Africanfuturism and Francophone Fiction: Science, Spiritualism, and Speculation

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Differences in worldviews are the result of culturally specific language, which when examined more closely, often reveals an underlying commonality between human societies. A line from Nnedi Okorafor's novel, *Noor* (2021) highlights the examination of science and spiritualism within Africanfuturist francophone fiction. In Okorafor's story, a stranger named DNA who accompanies AO, the protagonist explains: "'Science is mostly witchcraft… See what it has done to humanity, and the more science there is, the more there is to see. You are a spirit.'" (Okorafor, 2021 46). Although AO is a hybrid machine-human cyborg, DNA's assertion that she is above all, a spirit, which is something beyond the scope of scientific rationalism, is a clear acknowledgment of its limits. This personal recognition of the spiritual quality of a human body whose life is nonetheless intertwined with the science of supporting cybernetic technologies serves to further reinforce his equation of science to witchcraft, indicating the presence of two distinct yet functionally similar systems of engaging the world. The implications of the above quotation, therefore, are that science has expanded to the point that it has enveloped humanity, which must be reminded that it is not merely material, but also spiritual. From a postcolonial African perspective, the application of "scientific" knowledge, reason, and rationality, were the premises upon which European colonial projects posited their objectives to discover and "civilize" other cultures around the globe. Through theorizations of African cultures and spiritual traditions in the writings of John Mbiti, Felwine Sarr, and Achille Mbembe, this article will explore indigenous African conceptions of temporality and existence through an Africanfuturist reading of select Francophone African texts by Boubacar Boris Diop and Jean-Marie Adiaffi.

"Every Mukamba is a story-teller," writes the late John Mbiti (1983, 3) in the introduction to his collection of *Akamba Stories*, a Bantu indigenous people group inhabiting the Kenyan and Tanzanian borderlands. This perception of human beings as fundamentally narrative in nature resonates with the theoretical concept of ecolinguistics, which Arran Stibbe (2015) defines as such: "The stories are important because they influence how individuals think, and if they are spread widely across a culture then they can become stories-we-live-by and influence prevailing modes of thought in the whole society" (16). The stories that comprise the worldviews of many indigenous African cultures, like the Akamba depict a world that is infused with spiritual significance, as Mbiti further clarifies: "To speak of Akamba religion is almost misleading, since religious beliefs and practices are interwoven in the whole of life and do not constitute a department of their own." (1983, 14). In his essay on "African traditional religion," Kofi Asare Opoku (1993) expounds on this worldview while also invoking Yoruba and Akan spiritual traditions from West Africa, saying that "[e]verything begins with God" (71). Opoku argues that "God created man and placed him at the centre of the cosmos, not as its master but as a caretaker in a dependent role, and man is

expected to remain in harmony with the universe since he is part of it" (73). The key point in this religious worldview that infuses all aspects of life is that of connection and relationship, such that Opoku continues by proposing that "[t]o be human means to belong to a family or community [… and] community is not restricted to relations with human beings along. There is community with nature since man is part of nature and is expected to cooperate with it" (1993, 76-77). One can therefore read in the stories of many indigenous African cultures, a worldview in which humans participate in the natural and spiritual world, both of which are intertwined through a divine presence-in-absence that animates the existential fabrics of the natural and spiritual worlds together. The kind of spiritualism embodied by traditional African cultures has strong implications for understanding temporality, science, and human subjectivity in ways that contrast starkly with predominantly Eurocentric modes of thought. These notions are explored further in this essay by a concerted readings of fictional African texts—stories—analyzed through the theoretical lens of Africanfuturism.

Africanfururism is distinct from Afrofuturism, although the two share many salient features. Ytasha Womack describes Afrofuturist mixing of science-fiction and fantasy as a means of "imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens" (2013, 9). Reynaldo Anderson articulates Afrofuturism 2.0 as a project for "humanity that is not bound up with the ideals of white Enlightenment universalism, critical theory, science, or technology" (2016, 231). Interestingly, however, Afrofuturism operates through a fundamentally diasporic lens in that its constructions of science-fiction and fantasy remain entrenched within a particularly Western, if not uniquely African American perspective. For this reason, Nnedi Okorafor (2019) coined the term, "Africanfuturism," which like Afrofuturism is an artistic movement that challenges dominant narratives about Africa, though from an explicitly non-Western perspective, emphasizing the centrality of the African continent and its diverse indigenous cultures. Africanfuturism, as such, promotes visions of, "a technologically advanced Africa that has overcome many of its currently daunting challenges and is enjoying the benefits of socio-economic and political development…" (Oku 2021, 76). Kimberly Cleveland's recent book (2024), *Africanfuturism*, highlights many interesting works of art, although predominantly from anglophone Africa. This essay will apply Africanfuturism as a framework for investigating francophone African stories, as well as the manners in which they are told, in order to articulate alternative constructs of time, spirits, and science from an open plurality of cultural perspectives steeped in indigenous African practices, philosophies, and cosmographies.

Although anglophone fiction has typically dominated the field of Afrofuturist discourse—for example the recent anthology edited by Sheree Renée Thomas, Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki, and Zelda Knight, *Africa Risen: A New Era of Speculative Fiction* (2022)—the globalization and popularity of the genre and its constitutive sub-genres, as well as the evolution of the theoretical perspectives outlined above, have led to the emergence of a discourse on francophone Afrofuturist artworks. For example, in the introduction to a special issue of the journal *Œuvres et Critiques* dedicated to French language science fiction, editors Paul Scott and Antje Ziethen (2019) explore the concepts of futurist fiction and Afrofuturism in francophone textual traditions, including

an invitation to "apprehend science-fiction from a particularly African perspective" (Scott and Ziethen 2019, 12).[1] This notion, alluded to in the differentiation of Africanfuturism, takes its theoretical and cultural distance from European enlightenment ideal of linear time, singular narratives, and mechanization as the ultimate form of technological progress. More recently, still, the journal, *Études Littéraires Africaines* published a special issue on "Futurs africains: utopies et dystopies" [African futures: utopias and dystopias] in which works by francophone authors, including Thierno Monénembo, Léonora Miano, Abdelaziz Belkhodja, and Sony Labou Tansi are analyzed as representative examples of what Ninon Chavoz and Anthnoy Mangeon, author of *L'Afrique au future: le renversement des mondes* (2022), articulate the particularities of francophone Africanfuturist fiction vis-à-vis the dominant anglophone productions within the genre. They argue that because of French assimilationist policies throughout the African continent, francophone writers are invariably more concerned with, "la thématique de l'inversion et du renversement des mondes" [a thematic of inversion and reversal of worlds] (Chavoz and Mangeon 2022, 14). Not only has Afrofuturism gained traction in francophone literary and critical discourse, the popular French publication, *Usbek&Rica* released its 38th issue in print in January of 2023,[2] which includes a 40-page dossier on Afrofuturism and a reference to the book, *Afrofuturisms: Ecology, Humanity, and Francophone Cultural Expressions* (Kloetzli 2023, 158). The uptick in academic and popular publications on Afrofuturist francophone productions signals an important moment to investigate further the themes of progress and technology, as well as the languages and temporalities employed in the articulation of such concepts, from a critical postcolonial perspective.

In a particularly salient article on the early theatre of Sony Labou Tansi, Céline Gahungu explains some of the particularities of francophone Africanfuturist fiction by marking a distinction between science-fiction and political-fiction (2022). Her analysis of four plays from the early 1970's, all of which are set at the fin-de-siècle of the late 1990's, illuminates not only the differences between these two anticipatory forms of storytelling, but also some striking commonalities. Political-fiction poses the futurist hypothesis with regard to "the polemic and political question of 'development'" and its concomitant values of "personal enrichment, productivity, and global competitiveness" constitute the fundamental axes of a worldview hinging upon disaster (Gahungu 2022, 65). The significant difference between this perspective and that of science-fiction is that the projected societal or planetary cataclysm is predicated upon the slow and steady accumulation of toxicities resulting from the unfettered continuation of globalist extractive development practices rather than the result of some advanced technological weapon or of "a scientific discourse gone crazy" (Gahungu 2022, 67). In both cases, the science and politics of societal and planetary decomposition in Sony Labou Tansi's works depict a future in which the dehumanizing logics inherent in colonialism and in its postcolonial reconfigurations that continue to prioritize profit margins above any other forms of perceived progress, are called into question through the revelation of their ultimately destructive consequences.[3] These logics that dominate global discourses of development described by Senegalese political economist Felwine Sarr in his book, *Afrotopia*, through an ecolinguistic configuration. Sarr points out that "[k]ey words such as

development, *economic emergence*, *growth*, and *struggles against poverty* are, for some, the principal concepts of the dominant episteme of the era." (2019, xiii). Sarr concludes that contemporary global society operates according to predetermined rules and that "[p]rogress, reason, growth, order—these will become the keywords of the episteme of modernity in the West" (2019, 6). By contrast, one can posit alternative notions of progress and development through the telling of future stories in which alternative political, scientific, and epistemological orientations enter into the realm of possibility through the speculative turn.

Boubacar Boris Diop's novel, *Le Temps de Tamango*, first published in 1981, constitutes one such narrative example of futurist francophone political-fiction. The fracturing of time and narrative identities are multiplied in ways that defy the singular and linear logics that define commonly accepted notions of time and subjectivity. In this novel, which refuses to be a novel, the main character, N'Dongo Thiam, is an engineer educated in Germany who, having returned to Senegal, also dabbles in the literary arts as well as subversive political activities. N'Dongo's identity is intertwined with Tamango, an alias devised by the dissident political group M.A.R.S. for the person whose intended task was to carry out an assassination plot on the State's military counselor, the Frenchman, François Navarro.[4] Interestingly, Tamango is also the name of the fictional slave rebel invented by Prosper Mérimée in the 1929 novella by that name but modeled on an actual historical figure. When a bullet strikes Mamba, the fictional leader of the general strike of 1968 in Dakar, the protest errs aimlessly through the streets before petering out, much like the aftermath of Tamango's rebellion, as N'Dongo reflects on the tragic irony: "After the revolt and the victory he must have had to let the ship float about at random. That's what got him lost. He did not know how to steer a ship. Nice topic for a novel" (Diop 2010, 42).[5] A piece of literary deconstruction, the text mixes facts and fictions with pasts and futures and can be likened to a meta-narrative of the detective genre of "polar," as an intellectual is interested in uncovering what the informed reader can interpret to be the fictionalized events that transpired around the actual popular uprisings of May 1968 in Dakar. The resultant text of Diop's novel is what this anonymous researcher has uncovered in the projected future of 2063, one hundred and three years after Senegalese national independence in 1960. His narrative, which is broken up into three parts, each one supplanted with a section of "notes" compiled by the Narrator[6] in his efforts to reconstruct the time and space of Dakar in 1968, which has seemingly vanished from memory after a successful socialist revolution that is to have taken place in 2015 and drastically altered the national landscape (Diop 2010, 60). In particular, the narrator is interested in uncovering the story of N'Dongo Thiam whose implication in the events remains sufficiently occult and ambiguous.

Taken as an example of a futuristic "Afrotopian" imaginary, Boubacar Boris Diop's novel *Le Temps de Tamango* is particularly salient for its time-traveling temporal distortions. Although the specific setting is the 1968 Dakar demonstrations,[7] which the Narrator portrays in his descriptions of the protesters and the revolutionary group M.A.R.S. The protagonist, N'Dongo Thiam, is an integral member of this group. Over the course of his reconstruction of events, the Narrator who had previously known and had some correspondence with N'Dongo while the latter was studying in Germany, reencounters N'Dongo at a Christmas party after many years. He recalls that in one

of his letters to N'Dongo he had spoken of Samba Diallo, the protagonist of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961), and how he had remained unchanged, true to his origins, even when in France. (Diop 2010, 69) Unlike Samba Diallo, however, N'Dongo had never replied to his letter. In some ways, one can read N'Dongo as a specific type: the European-educated African intellectual who has taken up the novelistic project as means to express longing and homesickness while simultaneously composing a discourse critical of Franco-African relations. N'Dongo's particular project was entitled Les Fenêtres de Lauchammer, which he describes thusly: "So you sat down by your window and you described Africa from the other side of Lauchammer. And after ten years you realized you were telling stories to fall asleep to" (Diop 2010, 70, my translation). N'Dongo describes how he tore up the manuscript and threw it to the fire, an act that recalls how Rimbaud would have done the same with his *Une saison en enfer*, wherein the narrator wishes to express to N'Dongo how his having thrown the manuscript in the fire may very well have been his very own way of writing his *Windows of Lauchammer*. Destruction and production are conflated in the creative act. A narrator refusing to be a novelist and an impossible novel are only the first layer of estrangement. N'Dongo as a reprisal of Tamango and perhaps also as a double of Kane's fictional protagonist, Samba Diallo. Furthermore, there is an alternate narrator whose story is reconstructed through the commentary of the Narrator's "notes" and who is revealed at the very end of the story to be N'Dongo's friend Kader (Diop 2010, 162). The multilayered identities and temporalities in Diop's novel are indicative of an Africanfuturist worldview that articulates numerous possibilities for what can be.

In essence, the novel's fractured and refabricated narrative threads create the effect of a literary time machine, demonstrating how past, present, and future, are all related and relative to one another. This notion of interrelated temporalities corresponds to what John Biti argues in terms of time, explaining how for the Akamba "time is divided into two main sections: *Tene* (the Past), and *Mituki* (the immediate Present). Everything moves back into the *Tene* period, and past events constitute Time" (Mbiti 1983, 17). Although there is a great geographical distance between Kenya and Senegal, the temporal vision presented in Boubacar Boris Diop's novel reflects a similar understanding of the present time feeding into the past. Writing about the 1960's during the 1980's, but projecting another 80 years into the future, as Diop does, reveals the ways in which past histories are reconstructed through present perspectives, and also that present perspectives will become those reconstructed histories of yet-to-be-realized future perspectives. To this point, Sarr defines the concept of Afro-contemporaneity as "[t]o name one's own contemporaneity is to inscribe it within a project: to give it meaning, indicating the values it must accomplish, and to create a space and an environment where these values can be accomplished. Afro-contemporaneity is this present time, this psychological continuum of the lived experience of Africans…" (2019, 22). The project of making one's own time and giving it meaning is inherently linked to the notion of occupying time, which implies the articulation of activity in the world of individual and collective agency. This very notion of temporal agency, or being in time within a particularly African worldview will be explored further through an examination of culturally

determined thought processes and worldviews in relation to specific cultural ideologies—spiritual or scientific—that are in turn informed by a unique cultural orientation toward existence.

A scientific understanding of time, agency, and the world rests at the base of human cultures, as it precipitates a common understanding of narratological identity construction, the capacity to envision and engage in useful and beneficial activities, and to do so in a manner that corresponds with the environmental orderliness of a given population. In her book, *Yurugu: An Afrikan-Centered Critique of European Thought and Behavior*, Marimba Ani employs the concept of *utamawazo*, which is like the concept of a worldview, but differs in that as it "places more emphasis on conscious mental operations and refers to the way in which both speculative and nonspeculative thought is structured by ideology and bio-cultural experience" (Ani 1994, 15). Furthermore, Ani argues that the thought processes of a culture are dependent upon what she terms the *asili* or "the germinal principle of the being of a culture, its essence (Ani 1994, 12). Accordingly, there is a certain worldview or conglomerate of thought processes resulting from a cultural essence, which indicate how the world is thought and experienced. Furthermore, she delineates the collective affect of a culture's *asili*, which she defines as concept of utamahoro, which is "the vitality of a culture . . . a force made powerful through its collectiveness" (Ani 1994, 16-17). The central question for our analysis here is what precisely constitutes the cultural essence of a culture —African or European—and how does this essence manifest itself in thought, worldview, and vitality, paying particular attention to the concepts of science and spirituality within a temporal framework.

In terms of time and temporality, Ivoirian poet, philosopher and novelist Jean-Marie Adé Adiaffi's novel *La carte d'identité*, translated as *The Identity Card* (1983), provides us with an example of the ways in which a linear temporality is insufficient for characterizing the "continuum of lived experience of Africans" that Sarr alludes to above.[8] This alternate conception of time, as well as a corresponding vision of the world and human agency resides at the core of Adiaffi's novel, which traces the surreal journey of the protagonist Mélédouman, a name that paradoxically means "'I have no name' or more precisely, 'they falsified my name'" (Adiaffi 1983, 1), as he seeks to uncover his missing identity card for the colonial authorities. However, the novel subverts the conventions of space, time and subjectivity, suspending reality within the time of a sacred week, at the end of which he discovers an embodied identity with cultural and spiritual significance far beyond the facts and statistics of the material circumstances of one's birth, parents, given name, and so forth. Mélédouman's journey to discover himself in relation to the world and its "deep time" of a continuous present retreating into an infinite past tense is punctuated by a transcendent spiritualism that infuses the world with significance.

It is important to note, first and foremost, that Adiaffi's text defies the conventional rules of novelistic forms, combining theatrical dialogue, poetic interludes, and prose in a fashion that seeks to embody the orality of storytelling that is fundamental to many indigenous African cultures. Adiaffi refers to his writing style as *n'zassa*, or "genre without genre," and by privileging multiple modes of expression, the text itself undermines the primacy of written documentation, which undergirds all of Western imperialism. Whether in the form of maps, identification cards, land

deeds or contracts, all of which operate to divide and differentiate the totality of the world and humanity, singularity and documentation are the modus operandi of global rationalist capitalist civilization. This fact is further reinforced by Mélédouman's blindness in the text, which is the result of his imprisonment and torture by colonial authorities. Beginning his journey the sacred week, Mélédouman demands to be taught "your science, the knowledge of primeval, original time" (Adiaffi 1983, 49). There is an expressed desire to understand the past, the (*Tene*) into which all presents (*Mituki*) flow, beyond the linear, written histories of Western European superpowers. This task to uncover the past or "play the Sherlock Holmes of history" (Adiaffi 1983, 49) marks a thematic link between Adiaffi and Diop's work, although the latter is more focused on the time of twentieth-century political histories from that present's future, whereas the former looks to the deep past of indigenous knowledge systems and traditions from the present's past.

Jean-Marie Adiaffi was a descendent of indigenous Agni ruling elite (his father) as well as an animist priestesses (his grandmother) and following his philosophical studies at the Sorbonne in Paris during the late 1960's, he returned to Côte d'Ivoire intent upon expositing the indigenous philosophies and religions of his people while working to fight against primitivist prejudices, thereby proposing Bossonism as a modern indigenous African religion. Véronique Duchesne (2000) describes Adiaffi's project as such:

> "Le Bossonisme affirme l'existence, dans la conception africaine, d'un dieu unique créateur du monde et des hommes. […] Ce Dieu suprême se tient loin des hommes avec lesquels il n'a aucune relation. Il a créé des puissances intermédiaires, envoyées comme des messagers, les Bossons." (Duchesne 2000, 304)
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> [Bossonism affirms the existence, within African conceptuality, of a god which is the sole creator of the world and of humanity … This supreme being is distanced from humanity and has no relation with it, and so created intermediary powers which are sent as messengers, the Bossons.]

Much like the Aimu, which is the name given to the spirits that inhabit the world of the Akamba (Mbiti 1983, 15), Bossons are, like the *orisha* in the Yoruba spiritual tradition (Opoku 1993, 71), distinct divinities that inhabit the earth and animate existence through their presence. Between the Agni, Yoruba, and Akamba religious traditions, we see a striking similarity in the role that intermediary spiritual entities play in relation to an absent creator God and the existential functioning of human societies across the African continent. The resultant worldview as it pertains to the natural environment is one in which the material and the metaphysical intermingle, where the juxtaposition between the spiritual and the scientific is harmonically intertwined through a temporality that continually re-presents the past. Birago Diop's poem "Souffles" ["Breaths"], articulates this vision through the imperative: "Listen more often / to things than to beings / the voice of the fire / the water that speaks / the voice of the wind / the bush that weeps / this is the ancestor's breathing" (Diop 1960). The voices of the wind, the fire, the water, the flora are all infused with the breath of the ancestors, animating the world with their past-time, breathing the

significance of deep time into the objects that make up the world, animating them with spirit and significance.

Scientifically speaking, linear economic humanism marks the current societal understanding of these elemental forces, in that human nature constitutes the dominant environmental component of the Anthropocene. The active and animating power that provides the framework for human and non-human activity on a planetary scale is that which operates according to the laws and logics of economics, all of which rests upon the premise that seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years accumulate according to a steady and constant fixed progression. This worldview is limited by a culturally specific set of logics encoded in language, as Sarr proposes that "[i]n this context, economic discourse functions as a language that ensures the establishment of a common symbolic code through which the group's ability to name, think, and experience the real develops" (2019, 49). If the human experience of reality is governed by laws of economics, constituting the cultural essence or *asili* of a globalized Western European culture, then the worldview (*utamawazo*) and vitality (*utamahoro*) will be a reflection of those particular cultural values. The condition of being confronted with antagonistic cultural values inherent in (post) colonial societies is what drives Mélédouman to seek to reconstruct his own cultural identification in order to better apprehend ways in which to interact with the world around him. He declares: "Forgotten science of our forefathers, science of power and strength" (Adiaffi 1983, 99). Mélédouman is not concerned with the science of West, but with a different science, one which seeks not only to "stud[y] nature […] to penetrate its laws in order to own it and master it," but also "to understand the laws of the supernatural, in order to own and master it too" (Adiaffi 1983, 100). The recognition of a supernatural reality that is superimposed upon and infuses itself in and through the natural order of things yields an alternative understanding of human relationships with these worlds, resulting in a different ethos and affective modality of existence. He goes on to articulate this vision further:

> "The science of nature is still too young to face such a new challenge. The question has to be put scientifically. If we consider science according to its results and not its methods, it certainly has gone beyond the wildest magician's dreams. Its results can indeed be seen as more magical than magic itself – but a different kind of magic, a magic which can prove, explain. That is the major difference. Who knows whether all unexplained facts are not simply the results of unknown methods, methods we have yet to discover from their very results?" (Adiaffi 1983, 100)

Recalling the quotation from Nnedi Okorafor from the beginning of the essay, once again, one observes that magic and science operate to serve a similar function, which is to explain unexplainable phenomena. Within indigenous African imaginaries, time and matter are infused with spiritual significance, unlike the purely scientific rationalism of a global economic system that operates primarily through the destruction and exploitation of people, their time, and their material environments. While science is the logic that vehicles such a system, Mélédouman's observation insinuates that the scientific worldview is itself more magical than magic; its realities often times border on the realms of the impossible within human imagination and experience.

Furthermore, he seems to imply that a magical worldview may be equally valid as a way to approach nature, a notion that is echoed by Sarr who argues that "[t]he legitimacy of this method, which consists of attempting to grasp the African real or reality [*le réel Africain*] through the tool we call science, has not been called into question" (Sarr 2019, 81). Since scientific inquiry has been the privileged method of knowledge production in most societies, one must wonder if knowledge and experience could be enriched by considering the value of different methods of inquiry, including but not limited to the spiritual and the speculative.

If, for example, science, or magic as it were, explained temporality differently, like those conceptions explored earlier in Diop's novel, then one can begin to articulate alternative models to linear progress. For example, in their article, "Inviting a decolonial practice of future imaginaries of nature: Introducing the Entangled Time Tree," Terry and her co-authors describe multiple alternative formulations of time, "including perspectives that are not linear in their conceptualization of time and that connect to the multi-layered place-based futures found in African storytelling" (2024, 3). Rather than avaricious competition against the notion of time running out, or what is often referred to as "apocalyptic time," one might imagine that alternative modes of engagement with time and space can foster more inclusive relationships between humans and nature, as Terry et al. suggest: "[African speculative] fiction embodies animist folktales, and highlights the moral value placed on multi-species interactions and reciprocity […] as a way to re-emphasize the human-nature-culture interdependencies that disciplinary science turned away from during the Enlightenment" (7). Accordingly, the entangled temporalities of animism-infused storytelling might also yield an understanding of nature that consists of the entirety of beings, both human and non-human, both living and non-living that occupy the terrestrial, cosmic, and psychic spaces of experience. Just as entangled temporalities foreground the relation between human and non-human communicative agencies that allow for humanity and its constituent relationships to appear and function according to different sets of ideological and practical principles.

Interestingly, the same kind of animist logic that informs the entanglement of human and natural forces within time, can also be applied to contemporary capitalist society, as Achille Mbembe writes in *Necropolitics*, "the Afrofuturist critique of humanism can only be deepened by combining it with an equivalent critique of capitalism" (2019, 177). He further expounds upon this notion, stating, "capitalism is establishing itself in the modality of an animist religion" (178). In the complex nexus of competing worldviews, such as those that persist in postcolonial contexts, one sees nonetheless some underlying similarities. In the indigenous and Africanfuturist perspective, time moves steadily into the past as do the spirits of the ancestors, animating the world with invisible forces, which in turn precipitate actions and reactions among human and non-human beings in the material sphere. Similarly, one might build upon Mbembe's Afrofuturist critique of the global capitalist perspective, which depicts time as an accumulating forward momentum containing the traces of past transactions and exchanges, the invisible forces of which animate the material world through designations of value, precipitating conscious orientations and actions within human societies. Understanding that languages, logics and beliefs are culturally contingent

affords the opportunity to critique the nature of the real, as the narrator in Diop's novel states: "I really feel like asking myself if reality exists. Since it never is what it is, it ends up inspiring doubt in even the best intentioned of minds" (2010, 123). This observation reveals that reality is always subject to narration; it is always interpreted through human and non-human frameworks, and therefore never perceived in its absolute totality. The question that remains is which stories we choose to tell as societies in order to ascertain what reality is. Is it pure economic abstraction, linear temporality, and technological development? Or, are there other stories to tell about reality, such as those that reveal a transcendent spiritual realm that imbues the natural world with power and significance within a perpetually receding past-time made up of infinite presents? Okorafor exemplifies the importance of storytelling when she admonishes the younger generations that have, "lost the art of the proverb, the gift of wordplay, the science of fiction, the jujuism of the African'" (2021, 100-101). Telling stories that create and disseminate new, improvised meanings for the world beyond the purely logical constraints of rationalism constitutes a valuable contribution of oral cultures for imagining alternative worldviews for human cultural development.

Let us therefore presume that there are infinite possibilities for developing through storytelling, new magical and scientific conceptions of time, animating forces, and nature which will determine the qualities and characters of human and non-human cultures. One can immediately perceive the consequences of scientific rationalism that promotes a singular worldview and corresponding value system, as Okorafor notes, again through the character, DNA:

> "We let them convince us that we had nothing and our lands were useless. If it cannot make money, then it is worthless. That is not our culture, that is capitalism. Yet we still listened. We saw their big cities, we wanted all their nonsense things, we respected their big talk. We learned to prize money over things far more valuable." (2021, 61)

When humanity becomes steeped in a singular worldview, we may too easily forget that there are other registers of value, including connection with one another, a sense of cultural embeddedness and belonging, and a mutually respectful relationship with the natural environment and its own animating forces, cycles, and rhythms. It suffices to simply tell different stories of ourselves as humans, altering the ways in which we perceive our relationship to one another, our environment, our technologies and our magics. If humanity's stories are intertwined with other stories of those beings that share this planet, and if time could be reconfigured according to multilayered temporalities that all those stories embody, humanity might find itself with more than enough time to experience the fullness of being in relation. Other stories with other times, like those told by the grasshopper, the fish, or the ficus tree might be the key to unlocking the very same magic that humans seek to create through their technological stories. Both have a place in the world, but it is important to recognize their limits. In the words of Okorafor's cybernetic protagonist, AO: "Technology always fails eventually, and juju is made to succeed" (2021, 104). The past time has shown us this much. Technologies always eventually become obsolete or outdated at some point, which is why imperialism has taken on so many innovative forms over the centuries. New technologies afford opportunities to systematically

oppress, dominate, and conquer old technologies in an endless sequence of substitutions. because it is bound by the effects of a linear temporality. Magic, juju, animating forces are not bound by the effects of linear temporality, such as degradation, decay, or obsolescence. They operate along different timelines, serving as inexhaustible sources of inspiration, meaning, and value for human societies in full planetary relation through pasts, presents, and into futures.

Notes

1. Translations of French texts are my own: "apprehender la science-fiction d'une perspective proprement africaine."

2. Also published online at: https://usbeketrica.com/fr/article/mort-afrofuturisme-biopiraterie-decouvrez-le-sommaire-du-nouveau-numero-d-usbek-rica.

3. See also, Joslin (2018). "Sony Labou Tansi: Une écocritique équatoriale égalitaire," Nouvelles Études Francophones 33:1, pp. 210-225.

4. For more on N'Dongo and Tamango, see the "notes" from the third part of Diop's novel, specifically, p. 178.

5. This passage is also reminiscent of Rimbaud's celebrated poem, *Le bâteau îvre*, or "The drunken boat."

6. He insists, "Je ne suis pas un romancier, moi. Je ne suis qu'un Narrateur" (Diop 125) [I am not a novelist, myself. I am only a Narrator].

7. Abdoulaye Bathily describes these events in his study, *Mai 1968 à Dakar ou la révolte universitaire et la démocratie* (Chaka, 1992).

8. For more on Adiaffi's novel, see also, Joslin (2019). "Futurité en francosphère: enjeux du fantastic et de la science-fiction." *Œuvres & Critiques* 44:2, pp. 101-118.

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