

Introduction

Africanfuturism, Development, and Humanities

It's time for us as a people to start making some changes. Let's change the way we eat. Let's change the way we live. And let's change the way we treat each other. You see, the old way wasn't working, so it's on us to do what we got to do to survive.

—2Pac, "Changes"

In these times of crisis of meaning for a technological society, offering a different perspective of social life, coming from other mythological universes and borrowing a common dream of life, of balance, of harmony, of meaning.¹

—Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*

Today we are still waiting for the propositions of an Africa that need either join the world, or propose an alternative to the world.²

—Jean-Pierre Bekolo, *Africa for the Future*

You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. In this case, it comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future.³

—Thomas Sankara

The world begins with imagination. With a possible exception of prehistoric megalithic ruins dotting the earth's crust, at no time in recorded history has a planetary civilization faced a crisis of such magnitude as the emergent reality of a necessary cultural, ecological, pathogenic, economic, political, moral, and psychological reorientation precipitated by irresponsible practices of globalization. The twenty-first century has spawned a fundamentally technocratic global society of generally uprooted multinational and polycultural individuals residing primarily in highly concentrated urban areas spread across the planet's surface: the majority of these individuals are almost entirely dependent upon the continued functioning of basic human services controlled and operated predominantly by a corporate and politically influential elite social class. These conditions belie systemic inequalities that undergird the functioning of societal systems, from health and welfare and educational institutions to the economic and political models through which such inequalities are often imposed and sustained. Populations and regions that are the most vulnerable to the destructive human and environmental impacts of such processes are those that have been historically marginalized and exploited by the centuries-long developments of globalized neoliberal democratic capitalism spawned by the age of European exploration in the fifteenth century.⁴ Consequently, there is an emergent bifurcated discourse that pretends to maintain a definitively decaying social order and its supporting global institutions, while also endeavoring to anticipate and predefine a future through speculation, projection, extrapolation, and imagination.

The death and rebirth of civilizations is a phenomenon as common as the cycling of the seasons, only that in some instances the death rattles and birth pangs are perceived and experienced in more acute and extreme ways. Consider the rise and fall of the Ghana Empire between the Niger and Senegal Rivers, which flourished for over five hundred years until the early 1200s CE, only to be reincarnated by the Islamic Mali Empire for the next half a millennium and later expanded into the Songhai Empire,

which eventually gave way to French colonial expansion and the incorporation of the region's people and resources into the global capitalist network of exchange that violently spread throughout the world in the twentieth century. This and other European expansionist projects are intrinsically linked to a colonialist worldview with a supporting vocabulary steeped in constructs of religious, racial, and civilizational superiority and correlative inferiorities. In order for future-oriented concerns on a global scale to engender positive and productive changes, it is essential to interrogate and deconstruct the entrenched and engrained biases in the concepts that define the perceptions and experiences of humans in the context of global civilization. In response to this, the work that follows constitutes a multidisciplinary study of Francophone African cultural expressions to identify and congeal alternative societal orderings of educational, political, economic, cultural, and communal practices that coalesce around the dual foci of long-term human and planetary sustainability.

The imperative moving forward must involve an interrogation of the value systems and practices that led to this tipping point in order to appropriately pivot toward a new direction, one capable of disengaging from destructive paradigms while creating new opportunities in which life can thrive on the planet. Such visionary projects have continuously been realized over countless centuries by artists, painters, poets, and philosophers who experience and represent the moments of their own civilizational transformations. In the Islamic world we have the travel narratives of Ibn Battuta that provide us with a glimpse of an expansive caliphate that is about to buckle beneath the weight of the growing civilizations on its borders, namely Asia and Europe of the Middle Ages. The authors of the European Enlightenment in many ways signal a transitional moment of overture into the global capitalist arena marked by nationalism, conquest, and exploitation of human and planetary resources on a then-unimaginable scale. In the current era, writers of speculative fiction and Afrofuturist thinkers point out societal disparities through imaginative extrapolation. In an

essay originally published in 1989, Octavia Butler writes on science fiction's capacity for "thinking about the present, the future, and the past . . . to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing [and] its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction" (1996, 134–35).

Authors of what may be characterized as global Black culture herald the ever-elusive escape from the enduring legacies of racism that wrought current global socioeconomic and cultural order. In reading Laurence Dunbar, W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Octavia Butler, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Sony Labou Tansi, Spike Lee, or Djibril Diop Mambety, there emerges a common imaginary thread that cohabits the conflicted and contradictory spaces of loss and grief, coupled with creativity and hope, and in this temporal momentariness of *le pleurer-rire* (or the "laughing-cry" to borrow from Henri Lopes) that new worlds and worldviews are ushered into existence. André Carrington's work *Speculative Blackness* outlines the intrinsic Whiteness of science fiction, noting how "the production of literature and culture fits within the structure of societies in which it takes place" (2016, 1). For this reason, building on the work of Achille Mbembe, Felwine Sarr, and other contemporary African philosophers, this book proposes that a sustainable planetary future must necessarily be one which dispenses with the limitations that have been unequally imposed upon different humanities by the mechanisms of an inhuman global capitalist democracy which exists only through its continuous relation to that "other" always lurking in the shadows of exclusion. Reconstituting the Black Atlantic world through its creative cultural signifiers can trace the vectors of a new civilization built upon differing scientific codes, ideological structures and belief systems, cultural practices, educational processes, linguistic and ecological diversification, and ethical human interrelations in order to transcend the aporias of our contemporary world order, which appears to be on the brink of collapse. And while Carrington's *Speculative Blackness* expertly

interrogates racialized and gendered biases and constructions of the genre, it remains steeped in Western (and specifically American) modes of cultural production and identification. In response to this apparent lack of diversity with regard to global Blackness in speculative fiction, I draw from the theoretical and artistic imaginings of African writers and thinkers such as Jean-Pierre Bekolo whose work *Africa for the Future, sortir un nouveau monde du cinema* (2009) depicts the potency of African narratives, expressed cinematically as a means of realizing—*réaliser* is the French verb for directing a film—a more inclusive and innovative future for Africa and Africans on a global scale.

Beginning with a reformulation of the concept of *development* through its disassociation with purely quantitative measures of economic abstractionism, humanistic inquiry into the creative visions of African artists and thinkers will provide alternative visions of how an inclusive, sustainable global society might appear. Numerous prominent Africanist scholars have long advocated and argued for new frameworks through which development in Africa could be conceptualized differently by appealing to indigenous forms of knowledge, societal organization, and cultural values. In *A Prescience of African Cultural Studies*, Handel Kashope Wright argues that “if we reconceptualize development as more than a process of economic growth, then we can begin to see how orature contributes to development by creating the space to put forward ideas about how, why, and in what direction social change should take place” (2004, 133). For Wright, the notion of development for human society needs to be viewed through the lens of humanities, in the African sense of a communal practice of sharing ideas, such as the griotic oral traditions of ancient Mali. He claims that the study of literature, including oral literatures, as a form of cultural expression is tantamount to creating a society that is capable of self-determination through shared knowledge and communal interaction. Wright continues by invoking Chinua Achebe’s essay “What Has Literature Got to Do with It?” in order to make an argument for the importance of literature for African

studies, with a focus on elaborating on socioculturally sensitive development discourses and practices in Africa. He writes, “So-called pragmatic changes fail to recognize not only that people need a well-rounded education but perhaps more significantly that the liberal arts themselves in general, and literature in particular, can contribute significantly to addressing the issues faced in considering the direction, pace, and requirements of development and social change” (133). Felwine Sarr further describes “Francophone Literature as an Ecology of Knowledge,”⁵ noting the ways in which the multiple forms of knowing, including those of “oral reason” represented in African literatures, constitute a counter-archive to the (neo)colonial library, proposing alternative epistemological avenues for understanding Africa and the world. Reconceptualizing the thought-worlds in which humans operate is a key component of reconfiguring humanity’s relation to the planet-world that supports and sustains it.

In the seminal work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney describes the importance of “development” for the individual and the society in which they are embedded, pointing out the predominant, limited understanding of development “in an exclusive economic sense—the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features” (4). Accordingly, the reduction of development to a purely economic abstraction allows for the very conditions of underdevelopment to be spawned, disseminated, and maintained. Furthermore, as Felwine Sarr argues in *Afrotopia*, this narrowly defined conception of what is developed and underdeveloped constitutes an epistemic invasion: “Development is one of the West’s entrepreneurial expressions, an extension of its episteme in the world” (2019, 4).⁶ Sarr goes on to further elaborate on the particular language of this Western enterprise, which includes *development*, *economic emergence*, *growth*, and the *struggles against poverty* among its key concepts (xiii),⁷ indicating that such views are in fact antithetical to humanity as such, adhering to an inverted perspective of the human via “the mandate of quantity over quality, of having over being” (xi).⁸ In

response to this complex set of sociocultural conditions that ultimately contribute to dehumanization in favor of the hegemony of economic primacy emerges what Sarr terms “quantophrenic bias: the obsession to count everything, to evaluate, to quantify, and to place everything into equations” (1).⁹ Numerous theoretical works exist on development in Africa, from textbooks to critical analyses,¹⁰ yet by and large what these works typically fail to consider are the underlying cultural-linguistic biases of development discourses steeped primarily in neoliberal expansionist and democratic capitalist economic ideological terms—the hallmarks of colonialist practices.¹¹ Consequently, through critical approaches and humanistic literary analyses of African fictions, *Afrofuturisms* aims to extract alternative notions of development from the quagmire of neocolonialist global economics and then relocate it within the domain of the human and planetary relationality.

At a moment when technology and the environment appear to be at odds, when humanity and the biosphere that it inhabits are struggling to establish a suitable balance for sustainable existence, it becomes imperative to imagine new *épistémès*, in the Foucauldian sense, to accommodate—materially, socioculturally, psychologically, as well as spiritually—the ever-evolving realities of any given epoch. Any change in collective human consciousness, thought, and imagination is first and foremost a question that resides in the nature of language. The quest for a fundamental alteration in the conceptualization of humanity’s continuous relationship with its environment, both the biosphere and the technosphere, must originate within the realms of signification and representation. The concept of ecolinguistics delineates the processes by which language, serving as the elemental cognitive filter of human experience, determines the perception of the environment.¹² If language is limited to purely abstract economic indicators as reflective of the quality of life of a given human culture, then the reality of human experience will be limited to those very basic substances. The concept of “ecoliteracy”¹³ can therefore be defined as the capacity to read and decipher particular nuances

and particularities of the non-self, the “other,” one’s “environment,” which is simultaneously our singular planet, Earth, and the civilizational modifications that have inhabited it.

In this nexus of relation between human and nonhuman, this book proposes a rethinking of the signifying term “development” through an alternative conceptual framework that foregrounds the interconnected circularity of time, space, and consciousness. In this regard, Achille Mbembe proposes the following: “The Afrofuturist current declares that the category of humanism is now obsolete. If the aim is to adequately name the contemporary condition, its spokespersons suggest, it will be necessary to do so based on all the assemblages of object-humans and of humans-objects of which, since the advent of modern times, the Negro is the prototype or prefiguration” (2019, 164).

While many of the works analyzed and discussed in this project may not be considered “Afrofuturist” in the conventional sense of science-fictional norms steeped in Western science, I contend nevertheless that speculative fiction, science fiction, and Afrofuturist themes, rhetorics, and motifs are prevalent in African cultural expressions, namely in the expounded vision of the human and nonhuman entities that animate and inhabit the material and ideological planes of existence. While some African writers do operate in the speculative and futurist modalities of Afro-science fiction,¹⁴ I contend that intrinsic ecolinguistic biases concerning the nature of “science” and “speculation,” hinged on materialistic, quantitative limitations of Western science, can preclude certain works from consideration within the salient critical sphere of Afrofuturist discourse. For this very reason, Nigerian American sci-fi writer and Afrofuturist scholar Nnedi Okorafor has coined the term “Africanfuturism” to further differentiate works of speculative fiction that center and foreground African cultural modalities over those that are encoded by the conceptual biases of Western and diasporic thought.¹⁵ Although I use the term “Afrofuturism” throughout this work, it is important to clarify the distinction between the generic Afrofuturist science fiction of

Western diasporic construction and a speculative fiction that is directly rooted in African modalities of thought, expression, and mythologies. In the expository theoretical chapter of this book, I will underscore the cultural contingencies of scientific discourse. By drawing on the critical works of Valentin Yves Mudimbé, Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga, and other prominent voices from African philosophy, bolstered by literary examples from Sony Labou Tansi, Jean-Marie Adiaffi, and Gerges Ngal, I will outline the intrinsic ecolinguistic biases in the construct of positivist, objective science in order to broaden the scope of Afrofuturist science fiction to include not only magical and mystical sciences but also the science of everyday experience¹⁶ as related through works of filmic and literary fiction.

An expanded understanding of science will allow for a consideration of African works that depict the condition of subalternity in dialogue with dominant Western discourses, a hybrid cultural encoding that informs conceptions of individual and collective identities, economic progress and societal development, cultural and linguistic values, as well as ecological and cosmological relationality. Critical pedagogies, which argue specifically for the importance of arts and humanities for imagining equitable and sustainable futures for global societies, yield alternative frameworks of reference and exchange for engaging with the complexities of human societies from a planetary perspective. There is an underlying generic thread in this book that pushes the boundaries of what might be considered literature, taking into account the recent technological advancements that inform the emerging field of digital humanities, while engaging with poetry, music, film, orature, and other forms of cultural expression. Consequently, broadening our understanding of various forms of new media, in addition to standard literary and cinematic texts, can contribute to a fuller understanding of the diverse facets of societal development from postcolonial and indigenous African perspectives, with a speculative approach to creating and nurturing sustainable future civilizations for humanity.

Following the expository theoretical chapter of this book, the second chapter outlines multidimensional epistemological frameworks for analyses of métisse logics through the incarnation of mixed-race pregnancies, births, and children in the fictional works of women writers from Africa and the diaspora, including Mariama Bâ, Ken Bugul, Marie NDiaye, Véronique Tadjo, and Werewere Liking. Building on the feminist and womanist critiques of Françoise Lionnet, Odile Cazenave, Valérie Orlando, and others, the matrix of motherhood, femininity, and childbirth is cast in terms of a postcolonial societal schism, providing an embodied analysis of the notion of “cultural *métissage*” espoused by Léopold Sédar Senghor and other contemporary theorists of (post)colonial Africa. Read against the backdrop of early and canonical novels, such as Ousmane Socés’ *Mirages de Paris*, and works by Camara Laye, Ferdinand Oyono, and Henri Lopes, the trope of a real or imagined infant born of two distinctly different parentages in African literary texts is adopted and expanded by the women writers in this chapter, who depict two fundamentally different views of the idea of *métissage*, one hopeful and another tragically negative. Examining the nuance and sociocultural contexts of these five postcolonial woman writers’ texts, chapter 2 delineates points of contact and convergence between these two perspectives through the trope of motherhood in order to interrogate the intricate complexities—physical, emotional, psychological, social, and cultural—of postcolonial identity construction.

This point is exemplified in the work of Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala, who characterizes this state of indeterminacy when she explains the notion of *l’écriture lunatique*, or “lunatic writing,”¹⁷ as the constant negotiation between hope and despair. Focusing on the future grants the capacity to access other modes of thinking and being, a transformation that is visible in her novel *Tu t’appelleras Tanga* when the young African protagonist Tanga requests that her French-Jewish interlocutor take her hand, a gesture that joins the two women together along a physical and spiritual plane of coexistence: “Give me your hand, and heretofore

you will be me . . . my story will be born in your veins” (Beyala 1988, 18).¹⁸ Such a transformation is possible if one believes in its possibility. The ability to envision the future and to see oneself as one or several being(s) perpetually in the future constitutes the fundamental power to withstand the influence of societal illusions and to traverse, even transgress, the barriers between the self and the other, thereby permitting the possibility of sharing common experiences and creating a society reflective of its composing members.¹⁹ This calling into question of the real, or rather engaging a new set of potential perspectives through which to approach the real, constitutes a fundamental aspect of the African literary imagination. Accordingly, this chapter analyzes the complexities and contradictions of giving birth to the metaphorical *métisse* society of the future, focusing on the fundamental role of women in the creation of the future, both in a literary sense—the women writers of the works express their vision of what a culturally *métisse* society may be—and in a more literal sense, of mothers as leaders who exercise a highly influential role in the physical, psychological, and emotional formation of the future generations whose task it is to overcome the obstacles left by preceding generations. This move toward racial transcendence and conciliation, and gender inclusivity derived from strong femininity, constitutes an essential grounding for newly imagined forms of societal development, which will be elaborated on in further detail in chapter 4.

The third chapter of this book addresses one of the major stumbling blocks for the development of future generations in African society, namely, a socially destructive culture of perpetual war that destabilizes societal structures and creates a market for child soldiers, further mortgaging the futures of African societies. Following Joseph Slaughter’s assertion that human rights are predicated on a person’s “right to narration” (2007, 39), one must inevitably accept the new forms of narration that such a practice may take as we approach the quarter mark of the twenty-first century. In this context, I examine fictional and nonfictional accounts of child soldiers, including those by Ahmadou Kourouma,

Emmanuel Dongala, Ismael Beah, and others, within the context of internationally motivated intranational violence in Africa, which illustrates the problematic nature and devastating consequences of systemic political corruption, foreign intervention, and human avarice for the most vulnerable of citizens—children—and the crippling effect of this self-perpetuating cycle on the future development potential of these areas. I draw from an array of critical approaches, including Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, Maureen Moynagh's discussion of human rights discourses, and Christina Lux's conception of "peacebuilding." These perspectives engage with the textual accounts, whether biographical or fictional, as a tool to promote healing for the individual, the collective society, and the larger international community, whose involvement in the conflict is often as ambivalent (in some cases, profiteering and arming multiple sides in a conflict) as the child soldier's. The dichotomous lines between victim and perpetrator are blurred on all levels, and as a result, these accounts force us to rethink the ways in which global market forces, humanitarian agencies, political alliances, and persisting (neo)colonial legacies all participate in the factors that give rise to a culture of war in which child soldiering becomes a viable career path for survival. From this standpoint, then, one is required to rethink the societal value placed on products and persons, emphasizing communitarian well-being and a robust social dynamic rather than ruthless individualism and the unfettered pursuit of corporate profit.²⁰

The tension between the destitution of the present and future possibilities finds definitive form in the infamous warning of Sony Labou Tansi's *La vie et demie*, in which he warns of a world of tomorrow dominated by authoritarian dictatorship, violence, and general dehumanization: "But we cling to war. War is our tic. Before when it was war for peace we fought like men; now that we've entered into war for war, we fight like savage beasts, we fight like things" (1979, 185).²¹ Although Tansi does invent several spaces of survival in his story (both natural and technological) where one might always discover a more apocalyptic world yet to

come, beyond the horizon, *La vie et demie* serves to apprise humanity of the dangers of life denial, of drawing one's life force from absolutist artifice, the censored histories that are the invention of nationalist despots, the Providential Guides.²² Mbembe articulates the "generalized instrumentalization of human existence" as the operational mechanism in the necropolitical exercise of sovereignty, in which "becoming a subject . . . supposes upholding the work of death" (2019, 68). The necropolitical antieconomy that Mbembe theorizes reveals the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of modernity as inherently violent, resulting in the perpetual war, even if only ideological, that has infused the global history and culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The consequence, as we see in the works discussed in this chapter, is a population divided upon itself, much like the ambivalent figure of the child soldier who embodies the contradictory practices of innocence and complicity, a conception that is drawn out further in terms of the figure of the migrant in the following chapter.

The fourth chapter analyzes literary and cinematic works that depict the problematic processes of migrant experiences through an existential lens, focusing in on the innate human desire for change, novelty, or merely difference, which can be abated through humanistic educational adaptations in local societies. At the crux of this project lies a reorientation of the ideological and linguistic relationships between global civilization and its composite cultures, allowing for a nonbinary reading of the imaginative spaces created by artists representing historically oppressed and marginalized peoples, namely through the figure of the migrant in chapter 3 whose simultaneous presence and absence necessitates an embrace of paradoxical ambiguity. Much like the dialogical narrative and psychic structures in Ngal's *Giambatista Viko*, the identity doublings in Beyalá's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, the time dilation in Tansi's *La vie et demie*, or the geohistorical inversions in Abdourahmane Waberi's *Aux États Unis d'Afrique*, Afrofuturist and speculative narratives create ancillary spaces, concepts, and methods through which to imagine and then enact significant

change in global narratives, thus critiquing and creating alternative global futures. The twenty-first century has ushered in an epoch of virtual exploration in which once again the potential existence of other possible worlds incites the imagination to project its utopic or dystopic visions from the present. This is no less the case for African writers than for any others, as illustrated by Waberi's novel *Aux États-Unis d'Afrique*, in which he relates a transcontinental vision of an Africa that has become the ideal place to earn a comfortable and pleasant life for oneself in a world in which political and cultural stereotypes, as well as the origins, destinations, and ethnicities of migrant figures as they are typically conceived, have been reified and reversed. In the United States of Africa, we find Africanized consumer industries, such as the McDiop restaurant, Safari beer, or Guelwaar tires, as well as museums of art and culture that display the significance of Africa's civilizational exploits.²³ In addition to giving a fictional home to the musings and visions of the negritude poets of the past century, the richness of African arts constitutes a poignant critique of the debate over African cultural and artistic artifacts pillaged during the original colonial era to their rightful repatriation to continental inheritors. In an article on Waberi's novel, Anjali Prabhu (2011) outlines the discursive power play that Waberi's speculative fiction enacts through a systematic inversion of reality, likening it to Voltaire's *Candide*. She writes: "The author of *In the United States of Africa* presents a story (an enunciation) in which Africa emerges as the legitimate and comfortable space of that enunciation. In situating this fabulous story as an inversion of the real relationships of authority, the author goes beyond pessimistic irony . . . in order to suggest the contingency, not only of 'facts,' but also of the play of power in the act of enunciation that results from these facts" (83).²⁴

The inversion of the static order of North-South power relations that has for centuries dictated the "facts" of reality undermines the truth of that reality through its fictionalization. Moreover, Prabhu argues that through the enunciative act of

the novel itself, the primacy or veracity of those very power relations themselves, is further called into question. One powerful illustration of this fictionalizing fact-checking in Waberi's novel is illustrated through the figure of the clandestine immigrant, a principal character in many African narratives. However, in Waberi's rendering, the prosperous standard of living found in the United States of Africa is only understood in contrast to the poverty and misery found elsewhere in the world: "Do they not know that they owe their health and their prosperity to the gray silhouettes dressed in rags that cross the Mediterranean to sell themselves to the industrialists in the Transvaal or to the marine merchants of Nouakchott?" (2006, 107).²⁵

Showing that wealth and success for some are dependent upon the exclusion of others, a historical reality that Western powers—built upon the exploits of colonialism and the slave trade—continue to deny through their imposition of a colonial debt upon their former colonies, Waberi assumes the responsibility on their part and brings a bitter sense of realism to his otherwise utopic narrative.²⁶ Recognizing the suffering of the other becomes essential for appreciating the status of the self.

Through the literary trope of the migrant, a lack of relational authenticity in postcolonial cultural exchanges is clearly dictated primarily by media politics and precedent, which is rooted in colonialist ideologies and the accompanying remnants and reincarnations of their institutions. This notion was first represented in African fiction by Ousmane Socé (1937) in his novel *Mirages de Paris*, which describes the artificiality of the images of the colonial metropole that are produced in the imaginations of the colonized African subjects. Building upon Julia Kristeva's conception of alienation in her work *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, this chapter approaches the phenomenon of emigration from the perspective that the desire to emigrate is a fundamental human longing for completion that is misplaced through fictitious representations of Europe dating back to the very first colonial encounters. Beginning with canonical texts in Francophone literature, including Cheikh Hamidou

Kané's *L'aventure ambiguë*, this chapter addresses the indeterminacy of human experience in terms of Samba Diallo's alienation. From that, the notion of humanitarianism is further critiqued through Aminata Sow Fall's short story "La fête gâchée," which, along with NDiaye's *Trois femmes puissantes*, depicts in dramatic fashion the mediatic mechanisms responsible for reproducing endemic poverty and its corollary: mass migration. These notions of territoriality and interculturality are further elucidated through analyses of African films, including Abderrahmane Sissako's *Heremakono* (2002), Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki Bouki* (1973), and Amadou Saalum Seck's *Saaraba* (1988). All these films represent an immigrant's incomplete journey as an injunction against the virtual narrative of linear trajectory toward a better future elsewhere. Rather, these films propose—through circularity and multiplicity—an affirmation of life in the present circumstances as the key to self-creation toward a better collective future in the here and now. Against such divisive illusions and systemic inversions of the real, of the human, and of life, the third chapter of this book proposes a valuation of nonhuman life in migrant narratives as a means of rehumanizing the dehumanized. An example of this is seen in Youssouf Amine Elalamy's beautifully poetic novel *Les Clandestins*, which in its depiction of lives lost to a failed emigrant journey also includes the "lives" of an apple, a worm, and even the boat itself, which has been battered by the waves of the Mediterranean. The decentering of human life by including other living entities in the same common environment serves as a metaphor for an expanded understanding of the interrelationality of life-forms on a planetary, or even cosmic, scale. The chapter concludes with an explication of Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, which illustrates both the illusory nature of the "European dream" and the tragic consequences of its vain pursuit from the perspective of a "successful" immigrant. In so doing, Diome proposes alternative modes of constructing African identities and sustainable economies in the era of twenty-first-century diasporic displacements, cultural transplants, and globalized commodity capitalism.

In response to the illusionism and artificial paradises²⁷ of current global politics, chapter 5 explores ways to meet the challenges of the physical and ideological borderlands that have succeeded in dividing humanity into interminable sequences of selves and others by focusing on education as a crucial tool for overcoming violence, racism, sexism, and institutionalized inequalities that are often latent in development problematics. In the book *Africa for the Future* (2009), Bekolo reformulates knowledge construction as a kind of cinematic language, “le mentalais,” which is based on a narrative rendering of reality and the relationality of the subject position. Bekolo’s cinematic language exemplifies an indigenous epistemology grounded in precolonial oral traditions in which fact and fiction are inherently intertwined. Drawing from this perspective, fictional and nonfictional accounts such as Ba Kobhio’s films *Sango Malo* and *Silence de la forêt* illustrate the importance of education for the well-being of society while simultaneously subverting commonly accepted educational methods and structures that are steeped in Occidentalism. For example, to again cite Wright, “Indigenous African education would conventionally be considered to be regressive and antithetical to development” (2004, 131), but “if we reconceptualize development as more than a process of economic growth, then we can begin to see how orature [and other indigenous cultural practices] contributes to development by creating the space to put forward ideas about how, why, and in what direction social change should take place” (133). Education must be conceptualized in terms of humanistic development, nurturing the whole person for the betterment of the community. The ability of the voice to name and to enunciate holds the creative power to bring into existence that which one can conceive, which leads Méléoudouman to exclaim in Jean-Marie Adiaffi’s novel *La carte d’identité*: “It is others who are the proof of our existence” (2002, 128).²⁸ This notion of being because of others is summarized in the ancient African wisdom and philosophy of *ubuntu*, an insistence on the commonality of human being, which Sarr summarizes as “I am because we are” (2019, 68).²⁹ After his

rebirth through the mirror's mediation and the life-giving words of Ebah Ya that function like a transfusion of lifeblood, Mélédouman seeks out his place in the community of Bettié, a city described as mere ruins in comparison to its former grandeur.

Mélédouman's clairvoyance in *La carte d'identité* helps to illustrate this synthetic didactic method and its accompanying hybrid epistemic forms when he encounters a teacher with whom he debates the values of an educational system that alienates through its imposition of a particular set of linguistic, scientific, and cultural principles. Unlike the past, in which "African school was adapted to African society" (101),³⁰ Mélédouman again perceives the double standard by which knowledge systems are ultimately produced. The teacher makes eloquent arguments about the value of the French language and the various "sciences" that it codifies—medicine, biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics—even going so far as to propose: "It's for the good of Africa's future" (106).³¹ Mélédouman responds by expressing the need to extol the philosophical virtues of African civilizations like the Ashanti, the Manding, the Congo, and Benin, ending with a plea to preserve the languages that drive the wisdom and knowledge systems of these indigenous African cultures: "If we bury our languages, in the same coffin, we forever lock away our cultural values" (107).³² In a surreal rendering of the consequences of the epistemological substitution enacted by colonialist institutions, Mélédouman and Ebah Ya find themselves wading through a literal shitstorm as torrential rains have produced a "purée of poo and black muck" (113)³³ that reaches to mid thigh. Yet they continue to struggle, revealing the internal force of human desire that can overcome the greatest of obstacles: man's desire to be what he is, to find his true self. Almost like a superpower or a spacesuit from science fiction, the willpower to persevere in the face of adversity represents a defense mechanism that allows for Mélédouman to survive the physical and epistemological impacts of an alien civilization.³⁴

The analysis in this chapter addresses first and foremost how Ba Kobhio's films highlight the shortcomings of an alien education

system imported from France and maintained after independence as a system that does not sufficiently address the needs of the populations that it is intended to serve. Dissecting these films, which have been grossly understudied, and other related texts, reveals two alternative epistemologies, one material and the other metaphysical, both of which emphasize the collective good and the relationship between humans and the natural environment in contrast with the status quo of modernist educational discourses. The subtext of both of these films is a virtuous educational program that does not reproduce slaves to a system of corruption driven by personal greed and societal degradation. This chapter thus constitutes a pivotal juncture in the elaboration of ways in which African literature and film can provide alternative modes of understanding key developmental issues and propose model solutions that are rooted in indigenous African modes of communal knowledge production and dissemination. Thus, it demonstrates alternative frameworks for understanding and confronting developmental concerns, sometimes in direct opposition to some of the Western industrialist and nationalist biases and linear reasoning that persist and exert tremendous influence in the affairs of post-colonial African societies. This project as a whole, therefore, rests upon the premise of this chapter, employing alternative forms of data and analysis, specifically those forms that have traditionally been excluded from fields of rigorous “scientific” studies. Demonstrating ways in which literary studies can be undertaken with an eye toward understanding the social context of the works, including the problems and solutions that they imply, this chapter effectively elucidates the ways in which we can engage intelligently with developmental issues in Africa from a culturally sensitive narrative position.³⁵ Because development problematics are often aligned with particular global political and financial interests and are therefore subject to a degree of bias in their “objective” representation, works of art may escape from these implicit or inherent prejudices while still presenting a realistic interpretation of a particular set of developmental issues. For, as Albert Memmi

posits in *Decolonization and the Decolonized*, “Fifty novels from a given time period provide a richer source of insight than tons of newsprint published during the reign of a dictator” (2006, 36). It is precisely this interplay of the political, the socioeconomic, and the aesthetic that leads Wright to propose the imperative that “literature studies in Africa must become part of African cultural studies” (136). This project is therefore emblematic of the intentional study of literature and the arts as vehicles of socially responsible and culturally sensitive commentary in contemporary African cultural and developmental discourses.

The idea that cultural awareness and sensitivity attained through literary study can have a positive impact on developing and implementing effective economic policies in modern African nations is at the core of an emergent “Africa Rising” debate, particularly in the sense that the general continental shift toward playing a major role in the twenty-first-century global economy will transform the very nature of global economics through endogenous African contributions.³⁶ Consequently, this project offers an in-depth examination of complex issues facing African nations that have historically been relegated to developing nations, through an analysis of African literary and filmic texts that propose critical alternatives to the educational, economic, gendered, ecological, racial, and geopolitical inequalities embedded in African societies through European colonialism and its aftershocks.³⁷ The principal theoretical dilemma associated with discourses of development in African contexts is that they are most often framed by Western conceptions of progress and often associated with a Eurocentric linear narrative of history. In the context of globalization, many development strategies that have been proposed or imposed upon African nations, whether in the educational, financial, or infrastructural sectors, are implemented according to a predominantly Western framework. As a result, these tactics often exhibit an underlying bias for Western interests. Edward Goldsmith has, in fact, argued that development is merely a new form of colonialism, and Kwame Nkrumah’s poignant critique of neocolonialism

and capitalist imperialism would certainly indicate a similar understanding of postcolonial Western interventionism. Dambisa Moyó's (2009) *Dead Aid* elaborates specifically on the ways in which the model of Western aid distribution on the African continent is inherently flawed.³⁸

Through the trope of the lottery, the sixth chapter analyzes films by Ousmane Sembène, Djibril Diop Mambety, Fadika Kramo-Lanciné, and Imunga Ivanga, each of which epitomizes money as the ultimate object of desire and source of hardship. The mechanism by which economic illusionism operates, namely derivative profits from promises of future returns for a modest initial buy-in, oppresses and disenfranchises the poor through an intentional signaling of false hopes or "artificial paradises," inviting their complicity in maintaining the inherent inequalities of the status quo. In contrast with indigenous African subsistence economies that were designed and implemented in such a way as to ensure the prosperity and longevity of entire communities, the imposition of a Western capitalist model predicated on endless economic growth and agency on the global economic stage often contributes to poverty and further entrenches inequality. Like the high hopes that accompanied political independence in the 1960s, much of the promise of economic independence turns out to be illusory and grossly problematic. Measures imposed by global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as inequitable economic policies that fall under the obscure yet ubiquitous umbrella of "Françafrique," operate in a disproportionately negative way that often outweighs the perceived benefits of global networks of exchange. Through the trope of the lottery, however, African writers and filmmakers are able to critique how arbitrarily infused economic shifts and comparatively astronomical sums of money exacerbate a number of underlying social and economic issues, thereby increasing alienation and causing further anguish for the supposed winner. Furthermore, these filmmakers all propose alternative models of wealth and prosperity, which are grounded in satisfaction with

oneself and one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being in a familiar context. Building on the theoretical concept of artificial paradises (*Les Paradis artificiels*) written about by Charles Baudelaire in 1860, money is likened to the kind of high that one associates with the use of intoxicating substances. Much like drug addiction, the prospect of obtaining a large unwarranted sum of money (e.g., winning the lottery), rather than providing relief from the harsh realities facing protagonists in these films, creates an entirely new set of problems and further exacerbates the pressures of daily life in a postcolonial society. The conclusion that one can glean from these filmmakers' critiques of global economic policies is precisely that external economic stimuli, whether in the form of international aid, debt relief policies, or multilateral trade agreements, often operate like a drug in ways that perpetuate and increase dependence, rather than affording opportunities for "developing" nations.

Returning full circle to the métisse logics espoused in the first chapter, the seventh chapter of this book entails an ecofeminist societal ethic that stands in stark contrast to the shameful simulations of absolute state authority.³⁹ In light of Alain Suberchicot's proposal that literatures from the so-called Third World, and specifically those from the African continent, represent a space in which the discourses of development, ecology, and the human coincide, this chapter explores the notion of ecocriticism as presented in the literary corpus of Tansi through the futurist environmental philosophy of Michel Serres and others. Drawing on the works of Mary Eburn Modupe Kolawole, Obioma Nnaemeka, and others, this chapter explores the ecological themes in Wanuri Kahiu's short film *Pumzi* (2009) and in Sony Labou Tansi's work, specifically, via the marginal yet essential presence of the forest and the river in his narratives *La vie et demie* (1979) and *L'anté-peuple* (1983). In these narratives, privileged natural spaces provide links between ecology and femininity in contrast to the shameful state of a male-dominated modernity, which is the overarching sociopolitical context in these two novels. The communal

eco-logic driven by the strong female characters in these novels defies the destructive forces of the state. Drawing out this alternative counter-logic of the human and planetary environments, Sony Labou Tansi's work represents a performative model for exorcising societal shame and opening up an alternative pathway for the future of environmental dignity.⁴⁰

In the conclusion to this book, Gayatri Spivak's (2012) notion of planetarity and planetary being are further elaborated as just such an alternative to the countless problems posed by societal divisions plaguing global civilization.⁴¹ In the context of the Francophone works of fiction that embody Afrofuturist themes related to gender dynamics and the environment, educational and economic practices, as well as the global politics of conflict and migration, planetary thought requires a cultural and linguistic reorientation toward open imaginaries and creative processes, rather than an overreliance on the fixed forms and rationalities that have driven human civilization to its current state. Thirty years after the appearance of the seminal work *The Empire Writes Back*, the French and Francophone literary scene has experienced an intense growth in popularity of writers and artists from former colonies, usually grouped under the polemic and politically ambivalent umbrella of *la francophonie*. Afrofuturism has long been prevalent in the philosophical and literary endeavors of prominent thinkers from the African continent. Following in the tradition of Mongo Beti, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Valentin Yves Mudimbé, and others, many contemporary writers, including Fatou Diome and Léonora Miano (to give two outspoken examples), have also participated significantly in the evolution of critical, theoretical, and philosophical discourses, particularly as they pertain to the intersectionality of art and politics, or more precisely, literature as societal critique.⁴² Since Mudimbé first proposed in 1973 that African intellectuals must "invest in the sciences, beginning with the social sciences and human sciences in order to grasp the tensions at play, to reexamine for our own sake the contingent findings and sites of enunciation, of knowing," African writers

and intellectuals have continually endeavored to express the tensions of African epistemologies marred by the blight of colonial encounters (qtd. in Sarr 2019, 73). As a result of the increased visibility and popularity of cultural and literary criticism by African intellectuals such as Mbembe, Sarr, Bekolo, and others, I propose that an important new direction in literary and cultural theory is a maturation of the decolonizing impulses first announced by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and the negritude poets, which has come to fruition in the postcolonial articulations of subaltern humanity by critical theorists such as Achille Mbembe, Ambroise Kom, Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga, and creative writers such as Werewere Liking, Aminata Sow Fall, and many others. Like their Anglophone counterparts Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nnedi Okorafor, Wangari Maathai—whose collective work builds on the legacies of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Kwame Nkrumah, Steve Biko, and others—the articulation of African futures has been a constant struggle within the domain of representation, as Stuart Hall clearly articulates. As humanity enters the third decade of the twenty-first century (according to the Gregorian calendar), the interconnectedness of societies on a global scale is practically complete, and as a consequence, the integration of “postcolonial” critical perspectives into the mainstream is an important means of better interrogating our human pasts in an effort to delineate a sustainable and humane future on a planetary scale. This book can therefore serve as an example of ways in which one might consider Afrofuturism as an alternative discourse for imagining and elaborating the ideas necessary to create a new world for all of humanity.