incorporated into the imagined nation, whether as East Indians or, latterly, Asian Americans. Many scholars have recently clarified that, although often rendered invisible by the dominant immigrant narrative associated with Ellis Island, Asian groups nonetheless encounter the same tropes associated with the New World as Europeans. For instance, noting that there are multiple "Americas" depicted in Asian American literature, Rachel C. Lee lists some of the most familiar of these visions, including "a utopian space of possibility," "a fantasy of wealth and privilege," an obsession with "consumption" (Lee, 1999: 3). Similarly, Patricia P. Chu glosses a familiar story as it affects Chinese American immigrants: "the immigrant passes from an old world defined as a dystopia of exhausted possibilities and tragic narrative outcomes to the utopian new world, where opportunity and happy endings beckon" (Chu, 2000: 146–7). In the South Asian diaspora, the old world is represented by myriad mixed legacies on the subcontinent including the effects of British reign in India. The ways in which varied versions of Asianness transform the American Dream highlight complicated politics of inclusion and exclusion that have plagued the Americas since the first settlers arrived. While the region represented expanded resources and freedoms for some, systems of dominance and oppression defined relationships between many groups of Anglo-Americans as well as between Europeans and New World Indians.

Far from the inviting welcome to America suggested by *Guyanese Opportunities*, for many—including imported African slaves, European and Asian indentured workers, laborers from around the world with little political power, and others—the American Dream was more properly rendered as a nightmare of violence, poverty, and injustice. The local realities evolved in ways uniquely informed by the groups

and resources that interacted in particular contact zones. In a classic contribution to Critical Race Studies, Chela Sandoval theorizes about the types of oppositional consciousness associated with those positioned as “Third Worlders” within the U.S. Charting the relationships between ethnic and postcolonial studies, Sandoval hybridizes multiple vernaculars in order to analyze affiliative and ideological investments that surpass simplistic categories; her interest is in *de*-colonizing minority experience and so she understands the term postcolonial “in the most general sense as a utopian site located somewhere beyond authoritarianism and domination” (Sandoval, 2000: 186n6). In an example of related intellectual work with a focus on South Asians, Jenny Sharpe in contrast problematizes the term

postcolonial [which] does not fully capture the history of a white settler colony that appropriated land from Native Americans, incorporated parts of Mexico, and imported slaves and indenture labor from African and Asia and whose foreign policy in East Asia, the Philippines, Latin America, and the Caribbean accounts, in part, for its new immigrants. (Sharpe, 2000: 106)

Synthesizing Sharpe’s painstaking historicity with Sandoval’s commitment to a radical semiology, one can better appreciate the nuances of differential possibilities for finding America to be utopian. This strategy illuminates that South Asian immigrant postcolonialism involves simultaneous negotiations with British Raj and hegemonic American epistemologies manifested symbolically as well materially. Furthermore, Sharpe argues that the two varieties of imperialism are mutually reinforcing rather than in tension, because, “the British colonization of India was a precondition for the post-1965 migration of South Asians to the United States” (*idem*, 114).

Due to this unique history, South Asians in the U.S. have been able, at times, to opportunistically (how different the connotations would have been had I written, “taken the opportunity to”!) manipulate immigrant versus diasporic identities. For example, differentiating themselves as a model minority in comparison to “problem” races opened up possibilities for leveraging social dispensations in order to achieve integration. Thus, their immigrant histories are best appreciated as paradoxically representing group privilege despite racial minoritization, at least for many in post-1965 communities, such that they actually “appeared to fulfill the American dream” (Purkayastha, 2005: 1). This history demonstrates that closely reading the American Dream as an example of utopianism requires constantly retheorizing power and how different groups are interpellated into the nation, which was also a central concern for

colonial discourse analysis, an important precursor to contemporary postcolonialism. Whether Americans are privileged or disempowered in their relative positionality influences how they might, and in fact choose to, conform to versions of nationalism or choose other means of responding to pervasive American utopianism.

Guyanese Opportunities represents one unforeseen chapter in the broader history of South Asian migration and engagement with the American Dream. Postcolonialism as an added perspective to such utopianism does not guarantee, but perhaps encourages, a clearer recognition of complex systems of world-building. The tragic incongruity is apparent to (if under-analyzed by) most people that the grand explorations and expanded horizons that the Americas represented for dreamers such as Christopher Columbus were founded upon the erasure, actual as well as metaphorical, of Other lives defined very differently in terms of needs and desires. European explorers' settlement of the Americas augured hellish rather than heavenly outcomes for many already living in those locations. Nonetheless, New World imagery of idyllic Eden-like spaces, readily available resources, and endless opportunity motivated not only Europeans colonizers but continues to strongly impact continuing belief in the purported American "dream," now a global mythology that persists despite documented harsh truths about contemporary U.S. inequalities based on wealth, sexuality, race, religion, gender, and so forth. Contemporary South Asians have proven as receptive as any other immigrants to the allure of the New World as utopia and are among the latest of groups from around the globe to respond to it by immigrating to the United States. That these "real" Indians crossed bridges to utopia constructed by the machineries of the Raj—with its distinct but mutually reinforcing patterns of colonization in diverse geographies—confirms just how tightly the (post)colonizing and the utopian impulses continue to be wound together.

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Unsettling Hope: Contemporary Indigenous Politics, Settler-Colonialism, and Utopianism



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Critical investigation of the varied conceptualizations and historical effects of utopianism is an essential concern for utopian studies scholarship. Utopia has been theorized beyond a literary tradition initiated by Thomas More as "social dreaming" (Sargent) and "expressions of desire for a better way of being" (Levitas), to reference two of the more prominent contemporary formulations. These characterizations tend towards inclusivity and allow for an expansive notion of "the phenomenon of utopianism" to be recognized across human cultures. Indeed Sargent argues "...the history of the utopia reflects the whole range of human experience and desire" (Sargent, 2000: 8). This is in contrast to Krishan Kumar's contention that utopia is "not universal. [And that it] appears only in societies with classical and Christian heritages, that is, only in the West" (Kumar, 1987: 19). For Kumar, the "utopia proper" ought be differentiated as "the modern utopia that was invented in Europe in the sixteenth century" (Kumar, 1987: 19).

Clearly, the conceptualization of the phenomenon of utopianism as an 'intercultural' meta-category facilitates comparative study. Equally clear is the existence of social dreaming, expressions of desire for a better way of being, or "texts that describe a non-existent society as measurably better than the contemporary society" outside of the 'West' and prior to the publication of More's 1516 novel (Sargent, 2010: 67). However, this should not preclude critical engagement with the particularities associated with the "modern utopia" tradition, especially with respect to its ongoing role in the settler colonial reality of the United States and Canada.¹

Towards this, I maintain that scholarly engagement with utopia deserves an ‘unsettling.’ As such, I intend to argue for utopian studies’ engagement with emergent critical discourses of Indigenous peoples themselves, as well as non-Indigenous work concerned with the phenomenon of settler colonization.² These discourses represent vital considerations for the potential reevaluation of the phenomenon of utopianism as a useful contributor to the destabilization of distinctly *settler* colonial foundations. The specific and substantial effects that More’s *Utopia* and, more generally, the modern utopian tradition have had (and, importantly, continue to have) on settler colonial formations offer a clear and compelling basis for scholarly attention to such concerns.

Firstly, there is an etymological dilemma involved in the utilization of More’s neologism “utopia” which may be translated as ‘the no place’ or, more commonly, ‘the good place which is no place’ to describe the social dreaming or expressions of desire for a better way of being by the Indigenous peoples of what is now known as the United States and Canada. While I do not at all wish to subsume the significant differences that have and do exist among Native peoples, the particularity of *place* is, generally speaking, a fundamental epistemological and ontological referent. It is the specificity of ties to a particular place which, in many ways, defines indigeneity. For example, the late Lakota philosopher Vine Deloria Jr. wrote in *God is Red* that “American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind” (Deloria, 1992: 62).

Moreover, the power of non-Indigenous persons (settlers and otherwise) to shape discourse and language in ways that contribute to the ongoing displacement and subjugation of Indigenous peoples should not be understated.³ This is perhaps most (in)famously exemplified by the nonsensical application of the term ‘Indian’ to the original peoples of the so-called ‘New World.’ It follows that it is problematic to utilize a term signifying ‘no place’ to categorize the hopeful practices or traditions of Indigenous peoples.

But aside from the etymological difficulties, the significant contributions of More’s famous text to the ongoing settler colonization of what is now known as the United States and Canada, and the settler utopian tradition itself must be critically evaluated in light of the consequences for Indigenous peoples. Indeed, Jeffrey Knapp has argued that *Utopia* “contains perhaps the first Tudor attempt to elaborate a theory of colonization,” and, referencing the work of D.B. Quinn, has suggested More was “...the first Englishman to use the word *colonia* in a Roman [i.e.

imperialist] meaning” (Knapp, 1992: 21). Furthermore, there are recognized parallels between *Utopia* and contemporaneous published accounts of Amerigo Vespucci’s explorations (Logan / Adams, 2002: 10).

However, it is the novel’s narrator, Hythloday, who recounts that the island ‘no place’—Utopia—was originally called “Abraxa” and was not an island at all. But after King Utopus’ invasion was successful, he “... brought its rude, uncouth inhabitants to [...] a high level of culture and humanity.” Furthermore, he ordered his own soldiers, alongside the conquered original inhabitants, to separate the territory from the mainland by digging a channel 15 miles wide to allow the sea to encircle the newly formed island (More, 2002: 42). Later, Hythloday details the philosophical rationale for the Utopians’ expansionist colonial adventures, explaining that when the Utopian population grows too large,

they enroll citizens out of every city and plant a colony under their own laws [...] wherever the natives have plenty of unoccupied and uncultivated land. Those natives who want to live with the Utopians are adopted by them. When such a merger occurs the two peoples gradually and easily blend together, sharing the same way of life and customs, much to the advantage of both. For by their policies the Utopians make the land yield an abundance for all, though previously it had seemed too poor and barren even to support the natives. But those who refuse to live under their laws they drive out of the land they claim for themselves and against those who resist them, they wage war. They think it is perfectly justifiable to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste yet forbid the use and possession of it to others who by the law of nature, ought to be supported from it (*idem*, 54).

Thus, as Antonis Balasopoulous has noted, the trajectories of utopian expansionism are clear (Balasopoulous, 2004). For *Utopia* clearly articulates the settler colonial doctrines of *terra nullius* [no man’s land], *vacuum domicilium* [unoccupied home], and *inane ac vacuum* [idle and waste] which were used by European powers to establish legalistic grounds, via an appeal to the “law of nature” for expropriating the supposedly uninhabited land. According to Knapp, this justification was “repeated time and again in the American propaganda of Renaissance England” (Knapp, 1992: 21).

While the Utopians “acknowledge gratefully the kindnesses of Mother Nature” the soil of the fictional island of Utopia is reported to be less than ideal, requiring “improve[ment] by industry [...] hard work and technical knowledge” (More, 2002: 74-75). Virtue is realized, for the Utopians, in the maximization of human pleasure and welfare through reason so long as it does not hinder “... the welfare of [human] others or the common [human] good” (*idem*, 74). In other words, the realization of the original modern utopia *obliges* the instrumentalization of what Daniel Heath Justice describes as the “other-than-human” in the service of humanity alongside the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples. For in order that Utopians act in accord with the “law

of nature” the rationale holds that Abraxans (Natives) have left their land “idle and waste” and, therefore, the principle of “maximization of human pleasure” commands that lands be expropriated. The extension of (settler) sovereignty over a territory in the service of the maximization of ‘rational’ human interests is dependent upon an “ecological sovereignty,” which Mick Smith argues is foundational to a purportedly ‘progressive’ political modernity (Smith, 2011: xi). This notion of modernity determines who is “fully human,” in part, based upon a notion of human nature reliant upon a break from a “primitive” “natural state” by “hard work and the employment of that unique human faculty ‘reason’” (*idem*, 66-67).

Therefore, More’s *Utopia*—the namesake of utopian studies—was articulated in decidedly modernist terms; the Utopians and their ideas are unambiguously representative of a notion of progressive modernity counter posed with Indigenous inhabitants (Abraxans) who are consigned to a backward ‘primitive’ pre-modernity, partly based on their failure to rationally recognize the “law of nature” and proceed to instrumentalize the land on which they lived. The consequences of this rationale were, of course, devastating for the peoples of Turtle Island—the English translation of the term utilized by the Haudenosaunee for what is now known as the continent of North America,⁴: ... ‘Haudenosaunee’ being the self-identification for the peoples of what is commonly referred to as the Iroquois Confederacy. More’s *Utopia* must, therefore, be recognized as having been constituted by and, crucially, as simultaneously contributing to the production and perpetuation of modernist epistemologies and ontologies, which were and, importantly, continue to be acutely dystopian for Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, More’s *Utopia* must be acknowledged as an archetypical modern settler society marked by what Patrick Wolfe terms “a logic of elimination” (Wolfe, 2001: 387).

This logic is articulated in the abovementioned passage from More’s *Utopia*: in short, the original inhabitants of Abraxa are to be assimilated as Utopians (“brought [...] to a high level of culture and humanity”), re-located, or simply eradicated (“But those who refuse to live under their laws they drive out of the land they claim for themselves and against those who resist them, they wage war.”). Wolfe writes, “Settler colonies were [are] premised on the elimination of native societies [...] colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event” (Wolfe, 1999: 2). As expressed by Lorenzo Veracini, this distinction is essential to the project of settlement as differentiated from other forms of colonialism:

... whereas settler colonialism constitutes a circumstances where the colonising effort is exercised from *within* the bounds of a settler colonising political entity, colonialism is driving by an expanding metropole

that remains permanently distinct from it ... as settlers, by definition, stay, in specific contradistinction, colonial sojourners—administrators, missionaries, military personnel, entrepreneurs, and adventurers—return (Veracini, 2010: 10).

The consequences include the ensuing naturalization of the Utopians' settler colonization and what Veracini calls a process of "settler indigenisation" (Veracini, 2011: 194). Here the foreign colonizers and the indigenous peoples switch places through a variety of one or more means of "transfer": the modern citizen-subject of the settler society is rendered natural and, in fact, *indigenous* to the modern nation-state and its territory while the original inhabitant, the 'Indian' or 'Aborigine' is de-naturalized, made foreign, and per Wolfe, marked for elimination.⁵ Additionally, *Utopia's* discussion of the management of what Veracini refers to as "exogenous Others"—an intentionally broad third category in a tripartite settler colonial order also involving settlers and Indigenous peoples—including foreigners, servants, and slaves (indentured and otherwise) exemplifies a distinctive form of settler sovereignty (Veracini, 2010: 17). In fact, the biopolitical administration detailed in *Utopia* ought be evaluated in light of contemporary examinations of biopolitics and settler colonial practices.⁶

Unfortunately, these processes can be observed as tropes routinely found in the utopian literary traditions of settler societies (Sargent, 2010b: 204). In fact, nearly all of the various expressions or "faces" of utopianism—from intentional communities to radicalized politics—which emerge from such settler societies ought be recognized as being predicated upon and, therefore, implicated in the ongoing naturalization of settler colonization. This resonates with Scott Morgensen's contention that "[s]ettler colonialism has conditioned not only Indigenous peoples and their lands and the settler societies that occupy them, but all political, economic, and cultural processes that those societies touch" (Morgensen, 2011: 53).

Clearly, recognition of settler colonialism's contribution to and naturalization within much of the modern utopian tradition is fundamental to utopian studies' engagement in an ongoing project of 'unsettling.' Furthermore, the editors of the journal *Settler Colonial Studies* opine in their definition of 'settler colonialism' that "[t]here is no such thing as neo-settler colonialism or post-settler colonialism because settler colonialism is a resilient formation that rarely ends" (Cavanagh and Veracini, 2010). Thus, it is apparent that use of the term 'post-colonial' is problematic for the utopianism of settler societies or the Indigenous peoples who continue to experience settler colonial realities. This is to say that, in such circumstances, there is a need for

a differentiated form of utopianism; “[s]ettler colonisation requires an imagination that is alternative from traditional accounts of decolonizing passages (Veracini, 2010: 114).

Undoubtedly, this ought to involve addressing Indigenous peoples’ expressions of desire for a better way of being. But Veracini exhorts us not to forsake focus on settlers and “on what they do, and how they think about what they do” in a wholesale deference to Indigenous experiences within settler societies, lest settlers remain naturalized as the “normative subject” to which Others are counter posed (*idem*, 15). In other words, it appears necessary to do both: to simultaneously critically examine ‘settler-ness’ and settler colonial phenomenon in addition to engaging with Indigenous discourses *on their own terms*. That is, we ought to heed Wolfe’s argument that “[c]laims to authority over indigenous discourse made from within the settler-colonial academy necessarily participate in the continuing usurpation of indigenous space (invasion is a structure not an event)” (Wolfe, 1999: 3).

In the context of utopian studies, here we might look to what Andrea Smith calls a strategy or politics of “re-articulation” (Smith, 2008: xvi). For Smith, this involves rejecting a “politics of inclusion that seeks to include a marginalized voice within a pre-established politics or discourse” in favor of a processual re-centering (*idem*, xiii). This would involve a moment whereby critical discourses of Indigenous peoples including, but not limited to, those which address settler colonialism, are positioned at the “center” of utopian studies. In doing so, utopian studies discourses would be subject to an estrangement that could and should allow for reflexive accountability. Just as Smith emphasizes, “we [must] constantly re-center the discussion to see if this illuminates our understanding [...] so that we can build a more liberating framework, not just for the communities we center in the analysis but for all peoples” (*idem*, xiv).⁷

Smith’s call for a project of “re-articulation” appears to have affinities with Ruth Levitas’s notion of utopia as method, which perhaps offers one basis for acting to ‘unsettle’ utopia from within utopian studies discourse. Levitas characterizes the utopian method—the imaginary reconstitution of society—as enduringly provisional, dialogical, reflexive, and animated by twin functions (Levitas, 2007: 47-66). In the first, we come to de-naturalize the status quo through a ‘cognitive estrangement.’ This estrangement allows us a critical perspective on ‘what is.’

However, it is a secondary function, for Levitas, the ‘what ought be’ proposition and its subjection to judgment, where we find the potential for a utopian method’s radical accountability. The simultaneous critiques of ‘what is’ and the utopian proposal of ‘what ought

be' result in a subsequent modification of the articulation of utopia. This conceptualization of utopia draws upon Blochian notions of an 'educated hope' which moves us from the escapist realm of the compensatory to an anticipatory hope activated in the service of realizing some notion of a better world—a concrete utopia (Levitas, 1997: 65-80).

Ernst Bloch conceived of a principle of hope whereby the 'warm' (passion) and 'cold' (reason) streams of human consciousness engage in a dialectic towards the achievement of a synthesis: utopia—the satisfaction of lack. For Bloch, the human experience of lack is a universal, inherent, and inescapable.

In Bloch's schema, there is the merely wishful and oftentimes escapist 'compensatory hope', which envisions, and may even realize, an 'abstract utopia.' To use an example from Bloch's *Principle of Hope*, compensatory hope inspires idle daydreams in which an abstract utopia is approached and, perhaps, apprehended, albeit only so long as the dreamer can maintain her or his reverie. As such, a compensatory hope poses no direct, immediate, and tangible threat to the status quo; it compensates for the dystopian material reality, ultimately allowing for the abstract utopia's recuperation.

Alternatively, an anticipatory hope is willful, activated, and, in keeping with Bloch's Marxism, grounded and activated in the service of a decidedly material 'concrete utopia.' Of course, the anticipatory/compensatory dichotomy is fluid and interrelated; Bloch's differentiation is convenient insofar as his Marxist affiliation obliges him to demonstrate the teleological implications of a dialectical, educative relationship the warm/passion and cold/reasons streams of consciousness, between compensatory and anticipatory hope. The dialectical interplay between reason and passion in pursuit of a concrete utopia is thought to result in 'educated hope,' drawing us ever closer to a specific, preordained goal: the Communist utopia of Marxian theory. Levitas's method, however, forgoes such teleology and, therefore, provides an opportunity for re-articulation of anticipatory hope.

Concerns over the legacy and language of 'utopia' notwithstanding, we may identify some of the trajectories within emergent critical discourses of Indigenous peoples which may deserve 'utopian' characterization insofar they involve the construction of what Smith calls "prolineal genealog[ies]" or "history[ies] of the future" (Smith, 2007: xxvii). Such discourses are often substantially concerned with interrupting the naturalization of a settler colonial reality, again, characterized by the "transfer" or "elimination" of Indigenous peoples.

Dale Turner, professor of Government and Native American Studies at Dartmouth University and a member of the Temagami First Nation of what is now Northern Ontario, has argued in *This is Not a Peace Pipe* for Indigenous peoples' more effective engagement with, crucially, the existing legal and political discourses of the state (Turner, 2008: 10). Turner is unequivocal that this a pragmatic strategy of survival, one he views as the best means for protecting the rights afforded to Indigenous peoples by the modern nation-state. Turner's strategic pragmatism also leads him to call for the further development of what he calls "word warriors," that is, Indigenous intellectuals charged with bringing indigenous voices into what he terms the 'dominant intellectual community' in order to bring about a recognition of the 'legitimacy' of Indigenous knowledges (*idem*, 7-11).

Interestingly, Turner identifies Taiaiake Alfred as a 'word warrior' even though the two have substantial differences. Alfred is of the Kanewake [ga-na-WAH-gay], a community of Kanienkeha [gun-yah-geh-haw-ga], which, according to Alfred, is the "proper" name for what are conventionally known as the Mohawk people. Alfred is the current director of the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria. His work, particularly *Peace Power Righteousness* and *Wasáse*, might be said to exemplify an emergent and decidedly more strident form of Indigenous nationalism, which seeks to revitalize traditional indigenous cultural and political practices, and advocates radical disengagement with the nation-state. Rejecting what may be considered a modern-liberal 'rights and recognition' approach as inherently subjugating, Alfred advocates a form of strategic essentialism that views a recovery of the cultural foundations of Indigenous nations as necessary for a de-colonizing project. However, this does not, for Alfred, imply a return to an idealized, fossilized past. Rather, the recovering of cultural autonomy is understood as the basis of an envisioned autonomy-oriented nation-to-nation relationship among both the Onkwehonewe [oon-gway-hoon-way], the word from the Kanienkeha language for 'original peoples,' and the settler population.

In fact, Alfred has sought to contribute to the conceptualization of what has been called 'anarcha [or anarcho]-indigenism.' For Alfred, the affinities between some strains of anarchist thought and his own framework are located in the desire for a radically democratic and post-imperial future, as well as the shared "rejection of alliances with legalized systems of oppression, non-participation in the institutions that structure the colonial relationship and a belief in

bringing about change through direct action, physical resistance and confrontations with state power” (Alfred, 2009b: 46).

A corollary to the efforts of Indigenous critical theorists to re-articulate notions of ‘nation’ and ‘nationhood’ can be found in what Daniel Health Justice, a Cherokee professor of English and Aboriginal Studies at the University of Toronto, describes as ‘Indigenous literary nationalism.’ Justice writes

Indigenous literary nationalism is a philosophy that places Indigenous intellectual and cultural values at the center of analysis, rather than the margins [...] It's also an avowedly political movement, in that it asserts the active presence of Indigenous values in the study of the literatures of Indian Country, and it sees transformative possibility in studying nation-specific literatures through the critical lenses of their source cultures [...] Indigenous literary nationalism—and Indigenous nationhood itself—can generally be distinguished from nation-state nationalism in both its foundations and its aims. Thus, Indigenous literary nationalism is rooted in kinship responsibilities and values difference and diversity, while taking into account their historical and socio-political contexts, rather than being located in the assimilative patriotism and historical amnesia of the nation-state [...] It doesn't take fragmentation or cultural confusion as critical givens, it doesn't assume a monolithic center or a lack of internal diversity, nor does it presume that cultural change equals erasure of either cultural distinctiveness or internal coherence. A complicated diversity is a strength of tribal nations, not a deficiency (Justice, 2011b).

Justice's high fantasy trilogy, recently collected as *The Way of Thorn and Thunder* can itself be seen as a ‘nationalistic’ work of high fantasy that may also be appropriately considered an Indigenous critical dystopia. This sprawling work fictionalizes the colonial experience of Turtle Island/North America as the ‘Folk’—a collective term used to describe the various inhabitants of the ‘Eld Green’—are faced with the encroachment of the ‘Humans.’ The Humans, of course, come from without and appear to represent European colonizers while, interestingly, the Folk are a diverse group of humanoid and other-than-humanoid beings that blur the separation between humanoid, flora, and fauna, emphasizing intimate inter-relationship between Indigenous peoples and their native lands. While Justice's rich narrative is often incredibly bleak, it also speaks hopefully to issues of resistance and survival, as well as the possibilities of ally-ship and cultural exchange between the Folk and Humans.

Indeed the politics of ally-ship and solidarity between Native and non-Native peoples are of real importance to social movements concerned with transcending settler colonialism. Alfred who advocates for a notion of Indigenous “resurgence,” argues that such a mobilization is contingent, in part, upon “the cooperation and support of allies in the Settler society” (Alfred, 2009b: 64). What's more the relatively small population of Indigenous peoples now living within the borders of the United States and Canada necessitates, for Andrea Smith, the strategies of re-articulation including the formation of “unlikely alliances” (Smith, 2008: 200). This notion of re-

articulation as a means to explore the possibilities of strategic alliances “... is central to Native organizing; Native organizers frequently reframe and recenter issues so that non-Natives will understand that they impact not only Native peoples but all communities” (*idem*, 3).

The ongoing [as of this writing] ‘Occupy Wall Street’ or ‘Occupy Together’ movement, which might otherwise be viewed in utopian terms, provides a prominent example of Smith’s notion of re-articulation as well as support for her claim that “... just as we must not presume that we cannot work with unlikely allies, we must not presume that we should always work with people who are perceived to be our likely allies” (*idem*, 200).

Occupy Wall Street has prompted criticism from Indigenous persons who point out the colonial histories of Manhattan and Wall Street, arguing that they have, in fact, been occupied since 1625 when the Dutch East India Company established a colony on the land the indigenous Lenape called “Manna-Hatta.”⁸ In a notable development, occupations in Albuquerque, Boston, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, and Seattle, among others, have taken some steps to articulate a settler colonial analysis, including passing general assembly resolutions of solidarity with Indigenous peoples and pledging an intention to decolonize their respective Occupy movements.⁹ In Albuquerque, New Mexico, a general assembly decided to change their name to “Unoccupy Albuquerque” in direct response to the expressions of hurt and frustration made by Native Americans at their encampment (UnOccupy Albuquerque, 2011).

It may be argued that the longer-term capacities of the Occupy Wall Street or Occupy Together movement—in whatever form or forms it is to evolve—to enjoy the support of Indigenous activists is substantially dependent upon an ability to both actualize critical self-reflexivity and commit to accountability to anti-colonial critique. This is to not to say that the concerns of Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism are to assume a permanently “centered” importance. However, they must not be neglected as part of an intersectional critical analysis of the interlocking and historical nature of the experience of oppression—including, but not limited to, those which are age, ability, class, gender, nationality race, religion, and sexuality-based. As Jessica Yee, a “self-described ‘multiracial Indigenous hip-hop feminist reproductive justice freedom fighter!’” wrote in a widely-discussed blog post,

We don’t need more occupation – we need decolonization and it’s everyone’s responsibility to participate in that because COLONIALISM AFFECTS EVERYONE. EVERYONE! Colonialism also leads to capitalism, globalization, and industrialization. How can we truly end capitalism without ending colonialism? (Yee, 2011)

Conclusion

Utopian scholars from Bloch to Sargent to Levitas have sought to expand the conceptual horizons of 'utopia' beyond a niche literary tradition. It follows that differing conceptualization of utopia enable varying analyses of utopia's historical role has been the subject of a debate with significant consequences for utopian studies scholarship. This sustained, critical and constructive, de-stabilization of the concept and historical effects of utopia is a healthy endeavor, one that may facilitate the relevance of utopia and utopian studies for a rapidly globalizing world.

As a case in point, Jacqueline Dutton, addressing the problematic of 'Non-Western' utopian traditions in her contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* suggests

... the concept of utopia may no longer be broad enough to encompass the full scope of social dreamings. 'Intercultural imaginaries of the ideal' may be a more appropriate and neutral term for [the] study of several different traditions of speculative and idealistic thought grounded in the projection of a better society (Dutton, 2010: 224).

This questioning of the appropriateness of 'utopia' as a universal category appears worthy of consideration, especially in light of the consequences of utopia for the Indigenous peoples of what is now understood as the United States and Canada. Moreover, activists, artists, and scholars have sought to differentiate settler colonialism from other forms of colonialism, which undermines the appropriateness of using the term "post-colonial" to describe circumstances in which a decidedly settler colonial formation endures. Without a doubt, More's *Utopia*, much of the ensuing modern utopian literature tradition, and the utopianism of settler societies are substantial contributors to the naturalization of settler colonialism.

Also, the relationship between the modern utopia, settler colonialism, and notions of ecological principles is highly suspect. Here again, the 'good place which is no place' etymology is awkward; far from signifying notions of interrelationships or balance, it enables the idea of an environmental blank slate. This idea of erasure buttresses a conception of human domination, exploitation, and 'rationalization' of the other-than-human as a mode of 'progress' towards the realization of a modernist and, arguably, anti-ecological utopia.

There is an opportunity, however, for a re-articulation of utopia as a means of accountability to settler colonial critique and the efforts of Indigenous peoples and their allies to reconstitute an unsettled society. This represents both a new area of focus for utopian studies scholars as well as a challenge to the imagination: the envisioning and actualization of an unsettled society.

Questions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous solidarity as well as ideas of decolonization are, in reality, extremely complex. For example, debates are ongoing with regard to the efficacy of the term ‘settler’ as it potentially neglects the specificities of ‘non-Indigenous’ identities and experiences, including but certainly not limited to, those pertaining to racialization, gender, and class. Furthermore, Joanne Barker—a member of the Lenni-Lenape or Delaware Tribe and professor of American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University—has questioned the value of utilizing the term ‘settler colonialism’ and the development of a distinctive settler colonial studies. The etymology of ‘settler,’ for Barker, suggests the idea of ‘making consistent with,’ which she rejects due to her perception that settler colonial studies necessarily anticipates a reconciliation within the current modern nation-state formation (Barker, 2011).

Ultimately, I have sought to demonstrate that these matters merit the attention of utopian scholars. As it stands, utopia appears, at best, a controversial notion with respect to Indigenous peoples. By way of a concluding example, the late John Mohawk refers to *Utopian Legacies* as the title of his history of conquest and oppression resulting from modernity’s pursuit of the ideal (Mohawk, 2000). It follows that accountability to the concerns of Indigenous peoples themselves will, on a variety of levels, certainly unsettle studies of utopia. But the process of unsettling—and it will necessarily be an ongoing process—will educate and enrich utopian studies as a project concerned with contributing to the realization of a better world.

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Notes

¹ This is not to suggest that the only contemporary settler colonial situations exist in the United States and Canada. To the contrary, additional settler colonial contexts may be understood to exist in Australia, Israel, and New Zealand, among others. However, due to this article's focus on the role of More's *Utopia* and its contributions to the settler colonization of the New World, I have narrowed what might well be a justifiably wider claim.

² Regarding terminology, in this article I have chosen to refer to the original inhabitants of what is now known as the United States and Canada as "Indigenous" or "Native" peoples, as these terms are utilized in place of "Native American" in deference to Indigenous critics who reject that label and its evocation of a citizenship and identity conferred by a settler state.

³ See, for example, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

⁴ Additionally, Mick Smith convincingly argues that the 'rational' instrumentalization of what he terms the "more-than-human" ought be recognized for the anti-ecological harm it has caused.

⁵ For a detailed schematic of the various mechanisms utilized in the service of settler and Indigenous transfer see pp. 33-52 in Veracini's *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*.

⁶ See Scott Morgensen. "The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now."

⁷ It is beyond the scope of this paper, but an addendum to Smith's statement might include reference to ecological concerns as well.

⁸ See, for example, "An Open Letter to Occupy Wall Street Activists" <http://mzzainalstraten.blogspot.com/2011/09/open-letter-to-occupy-wall-street.html>, "Indians Counter Occupy Wall Street with Decolonize Wall Street" <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/10/indians-counter-occupy-wall-street-movement-with-decolonize-wall-street/>, and "Manna-hatta" <http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2011/10/manna-hatta.html>

⁹ See, for example, "Occupy Boston Ratifies Memorandum of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples" <http://occupyboston.com/2011/10/09/occupy-boston-ratifies-memorandum-of-solidarity-with-indigenous-peoples/> and "Occupy Denver stands in solidarity with AIM to 'Decolonize Denver'" <http://occupydenver.org/occupy-denver-stands-in-solidarity-with-aim-to-decolonize-denver/> and "Indigenous Groups at Occupy Wall Street Mark Columbus Day as Day of Mourning" http://www.democracynow.org/se0/2011/10/11/indigenous_groups_at_occupy_wall_street