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Science Fiction/Fantasy and the Representation of Ethnic Futurity

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Science Fiction/Fantasy and the Representation of Ethnic Futurity

by

Joy Sanchez-Taylor

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a concentration in Literature
Department of English
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ABSTRACT

Science Fiction/Fantasy and the Representation of Ethnic Futurity examines the influence of science fiction/fantasy (SFF) as applied to twentieth century and contemporary African American, Native American and Latina/o texts. Bringing together theories of racial identity, hybridity, and postcolonialism, this project demonstrates how twentieth century and contemporary ethnic American SFF authors are currently utilizing tropes of SFF to blur racial distinctions and challenge white/other or colonizer/colonized binaries. Ethnic American SFF authors are able to employ SFF landscapes that address narratives of victimization or colonization while still imagining worlds where alternate representations of racial and ethnic identity are possible.

My multicultural approach pairs authors of different ethnicities in order to examine common themes that occur in ethnic American SFF texts. The first chapter examines SFF post-apocalyptic depictions of racial and ethnic identity in Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* and Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*. Chapter two explores depictions of ethnic undead figures in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* and Daniel José Older's "Phantom Overload." Chapter three addresses themes of indigenous and migrant colonization in Celu Amberstone's "Refugees" and Rosura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros: 2125-2148*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: ETHNIC FUTURITY

Perhaps the greatest challenge or potential of contemporary science fiction is to imagine political/social futures in which race does not simply wither away but is transformed, changing into something different and perhaps unexpected. This would require paying attention to an actual history of race (and racism) in which what constitutes the Other and the Self is always under revision. This means noting not only where traditional definitions of race and racism are broken but also how they are reformed in new guises...I will, therefore, hazard a prediction. The future of sf and sf studies will be informed by race as a significant component of our social/political lives and any historically conceived future.

—De Witt Douglas Kilgore

Without an image of tomorrow, one is trapped by blind history, economics, and politics beyond our control. One is tied up in a web, in a net, with no way to struggle free. Only by having clear and vital images of the many alternatives, good and bad, of where one can go, will we have any control over the way we may actually get there in a reality tomorrow will bring all too quickly.

And nothing gives such a profusion and richness of images of our tomorrows—however much they need to be revised—as science fiction.

—Samuel R. Delany, *Starboard Wine*

In *Starboard Wine*, Samuel Delany discusses the first time he came across a reference to a person of color in a science fiction/fantasy (SFF) text, Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. Delany states that the experience of discovering, more than a hundred pages in, that the main character was Dominican "made me realize that up until then, with all the efforts going on around me to 'improve the racial situation,' I really had no image of what the 'improved racial situation' was actually going to look like. Oh yes, *equality* was a word I knew; but what would it look like, feel like, smell like? How would I know it had actually come?" (10, emphasis in the original). Although Delany wrote this in the 1960s, his story is one that could easily happen today. I am frequently met with surprise from students when they discover the legacy of SFF writing by authors of color; most have no idea about the contributions African Americans,

Native Americans, Latinas/os and Chicanas/os have been and are currently making to SFF. Delany's words demonstrate a need for more texts where young people of color, who so often encounter "race blind" future worlds or human vs. "other" alien tropes, can see themselves reflected in the future. In ethnic SFF texts, the experiences of people of color become lenses through which to examine all possible avenues for future racial identification.

Critics such as Lázaro Lima suggest that ethnic American authors often sacrifice the idea of an ethnic futurity in the interest of writing historical texts that appeal to publishers. I argue that one way ethnic American authors can begin to approach the need for an ethnic futurity is through a further adoption of SFF writing. Bringing together theories of racial identity, hybridity, and postcolonialism, this project demonstrates how twentieth century and contemporary ethnic American SFF authors are currently utilizing tropes of SFF to blur racial distinctions and challenge white/other or colonizer/colonized binaries. Ethnic American SFF authors are able to employ SFF landscapes that address narratives of victimization or colonization while still imagining worlds where alternate representations of racial and ethnic identity are possible. Homi Bhabha argues that the literature of colonization often depicts indigenous or ethnic cultures as less advanced, an opportunity to experience the simplicity of pre-modern culture. SFF offers ethnic American authors a way to reverse stereotypical views of othered cultures in order to critique past representations of cultural history while avoiding essentialized views of race and ethnicity.

While SFF is not the only genre that allows for experimentation, my reason for focusing on multiethnic American SFF is because it is a relatively unexplored avenue of inquiry. There has been little effort to chart how authors of different ethnicities employ similar approaches in the construction of ethnic futures or alternate environments. SFF is also becoming a subversive

option for ethnic American authors who want to write fiction that appeals both to the general public and literary critics. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to write about African American, Latina/o, Chicana/o and Native American authors because these ethnicities all have experienced colonization within the U.S., allowing me to speak to the history of marginalization of ethnic peoples in the U.S. I purposely pair authors of different races and ethnicities in each chapter to demonstrate how SFF tropes are employed in each author's work. My goal is to go beyond acknowledging the contributions of writers of color to the SFF genre and examine connections in the ways ethnic authors utilize the potential of SFF to challenge current definitions of race and ethnicity.

Chapter one examines post-apocalyptic depictions of racial and ethnic identity in Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* and Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*. By connecting Homi Bhabha's theories of hybridity and interstitial spaces to theories of post-apocalyptic writing, I demonstrate how Delany and Vizenor's post-apocalyptic texts serve to disrupt essentialized views of race and ethnicity through depictions of post-apocalyptic U.S. landscapes. Instead of upholding a perceived view of racial or ethnic identity, Delany and Vizenor work to dismantle all stereotypical notions of identity in their works. In both texts, hybrid identities and multicultural groups are defined as better able to adapt to new environments, connecting the idea of hybridity to the survival of the human race. Delany and Vizenor also challenge the view of post-apocalyptic landscapes as a devolution of humanity by creating interstitial spaces where hybrid identities are valued.

Chapter two explores depictions of ethnic undead figures in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* and Daniel José Older's "Phantom Overload." Undead characters are a popular trope in horror and SFF texts typically used to embody a cultural fear, such as difference or contamination. In

recent decades, authors and filmmakers have created undead characters of color that challenge cultural stereotypes about race and ethnicity. I argue that Butler and Older's texts build on a history of undead ethnic representation by creating texts which blur the genre distinctions between science fiction and fantasy to redefine depictions of the undead—specifically vampires, zombies and ghosts. *Fledgling* and “Phantom Overload” employ hybrid ethnic/undead characters to expose the effects of colonization on ethnic peoples while examining alternate representations of race and ethnicity. Depicting African American or Latino undead characters allows each author to represent his or her racial and ethnic history; however, I argue that Butler and Older ultimately utilize the SFF genre to create layered depictions of race and ethnicity that more accurately reflect the multiplicity of contemporary U.S. ethnic peoples.

Chapter three addresses themes of indigenous and migrant colonization in Celu Amberstone's “Refugees” and Rosura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros: 2125-2148*. I argue that these texts represent a contemporary view of space travel that focuses on the consequences of the characters' displacement from Earth. Both texts bring together the experiences of indigenous and migrant¹ peoples in the spirit of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's Fourth World theory, described as “a conceptual place where the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas meet with the diasporic communities” (7). By creating hybrid ethnic/indigenous communities, Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita are able to argue that these groups share a common diasporic experience, refuting stereotypical depictions of diasporic and indigenous cultures as separated and opposed to one another. Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita's choice to set all or part of their texts

¹ While I realize that the terms “migrant,” “exiled,” and “immigrant” each refer to different ethnic and cultural groups, each with their own experience of displacement, for the purposes of this reading I will refer to these groups as migrant peoples. I choose to use this categorization because each of these groups is defined by movement and a connection to a distant space, whether voluntary and involuntary. I will also use the term “indigenous” to refer to the first peoples of the Americas and “Native American” to refer to specific institutions that affect indigenous populations in the U.S., such as Native American reservations.

in space also creates opportunities for the employment of liminal landscapes that reproduce narratives of colonization and diaspora while allowing for alternate outcomes.

The approach I take demonstrates that while authors of various races and ethnicities approach the representation of race and ethnicity differently in their SFF texts, they share similar tropes and themes within their works. It is important to acknowledge these similarities because although there are a few ethnic American SFF authors who have been accepted by the SFF community, SFF authors of color have primarily been overlooked or misclassified. The texts in this study also demonstrate how SFF authors of different races and ethnicities approach the representation of race/ethnicity in future or alternate environments, often employing hybrid or fluid identifications to complicate essentialized definitions. A study of multiethnic SFF acknowledges the ways ethnic SFF is expanding the boundaries of SFF and racial identification.

Racial Identity

SFF has the ability to create not-yet-realized races and species, allowing for fluid representations of racial and ethnic identifications. Racial identity is a complex, often contradictory notion. Some critics argue that racial identity is a social construction; while they acknowledge that racism has an impact on certain groups of peoples, they ultimately argue that race is not an intrinsic part of a person's identity.² Others argue that race, defined as one of many categorizations of identity which also include sexuality and class, is a part of a person's identity and also affects the way that they identify with other groups in public and private settings.³ Racial identification began in the sciences, and yet today scientists argue that there is no inherent genetic difference between peoples of different races. Race can also be conflated with ethnicity

² A few examples include Paul Gilroy's "Race Ends Here" (1998) and Anoop Nayak's "After Race: Ethnography, Race, and Post-Race Theory" (2006).

³ Later in the introduction, I give a detailed description of a critical work that embodies this view, Michael Hames-García's *Identity Complex: Making the Case for Multiplicity* (2011).

or culture; people consider “Jewish” to be both a racial and ethnic characterization, and yet other racial identifications such as “black” are based solely on skin color and can combine peoples of multiple ethnicities. It is no wonder that in the U.S. today, arguments are being made that racial language should be removed from political dialogue or that humans should move beyond racial identifications altogether.

One of the challenges when discussing race is conflicting arguments about how race is linked to the sciences of genetics and biology. After the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859), scientists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century began to examine the differences between peoples of different races, resulting in ideologies of scientific racism (Jackson, John 66). Scientific racism connected ideas of intelligence and race; the “higher” or more intelligent races were considered to be more civilized than the “lower” or “savage” races. Such ideas eventually led to writings such as Gobineau’s multivolume *Essay on the Inequality of the Races* (1853-1855) which specifically connected the idea of race as connected to civilization building:

[Gobineau] affirmed the widely accepted division of the races into white, black, and yellow, and introduced the idea that civilization itself was based on race. The white race, which Gobineau called the ‘Aryan’ race, was the only one capable of creative thinking and civilization building. The downfall of such great civilizations as Egypt and Greece owed to the commingling of Aryan blood with that of the lesser races. (70)

Such writing forms the basis of a major theme in colonial writing: the blood of lesser races as contaminant. Scientific racism is based on a fear of contamination and savagery which has formed the basis of racist thinking from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Today, advances in genetics have led most scientists to the conclusion that race is not connected to any significant difference between human beings. In “Genetic Residues of Ancient

Migrations: An End to Biological Essentialism and the Reification of Race,” William M.

Richman states the contemporary, revised scientific view of race and genetics:

Stripped of its scientific complications, the new research reveals a simple and elegant truth. *There simply are no genetically-based pan-‘racial’ differences in character, intelligence, or any other set of traits crucial to individual or societal success or position; racial essentialism is intellectually bankrupt.* (Richman 389, emphasis in the original)

This reversal in scientific thought has led critics to a complete negation of the idea of race-based difference, leading to arguments against the use of racial identifications.⁴ However, Michael Hames-García, author of *Identity Complex: Making the Case for Multiplicity*, argues that racial identification is still important to the understanding of racial experience: “While such outward differences as skin color, hair texture, or eye shape may hold little or no meaning for our biological functioning as organisms or for our innate capacities, they can prove crucial, in Western societies at least, for our social functioning” (58). To forget the social implications of race leaves out a crucial part of racial identity: the struggle that people of color often experience based on stereotypes about skin color and facial/body features. Although the genetic findings are an important part of educating peoples about the false claims of scientific racism, condemning centuries of negative identification does little to help peoples of color who are still living with the consequences of racial stereotyping.

The idea that humans of different races have no significant genetic difference is a concept that negates the notion of biological essentialism, and yet this idea also causes political issues for racial and ethnic groups who rely on a central notion of racial identity for political organization.

Barry E. Laga notes in a reading of Gerald Vizenor’s *Heirs of Columbus* that the negation of

⁴ A few examples of post-race theorists who argue against the use of racial identifications are Paul Gilroy in *Against Race* and Sumi Cho in “Post Racialism.” There are also post-racial theorists who argue that post-race theory does not negate discussions of race and racism, such as Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres in *After Race: Racism After Multiculturalism* and Ramón Saldivar in “Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism and Postrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction.”

racial identity, while well-intended, can be linked to a maintenance of racial hierarchies: “While Vizenor systematically destabilizes identity, he does not dismiss the need for representation. We should note that at the very time in history that Native Americans (and women, African-Americans, Hispanics, the Third World, and other suppressed communities) begin to have a voice, the notion of identity is obliterated, and identity politics with it” (81). Laga’s argument points out that contemporary political attempts to remove racial language or identification can be linked to attempts to limit the social or political influence of people of color. Although it is possible for identity politics to reinforce fixed racial identifications, group racial identification is also the foundation of many political and social organizations; such groups need racial/ethnic identification in order to gain access to resources and to enact social change. The contradiction of identity politics and racial/ethnic organization leads to racial debates, linked to ideals of racial identity and authenticity: how can people express their unique connections to racial identity while avoiding the essentialized identifications of identity politics? How can groups advocate against racism without erasing their racial identities? And how does a formerly colonized group overcome internalized views of inferiority, which are a residue of the colonization process, while still maintaining a link to their cultural history? All of these questions demonstrate how complex racial identification has become, especially in the U.S., a country that combines a history of internal colonization with patriotic rhetoric about racial and cultural acceptance.

For the purposes of my study, I will draw connections between Michael Hames-García’s definition of racial identity in *Identity Complex: Making the Case for Multiplicity* (2011) and Homi Bhabha’s definitions of hybridity and liminality in *The Location of Culture* (1994). I argue that these two critics discuss two major aspects of contemporary race theory: the effects of colonialism and the need for fluid representations of race. All of the authors I include in my

study come from racial/ethnic groups that have been colonized in the U.S., requiring an examination of the effects of colonization on U.S. populations. Bhabha's theories of postcolonialism challenge depictions of colonized countries as a homogenous group of peoples, opening possibilities for the discussion of how colonized peoples preserve a racial or ethnic identity which influences the colonizing culture. Hames-García represents a contemporary view of race theory, arguing that race cannot be separated from other socially constructed aspects of identity such as gender, sexuality, and class. Citing examples of laws that have attempted to deter racial profiling, such as California's Racial Privacy Initiative, he demonstrates that, often, laws designed to negate racial identification leave advocates with no way "to demonstrate discriminatory patterns of surveillance, arrest, or harassment" (40). What Hames-García's example demonstrates is that erasing racial language does not negate issues of racism. It may even work against the interests of people of color by preventing race-based groups from advocating against racial injustice. Hames-García ultimately argues for the use of race as a term for identification, but suggests that a "mutual constitution of race with gender, sexuality and other aspects of identity" would allow for a more complete view of identification (40). He also argues that racial theories should be judged by "their ability to evolve an understanding of the importance of race in relation to both the multiplicity of identity and the resistance to structural forms of discrimination, domination, exploitation, and oppression" (40). Hames-García's work demonstrates the balance needed in race theory; authors need to be able to express a multiplicity of identity that includes factors other than race while still raising awareness about issues of racism and essentialism. I would also add to Hames-García's argument that authors also need spaces to express a multiplicity of racial/ethnic identities; authors who identify with more than one race/ethnicity, as well as authors who identify with separate racial/ethnic identifications

(such as black/Caribbean or white/Italian) need spaces to express their racial and ethnic identifications.

I argue that one of the ways the authors in my study create multiplicities of identity while still addressing issues of colonization is through the creation of hybrid characters and the employment of interstitial landscapes. Hybridity is often linked to themes of alienation, making it a useful lens to inform theories of race, gender and culture. Because its most basic definition is a mixture of two parts, hybridity can be used to define any mixture of two things—items, peoples, sexualities, and cultures—that may appear opposite or contradictory. Susan Squier notes in “Interspecies Reproduction: Xenogenic Desire and the Feminist Implications of Hybrids” that interest in theories of hybrid species increased in the nineteenth century⁵ and were linked to discussions about the origin of humanity:

Preoccupied by the question of monogenesis or polygenesis—whether the human race issued from a single origin or from several different ‘species’—mid-nineteenth century thinkers found hybridity to be a useful term to express the anxieties produced, and articulated, by an evolutionary model that arraigned not only species, but the races of humankind, hierarchically. (365)

Because hybridity involves intermixture, it is directly linked to questions of origin, purity and essentialism. For nineteenth century colonial writers, hybridity, specifically hybrid races, were linked to negative ideas about the contamination of the human race. The idea that “lesser species” such as Africans or indigenous peoples could mate with whites created anxiety within the colonial structure about how to classify humans of different races and their mixed-race offspring.

Although theories of hybridity began as negative representations, hybridity also has the potential to demonstrate how mixtures of races and cultures can challenge colonial views of race

⁵ This is not to say that theories of hybrid species were not present before the nineteenth century; such theories were also present in the 18th century. For more information, see Tore Frangsmyr, J.L. Heilbron, and Robin E. Ryder’s *The Quantifying Spirit in the Eighteenth Century* (1990).

and humanity. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha highlights the ability of hybridity to challenge essentialized views of race and culture:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eyes of power. (160)

Bhabha examines depictions of hybridity in colonized cultures to highlight the presence and influence of a colonized culture on its colonizers. He argues that hybridity thwarts efforts to depict colonized countries as one, homogenous group of people and colonized peoples as assimilated or absent.⁶ Kay Anderson notes that Bhabha's theory of hybridity is significant because it challenges "the simplistic notion of colonial textuality as a system which entirely dominates indigenous people" (17). Bhabha's theory brings agency back to colonized peoples by demonstrating the influence of colonized cultures on the colonizing population, typically described as the creation of colonial anxiety. His theory of interstitial spaces also stresses the need to go beyond fixed identifications: "The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 5). Bhabha's theories suggest the possibility of opening fixed racial and cultural identifications in order to question their validity, creating the possibility for alternate identifications. Hames-García and Bhabha both work to highlight how complex racial theory has become and the need for spaces that allow for multiple, even contradictory, racial and ethnic identifications.

⁶ Although Bhabha draws attention to the influence of colonized people on colonizing culture, this does not imply that the colonized/colonizing peoples have an equal influence on one another. Economic, political, and social factors result in an unequal ability for influence.

The authors in my study each combine hybrid identifications and SFF landscapes to realize the possibility of hybrid racial and ethnic identifications. The possibility for hybrid representation in SFF makes it ideal for authors who wish to challenge essentialized views of race and ethnicity; in SFF texts, authors can make the idea of inter-species encounters literal, exposing the racist ideologies of colonial thinking. Hybrid races appear frequently in SFF writings, making SFF a potential genre for authors who want to utilize complex depictions of race and ethnicity. By blurring the line between human/other, SFF is able to employ hybrid or mutant cultures to challenge social norms. One example of hybrid characterization in SFF writing is Anne McCaffrey's short story "Duty Calls" in which a spaceship with a male, human brain goes on an exploratory mission with a female, human/cat hybrid species. The positive depiction of two hybrid characters and their relationship challenges the notion of hybrids as monstrous represented in early SFF texts such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. SFF authors are also able to use tropes such as genetic manipulation to challenge definitions of race by literally altering the DNA of their characters.⁷ Because SFF is a genre that allows for hybrid representations not possible in more realistic landscapes, SFF authors are able to build on Bhabha's theory of hybridity by creating hybrid human/other characters that disrupt notions of racial, ethnic or cultural hierarchy.

Definitions of SFF

Because this study argues for a closer examination of ethnic American authors currently contributing to the SFF genre, as well as the inclusion of overlooked ethnic American SFF texts, it is important to understand how such texts align with definitions of the genre. One difficulty for SFF authors of color is finding space in a genre which has, at times, served to erase racial distinctions or reinforce a fear of racial intermixture. Many nineteenth and twentieth century SFF

⁷ I discuss themes of genetic manipulation and SFF in more detail in chapters one and two.

texts depict white travelers who invent wondrous machines and travel to exoticized locations such as Asia or Africa.⁸ These texts served to enforce the racial thinking of the times and cultures these authors lived in. Brooks Landon describes early SFF adventure dime novels as “foreground[ing] a thoroughgoing racism that ranged from crude ethnic stereotyping to the almost gleeful application of technological inventions to the mass murder of dark-skinned natives wherever they might be found, thus inextricably linking technology with racism in what might be considered America’s earliest sf” (198). The depiction of exceptional white protagonists who overcome othered groups of dark skinned peoples created a racist view of “civilization” in SFF and advanced the stereotype of SFF as a genre for young white males.⁹

Contemporary SFF texts are still influenced by the history of negative SFF racial and ethnic representations. John Hutnyk notes that contemporary depictions of race in SFF are often connected to a fear of cultural mixture, resulting in “dystopias of ethnic mixture” that can be seen in contemporary SFF films such as *Bladerunner* and *The Fifth Element*.¹⁰ The future is dystopic because it has been overrun by ethnic peoples, connecting the rise of race/ethnicity to the apocalypse. Hutnyk argues that the white, male heroes of these films become metaphors for the attempts of society to preserve the fantasy of cultural purity; the heroes impose order on societies defined by cultural mixture and non-human species (94). Fear of cultural contamination

⁸ Some examples of early racialized SFF stories include the *Frank Reade or Doc Savage* dime novel series, Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *Under the Moons of Mars*, and the works of William Murray Gradon, Frank Aubrey, and Fenton Ash.

⁹ I am not trying to state that there were no ethnic American SFF writers during this time period; examples of early black speculative fiction include Martin Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America* (1859) and W.E.B. DuBois’s short story “The Comet” (1920). However, early SFF writers of color were generally not supported or acknowledged as part of the SFF genre. In addition, Latino and Native American cultures have a rich history of utilizing fantastical elements in their writings; however, it is only recently that these texts have begun to be recognized as related to the SFF genre. Samuel Delany also argues that because of the use of pseudonyms in popular fiction, there is no way to accurately chart how many ethnic American authors participated in the writing of SFF stories or dime novels.

¹⁰ An example of this theme in SFF literature is the cyberpunk works of William Gibson.

is not a new theme, yet there are few SFF texts depicting the effect of colonization on colonized peoples.¹¹

Another issue for SFF writers of color is the depiction of “race-blind” futures, or futures where racism is described as no longer being an issue. Mark Bould notes the lack of racial diversity in SFF texts in his introduction to a *Science Fiction Studies* special issue on Afrofuturism:

From the 1950s onwards, sf in the US magazine and paperback tradition postulated and presumed a color-blind future, generally depicting humankind ‘as one race, which has emerged from an unhappy past of racial misunderstandings and conflicts’ (James 47; see also Kilgore). This shared assumption accounts for the relative absence of people of color from such sf: if race was going to prove unimportant, why even bother thinking about it, when energies could instead be devoted to more pressing matters, such as how to colonize the solar system or build a better robot? (177)

Bould argues that the notion of a future where all racial issues have been overcome still dominates the SFF genre, yet most of these texts do not make any attempt to describe how racial issues have been overcome or to depict major characters of color.¹² The popularity of the long-running T.V. series *Star Trek*, which depicts a future where all racial issues have been overcome, adds to the popular acceptance of race-blind futures. This gap between the futures being depicted in SFF and the racial issues of today leave many ethnic American authors little room to address racial issues in a genre where racism is considered obsolete.

¹¹ There are a few authors who have attempted to depict the effects of colonization in SFF texts. Examples include Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* series and Samuel Delany’s *Tales of Neverjon*. Nalo Hopkinson also describes her writing as “subverting the genre which speaks so much about the experience of being alienating, but contains so little written by alienated people themselves” (qtd. in Leonard).

¹² There are a few SFF texts that include depictions of Africans or African Americans (Steven Barnes, Terry Bisson) and Native Americans (Orson Scott Card, Pamela Sargent, Andre Norton, and Harry Turtledove); however, few of these texts feature a protagonist of color. A few SFF novels written by white authors have also attempted to address issues of racism. One example is Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which introduces a Latina woman as the protagonist of the novel who travels to an alternate world in which racism, among other issues, has been eradicated. In the text, the protagonist’s race is mentioned in passing.

Writers of color who wish to write fantasy texts often find themselves confronting Westernized, white-dominant representations in the genre. Many fantasy texts do not discuss the race of their human characters, instead focusing on the representation of magical races.¹³ Such writing creates a worldview in fantasy similar to the race-blind futures of SF. The influence of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series on the genre also has many authors creating epic fantasy worlds heavily influenced by British imperialism. In *The Lord of the Rings* series, the human peoples live in what appears to be a feudal class system with a clear racial divide between the human or human-like races. In medieval Europe, white skin was believed to be "the color of superior class and noble bloodlines" (Heng 260). The Dunedain, Rohirrim and Gondorian peoples are depicted as pale with blonde hair and blue eyes, while Sauron's human minions are described as dark peoples dressed in a combination of Asian and Middle-Eastern dress. These people travel on large elephants from far-away lands, making them a clear metaphor for the colonial fear of invading peoples of color (Ibata). Tolkien's theories of world-building and his noble class structure continue to influence the fantasy genre. Examples of U.S. epic fantasy texts with white-dominant class structures are Piers Anthony's *Xanth* series (1977-2013),¹⁴ and George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (1996-2011), which is also the inspiration for the popular *Games of Thrones* T.V. series. In both series of novels the main characters, typically members of the nobility, are depicted as white, while many of the evil races and lesser tribes of humans are depicted as dark-skinned. While the authors' intentions may have centered on the

¹³ I understand that many fantasy texts use relations between humans and aliens or magical races as metaphors for racial issues. Examples include the treatment of house elves in the *Harry Potter* series or the depiction of Xenians in China Mieville's *Bas-Lag* series. There are also many texts where humans become the racial minority; Tolkien's humans in *The Lord of the Rings* series are depicted as inferior to elves and Rowling's "muggles" are considered inferior to witches. Some contemporary fantasy novels, such as the *Harry Potter* series, do represent a diverse human population; however, the main characters are still white. My point is that even if magical races are depicted as a metaphor for racial issues, the presence of a mostly white human population works against the author's good intentions.

¹⁴ Piers Anthony was born in England, but his family emigrated to the U.S. when he was six years old.

portrayal of a classic good/evil dichotomy, the depiction of human races enforces a white equals pure or good association within the genre.

Although SFF has a vexed history of racial and ethnic representation, the definition of SFF is constantly being revised to account for new texts and audiences. Critics frequently struggle to define science fiction and fantasy texts and even argue about whether these two categories should be considered one or two genres of literature. Definitions of SF range from Darko Suvin's theory of "cognitive estrangement" to Damon Knight's looser interpretation that SF is "what we point to when we say 'science fiction'" (1). Traditional definitions of SF, often associated with the category of "hard SF," focus on the integration of not yet realized technologies and their effects on the reader. Suvin identifies SF as the antithesis of realism, a literature defined by the presence of science and the interaction of estrangement and cognition:

SF is, then a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment. (375, emphasis in the original)

According to Suvin, a SF work must offer an alternative environment, based on the science of its day, that is both estranging and familiar. He describes SF characters and environments as mirror images of the real world; because the unknown world in SF texts is based on known scientific parameters, the text can serve as a mirror for present day societal issues (374). This alternate environment allows readers of science fiction to critically interrogate the impact of science or technology on society. Authors such as Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, L. Ron Hubbard and Robert A. Heinlein would fit Suvin's definition; each combined scientific-based tropes such as spaceflight, rocket ships, and robots with descriptions of future worlds and alien encounters in their writings to create an estranging environment for their readers.

Suvin's definition of SF argues that the SF genre critically interrogates the relationship between society and science/technology; however, shifts in themes of SF towards the social sciences and plots with more emphasis on relationships than technology (described by some critics as "soft SF") create the need for a more inclusive definition. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. builds on Suvin's definition by acknowledging the estrangement of the SF reader, which he describes in terms of two "gaps"—the first one being between the reader's ability to acknowledge that certain technologies and scientific principles "can be entertained" and the ability to recognize that they may be realized. The second gap occurs when the reader admits the plausibility of "historically unforeseeable innovations in human experience...and their broader ethical and social-cultural implications and resonances" (3-5, ellipsis added). He acknowledges that most SF is engaged with descriptions of the future, new technologies, and other worlds, but also argues that SF does not have to be set in the future, citing examples such as alternate histories and parallel universes. He also argues that while SF is usually based on plausible scientific knowledge, it also takes liberties and "plays" with scientific possibilities, in effect using scientific possibility as a metaphor for present-day hopes and anxieties (6). One example he cites is the transporter technology of the *Star Trek* T.V. series, which was not based on any scientific principles of its day, yet has inspired scientists since to explore the possibility of matter transport. Csicsery-Ronay's definition takes into account contemporary SF authors, who do not always depict scientifically accurate technology or space exploration in their texts. I argue that most of the texts in this study would fit Csicsery-Ronay's revised, more inclusive definition of SF.

Contemporary SFF criticisms mark the genre as having subversive potential; moving away from the stereotype of SF as escapist pulp literature, critics and authors argue that SF has

the potential to create mirror images of the real world which examine and critique present-day social and political issues. Ursula K. LeGuin states in the introduction of *The Left Hand of Darkness* that “the future, in fiction, is a metaphor” (xix). Futuristic landscapes can magnify present-day racial and social issues, allowing readers to recognize the connections between the imagined future and the present day. Carl Freedman also notes that though science fiction and historical fiction have certain commonalities (both use other time periods—the past and future respectively—as a way of commenting on the present) the main difference between the genres is the freedom of form and content: “As knowledge...of the past becomes ideologically more and more difficult to attain, the historical novel, necessarily tied as it is to such knowledge, is bound to become increasingly susceptible to reification. But science fiction is comparatively free of the burden of the past...” (57-8). Because science fiction is not tied to an accurate depiction of history (or at least one that seems plausible, as in historical fiction), it is able to employ an outside perspective not available to historical narrative. Daynali Flores-Rodriguez uses the example of one form of historical narrative, the dictator novel, to express the difference in reception between historically-based works and SF:

If science is enough to lend credibility to a fictional story, then dictator novels are no different when they use historical cues (instead of science) to claim likewise. The main difference between the genres is that one does not go further than the book (science fiction) while the other (the dictator novel) is treated as an accurate cultural representation. (100)

Flores-Rodriguez explains that because dictator novels are assumed to be based on some measure of historical fact, they are often privileged over genres such as SF (100). Such privileging creates an issue for ethnic American authors looking to move towards depictions of race and ethnicity that are not centered on historical narratives. Because SFF is not connected to

a historical or cultural tradition, it allows authors more freedom to experiment with depictions of racial and ethnic identity.

In *The Jewel Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*, Samuel Delany points to SF as a genre that allows authors more freedom to experiment with form and more freedom of expression to challenge social issues in their times. He uses the example of McCarthy Era SF, noting that SF authors were able to publish more politically aggressive texts because of the genre's reputation of dealing with the imaginary: "People were invariably astounded that so much freedom did exist within the genre. But the official reason was that SF was lunatic and not to be taken seriously" (100). Delany views SF as having the potential to create new, experimental forms of writing if literary critics and authors can change their perception of the genre as a "low" fiction.¹⁵ He also notes that SF has the potential to influence other genres, stating, "...the fact is, if SF had been influenced only by itself, it would have strangled long since. If it did not continually influence areas outside itself, we would not have the present increase of interest" (80). SFF is not a self-contained genre; there are works that are not categorized as SFF which employ tropes of SFF. Authors may also write fiction that relies on tropes of SFF but that is not categorized as such in order to avoid the label of SFF. This is especially true of genres connected to a racial or ethnic heritage, such as magical realism or neo-slave narratives, which are considered genres separate from SFF despite their use of fantastic elements.¹⁶ As one of only a handful of recognized African American writers of SFF, Delany

¹⁵ The introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, written by noted SFF critics Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sheryl Vint, states that "Many of the first critical stories about sf, in both fan and academic discussions, argued that it was as worthy of attention as the rest of literature" and goes on to state that fantasy was treated as even more inferior than SF, defined as "the feminized irrational Other to sf's masculine rigor and rationality" (xx).

¹⁶ One example is Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, a text where the main character living in California in the 1970s is inexplicably transported back to nineteenth century Maryland. Though Butler is considered a SFF author and her novel employs time travel, usually considered a SFF trope, this work is often classified as a neo-slave narrative.

understands both the possibilities and limitations the SFF genres provide to ethnic American authors.

If SF is the use of an alternative environment that is based on plausible scientific theory, it should be easy to state that the genre of fantasy is defined by an alternative environment based on magic, typically viewed as the antithesis of science. However, fantasy critics debate what elements are necessary in order for a text to be classified as fantasy. Richard Mathews notes that the basic definition of fantasy is literature that “evokes wonder, mystery or magic—a sense of possibility beyond the ordinary, material, rationally predictable world in which we live” (1). Common tropes of fantasy include the use of magic and magical races, the creation of new worlds based on magical principles, and engagement in quests. Mathews also notes that one of the main distinctions between fantasy and SF is that fantasy is not required to account for its wondrous events (3). Magic is not based on real-world scientific principles; therefore, a reader enters a fantasy text with a willingness to suspend the need for an absolutely explainable world or technology.

Fantasy criticism is also heavily influenced by the critical and fictional works of popular fantasy authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, who offers the basis for a definition of the fantasy genre in his essay “On Fairy Stories.” Tolkien does not view fantasy as connected to supernatural events; rather, he focuses on the creation of an alternate, magical world. Tolkien outlines fairy stories to be defined not by the presence of “fairies” as defined by Western society, but by the use of “Faerie” or “the realm of state in which fairies have their being” (4). He also argues for a treatment of magic as natural to the created world; if an author uses satire, it must not be to make fun of the presence of magic in the story (4). The job of the fantasy writer, according to Tolkien, is to create an alternate world complete with its own magical laws and reasoning. Tolkien ends

the essay by arguing that fantasy allows for “recovery,” which he defines as a regaining of a viewpoint that includes the possibility of wondrous events (19). Tolkien’s definition of fantasy most closely correlates to present day U.S. fantasy readers who have an expectation of escaping into a magical world complete with its own races, languages, and settings.

In the 1970s, Tzvetan Todorov introduced a theory of the fantastic that focused on the reader’s psychological state, rather than the author’s role as world-builder:

The fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work -- in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as ‘poetic’ interpretations.” (33)

Todorov describes the main element in fantastic works to be a creation of uncertainty; readers are never clear about whether the events occurring in the work are truly supernatural or merely coincidental. The events also cannot have a rational explanation. Todorov’s definition of the fantastic does not discuss magic; rather, this definition could apply to other genres of texts such as magical realism, where the reader encounters a realistic environment challenged by the representation of one key fantastical being or event. In Gabriel Garcia Márquez’s “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” the story centers on a man who not only has wings, but flies away at the end of the piece. Several theories about the man are presented by different characters, causing the reader to hesitate between a natural explanation (the man has a physical deformity) and a supernatural one (he is an angel). In order for readers to accept the conditions of the world created, they must accept the possibility of angels appearing on Earth, or the possibility of a human with wings. Depending on the ethnicity or culture of the reader, this acceptance may be

easier or harder to come to. Although some critics argue that magical realism is differentiated from fantasy by the normalization of the fantastic, Márquez's story includes hesitation. The narrator states early on in the story that "Father Gonzaga arrived before seven o'clock, alarmed at the strange news" (335). The appearance of the angel is considered strange, and people come to view the angel the same way they view a carnival freak. The fact that there are characters in the story who are alarmed by the arrival of the man demonstrates that the fantastic is not fully normalized in Márquez's work. Applying Todorov's definition, cited as one of the foundational definitions of fantasy, to a work of magical realism demonstrates that fantastic works from other cultures can be linked to the genre of SFF. Authors such as Márquez, who write stories with fantastic elements, fit Todorov's broader definition of fantasy, one that does not rely on magic or worldbuilding. Contemporary texts such as Daniel José Older's "Phantom Overload" further connect the two genres by combining elements of magical realism and fantasy to showcase new possibilities for the fantastic in Latina/o writing.

Contemporary fantasy critics are working to broaden the definition of the genre by commenting on its potential to critique present-day society. In her recent work *Fantasy*, Rosemary Jackson argues that fantasy must be considered in conjunction with the society it comes from; rather than being a way to "escape" the modern world and its problems, fantasy "attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints" marking it as "a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (3). Jackson's definition of fantasy marks it as a subversive genre, one that can use alternate environments and fantasy elements to critique present day society or recover lost cultural values. Ramon Saldívar applies the notion of fantasy as a subversive genre to post-race ideals, arguing for the potential of fantasy works to highlight the treatment of certain classes and races:

. . . fantasy compels our attention to the gap or deficit between the ideals of redemptive liberal democratic national histories concerning inclusiveness, equality, justice, universal rights, freedom guaranteed by rule of law, and the deeds that have constituted nations and their histories as public connective fantasies. Accounting for this democratic deficit and locating those who pass unacknowledged by it is the dynamic of the new postrace novel. (594)

Saldívar argues that fantasy is one tool authors can employ to highlight the constructedness of U.S. national histories, particularly those that exclude the experiences of marginalized groups. Like SF, fantasy allows for representations of “the gap” or liminal space (as defined by Bhabha) between how U.S. racial rhetoric is represented and the lived experiences of people of color in the U.S. Fantasy offers authors a freedom of form and expression, giving authors the potential to challenge essentialized racial and ethnic viewpoints. Several of the texts in my study, including Older’s “Phantom Overload” and Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling*, are examples of ethnic American texts that employ fantasy writing to call attention to social or political issues.¹⁷

It is impossible to separate science fiction and fantasy; firstly, because the two share elements of construction (alternate environments, metaphors of present day social issues), and, secondly, because there are many texts that blur the boundaries between the two categorizations. Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling* is a good example of a contemporary SFF work that combines the SF trope of genetic manipulation with the fantasy of the vampire myth. Other texts located on the boundaries between science fiction and fantasy include Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game* series and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* series. Andrew M. Butler argues against the misconception that SF is a “pure” genre, noting that “too many critics seem to assume a genetic purity to sf (or whatever) that is simply unsustainable. . . . There is no text that is not part of a genre, and there is no text that is *only* part of *one* genre” (11, ellipsis added, emphasis in the original). SF and fantasy each have their own qualifying aspects. Yet science often appears to be

¹⁷ For the purposes of this study, I identify Butler’s *Fledgling* as a hybrid science fiction/fantasy text.

magic when it is viewed by a society for the first time. In a genre defined by the ability to depict not-yet-realized races and landscapes, there will always be room for texts that challenge accepted boundaries.

SFF has the potential to become a genre that challenges essentialized notions of race and ethnicity. Its greatest strength is its ability to transport the reader to alternate environments where social issues become metaphors, allowing for an indirect discussion of racism and colonization not tied to a specific cultural history. The fact that SFF is considered a genre which depicts not-yet-realized events and characters helps SFF create hybrid, liminal landscapes that explore the inconsistencies between the rhetoric of race in contemporary U.S. society and the experiences of peoples of color. SFF is a genre with fluid borders, which is constantly revising itself to take into account new voices and experiences. Its ability to depict hybrid characters allows for representations of race and ethnicity that are not yet portrayed in mainstream ethnic American literature. These factors make SFF a subversive genre useful for ethnic American authors, who often live in a liminal space between a desire to express all aspects of their identity and a need for social or political unity with racial/ethnic communities.

The Current State of Ethnic SFF

Although racial representation in SFF is an ongoing issue, I want to call attention to the history of ethnic SFF movements and the small but growing number of ethnic SFF scholars and authors addressing racial and ethnic representation in SFF. These works influence the definition of SFF by arguing for the inclusion of ethnic works not typically defined as SFF. If works by Edgar Allen Poe, Jules Verne and H.G. Wells are accepted as examples of early SFF, then there have been SFF texts written by authors of color in the U.S. and in other countries since the nineteenth century, such as Martin Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of America* (1859) and Juan

Nepomuceno Adorno's "The Distant Future" (1862). Scholars of ethnic SFF are re-visiting nineteenth and twentieth century ethnic writings to demonstrate the numerous contributions that authors of color have been and are currently making to the SFF genre.¹⁸ Ethnic SFF movements also draw critical attention to the connections between SFF and the lived experiences of people of color by using SFF metaphors and tropes to highlight the lack of social and political opportunities for peoples of color.

One of the earliest ethnic SFF movements that has received critical attention is Afrofuturism. The term is contributed to Mark Dery, who first used the term in an interview with African American scholars Samuel Delany, Tricia Rose, and Greg Tate which discussed how these authors combine themes of African American culture and SFF (Rollefson 83). J. Griffith Rollefson notes that the origins of Afrofuturism can be found in works as early as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and in other artistic media such as the music of Sun Ra (1950-1970) (84). Today, Afrofuturist authors continue to produce representations of the future that feature blackness and diversity. Lisa Yaszek notes in "An Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*," that "...Afrofuturism appropriates the narrative techniques of science fiction to put a black face on the future. In doing so, it combats those whitewashed visions of tomorrow generated by a global 'futures industry' that equates blackness with the failure of progress and technological catastrophe" (297, ellipsis added). By appropriating visions of the future and equating them with blackness, Afrofuturist artists and critics worldwide are working to combat depictions of color-blind futures. Examples of contemporary African American SFF works which imagine blackness in futuristic settings include the works of Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, Tananarive Due, Steven Barnes, Jewelle Gomez, Ishmael Reed, Minister Faust,

¹⁸ Examples of scholars revisiting ethnic writing to link it to the SFF genre include Rachel Haywood Ferreira, Grace L. Dillon, and Sheree R. Thomas.

Charles R. Saunders, and Nisi Shawl. Afrofuturist scholars and artists work to challenge the idea that technology and social progress are linked to whiteness.

The increased visibility African American SFF authors in the SFF marketplace has created a platform for critical works and anthologies about African American SFF/speculative fiction. Examples of recent critical texts that examine the connections between African American culture and SFF include Sheree R. Thomas's anthologies *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000) and *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* (2005), De Witt Douglass Kilgore's *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space* (2003), and Milton Davis/Charles R. Saunders's collection of "Sword and Soul" African-set fantasy texts, *Griots: A Sword and Soul Anthology* (2011). Each of these texts takes a different approach to the study of African American SFF. In the introduction to her first *Dark Matter* anthology, Thomas uses the metaphor of "dark matter" to describe the experiences of black speculative fiction authors. Dark matter is "a nonluminous form of matter which has not been directly observed but whose existence has been deduced by its gravitational effects" (qtd. in Thomas x). Thomas argues that the black contribution to speculative fiction is similar; the contributions of black speculative fiction authors from the 1920s to today "[have] not been directly observed or fully explored" (xi). Douglass Kilgore coins the phrase "Astrofuturism" to discuss representations of the future and depictions of space travel as presenting "...invitations to worlds (real and imagined) that are ordinarily inaccessible" (3). She argues that moving SFF to alternate environments, such as space, allows authors to address social and political issues in the present, such as racism. Both texts argue for the inclusion of the experiences of people of color in discussions of the future, futuristic technologies, and alternate environments.

Davis and Saunders's anthology is one of the few critical works which draws attention to the influence of African culture on fantasy writings. Saunders explains in the introduction to *Griots* that there was a surge of interest in African culture in the 1960s, which prompted him to use an African setting for his "sword and soul" fantasy texts, a play on the popular heroic fantasy such as the *Conan the Barbarian* texts. He states that until the 2000s, he had not met many other fantasy authors who wrote African-themed fantasy texts. Today, he notes the growing number of SFF authors of all races who are writing fantasy texts with African themes or settings, including Sheree R. Thomas, Amy Harlib, Carole McDonnell, Gregory Walker, Mshindo Kuumba, and N.K. Jemisins. *Griots* makes an important contribution to the definition of fantasy literature; using an African setting allows these authors to demonstrate that ethnic SFF authors do not have to use traditional fantasy settings to write popular fantasy works.

Critical contributions to the study of Native American SFF are also increasing. The introduction to Amy H. Sturgis's critical collection *The Intersection of Fantasy and Native America: From H.P. Lovecraft to Leslie Marmon Silko* (2006) is a reworked speech Sturgis made as the keynote speaker at Mythcon XXXVII. The theme for the conference was Native American fantasy and Native Americans in fantasy. In her speech, Sturgis notes the lack of acknowledgement for Native American contributions to fantasy, stating, "Why do booklovers who devour the work of the Inklings and their modern-day descendants, who through their reading absorb the mythology of Iceland, of Finland, of Germany, not know the comparable tales of the Cherokees or the Navajos?" (11). She goes on to argue that many well-known Native American authors use elements of fantasy in their writing, including H.P. Lovecraft, Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor, and Leslie Marmon Silko. Her text examines the works of Native American authors through the lens of fantasy to make an argument about the contributions of

Native American authors to fantasy writing. Another important text increasing awareness about U.S. and Canadian indigenous SFF is Grace L. Dillon's anthology, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012), the first indigenous SFF collection to date. Like Sturgis, Dillon revisits the works of well-known indigenous authors, including Sherman Alexie, Gerald Vizenor, and Leslie Marmon Silko; however, she also draws attention to works by emerging indigenous SFF authors, such as Celu Amberstone, Andrea Hairston, and Nalo Hopkinson. Both texts demonstrate how critics of ethnic literature are beginning to explore overlooked connections between indigenous writing and SFF while also calling for more indigenous participation in mainstream SFF, creating a space for indigenous participation in a genre that once depicted indigenous peoples as othered, alien figures.

Spanish-speaking cultures have a rich history of SFF writing that contemporary scholars are beginning to revisit.¹⁹ Rachel Haywood Ferreira notes in "The First Wave: Latin American Science Fiction Discovers Its Roots." that the desire to retrolabel Latin American texts as SF (even those before the 1920s, when the term became popular), stems from the desire to represent "a more direct national or continental SF family tree" that allows present-day Latin American and Latina/o authors to connect with a history of Spanish language SF writings (432). Such a move allows current Latin American and Latina/o SFF authors to feel more ownership within the SFF genres, rather than being forced to look towards the notoriously white dominant U.S. SFF tradition.

One of the most comprehensive studies of Spanish-speaking SFF to date is Andrea L. Bell and Yolanda Molina-Gavilán's *Cosmos Latinos: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Latin America and Spain* (2003), a text that explores Latin American and Spanish contributions

¹⁹ I use the term "Spanish-speaking cultures" to indicate the broad variety of Spanish-speaking groups both in the U.S. (Latina/o, Chicana/o) and outside the U.S. (Cuban, Mexican, Spanish, Latin American, and Caribbean).

to SFF chronologically from the nineteenth century to the present day. Bell and Molina-Gavilán explain that the majority of the works in their anthology come from five Spanish-speaking countries which have been economically capable of maintaining a strong publishing community: Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, and Spain (3). They also note that fantastic works were not popularized in Latin America until Jorge Luis Borges, Bioy Casares, and Silvina Ocampo edited a volume of fantastic fiction, *Antología de la literatura fantástica (The Book of Fantasy, 1940)*. One important contribution *Cosmos Latinos* makes is to document the history of Spanish-speaking countries' engagement with SFF. In the 1950s and 1960s, Spanish writers in Spain wrote under Anglo pseudonyms due to conservative cultural views about literature. The 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in popularity for SFF works due to an increased availability of translated SFF works and a broadening of the genre to include themes of soft SF (6). In the 1970s and 1980s, political turmoil in Latin American caused a decrease in the production of Latin American SFF. Bell and Molina-Gavilán conclude by noting the resurgence of SF fanzines in Spanish speaking countries, both in-print and online. However, they also note that many authors have difficulty getting their Spanish or Portuguese SFF texts published by large publishing houses. It seems that one obstacle to including Latin American and Spanish SFF authors into the genre is a lack of U.S. exposure to SFF texts written in other languages.

In the U.S., Latina/o and Chicana/o SFF study is moving slowly; however, a few critics and authors are beginning to examine SFF themes in Latina/o and Chicana/o writings. In 2004, Catherine Ramírez introduced the term “Chicanafuturism”; building on definitions of Afrofuturism, Ramírez defines Chicanafuturism as “explor[ing] the ways that new and everyday technologies, including their detritus, transform Mexican American life and culture. It questions the promises of science, technology, and humanism for Chicanas, Chicanos, and other people of

color. And like Afrofuturism, which reflects diasporic experience, Chicanafuturism articulates colonial and postcolonial histories of *indigenismo*, *mestizaje*, hegemony, and survival” (187). Ramírez makes an important connection between African American, Chicana/o and Native American cultures to demonstrate how all have been affected by technological “advances” and the stereotype that peoples of color have no connection to technology, and therefore no place in the future.

While scholars of ethnic SFF are making an important contribution to critical discussions of race and SFF, there is still a lack of critical attention to the intersections between SFF authors of different races and ethnicities. By separating the study of ethnic SFF into subcategories based on race or ethnicity, ethnic SFF scholars risk creating the same essentialized categorizations of ethnic SFF that currently exist in discussions of race and ethnicity. SFF is able to blur distinctions between races and ethnicities, giving it the potential to challenge and transform current racial and ethnic identifications. Such a transformation is necessary if race and ethnicity are to survive current arguments about post-race identification and genetic similarity. What my study demonstrates is how ethnic SFF authors work to create texts which represent the complexity of the experiences of peoples of color in the U.S. yet also disrupt current racial and ethnic identifications. Ultimately, these authors demonstrate how representation of race and ethnicity can adapt to meet the personal, social, and political needs of present-day peoples of color.

SFF and the Future of Race

In demonstrating the contributions of ethnic American authors to SFF, I hope to show the importance of making space for more fluid depictions of race and ethnicity, as well as for futures that reflect the diversity of U.S. culture. In the face of critical arguments about the constructed

nature of racial and ethnic identities, ethnic American authors must find a way to reconcile the desire to connect with a racial/ethnic heritage and the knowledge that there are no distinct genetic differences between races. Hames-García argues for a significant shift in the ways cultures theorize racial issues:

Racial hierarchies and biological determinist assumptions about racial difference will not evaporate without a significant reorganization of cultural, economic, and political relations at the personal and societal levels, as well as an accounting for how different bodies intra-act with racial categories and ideas. This reorganization, in turn, must come in part from racial identity projects that do not simply reaffirm what race is and has been, but rather seek a transformation of race into something new. (66)

Hames-García argues for a shift in racial theories towards rhetorics of change and originality, creating opportunities for hybrid, liminal racial and ethnic depictions not tied to an essentialized cultural history. While the history of race and racism is consistently addressed in ethnic American writing, few ethnic American authors take the time to consider what race and ethnicity could become, how it could change and still be relevant to discussions of racial/ethnic identity. SFF offers a means through which ethnic American authors can create these future constructions of race and ethnicity while still addressing present day racial issues. As a subversive genre, SFF creates the possibility for representations of race and ethnicity that may not be available in other genres. As metaphors for present-day societies, SFF texts allow authors to critique social and political issues. Yet the fact that SFF texts are also set in future or alternate environments create forward-looking depictions of race and ethnicity. It is important to recognize a past history of alienation or discrimination; however, what the authors in my study also prove is that it is just as important to move towards alternate depictions of race, ethnicity, and culture which take into account mixed-race individuals, cultural need, and social change.

CHAPTER TWO

“ARMAGEDDON BEEN IN EFFECT”: POST-APOCALYPTIC LANDSCAPES IN SAMUEL DELANY’S *DHALGREN* AND GERALD VIZENOR’S *BEARHEART, THE HEIRSHIP CHRONICLES*

The advantage of Science Fiction as a point of cultural departure is that it allows for a series of worst-case futures—of hells-on-Earth and being in them—which are woven into every kind of everyday present reality. . . . The central fact in Black Science Fiction—self-consciously so named or not—is an acknowledgement that Apocalypse already happened: that (in [Public Enemy’s] phrase) Armageddon been in effect. Black SF writers—Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler—write about worlds after catastrophic disaster; about the modalities of identity without hope of resolution...

—Mark Sinker

This chapter examines Samuel Delany’s *Dhalgren* and Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart, the Heirship Chronicles* as representations of the SFF subgenre of post-apocalyptic literature. Although apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts are often distinguished from SFF, the fact that these texts represent alternate worlds that do not yet exist makes them an important subgenre of SFF. By connecting Homi Bhabha’s theories of hybridity and interstitial spaces with theories of post-apocalyptic landscapes, I demonstrate how Delany and Vizenor’s post-apocalyptic texts serve to reimagine spaces typically associated with racial violence: the inner city and the reservation. Rather than looking back nostalgically at the comforts of modern life, Delany and Vizenor’s texts challenge readers’ assumptions about the superiority of modern culture. In both texts, hybrid identities and multicultural groups are defined as better able to adapt to new environments, connecting the idea of hybridity and multiple identifications to the survival of the human race. Delany and Vizenor create sexually graphic, disjointed narratives that force readers to acknowledge the similarities between African American or indigenous colonization and the

apocalypse. By employing postmodern tropes, both authors disrupt static depictions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality to highlight the ways U.S. linear narratives of progress have suppressed marginal or alternate viewpoints.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues against a “linear narrative of the nation” or the notion of a nation as one, essentialized group with a common history: “The linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes, most commonly signifies a people, a nation, or a national culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity” (201). Instead, Bhabha argues for an “interstitial perspective” designed to replace “the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation ‘in itself’ and extrinsic other nations” with the notion of “cultural liminality within the nation”:

For the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space—representing the nation’s modern territoriality is turned into the archaic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. The difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One. The liminal point of this ideological displacement is the turning of the differentiated spatial boundary, the “outside”, into the authenticating ‘inward’ time of Tradition. (213)

Bhabha contrasts linear narratives of cultural history with liminal, interstitial spaces—hybrid, marginal spaces that challenge linear narratives of the nation supported by Western, hierarchical traditions. The idea of embracing multiple historical narratives inverts traditional narratives of a singular, forward-moving modern nation, threatening its base of power.

I argue that post-apocalyptic literature creates the liminal space that Bhabha argues for by literally creating situations where society is forced to exist in a place in between the “modern” world and a perceived end of civilization. Homi Bhabha reads a passage from Fitzjames Stephen’s “Foundations of the government of India” as an apocalyptic reference, arguing that

Stephen's description of an India without British rule demonstrates the paranoia that colonial texts associated as apocalyptic:

In the oscillation between apocalypse and chaos, we see the emergence of an anxiety associated with narcissistic vision and its two dimensional space. It is an anxiety which will not abate because the empty third space, the other space of symbolic representation, at once bar and bearer of difference, is closed to the paranoid position of power. In the colonial space, that space of the other is always occupied by an *idée fixe*: despot, heathen, barbarian, chaos, violence. (143)

Bhabha argues that colonial texts use apocalyptic references to highlight a fear of chaos; when the world loses its rational order through a loss of institutions, a baser nature of humanity is allowed to run wild. Such a reading conflates colonized peoples with chaos and apocalypse; the literature of colonization cannot see past a moment when the colonizer will be present to impose "order" and "civilization" on the colonized. Bhabha's reading demonstrates how the literature of colonization is limited by its refusal to accept the value of alternate cultural constructions, an anxiety that results in cultural paralysis.

Beyond the representation of colonial anxiety and its connection to apocalyptic language, post-apocalyptic landscapes serve to challenge stereotypical views of modernity. Mary Manjikian notes that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic²⁰ writings "rewrite our understanding of the world's map, since they reverse the situation of the center and the periphery" (286). By creating a situation in which First World, "modern" culture has been destroyed or degraded, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic writings allow authors to either reinforce or critique "modern society and its narrative of exceptionalism" (146). Some post-apocalyptic texts reinforce discourses of colonialism; in texts such as Richard Jefferies' *After London*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Manjikian notes, "the land (and the people) has been reenchanting, as they have abandoned modern beliefs and forms of social

²⁰ For the purposes of my study, I will define apocalyptic writing as writing set during an apocalyptic event and post-apocalyptic writing as writing set in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event.

organization for the primitive. This destroyed environment is then visited by a colonizing foreigner from across the sea, or alternately is described by a narrator from an earlier time who looks back from a vantage point where America was the pinnacle of success but now must gaze upon the ruins of its former self” (234-5). In these post-apocalyptic texts, the destruction of modern society is viewed as negative, a loss of modernity and a devolution of humanity back to its “savage” roots.

Post-apocalyptic texts also have the ability to counter colonial viewpoints by allowing for an examination of the disadvantages of modern society and the recreation of alternate social spaces and relationships. Post-apocalyptic SFF texts such as Phillip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, John Mitchell’s *The Last American*, and Pat Frank’s *Alas, Babylon* use post-apocalyptic landscapes to critique aspects of modernity by turning the U.S. or Earth into a wasteland caused by a misuse of technology. In *Alas, Babylon*, the U.S. experiences a nuclear attack and ends up needing foreign aid from Brazil and Venezuela. Such a reversal of first world/third world stereotypes critiques U.S. politics and foreign policy. Postmodern post-apocalyptic texts, such as Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* and Matthew Sharpe’s *Jamestown* take the critique of modern society a step further by suggesting that the desire for social order present in most post-apocalyptic texts is either unnecessary or impossible. I argue that *Dhalgren* and *Bearheart* fall into this category of post-apocalyptic texts; each text employs postmodern tropes to disrupt the view of post-apocalyptic landscapes as spaces defined by a need for imposed social order. Delany creates fluid depictions of time and space, literally changing the landscape of the inner-city and its social identifications, while Vizenor focuses on distorting linear narratives of U.S. history. Both authors also employ racial/ethnic hybridity, graphic

depictions of sexuality, and language manipulation to challenge readers' perceptions of racial and sexual norms.

Future Present

James Berger notes that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic writings create a temporal loop where “the writer and reader must be both places at once, imagining the post-apocalyptic world and then paradoxically ‘remembering’ the world as it was, as it is” (6). Post-apocalyptic literature is set in a time that has not yet occurred; however, because it is a society in ruins, it must appear close enough to a recognizable present for the reader to be able to compare the two realities. This creation of an immediate future which looks back to the present is one reason why some post-apocalyptic texts are less likely to be classified as SFF, especially if the author, like Vizenor, is not usually associated with the SFF genre. Several SFF critics, such as Algis Burrys, have also defined Delany's *Dhalgren* as “allegorical quasi-fantasy” that should not be considered SFF. Mark Chia-Yon Jerng argues that the reason for such critiques of Delany's work is related to the text's depiction of time: “...because the depictions in the novel might be easily related to the given world, readers lose the sense of an alternative world that is central to defining the novel as SF” (264). I argue that Delany and Vizenor's texts do not appear to be depicting a distant future because the past and current racial issues they highlight are already post-apocalyptic. African Americans and indigenous peoples are both attempting to rediscover or rebuild cultural traditions destroyed by colonization; Vizenor and Delany play with this depiction of ethnic culture as post-apocalyptic by making their future landscape an allegory for present racial and ethnic crisis. Delany and Vizenor's texts are overlooked as SFF because these texts refuse to consider the apocalyptic event as a loss of culture; instead, the post-apocalyptic landscape

becomes a space where these authors can imagine cultures defined by an acceptance of hybrid, liminal identities.

Dhalgren and *Bearheart* create post-apocalyptic landscapes that mimic the lived experiences of African American and indigenous cultures today. Delany includes a riot in *Dhalgren* which recalls the civil unrest of the 1960s (Delany wrote his novel after the Watts riot and the riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King). Jason Haslam argues that *Dhalgren* challenges linear, nostalgic narratives of history by creating a “tension related to the past and to a largely unspoken sense of guilt that concerns memories (personal and cultural) of inaction in the face of (cultural and personal) moments of violence” (79). Delany uses his post-apocalyptic texts to draw attention to historical narratives that have been repressed because of U.S. guilt or anxiety concerning racialized violence. *Bearheart* revisits the history of indigenous exploitation in the U.S. through a parody of forced migration. Both moments of historical violence have been ignored or downplayed in U.S. historical memory and transformed into “a universalized myth and therefore... a supposedly unassailable truth” (79, ellipsis added). In order to disrupt a received, essentialized view of U.S. history and culture, Delany and Vizenor employ post-apocalyptic landscapes to challenge and reimagine present day depictions of racial violence in U.S. historical accounts.

Each author uses a different approach to the disruption of U.S. historical narrative. *Dhalgren* uses time distortion to disorient readers, who never receive a full explanation of how time functions in the text. The narrator of the text, who calls himself Kid, has lost most of his memory. He also periodically loses random amounts of time; what seems like hours to him become days when he encounters others. Kid finds himself entering Bellona, a post-apocalyptic city space that has been devastated after a riot. The people of Bellona have limited power and

access to food; most are forced to join groups of residents and pool resources to survive. Bellona is marked by violence and sexuality; Kid finds himself participating in both violent raids and orgies throughout the novel. During his stay in Bellona, Kid meets an assorted cast of characters, becomes the head of the city's main gang, engages in a variety of sexual encounters, writes a book of poetry, and survives the destruction of the city by fire and water. Delany purposely employs an unreliable narrator to confuse the notion of time in Bellona; the reader is never sure if it is only Kid who loses time, or if all of the characters are experiencing time-distortion.

Delany's time distortion makes the plot of *Dhalgren* fragmented; Similar to Bhabha's argument against linear narratives of history, Delany argues against the perception of time as straightforward and linear; instead, he opens a space where each character's perception of time can be different, allowing for entirely different experiences of Bellona. However, Peter S. Alterman argues that the depiction of time in *Dhalgren* is actually more realistic than texts defined as chronological:

In the relativistic universe, time is indeed not constant, but is related to the velocity and frame of reference of the observer. This is dramatized in *Dhalgren*, and although it is a physical reality of the universe we all inhabit, we persist in viewing time as a universal and linear norm. . . . What seems to be a fantastic view of time is in fact a realistic, because time is psychologically a function of the state of the observer and physically a function of the velocity of the observer. (26, ellipsis added)

Readers become confused when faced with *Dhalgren's* portrayal of time because it is not viewed as linear. Because the time in *Dhalgren* is based on Kid's "real-time" perception, it changes as he moves through different areas of the city. The ability to create a non-linear perception of time allows Delany to present an otherwise present-day depiction of inner-city life, yet challenge the ways that readers define and justify this space. There is no logical explanation for how time

changes in Bellona, as there is no justification for the social situations of poverty and crime that exist in inner-city populations.

In addition to the distorted perceptions of the characters, the only form of media left, *The Bellona Times*, also disrupts views of time in the novel by printing random dates in its issues. The newspaper states that it is April 1, 1919 one day and December 25, 1940 another. The residents of Bellona make plans by meeting whenever the paper says it is Sunday. The fact that the paper states such wildly different time periods can be viewed as a joke, but with all of the other phenomena happening in Bellona, it is possible that the entire city could be on a different plane of time and space. *The Bellona Times* is yet another way that Delany disrupts his reader's expectations for linear narratives. If the newspaper, a symbol of knowledge and information, is distorted, then all of the information Kid receives is questionable. Haslam notes that the U.S. mass media has influenced perceptions of race, in particular views of ethnic peoples connected to images of violence in inner-city settings (83). By distorting perceptions of linear time, Delany highlights the ways that the media creates narratives of racial violence to influence public opinion.

The physical landscape of Bellona is as distorted and changeable as the timeline of the novel. Kid describes Bellona as a liminal space, both accessible and unknown:

Very few suspect the existence of this city. It is as if not only the media but the laws of perspective themselves have redesigned knowledge and perception to pass it by. Rumor says there is practically no power here. Neither television cameras nor on-the-spot broadcasts function: that such a catastrophe as this should be opaque, and therefore dull, to the electric nation! It is a city of inner discordances and retinal distortions. (14)

Several critics have connected descriptions of Bellona to the lack of police and television attention in inner-city areas, which have become lawless spaces defined by violence.²¹ Robert Elliot Fox notes the incongruities of Kid's description: Bellona is described as a Midwestern metropolis with a former population of about two million people, which has been reduced to thousands. Such a disaster would surely attract attention, and yet Bellona is not receiving recognition from the rest of the country; the only new people are the few adventure-seekers that enter out of curiosity. How can they know about the existence of Bellona without the rest of the country being aware? It is clear that somehow, Bellona is not included in the national consciousness, possibly because the majority refuses to acknowledge the violence that has marked it, and therefore the rest of the country.

Bellona's position as a fluid landscape allows Delany to play with readers' perceptions of the "natural" world. Several natural phenomena occur during Kid's visit. Fires seem to randomly start and stop in the city, two moons appear in the sky, and a giant sun rises and sets in the course of a few hours. The residents of Bellona never discover whether the fires are being set or are spontaneously erupting. They also do not know if the two moons and giant sun actually appeared, or if they were the result of a mass delusion. Even the former astronaut, Captain Kemp, cannot see any stars that would prove that Bellona has not somehow moved to a different galaxy, and is, in fact, still located on Earth. Like every other aspect of Bellona, the landscape is experienced differently by each resident, making the definition of the events based on the perspective of the person relating them. Delany uses the natural phenomena to add fantastic elements to an otherwise realistic landscape. Disrupting the reader's perception of the landscape allows Delany to highlight the post-apocalyptic aspects of inner city life for people of color. The

²¹ See Stefanie Dunning's "The Wounded City: Ambiguous Subjectivities and the Riotous Metropolis in Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren*" and Robert Elliot Fox's "'This You-Shaped Hole of Insight and Fire': Meditations on *Dhalgren*."

natural phenomena are often linked to racial issues. The second sun is named after one of the prominent black men in the city who may have started a race-riot. The fires that burn sections of the city are thought to have originated with the riot that caused Bellona to become cut off from the rest of the U.S. These natural phenomena force the reader to notice the similarities between surviving in an inner city environment and surviving the apocalypse. By the end of the novel, the city is consumed in an explosion of fire and water, and yet Kid meets people entering the city as he leaves. Bellona is both destroyed and renewed for those first entering, creating a cyclical pattern of time and space that suggest an unending cycle of poverty and violence.

Rather than distorting time, *Bearheart* disrupts linear narratives of historical progress by connecting the history of U.S. government/indigenous relations and contemporary indigenous political groups to the end of the world. *Bearheart* tells the story of Proude Cedarfair, a powerful, shape-shifting Native American man, and a group of mixed-blood pilgrims. Proude and the pilgrims travel through a post-apocalyptic U.S. that has run out of gasoline, resulting in the destruction of “modern” life. At the beginning of the novel, Proude is forced to leave his ancestral home, which his family has occupied for four generations, because the government decides to cut down the cedar trees on his land for fuel. Along the way, he and his wife encounter other mixed-blood pilgrims trying to make their way to New Mexico. The landscape is riddled with dangers, which test the pilgrims’ sense of identity. Vizenor uses the concept of “mixed-blood” or “cross-blood” figures to complicate essentialized definitions of indigenous identity. As the son of a Native American father and a white mother, Vizenor himself is a “mixed-blood” and creates characters with mixed indigenous identities in his works to disrupt “terminal creeds,” a term he creates to describe limited or essentialized views of indigenous cultures.

Vizenor's post-apocalyptic text works to dismantle perceived notions of indigenous cultures being less than modern. The novel starts with a description of the political factors that caused the destruction of the U.S.:

Through political and executive nonfeasance the national supplies of crude oil had dribbled to nothing. Paralyzed in its own political quarrels the executive and legislative branches of government were not capable of negotiating trades or developing alternative fuels. The nation ran out of gasoline and fuel oil. . . . Economic power had become the religion of the nation; when it failed people turned to their own violence and bizarre terminal creeds for comfort and meaning. New families were made from aberrations. (23, ellipsis added)

The idea that a developed country would run out of fossil fuels through a failure to explore alternative fuel options is not unusual in post-apocalyptic literature. However, Vizenor connects the government's exploitation of natural resources to a history of indigenous exploitation through the story of the Proude family and their cedar nation, the forest they call home. Fourth Proude Cedarfair represents four generations of indigenous resistance to government exploitation. For decades, the Cedarfairs have protected the cedar forest from outsiders who wish to exploit the land's natural resources. The fact that Proude and his wife are finally forced to leave the cedar nation represents an indigenous apocalypse in which the last remnants of indigenous peoples are finally forced off of their lands. Vizenor's depiction of Proude and the other pilgrims searching for a new home plays with themes of indigenous displacement and manifest destiny; the exploitation of natural resources and the exploitation of indigenous peoples both contribute to the post-apocalyptic environment.

Vizenor does not create a text where indigenous peoples are innocent victims; he is careful to also represent the contributions of indigenous peoples to the apocalypse. The first section of *Bearheart* includes a sexual encounter between Proude Cedarfair and a female member of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Proude's monologue in the first section

describes the effect that contemporary indigenous peoples and their false movements are having on indigenous culture:

There are new tribal evils with us now. The crossbloods and wicked skins dressed in animal hides and plastic bear claws are down around us here in the heirship documents. The aimless children paint harsh words on the federal windows in their material wars, and the words are dead, tribal imagination and our trickeries to heal are in ruins. (ix)

Proude's statement about "plastic bear claws" brings to mind issues of plastic shamanism, the idea that some indigenous people are willing to "sell out" their people's sacred practices for personal gain.²² The reference to "material wars" points to contemporary indigenous movements that are more concerned with material gain than the preservation of cultural traditions. Proude's description of "crossbloods" and his argument with the AIM member about cultural authenticity demonstrates Vizenor's physical and cultural apocalypse for indigenous peoples, filled with fake shamans, broken treaties and "terminal creeds."

In *Bearheart*, Vizenor demonstrates how indigenous peoples are defined by "survivance," a term he coins in his later work to describe the renunciation of a "legacy of victimry" and the creation of an "active presence" in indigenous writing (*Survivance* 1). His view of indigenous culture is that it is adaptable, yet still able to preserve indigenous traditions. During the argument with a female AIM member about cultural traditions, Proude mocks her for her anger and lack of cultural knowledge. When she states that she is part of a revolution, Proude refers to it as a "revolution with plastics." Vizenor's post-apocalyptic landscape becomes a space for exposing the terminal creeds of contemporary indigenous peoples (or any peoples who falsely claim connections with indigenous culture) who have replaced lost cultural knowledge with imagined

²² In "Appropriation and the Plastic Shaman: Winnetou's Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City," Lisa Mayo defines plastic shamanism as "a Native or non-Native individual who sells native spirituality; who claims to have studied Native spirituality and runs sweat lodges and other sacred ceremonies for a very high price" (54).

movements and plastic shamanism. His definition of survivance indicates that in the post-apocalyptic landscape, false representations of indigenous culture cannot survive.

Delany and Vizenor both use post-apocalyptic landscapes as liminal spaces, allowing them to disrupt linear, essentialized narratives of history, race and ethnicity. Their landscapes become fluid, constantly changing places where people (and in Vizenor's case, animals) must adapt by embracing multiple identifications. Any attempt to hold on to rigid notions of identity results in stasis and, ultimately, death. While Delany chooses to distort *Dhalgren's* timeline and physical landscape, Vizenor concentrates on distorting images of historical progress and essentialized depictions of indigenous culture. Both texts highlight violence towards racial and ethnic groups; however, their employment of the SFF post-apocalyptic landscape also creates spaces that will allow for multiple racial, ethnic, cultural, and sexual identifications. Both texts demonstrate the possibility for SFF post-apocalyptic texts to challenge essentialized, static representations of race and ethnicity.

SFF Mongrels

Mixed-race characters or multiracial groups in *Dhalgren* and *Bearheart* are better suited to survive in post-apocalyptic environments. In genetics, mixing two like species usually results in the hybrid organism gaining the advantages of both gene sets.²³ Mules and certain types of dogs were created by interbreeding two animals of the same species for specific purposes. One example is the mule, which was bred to have the power of the horse and the durability and sure footing of a donkey. Mixed-breed animals embody traits from both of breeds involved; Hal L. Black and Jeffrey S. Green conducted a study of the use of mixed-breed dogs to guard livestock

²³ I will also discuss themes of genetic manipulation in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* in chapter two. The main difference between Delany and Vizenor's works and Butler's is the means of manipulation; genetic interbreeding has been used as a low-tech means of genetic manipulation while the character in Butler's text is manipulated in a laboratory setting. Either way, the manipulation is used to complicate racial and ethnic classifications.

on Navajo reservations, finding that mixed-breed dogs were able to display the herding tendencies of sheep dogs and the protective nature of other breeds.²⁴ These examples demonstrate that under certain circumstances, mixing genes creates a hybrid that is more adaptable than the “purebred” species that created it. Delany and Vizenor both utilize the theme of genetic mixture as positive to combat colonial views of racial interbreeding as negative.²⁵ *Dhalgren* portrays mixed-race peoples and communities as more able to adapt to life in Bellona. At the beginning of the novel, a nameless narrator describes Kid as half white, half indigenous. His artistic ability and bravado quickly give him a reputation equal to the gun-slinging cowboy he ironically names himself after. This reputation and his ambiguous ethnic background allow him access to all classes of people in Bellona, and eventually result in his becoming the leader of the Scorpions, a mixed-race gang. The Scorpions choose to live together, protect each other, and go on raids of the city together, making them one of the most formidable groups in Bellona. The fact that the Scorpions are able to accept peoples of different races into their group make them more adaptable; each member brings certain skill-sets into the group, and the group as a whole acts as a family unit by living together, sharing food and resources. Once Kid becomes the leader of the Scorpions, it becomes the most formidable gang in Bellona. Kid’s liminal position as a mixed-race individual allows him to negotiate racial misunderstandings and make the group a cohesive unit. He never offers information about his ethnic background; indeed, it is difficult to know if he is actually the ethnicity the text describes him as. Because Kid does not remember

²⁴ Vizenor has discussed his admirations for “mongrel” dogs in various interviews, often telling stories about mixed-breed dogs he owned in his youth. Black and Green note that the Navajo do not have a specific mixture of breeds used as guard dogs. The reservation dogs often run free, allowing them to mate and create mixed-breed dogs. Black and Green do state that certain breeds, such as German Shepherds, are not considered good livestock dogs because of their tendency to bother or chase the livestock (14). They also note that the presence and employment of mixed-breed dogs is an aspect of several Native American tribes.

²⁵ U.S. slave laws such as the “one-drop” rule equated racial intermixture as negative; any individual who had even a trace of African ancestry was treated as a slave, and stripped of their rights. I discuss this topic further in my discussion of race and genetics in chapter two.

most of his life or even his name, he could potentially be a number of races or ethnicities. He is described by one of the Scorpions as “dark,” so it is possible that many of the Scorpions mistake him for black or another ethnic minority. However, towards the end of the novel, Kid’s girlfriend Lanya, who is white, asks why Kid is the head of the Scorpions instead of one of the black members. After giving the questions some thought, one of the black Scorpions explains his reason:

“I think more or less everybody has got it in their head that one of these runs or other, the shit is going to come down. Hard. When it does, you gonna see some niggers fade in the night like nobody’s business. But the chief scorpion, maybe, ain’t gonna be able to fade quite so fast. So that if this dumb-ass white motherfucker—” Glass put his arm around my shoulder and gave me a big grin.— “wants to stick around here and play superman, ain’t no nigger with any sense gonna stand in his way. I mean the guy in charge is the one who gets zapped. At least, that’s the way it works anyplace else...” (769)

It is clear that each member of the Scorpions reads Kid’s race differently, and accepts him for different reasons. As a representation of whiteness, Kid represents a possible scapegoat. As a mixed-race individual, he represents a variety of identifications that make him able to adapt to different racial and social environments, such as the park commune, the Richards’ apartment, and Calkin’s party. Kid is able to move more freely around Bellona, bringing the Scorpions with him, because of his liminal racial identification.

Delany contrasts depictions of the Scorpions’ open, communal lifestyle with that of the Richards, a white, middle-class family that has refused to leave Bellona. Mrs. Richards stays in her apartment all day, afraid of what the world outside has become. She lives in a perpetual state of stasis and is obsessed with making her living space perfect. She hires Kid to clean the upstairs apartment so her family can move because she cannot stand the noise her new neighbors make. When Kid makes the suggestion that she run an extension cord into the hallway to get more light in the apartment, she refuses because management would not allow it, stating, “Oh no, this isn’t

that kind of place” (126). Mrs. Richards is unable to adapt to Bellona’s post-apocalyptic landscape like Kid and the Scorpions, so she becomes trapped in her apartment, unable to leave or acknowledge the changes that go on around her. At one point, Mr. Richards explains to Kid that his wife’s inability to adapt to her surroundings or leave Bellona is affecting his perception of reality:

A man’s home is supposed to be—well, a place where everything is real, solid, and he can grab hold. In our home, I just don’t know. . . . I think it’s me, sometimes. Mary’s always been a strange woman; she hasn’t had it that easy. She tries so hard to be . . . well, civilized. We *both* do. (173, first ellipsis added)

Mr. and Mrs. Richards’ obsession with maintaining a façade of “civilized” behavior leads to their inability to adjust to the changes of Bellona. Mrs. Richards’ decision to move from the seventeenth floor to the nineteenth floor, away from her uncivilized new neighbors, represents her desire for upward social mobility. Mr. and Mrs. Richards are obsessed with trying to fit an essentialized, static definition of civilization, and are thus trapped in their own perception of Bellona as a chaotic, “savage” place. Adding to their issues is the fact that Mrs. Richards is only able to interact with people that she considers “safe”—those who are white.²⁶ Her refusal to interact with peoples of other races and classes traps Mr. and Mrs. Richards in a limited space of their own making.

The Richards represent Western cultures’ creation of social and historical myths, described by Barry E. Laga as connected to a perceived view of social stability: “Western culture creates myths important to its stability, reducing anxiety by explaining away contradictions or providing a way of living with them” (73). Mr. and Mrs. Richards manage to reduce their anxiety

²⁶ Although Kid may be half-Native American, he is perceived by characters in *Dhalgren* as white and ethnic in different circumstances. His interactions with Mrs. Richards are limited and based on her terms; he first works for her as an employee, and after she discovers he is a poet, is invited to her home to read his works for her and her friends. Delany does not indicate whether Mrs. Richards believes Kid is white or of a different ethnicity; it is possible that his ambiguous racial identification allows Mrs. Richards to interact with Kid on a limited basis.

by creating what they perceive to be a stable living space; however, the event that finally shatters Mr. and Mrs. Richards' constructed identities is the death of their son, Bobby. It is unclear whether Bobby accidentally falls down an elevator shaft or whether he is pushed by his sister, June. Both representations destroy the Richards' controlled environment, leading to "an absolute spatial hemorrhaging in which the family being is torn and exposed to all the difference it hopes to elide" (Comer 176). Bobby's death cannot be ignored or explained away, forcing Mrs. Richards to acknowledge the effect that Bellona's shifting environment is having on her and her family. Delany hints that the older Richards children—the younger generation—may have the ability to adjust that their parents lack. June Richards goes out to explore the new landscape frequently, and to search for George, a black man she has had relations with in the past. Her older brother becomes a member of the Scorpions and renames himself "Tarzan" in an ironic nod to his perceived decivilization. In Bellona, those willing to adjust to new racial/social/sexual situations by building new family units are able to thrive in the post-apocalyptic environment.

Mixed race peoples and communities in *Bearheart* use adaptability to challenge colonial stereotypes about the mixture of races. Vizenor makes constant references to "mongrels" in *Bearheart*, both human and animal. A mongrel, or mixed breed animal, is typically used as a derogatory term to indicate a lesser breed. Such a description recalls issues of anxiety in colonial writings about intermixing of cultures and loss of racial or cultural purity. Vizenor plays with such cultural anxieties, as well as the stereotype of indigenous peoples as uncivilized "savages," by using a word typically associated with animals to describe humans. As John Purdy argues in "A Scapehouse for Us All: Pure Gumption, Agents of Agitation and The Ecological Vision of *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*," "'Mongrel' suggests a wanton disregard for the supposed sanctity of bloodlines, and thus a sense of chance derived from sexual action that results in a

contamination; in the case of the terms' use in [*Bearheart*], the word brings into sharp relief underlying value systems that privilege one animal over another, and, like 'race,' this is a social construct" (Purdy 185). The fact that mongrels are more adaptable in *Bearheart's* post-apocalyptic landscape also points to the idea of genetic complexity as positive. Purdy explains that a pure-bred dog is limited by its blood, "its engineered nature" and notes that in indigenous cultural stories, monsters that are limited to one action or way of thinking are used as negative examples: "Ironically, in this way [the pure-bred dog] resembles many of the monsters that inhabit the stories of indigenous cultures, who also act in predictable ways; oftentimes, these automatic responses to certain stimuli actually doom the monster, if the hero of the story is clever enough to understand these limits of thinking and power and thereby anticipate the monster's reactions, turning them against it" (187). Indigenous stories reinforce ideas of adaptability and survival; the heroes are able to overcome monsters by drawing on a number of skills and adjusting to new situations. Vizenor employs the history of indigenous peoples as adaptable to connect indigenous culture and survival, or survivance.

In an interview, Vizenor notes that one of his goals for *Bearheart* was to dispel notions of racial purity for all races and cultures: "The characters in my stories forever contravene racial categories. Only the separatists play to racial purity and privilege, and that has been the dreadful human condition in the modern world, and world, anytime! There is no other source of native consciousness than crossbloods, and that naturally is the heart of this bear story. Everyone, everywhere is a crossblood" (qtd. in Purdy 186-87). All of the twelve pilgrims in *Bearheart* embody multiple identifications. Fourth Proude Cedarfair has the ability to change into a bear. Benito Saint Plumero has a relationship with a statue, Lilith Mae Farrier has sexual relations with her two dogs. Pio Wissakodewinini is a man who was punished for rape by being surgically

changed into a woman. The Bishop and Pio each wear a series of “metamasks,” allowing them to disguise their facial features and gender. Each pilgrim is willing to accept the others and their choices, allowing them to band together for protection.

The group of pilgrims that travel in Vizenor’s novel are not simply a collection of mongrels or crossbloods; it is also a mixed-species group. Vizenor frequently comments on the human-animal relationship in indigenous cultures and stories. His critical article “Authored Animals: Creature Tropes In Native American Fiction” argues for a “warranted” literary anthropomorphism by explaining how indigenous cultures create literary depictions of animals that, while not entirely realistic, serve as metaphors for larger cultural concepts: “The creatures in native literature are seldom mere representations of animals in nature or culture, wild, domestic, generic, or otherwise; however, there is an unnamable presence, traces of a familiar nature, comic motivation, native reason, and author introspection” (678). Vizenor is concerned with deconstructing the perceived divide between “civilized” human beings and animals. He achieves this goal in two main ways: by describing scenes and indigenous tales where animals and humans engage in sexual relations and by creating powerful animal characters capable of human intelligence and empathy.

The animals who travel in the group of pilgrims contribute to the group’s ability to adapt and survive. Proude’s ability to transform into a bear is a connection to his position as a shaman and lends him the power to overcome his enemies and escape imprisonment.²⁷ Vizenor quotes Paul Shepard and Barry Sanders’ definition of the bear in *The Sacred Paw* to show how bears can serve as hybrid metaphors for the human/animal distinction:

²⁷ Bernadette Rigel-Cellard explains in “Doubling in Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart*: The Pilgrimage Strategy or Bunyan Revisited” that bears and bear transformation stories are found in the oral traditions of many indigenous tribes; the Chippewa, in particular, are fond of bear transformation stories. She also notes that bears in many indigenous cultures are considered animals that embody “strength and spiritual wisdom, shamanistic power” (99).

Living beyond civilized life, sexually and boldly aggressive, the bear gives vent to a massive and uncontrolled appetite, upsetting rule and restriction. . . . But in its display of maternal care and concern, the bear is the very essence of civility and order. Standing for both male and female characteristics, the bear would appear to have no gender. (qtd. in Vizenor 672, ellipsis added)

Bears are typically viewed as aggressive, savage animals by “modern” cultures; however, indigenous cultures often view bears as maternal survivors. Vizenor plays with indigenous stories, which often acknowledge an animal’s “human” qualities or personify animals, by making Proude a powerful bear/man hybrid. Other animals that travel with the group include the seven crows, who act as tricksters and warn Proude about impending dangers, Lilith Mae Farrier’s two dog companions, who gives her love and protection, and Pure Gumption, a magical dog. Each animal contributes to the adaptability of the overall group, making each animal as important as the human pilgrims.

In order to further stress the connections between humans and animals, Vizenor creates an animal character whose powers rival that of his main character, Fourth Proude, who is already a human/animal hybrid figure. Pure Gumption, the glowing dog, is the most powerful animal described in the text. Vizenor has commented in numerous interviews about the intelligence and resourcefulness of dogs, and in “Authored Animals,” he explains that indigenous authors such as M. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko also depict dogs with human traits that have meaningful roles in their texts. In terms of magical ability, Pure Gumption works some of the most powerful magic in the novel. She heals a woman with cancer and is not allowed to be present when Proude battles the Evil Gambler because her powers are recognized as a threat. Animals frequently serve as healers and teachers in indigenous oral tales²⁸; therefore Pure Gumption serves as an animal shaman, a mystical creature who demonstrates the intelligence and

²⁸ One example of animal as healer/teacher is that of *gichimakwa*, a Chippewa figure who is both a bear and a boy who can heal the sick and teaches the secrets of the *midewiwin*, the secret society of the Chippewa (Rigel-Cellard 102).

compassionate nature of animals. The fact that the pilgrims never attempt to eat their animal companions, and even protect them from being killed by other hungry travelers, creates a landscape where humans and animals work together to survive. By embracing the animals of the group as equals and acknowledging their power, the pilgrims are able to avoid terminal creeds and create a space that challenges perceived notions about animals, and through them, the nature of humanity.

Vizenor contrasts the anthropomorphic animals in *Bearheart* with depictions of “savage” humanity—disfigured cancer victims looking for body parts and cannibals who roam the highways. The humans are depicted as grotesque figures whose bodies are marked by the effects of pollution. Described as “less than whole, less than human,” the cancer patients are humans with “poisoned genes,” and they are portrayed as the victims of chemical manufacturers, whose evil polluting of the land went unchecked until the effects became visible. Prude describes the deformed humans as victims of their own limited thinking: “We become the terminal creeds we speak. Our words limit the animals we would become” (147). The cancer patients become a reminder of the evils of civilization, limited humans who are even less than animals. Later, Vizenor describes the cancer victims as smelling of putrefaction, invoking the fear of undead hordes found in zombie texts.²⁹ He also notes that the deformed peoples are aggressive, as evidenced by their interactions with Little Big Mouse on the highway. Little Big Mouse is awed by the cancer victims, who she views with childlike wonder. When she performs an erotic dance for them, they swarm her, eventually ripping her body apart. At this point, Vizenor describes them as “whitecripples” who are “moaning and drooling” as they rip Little Big Mouse’s body apart with teeth and thrust their deformed penises at her body. This scene marks the

²⁹ For a more thorough discussion of the role of zombies in ethnic American SFF, see my discussion of ethnic undead characters in chapter two.

whitecripples as savage, overly sexed beings who are less than human; the same stereotypical language often used in colonial writings to degrade indigenous peoples. In Vizenor's landscape, roles have been reversed: the peoples most reliant on modern life and technology become disfigured, inhuman beings while the "animals" thrive.

Throughout *Bearheart*, Vizenor stresses the idea that those willing to form hybrid communities are better able to survive. The first place Proude and his wife take refuge is the Scapehouse, a survival center housing a group of thirteen women poets described as "weirds" or "sensitives" who built the center during the first energy crisis. During their stay, one of the sisters asks Rosina if she has tested her instincts of survival, then proceeds to tell her the story of how she survived a plane crash in the jungle, leaving her body completely scarred. When asked if the scapehouse birds remind her of the jungle, she states, "No, not now...I am never alone here because we are survivors protecting ourselves from our fears and past memories" (41). The communal nature of the scapehouse contributes to its survival by demonstrating that "interdependency, tempered with a willing acceptance of new members...is at the very core of an ecosystem and its survival" (Purdy 188-89). People willing to put aside their received notions of race, class, and gender and form interdependent communities are the true survivors in *Bearheart*.³⁰

Along the roads, the pilgrims encounter many dangers, including an evil gambler and hordes of cannibalistic, deformed humans. The people walking along the interstate are so afraid of cannibals that they sleep in groups for protection. The apocalyptic environment causes some people to release their "savage" natures, while for others it creates a situation where peoples of different ethnicities and backgrounds can band together for a common purpose. Vizenor makes

³⁰ John Purdy likens the scapehouse to an ecosystem; I discuss the connection between the ecological concept of mutualism and human survival further in my reading of Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* in chapter two.

the connection between community and survival clear when the pilgrims travel the dangerous open highways: “The Circus pilgrims discovered the new meaning of families. Independence for some people was preserved in hunger. . . . Those who survived the longest knew themselves at least as well as the government instigators once knew them. The toughest survivors never had their internal chickens plucked” (Vizenor 162). In *Bearheart*, people of any race can become cannibals; it is the people who are willing to accept their new circumstances and form communities who manage to avoid death. The fact that Vizenor stresses that “those who know themselves” will survive also indicates that a knowledge of self and culture is necessary for survival.

The pilgrims represent different levels of survivance through their ability to adapt and discard terminal creeds while still maintaining a connection to culture and spirituality. As *Bearheart* progresses, eight pilgrims die or are left behind after a series of tests. Lilith Mae Farrier sets herself on fire because she cannot overcome a past of victimization. Belladonna Darwin Winter Catcher is poisoned because of her essentialized views of Native American culture. Princess Gallroad/Zebulon Matchi Makwa is murdered by a horde because of his inability to control his lust. Bishop Parasimo dies after deceiving the Master Stranger of lightning. Little Big Mouse is torn to pieces by savage cancer victims because of her inability to recognize the danger they represent. As the group travels, the pilgrims who cannot overcome their terminal creeds die off, leaving only Proude and Inawa Biwide access to the “fourth world,” a term Vizenor creates to refer to a spiritual plane of existence, an escape from the meaningless words and actions of the post-apocalyptic U.S. landscape.

One of the most significant deaths is that of Belladonna Darwin Winter Catcher during the pilgrim’s visit to Orion, a community defined by peoples who live to destroy terminal creeds.

Belladonna is described as a mixed-blood woman born during the siege at Wounded Knee.

Belladonna, like the young female member of the American Indian Movement, believes she understands the nature of Indianness, and proceeds to recite a speech at Orion about tribal values:

We are raised with values that shape our world in different light. . . . We are tribal and that means we are children of dreams and visions. . . . Our bodies are connected to mother earth and our minds are part of the clouds. . . . Our voices are the living breath of the wilderness. (194)

Rigel-Cellard notes that Belladonna's speech utilizes "the same worn-out clichés" about Native Americans that Vizenor is constantly attacking in his work—the terminal creeds of contemporary Native American culture (106). When the residents of Orion begin to question Belladonna's definition of Indianness, she quickly becomes frustrated and defensive:

"Are you so hostile that you cannot figure out what and who Indians are? An Indian is a member of a recognized tribe and a person who has Indian blood."
"But what is Indian blood?"
"Indian blood is not white blood." (195)

Belladonna cannot adequately define what makes a person indigenous; instead she uses the language of colonization by stating what Indians are not. The fact that she chooses to describe indigenous peoples using essentialized, stereotypical language demonstrates her lack of knowledge about indigenous cultures. The residents of Orion attack her logic by pointing out the constructed nature of Indianness: "'Indians are an invention' said the hunter with the beard. 'You tell me that the invention is different than the rest of the world when it was the rest of the world that invented the Indian...are you speaking as an invention?'" (195). The fact that it is a white hunter who questions Belladonna's definition demonstrates that Vizenor is choosing to reverse the roles of colonization for a minute in order to demonstrate the ways in which contemporary indigenous peoples' adoption of terminal creeds is destroying the survivance of indigenous culture. Belladonna is not able to overcome her stereotypical definitions of indigenous peoples,

so the residents of Orion feed her poison-laced cookies to keep her from spreading her “poison”—the Belladonna who poses as indigenous expert or cultural informer.

Dhalgren and *Bearheart* each link survival to an acceptance of mixed-race or mixed-species peoples and groups, challenging U.S. historical narratives that equate racial intermixture with the apocalypse. Both novels include a group that survives because of their willingness to accept new peoples and ideas. Delany and Vizenor also include peoples who suffer because of an inability to let go of racist or essentialized views of race and culture. Their SFF post-apocalyptic landscapes use fantastic characters and descriptions to highlight the dangers of not being able to accept the fluidity of racial and cultural identity.

Hybrid Sexuality

Delany and Vizenor each use multiple elements to disrupt readers’ assumptions about SFF post-apocalyptic narrative, which often depict linear narratives and focus on combating the landscape or monsters.³¹ In addition to disrupting the linear narratives and landscapes, Delany and Vizenor each utilize depictions of graphic sexuality in their texts to challenge views of cultural purity. Both authors play with the idea of contamination; if racial or cultural intermixture is considered to be contamination in colonial texts, then Delany and Vizenor exaggerate this idea to the extreme by creating texts that feature sexual acts between peoples of different races and species considered taboo by modern society. Several critics have noted the connections between colonization and sexuality. Andrea Smith argues in “Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples” that all colonial relations can be examined in terms of sexuality. Smith notes, “If sexual violence is not simply a tool of patriarchy, but is also a tool of colonialism and racism, then entire communities of color are the victims of sexual violence”

³¹ A few examples of the numerous post-apocalyptic texts that would fit this definition include Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and Richard Matheson’s *I am Legend*.

(71). When two cultures are connected by colonization, which consists of extremely unequal social, political, and economic relationships, then one culture gains the opportunity to dominate the group with less resources, resulting in what Haunani Kay Trask labels in her study of U.S./native Hawaiian relations “cultural prostitution” (194). Trask goes on to draw connections between the idea of prostitution, or the sexual commodification of women, and the commodification of the Hawaiian peoples through tourism, stating, “The point, of course, is that everything in Hawai’i can be yours, that is, you the tourist, the non-native, the visitor. The place, the people, the culture, even our identity as a ‘Native’ people is for sale” (194). Trask’s argument about the cultural prostitution of native Hawaiians also applies to other colonized peoples in the U.S. *Dhalgren* and *Bearheart* each connect graphic depictions of sex with scenes of sexual commodification to challenge racial/gender stereotypes and highlight the ways that peoples of color have been “fucked” by colonizing cultures. *Dhalgren* includes scenes of interracial sex, as well as scenes of homosexual sex and orgies. In the beginning of the text, Kid is depicted having sex with a woman whose ethnicity he cannot clearly define: “. . . her cheek bones were Orientally high. She *was* Oriental, he realized and waited for another word, tuned for accent. (He could sort Chinese from Japanese)” (2). Like Kid, the woman’s ethnicity is vague and expressed stereotypically. Their sexual encounter marks the beginning of Delany’s complication of racial stereotypes. Upon arriving in Bellona, Kid’s first sexual encounter is with a man named Tak. Kid seems hesitant to go through with the sexual encounter, but does so anyway. The fact that he agrees to have sex with Tak suggests the use of sex to form bonds or as a social currency; Kid “sells” his body for shelter and help navigating Bellona’s social landscape. He then meets Lanya, a young white woman, and forms a relationship with her. Later, they meet an underage white boy named Denny who joins them. All of these sexual encounters relate to the formation of social

bonds; his relationship with Lanya and Denny becomes akin to a family unit. Such an association of sex with social bonds and family makes sex an important part of adapting to life in Bellona. The idea that sex could be at the center of all social interactions in Bellona creates a connection between blatant descriptions of sexuality and the mixture of races, forcing readers to confront any perceived notions about ethnic intermixture.

During his stay with Scorpions, Kid also participates in an orgy with a black woman and a mixed-race group of men. Delany takes a sexual encounter typically associated with violence—gang rape—and distorts it so that the black woman engaging in sex with multiple partners becomes the instigator. Kid speaks to the woman after the encounter; he is concerned because some of the Scorpion women did not approve of the sexual encounter, and wants to make sure the young black woman was not forced to have sex. The woman seems offended and tells Kid “That was all mine. You can’t have any part of that” (684). Kid seems surprised and asks her if she enjoyed herself, to which she answers, “You go find out yourself, if you want it!” (685). The conversations prompts Kid to consider whether he wants to have sex with multiple men. Both sexual encounters speak to the idea of choice; the idea that a woman could instigate and enjoy a sexual encounter with multiple men without being forced does not occur to Kid. The woman’s answers force him to confront his stereotypes and question why the idea of a woman controlling a group sexual situation disturbs him. In Delany’s post-apocalyptic landscape, the destruction of racial and gender sexual stereotypes allows for a freedom of sexual expression.

Delany also uses sexuality to challenge racial stereotypes. One of the most volatile sexual encounters in *Dhalgren* is the one between a black man named George and June Richards, a young white girl. George and June have sex during the riots in Bellona, and Kid hears rumors that their encounter is what caused the riots. *The Bellona Times* depicts their encounter as rape,

reinforcing the stereotype of hypersexualized black masculinity. However, the fact that June Richards is seen twice searching for George and even asks Kid if he can get her one of George's erotic posters suggests that more is going on between them than the newspaper account and rumors suggest. When Lanya questions George about the incident, he dismisses the rumors of rape and describes their next encounter:

“And the sky gonna go dark and the lightning gonna go roll over the night . . . and buildings gonna come toppling with fire and water both gonna shoot in the air, and people gonna be running and screaming in the streets!” George winked, nodded. “Gonna be just like last time.” (212)

George describes his next encounter with June in terms of natural phenomena; the destruction of Bellona and its population mimics the destruction that supposedly caused Bellona's post-apocalyptic situation, connecting taboo sexuality and the destruction of civilization. George goes on to state that when he and June meet again “*we* just gonna be doing our thing. *You* all is the ones who gonna be so frightened the city gonna start to fall down around your head” (Delany 212). George's remark acknowledges the dangers of racial and sexual stereotypes. The assumption that June has been raped by George causes the residents of Bellona to riot, destroying the city. The fact that the citizens of Bellona cannot accept that June and George's sexual encounter could be consensual is the catalyst for Delany's post-apocalyptic landscape. This connection between limited racial thinking and catastrophe highlights the ways that people of color can find themselves facing disaster when racially profiled or stereotyped. Delany takes a stereotypical view of race (sexually crazed black man, helpless white girl) and dismantles it to expose the underlying psychology that creates the post-apocalyptic experience of the inner city.

Throughout *Dhalgren*, George is sexualized and compared to natural phenomena occurring in Bellona, setting him up as both a sexual object and a God. The only church left in Bellona circulates posters of George in sexual poses, creating an irreverent view of organized

religion and allowing Delany to connect stereotypes of black masculinity and divinity. Having the church, generally assumed to be the center of social morality, distribute sexually suggestive posters asks readers to consider the role of social institutions in creating sexual “norms” and highlights the sexual commodification of people of color. Again, Delany plays with the sexual stereotypes of black masculinity; in Delany’s post-apocalyptic world, black masculinity is both fetishized and worshipped. George becomes such a large celebrity in Bellona that when a second moon appears in the Bellona sky, the people unanimously decide to name it George. Mark Chia-Yon Jerng states that “the way George is immediately related to another object in the world—the second moon—forces the reader to confront how the constitution of the world and the organization of objects in the world shapes evaluations of race” (267). Naming the moon after a man associated with rape and sexual deviance allows readers to consider how the moon and George are constructed. Bellona constructs an image of George based on their own racial stereotypes and sexual needs; however, George and the moon might both be false constructions. The readers never discover the truth about George or the moon, which both lend themselves to multiple interpretations. George may not be a sexual deviant or rapist, and the moon may be a mass delusion. The city of Bellona, its inhabitants, and the laws of science are all constantly shifting identities and identifications to draw attention to the ways people and social institutions construct environments that appease their need for social order.

Like Delany, Vizenor uses graphic descriptions of sexuality to draw his readers’ attention to connections between sexuality and racial identity. Throughout *Bearheart*, Vizenor plays with connections between sexuality, colonization, and the phrase “being fucked.” When the AIM protester asks Proude what his book is about (which is titled *The Heirship Documents*), his answer is “sex and violence,” which references the history of violent indigenous colonization in

the U.S. The sexual encounter between the AIM protestor and Proude becomes a moment of connection and teaching. They have sex as he teaches her about the text, connecting the joy of their sexual encounter with a gaining of cultural knowledge. After they are finished, she opens the book to the section where the federal man and woman have a sexual encounter, a scene that occurs again in chapter one. When the two government officials visit Proude to demand that he surrender the cedar forest, he asks the female citizen “do you fuck with words?” referring to the history of broken treaties and the exploitation of U.S. indigenous peoples at the hands of the government. After he asks the question, the government officials leave his home and proceed to have sex in the Cedar forest. Although the sex is described as fumbling and uninspired, it makes the officials aware of their “animal needs” and the beauty of the land around them. The next day, the female citizen decides to leave the cedar forest out of her official report. The reason the AIM protestor opens Proude’s text at this scene is because it is a metaphor for the “sex and violence” that Proude describes as the theme of *Bearheart*. Colonization has “fucked” indigenous peoples in multiple ways. The U.S. government has made a string of broken treaties, resulting in indigenous peoples losing land and resources. Whites engaged in sex with indigenous peoples both voluntarily, through intermarriage, and by force, through rape. Vizenor contrasts the idea of “fucking with words,” represented by the federal officials and their executive orders, with the graphic sex scene between the two federal agents. When the two federal agents literally “fuck,” they become more appreciative of the natural beauty of the cedar forest, resulting in the female agent’s decision to omit the forest from her report. Vizenor connects his opening letter to the reader to the first chapter through a description of sex as a form of connection to others and to the land, creating a view of sexuality as either liberating or dominating, depending on the circumstance.

The pilgrims' openness to sexual experience is contrasted with scenes of sexual violence, allowing Vizenor to contrast the high of unrepressed sexuality with the cost of sexual exploitation and violence. Bigfoot's sexual orgy with the women of the scapehouse is depicted as a joyous exchange; the women undress him and take turns having sex with him. The fact that his penis is named "President Jackson" is Vizenor's way of poking fun at the President responsible for a large portion of nineteenth century Native American policy. Bigfoot's designation as a "clown" and his penis's designation as a president suggest both the ridiculousness of cultural prostitution and the government's role in "screwing" the inhabitants of Vizenor's post-apocalyptic world. Bigfoot sells himself to the women in exchange for food and shelter, screwing them out of resources as they revel in his sexual prowess like colonized peoples feigning subservience. At the end of the novel, Bigfoot moves from a clownish parody of cultural prostitution to a participant in cultural domination when he forces Rowina to perform fellatio on him. Rowina is not willing at first, but eventually succumbs to Bigfoot's will. During this sexual act, Bigfoot has his neck snapped by Pio a "parawoman mixedblood mammoth clown." Linda Tanner notes in *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* that the act of rape is related to a loss of subjectivity in the victim, similar to the position of colonized peoples:

Beneath the violator's hand, the rape victim's body becomes a text on which his will is inscribed, a form that bears the mark of his subjectivity even as she cannot divorce it from her own. Within such a scenario, the entanglement of subject and body allows the violator to assume control of both and the victim to assert power over neither. The image of bodily penetration is thus bound up with the assault on subjectivity in which the victim is annihilated from both inside and outside; the woman's body continues to allow the violator access to her subjectivity even as the power of agency is stripped away from her, imprisoning her in a material form over which she as subject has no control. (115)

The minute Bigfoot sexually assaults another pilgrim, he has crossed the line and become a colonizer. Because Bigfoot has stripped Rosina of her subjectivity, including her sense of self, and has forced her to become a vessel for his desires, he cannot be allowed to enter the spiritually clean space of the Fourth World. Rosina's participation in the sexual act, although not voluntary at first, strips her of her agency and imprisons her in her material body, suggesting that she also cannot move into the Fourth World. Vizenor uses the various sexual encounters in *Bearheart* to link sexual dominance, victimization, and a loss of agency, suggesting that those who dominate and those who participate in cultural prostitution lack the cultural awareness necessary to break the victimizer/victim binary in colonized cultures.

The inclusion of inter-species sexuality in *Bearheart* works to dismantle perceived notions about "savage" sexuality. The fear of bestiality is connected to the colonial fear of contamination and devolution. Aline Ferreira notes, in "Primate Tales: Interspecies Pregnancy and Chimerical Beings," that scientific advances in implanting embryos from one species into another question former views of the human/animal divide: "Xenotransplantation raises ethical questions about the eroded boundary between human and animal and reminds us that culture, as much as science, produces and shapes this divide" (224). Like interracial or same-sex pairings, animal/human sex is often considered taboo and a marker of degraded humanity. Vizenor plays with the idea of sex with animals by connecting it to the idea of embracing a connection to the natural world.

The scenes in *Bearheart* where humans engage in sex with animals challenge essentialized views of indigenous cultural identity. Vizenor contrasts a tribal story of a girl, a mongrel, and four puppies with the story of Lilith Mae Farrier to demonstrate the consequences of limited identifications. In the first story, the girl, who "moved in the magical flight of shaman

crows and the languages of tribal animals,” dreams that her favorite mongrel becomes a man, and they have sex (62). Soon after, she discovers that she is pregnant. The people of her village shun her and gossip about her. When her father decides to kill her, the crows warn her in a dream and she escapes to live outside of her community. The villagers bring an evil on themselves because they “shunned the love of animals,” and they are only saved after the girl returns to the village and teaches them to love both animals and themselves. The animals in this story are a metaphor for cultural difference or change. Because they refuse to accept the human/mongrel children (representative of mixed-blood peoples), the villagers are almost destroyed. Once they shift their cultural views and accept change, the village is saved. This story is told before the pilgrim Lilith relates her life story to the other pilgrims. Lilith has an ongoing relationship with two reservation dogs which she describes as “dumb bastards,” a reminder of her “slobbering father” who violated her as a child (90). Lilith associates the dogs with her time teaching on a reservation and the humiliation she faced at being raped and accused of having sex with dogs. Although she loves the dogs and they are devoted to her, she cannot accept the pleasure the dogs give her. Lilith eventually kills herself because she cannot move past the labels of victim and dog lover that the tribe places on her. In fact, Keady notes that Lilith comes to embody the views of others, losing her identity in the process:

Lilith Mae believes the stories she has been told about herself and acts out of them. Having been mocked by the Anishinaabe women as a ‘lover of dogs’ Lilith Mae goes on to become a lover of dogs. She tells of victimization by her incestuous father, but offers herself as a victim to the Anishinaabe men, and then to the Evil Gambler. Her optimism is superficial, and lacking spiritual strength, she places her faith in words. . . . (63)

Lilith’s inability to view herself in terms other than sexual victim causes her to kill herself rather than accept change. She is the antithesis of the girl in the tribal story who is not ashamed of her identity as a dog lover. These two stories demonstrate how Vizenor connects sexuality and

“mongrels” or mixed-race individuals to warn his readers about the dangers of essentialized cultural views.

Delany and Vizenor each stress a need for sexual acceptance connected to an understanding of one’s racial or cultural identity. The acceptance of sexual taboos is one more way that these authors challenge perceived views of civilization and cultural norms. In Delany and Vizenor’s post-apocalyptic environments, there are no “norms”; each character is faced with the challenge of accepting themselves and others, despite their terminal creeds.

Liminal Languages

Vizenor and Delany are both concerned with creating languages that point to limited cultural constructions, participating in self-conscious readings of African American and indigenous cultural identity and opening liminal spaces that allow for multiple readings of race and culture. *Dhalgren* and *Bearheart* each use SFF tropes to demonstrate how language can create cultural barriers and miscommunications. Both authors have written extensively about the possibilities available through language manipulation. In his critical text, *Starboard Wine*, Delany focuses on the possibilities of SFF as a metaphorical language. Delany notes that one of the advantages of SFF writings is that SFF readers have been trained to “read between the lines” by recognizing clues in the language of SFF and orienting themselves to the SFF environment. Though SFF authors often use similar tropes, nothing in a SFF landscape can ever be assumed. This is especially true in post-apocalyptic literature, where characters often use everyday objects in vastly different ways than their original purposes. Vizenor has also noted in his critical writings that postmodern “language games” or the manipulation of language often found in postmodern texts, has the ability to refute cultural misreading and to create indigenous texts that

challenge cultural expectations and stereotypes. Both authors create disjointed, layered SFF texts to demonstrate the breakdown in communications between colonizers and colonized peoples.

Delany and Vizenor take advantage of the language possibilities of postmodern and post-apocalyptic literature by manipulating narrative and language to expose its limitations. Their language mimics the confusion and fluidity of the post-apocalyptic landscape. For example, in *Dhalgren*, Kid is self-conscious of his use of language because he is a poet and constantly writes and revises his experiences. His writings and revisions are included in the novel; sections of the text are crossed out and re-written, suggesting that the majority of the novel is a transcript of Kid's notebook. At times, Kid is not aware of which passages he has written in his notebook; he claims to have found it half-written-on and to be writing in the margins. If this is true, then Kid's writing can be connected to the writing experiences of colonized people. Because Kid is writing an alternate narrative in the margins of already established writing, his writing represents a marginalized viewpoint. Delany also suggests that Kid may have written in the notebook, lost it, recovered it, and continued writing without realizing that the main writing is also his. If this is true, then the notebook represents different aspects of Kid's identity, suggesting that he is able to embody multiple identifications. In his comparison of *Dhalgren* and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, Haslam suggests that Kid's amnesia is linked to a suppression of marginalized narratives, noting that "the ways in which the American national narrative, in order to maintain a self-cohesive vision of the nation, needs to suppress its very creation of and relation to a silenced other" (79). Kid cannot recognize the main text in his notebook because his place in U.S. historical narrative has been erased. His self-conscious narrative, full of revisions, and his desire to create poetry worthy of being published, show his desire to both represent his experiences and re-imagine them, creating a liminal narrative that brings marginalized writings to the center of

the text. Delany purposely creates a text where the reader is forced to be aware of the ways language can be revised and manipulated to represent how the constructed narratives of colonialism suppress alternate narratives.

While Delany focuses more on manipulating the wording and appearance of his narrative, Vizenor manipulates language in his dialogue to highlight the language barrier between the U.S. government and indigenous peoples. One of the most significant critiques of language occurs when the pilgrims visit a “word hospital,” an institution authorized thirteen years prior to the apocalypse to investigate “public damage to the language” and “words in conflict.” As they tour the facilities, one of the officials describes the history of word hospitals:

The government discovered that there was something wrong with our language. The breakdown in law and order, the desecration of institutions, the hardhearted investigations, but most of all the breakdown in traditional families was a breakdown in communications. . . . This caused our elected officials to create this word hospital and eight others in the nation. . . .two were created in the ruins of the old Bureau of Indian Affairs field offices. . . . The bureau records were included in our analysis of language. You might say we are using the files and reports from the Indian offices as the basic paradigm to determine the causes for the breakdown in languages and government services. (166)

The idea that government documents, in particular those of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), cause the breakdown in language responsible for the destruction of modern society places indigenous culture at the center of *Bearheart's* apocalypse. The BIA is known for its mistreatment of indigenous peoples; Vizenor specifically names this group to suggest that had the government attempted to understand indigenous language and cultural traditions, the apocalypse might never have happened. The fact that the government authorized the word hospitals demonstrates an understanding of the need for better government/indigenous communication; however, the scientific approach of the word hospital, reminiscent of

government wire-tapping programs, fails to create a true understanding of indigenous language and culture, causing the apocalypse.

In *Bearheart*, the figure of the trickster and language of chance highlight the malleability of language. The manipulation of language in colonial texts (in particular, historical accounts written by colonizers) is linked to Vizenor's themes of language as chance and language as cultural barrier. Vizenor often comments on the connection between the trickster figure and postmodernism; in *Narrative Chance*, he argues the indigenous trickster figure is postmodern because its primary function is to challenge linear narrative, perceived closure, and the language of stability (x). The trickster figure serves multiple roles; Alan Velie notes in "The Trickster Novel" that depictions of trickster figures differ according to tribe:

The tribal trickster is not a single figure; tricksters differ greatly from tribe to tribe and from tale to tale in the repertoire of the same tribe. Sometimes trickster is human, such as the Winnebago Wakdjunkaga and Blackfeet Napi; among other tribes trickster takes the form of Coyote, Raven, or Hare. Whatever his form, trickster has a familiar set of characteristics: he plays tricks and is the victim of tricks; he is amoral and has strong appetites, particularly for food and sex; he is footloose, irresponsible and callous, but somehow almost always sympathetic if not lovable. (122)

Trickster figures in Vizenor's work manipulate language to expose the loss of perceived "rules" about language and civilization. Many characters in *Bearheart* play trickster roles, including Bigfoot and Proude's crow companions; however, one of the most significant scenes for understanding the role of trickster in Vizenor's text is the mission clown scene. After escaping the pentartical pensioners, a group of men attempting to "build an empire in the new world," the pilgrims meet a group of mission clowns walking backward on the road to New Mexico. When asked about their strange activity, two of the clowns state, "Time and space between the starting and the stopping makes upward downward and backward forward and noward. . . . Place is not an invention of time, place is a state of mind, place is no notched measuring stick for memories

here to there” (237-38). The clowns act as tricksters in this scene by trying to stop the pilgrims’ linear journey. They serve as a reminder that linear space, like linear narratives, create terminal creeds. Unlike the pensioners, who hold on to a perceived notion of the need for colonization and empire, the clowns represent a complete loss of connection to place and a failure of forward progression; they mock the pilgrims’ journey to find a new space of acceptance and insinuate that the pilgrim’s journey is doomed to failure. However, one of the clowns notes that place is “a state of mind,” suggests that it is the pilgrim’s responsibility to maintain cultural traditions, even without a connection to a specific place. Bradley John Monsma describes the connection between the trickster figure and language as “help[ing] us understand that landscapes, like words, are simultaneously shifting and meaningful” (61). Vizenor views language as an active connection to indigenous cultural traditions, yet he also understands the ability of language to trick and cheat, to play with and distort perceptions of culture. The clown’s irreverence in the narrative is balanced by the presence of Proude who represents a stable shaman figure and the possibility of reaching “the fourth world,” or a liminal space that balances the need for language (in the form of cultural myths and stories) with the view of language as cultural barrier.

Games of chance in *Bearheart* also demonstrate how language, and people, can be manipulated. Proude’s game of chance with Sir Cecil Staples, The Evil Gambler, connects evil language to politics to demonstrate the power of language to coerce and manipulate. Sir Cecil plays games of chance with unwitting travelers; the travelers stake their lives for the chance to win gasoline. The Gambler enjoys wielding his evil power and pointing out how degraded people have become in the face of vanishing resources. When Proude states that their powers are not equal because death is not malignant, Sir Cecil mocks his tribal knowledge of life and death

as “tribal pronunciamientos” and points to a history of evil language as connected to a history of government “games”:

What holds us together now is what held the nation together for two centuries. . . . The constitutional government and the political organizations were deceptive games of evil . . . National games that preserved and protected the cause of evil. . . What happens between us when the game ends is what happened to the government when the political games were exposed . . . nothing! Nothing but the loss of faith among gambling fools. Nothing but chance. Fools and the games with their fantasies that living is more than death and evil is less than goodness. . . Winning is losing. (132, first ellipsis added)

Sir Cecil sees his power as connected to a tradition of colonizing governments’ manipulation of language for power and profit. He compares the game of chance he runs to political games, meaningless games of chance that pretend to maintain order when they are really designed to protect certain classes and races of peoples from the “chaos” of allowing colonized peoples to decide how they wish to be governed. Those who gamble, or attempt to overcome the effects of colonization, are “fools” who will lose even if they gain advantages in the short term. Sir Cecil views language purely as deception; his loss of faith in the idea of social order is juxtaposed with Proude’s faith in indigenous tradition.

Postmodern language games create narratives that challenge perceived notions of stability and linear narrative. When combined with post-apocalyptic landscapes, which distort landscapes to disrupt views of modernity and progress, language becomes another tool to disorient readers, forcing them to examine their adherence to certain established “truths” about race and culture. Delany and Vizenor each formulate ways to shape language and narrative to expose the chaos behind established narratives of colonialism and reclaim the fluidity of racial and cultural identity.

New Beginnings

Delany and Vizenor both demonstrate the need for spaces where alternate views of race and culture can be created and acknowledged. Both authors carefully craft landscapes and language to challenge linear, essentialized views of history and identity. For each author, the post-apocalyptic landscape becomes more than a way to critique present-day culture or to look back nostalgically at a time of prosperity; it is a way to re-imagine spaces previously defined by oppression and violence. In *Dhalgren*, the urban ghetto becomes a space of freedom for those willing to adapt to new social and sexual situations. In *Bearheart*, the group of mixed-blood pilgrims enacts a reverse migration through a landscape that tests their ability to adapt and punishes those who adhere to terminal creeds. Both texts point to the survivance of ethnic groups; however, the groups that survive are a mixture of races that do not adhere to essentialized definitions of race and ethnicity, suggesting that people of color will also have to adjust their thinking about race and culture. Both authors prove that post-apocalyptic writing opens the possibility to reflect the complex racial and cultural experience that is contemporary ethnic American writing.

CHAPTER THREE

OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *FLEDGLING* AND DANIEL JOSÉ OLDER'S "PHANTOM OVERLOAD": THE ETHNIC UNDEAD

[T]here is room to say that science fiction is an engine of difference (an engine of prolific alterity or proliferating alterities). It is a fantastic medium through which we continually construct and manage images of new peoples and, therefore, new races. If we accept the implication that the representation of new races is an essential component of science fiction (as well as of human biosocial/historical evolution), we will have a better chance of gaining imaginative as well as political control over their transmission and meaning.

—Roger Luckhurst

Undead characters are a popular trope in SFF texts typically used to embody a cultural fear, such as difference or contamination. Some of the most famous undead figures in SFF texts, such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or Edward from Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, have been defined in terms of absolute whiteness, which is often equated with normalcy or perfection. In recent decades, however, authors and filmmakers have begun to introduce ethnic undead characters to challenge cultural stereotypes about race and ethnicity. This chapter examines representations of ethnic undead characters in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) and Daniel José Older's "Phantom Overload" (2012). I argue that Butler and Older's texts build on a history of undead ethnic representation by redefining depictions of the vampire and zombie/ghost. Grounding my study in theories of hybridity, I demonstrate how *Fledgling* and "Phantom Overload" employ hybrid ethnic/undead characters to expose the effects of colonization on ethnic peoples. Butler uses a hybrid black/vampire character to comment on the history of racial eugenics in the U.S., linking an acceptance of racial/species diversity to survival, while Older uses hybridity to expose the effects of internalized colonization on Latina/o culture. Depicting African American and Latino undead characters allows each author to represent his or her racial

and ethnic history; however, I argue that Butler and Older also use their ethnic undead characters to avoid essentialized depictions of race or ethnicity.

Fledgling and “Phantom Overload” each employ SFF elements to expose cultural stereotypes and demonstrate the possibility for complex racial and ethnic identifications. Butler’s representation of a black, female vampire figure challenges popular culture’s depiction of the vampire as a symbol of white masculinity. Her use of genetic manipulation³² and portrayal of the vampire/human relationship as symbiotic combats racist stereotypes about black blood with themes of mutualism and survival. Conversely, Older’s “Phantom Overload” plays with assumptions of zombie and ghost figures as negative reminders of a violent historical past. I argue that “Phantom Overload” represents a more contemporary Latina/o ethnic representation; the addition of a half-dead Latino narrator and multi-ethnic cast of characters demonstrates the possibility of revising traumatic cultural histories while also celebrating the mixture of Spanish-speaking cultures located within the U.S. Butler and Older challenge assumptions about race and ethnicity by writing texts whose characters that embody multiple racial and ethnic identifications.

Although Butler and Older create unique representations of undead characters, their writings build on oral and literary tradition. Stories featuring undead figures have existed for thousands of years and permeate multiple cultures. There are many types of undead figures, including vampires, zombies, ghosts and certain monsters. Early oral cultures told of creatures who returned from the dead to haunt the living, causing sickness and death. From the *adze* of West Africa to the *krasue* of Southeast Asia, undead figures surfaced to explain local phenomena and embody the fears of the culture that created them. In the late seventeenth century and early

³² The use of genetic engineering in SFF stories is not unique to Butler, although it is a more recent trend in SFF. David Ketterer identifies James Blish’s *The Seedling Stars* (1957) as one of the first SFF texts to utilize themes of genetic engineering.

eighteenth century, fear of the undead reached hysterical proportions in Europe, when masses of migrating peoples caused outbreaks of plagues, one of which was named “the vampire plague” (McLeod 75-76). The origin of the zombie can be traced back to the writings of Moreau de Saint-Méry (1797), who described the slaves of colonial Saint Domingue as believing in the concept of a returned soul, named a *revenant* (McAlister 459).

Depictions of undead figures in literature would change drastically by the Victorian Era. Eve M. Lynch notes that Victorian ghost stories became a safe way for authors to discuss the effects of social pressures, particularly inside the home (67). Victorian vampire novels such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) also utilized undead figures as a safe vehicle for public commentary, transforming the vampire into a popular Western literary figure that could embody themes of deviant sexuality and decaying aristocracy. Victorian Gothic writings highlight how modern undead figures could do more than simply embody fear of sickness or death; Peter Day explains that these fantastic figures are also indicative of “[t]hreats to and longings for gender-crossing, homosexuality or bisexuality, racial mixture, class fluidity . . .” (210, ellipsis added). Although *Dracula* ultimately upholds Victorian-era societal restrictions, Stoker’s representation of sexual deviance and challenge to British supremacy demonstrates the undead figure’s potential to give voice to ideas and peoples that are often feared or repressed.³³

Today there are many depictions of undead characters, some frightening, some funny and endearing. Modern-day vampires in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* and Stephanie Myer’s *Twilight* series follow in Stoker’s literary footprints, creating sexually charged, undead creatures that seduce young women. On the other hand, the popular T.V. series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* depicts a teenage girl working to defeat the evil forces of the undead. The

³³ A few of the many *Dracula* critics addressing themes of sexual repression or politics include Troy Boone, Anne Cranny-Francis, Andrew Green, Judith Halberstam, Christopher Craft, Phyllis Roth, and Judith Wasserman.

Resident Evil movie series tells the story of an apocalyptic future in which most of the population has become mindless undead creatures created by an engineered plague. However, the film *Warm Bodies* depicts a zombie who befriends a young girl and protects her, becoming more “human” in the process. Ghosts, typically portrayed as terrifying creatures, are now being sought out in the *Ghost Hunters* T.V. series and communicated with by mediums. Whether the undead is portrayed as terrifying or as a sympathetic helper, the common denominator in contemporary horror and SFF works becomes the fact that they must function as a foil for (living) humanity, either by providing an excuse for human bravery or by helping humans overcome an obstacle. In “An Introduction to the American Horror Film,” Robin Wood adds that as a characterization of the other, the undead also represent “not simply . . . something external to the culture or to the self, but also what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outward in order to be hated and disowned” (199, ellipsis added). This description of the other also applies to entire cultures that project repressed fears onto undead characters in order to destroy them (199).³⁴ Two commonly repressed attitudes that appear in depictions of the undead are sexual repression and fear of racial contamination. Stoker, Rice and Myer’s strangely beautiful vampires fulfill repressed sexual desires, while the hordes of invading zombies in the *Resident Evil* films represent repressed fears of cultural contamination and invading immigrant groups.

The portrayal of ethnic undead characters, while limited, is fast becoming a recognized trope of horror and SFF literature. In the 1970s, several films were produced that featured black vampire characters. *Blackula* (1972) and *Scream Blackula Scream* (1973) were popular films that depicted a black vampire actively combating racist social views. Frances Gateward explains that the black vampire figure becomes a way for authors and filmmakers to address the history of

³⁴ Wood is not the first theorist to link the other to ideas of cultural repression. His definition combines ideas from theorists such as Freud and Marx; however, he specifically applies them to the figure of the other in horror films.

violence located within African American culture: “Vampirism in *Blackula* is more than just a premise to provide a source of horror or the mere appropriation of Stoker's novel and its film adaptations. It is used to invoke the horrors of slavery and the continued oppression of Black Americans” (np). In the film, *Blackula* acts as an avenger figure that consistently defeats the forces of white racism, usually embodied by white authority figures such as police officers. *Blackula* uses the power of the vampire figure to create a situation in which black characters can overcome societal power structures.

Since the 1970s, the black vampire figure has become more common in literature, comics, and movies. The *Blade* comic book and movie series features a black vampire hunter who is a “daywalker”—a human whose mother was bitten during pregnancy, making him a vampire with the ability to tolerate sunlight. This depiction of a black man as daywalker turns black skin into an advantage, reversing the typical black/white evil/good racial dichotomy. Recent Afrofuturist texts have worked to further challenge the vampire-as-white-male stereotype by depicting black, female vampire characters. Jewelle Gomez’s depiction of a black, lesbian vampire character in *The Gilda Stories* (1991) explores themes of slavery and sexuality by featuring a character with an extended lifespan who experiences multiple decades of racism. Tananarive Due’s *African Immortals* series depicts a relationship between a mortal and immortal that results in a child with blood that gives her unique power. Due plays with a loose depiction of the vampire and also connects her characters back to an African heritage (the immortals originally come from Ethiopia). Each of these texts complicates the traditional depiction of the vampire to express a complex racial, gender and cultural history.

Katherine Brogan notes in *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* that the ghosts which frequent many contemporary ethnic American texts differ from

earlier gothic representations. Rather than depicting fear-inducing specters, or using ghosts as a way to comment on societal anxieties, ethnic American authors often use ghosts to represent a lost cultural history (*Mama Day, Our House in the Last World*), as a way to reference cultural history (*Bless Me, Ultima* or *The Woman Warrior*), to represent a “haunting” of the present by a troubled past (*Beloved, Comfort Women*), and to reconcile a cultural past with its present (*Tracks, Dreaming in Cuban*). Brogan identifies the phenomenon of ghost characters in contemporary ethnic American texts as “cultural haunting,” defined as texts in which the agency of ghosts is used to regain or revise a lost, threatened or fragmented cultural history (6). She goes on to explain that “. . . the ghosts in stories of cultural haunting are agents of both cultural memory *and* cultural renewal: the shape-shifting ghost who transmits erased or threatened group memory represents the creative, ongoing process of ethnic redefinition” (12). The ghosts Brogan describes are more fluid than popular culture representations; these ghosts are a connection between past and present, cultural history and revisionism.

SFF and horror authors have also adopted a more Western representation of the zombie in order to appeal to a wider audience. Fans of popular zombie films and texts would find little similarity between popular culture’s depictions of zombies and zombie origins. Unlike contemporary zombies, generally depicted as walking corpses with no soul, Haitian zombies, or *zombi*, are depicted as pieces of human soul that can be captured and made to help their owner, more spiritually present than a walking corpse. The zombie stems from Afro-Caribbean traditions, making it one of the few undead figures without “a genealogy in European tradition or much presence in Gothic fiction” which “. . . represents, responds to, and mystifies fear of slavery, collusion with it, and rebellion against it” (McAllister 461). Although the zombie figure has been radically altered in contemporary writings and films (in fact, a large majority of

zombies in film and T.V. are white), the fact that the zombie represents the power of ethnic figures over death makes it a highly subversive figure. Zombies refuse to quietly die and vanish, giving them a power, similar to that of ghosts, to participate in cultural renewal. The zombie could also potentially stand for a fear of the repercussions of ethnic cleansing and slavery. McAllister notes that “. . . the living take charge of their history when they mimetically perform master-slave relationships with spirits of the dead. The production of spiritual (and bodily) zombis [zombies] shows us how groups remember history and enact its consequences in embodied ritual arts” (464). U.S. popular culture depictions of zombies describe soulless creatures that embody a fear of contamination and difference, figures that need to be defeated or contained. However, ethnic zombies are viewed as helpers, connections to the past that enable a peoples to resurrect or take control over their cultural history.

What becomes clear through these examples is that consistently, authors have utilized the ethnic undead figure to challenge contemporary perceptions about undead figures and to resurrect lost cultural connections. The undead figure in ethnic American SFF becomes more than a figure of horror or catharsis; it embodies the contradictory, complex experience of contemporary U.S. ethnic peoples. As a conduit between life and death, the undead serve to represent a liminal space. A figure that exists between life and death creates a grey area that allows for a more fluid, contradictory depiction of racial and ethnic identity. Such a space is useful for contemporary ethnic SFF authors, who often identify with multiple races, cultures and writing traditions. Butler and Older’s texts are unique in the ways that they challenge the perceptions and limits of race, ethnicity and the undead. Shori and Carlos are not simply undead figures that happen to be of color; they build on a tradition of ethnic undead characters as

subversive, yet also add new elements in their depictions of these characters as hybrid, doubly othered beings.

Undead as Hybrid

Undead figures provide a lens through which to examine the ways hybridity can problematize assumptions about humanity. Because undead figures represent a human figure that has become “inhuman,” they can also be utilized as metaphors for enslaved or socially devalued peoples. Gerry Canavan argues in his study of zombie imagery that the origins of Haitian zombie lore symbolizes the “social undeath” experienced by slaves: “In this way, slavery, to modify Orlando Patterson's famous term, is not so much social death as *social undeath*, insofar as the slave's expulsion from humanity is only ever partial and incomplete. The slave-owning class may deem the slave socially and legally dead, yet the enslaved person remains not only alive but a crucial, productive actor in society” (177). Groups of peoples who are ignored or suppressed by the dominant culture find themselves fighting to have their existence acknowledged, alive but not entitled to the label “human” or the political and economic advantages afforded the rest of humanity. Such peoples are not on the outside of their culture; indeed, they are typically immersed within the culture, and essential workforce in the colonial economy.

Butler and Older's undead representations serve to demonstrate the liminal position of African American and Latina/o peoples in the U.S. Shori's position as an African American Ina and her ability to pass on needed genetic advantages gives her a place in the Ina community, yet she is not fully accepted by all of the Ina peoples. She lives with Ina and participates in Ina cultural practices, but she is also described by some Ina as less-than because of her human DNA. Her experience as a black Ina marks her as socially undead. As a human who came back from death, Carlos represents a figure who lives between the living and dead worlds. He is never fully

accepted by either group; instead, he serves as a bridge of communication between worlds. He is a crucial member of living/dead society who is largely ignored by both groups. The Latin American ghosts in Older's text also represent a socially undead group. They are not entitled to the rights and resources given to other undead figures, and they are not given a choice about whether they want to go to the afterlife. *Fledgling* and "Phantom Overload" thus use undead figures to shift the focus of their texts to the stories of underrepresented groups.

As hybrid figures, undead characters challenge racial binaries. Anjali Prabhu notes that "In its dominant form, it is claimed that [hybridity] can provide a way out of binary thinking, allow the inscription of the agency of the subaltern, and even permit a restructuring and destabilization of power" (1). Binaries serve to enforce the racial perceptions of dominant cultural groups. Shori and Carlos, however, cannot be defined using a single binary; both are hybrid human/undead or living/undead characters, yet if one considers Richard Dyer's theory of whiteness, which argues that whiteness is often synonymous with humanity in general (3), then Shori and Carlos's race and ethnicity add an additional element of alienation which complicates a simple binary description. Dyer explains that "The assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to white culture" (2). If whiteness is equated with humanity, then Shori and Carlos's racial and ethnic identity is separated from a notion of universal "humanness," in effect dismantling notions that people of different races and ethnicities can be grouped together in the name of "humanity."

Because people of color have a history of being dehumanized, the "human" side of their identity becomes a complex, often contradictory representation. Shori and Carlos each struggle to define themselves and to find a place where their hybrid identities can be accepted, much like

the experience of colonized peoples. Their position as hybrid undead characters create opportunities to challenge dominant discourses about race and ethnicity while shifting the focus of the narrative not to the outside, but to those marginalized within their own communities. Shori and Carlos represent a multitude of identities; they are human, they are of color, they are undead. They cannot be defined by a single binary. Such a representation is characteristic of the SFF genre, a space where authors can play with current representations of undead characters to demonstrate how undead characters connect to the experience of social death. Butler and Older's hybrid ethnic undead representations demonstrate the potential within SFF for fluid racial and ethnic identifications.

A New Vampire

Butler follows in the Afrofuturist footsteps of Jewelle Gomez and Tananarive Due by creating a vampire that challenges the traditional depiction offered by authors such as Stoker or Rice. However, Butler's characterization also "strips vampires of both their omnipotence and their universalizing whiteness...rather, their strength can be found in symbiosis and hybridity, a transgressive, Afrofuturist feminist stance dangerous to conservative notions of identity and community often found in vampire lore" (Morris 161, ellipsis added). Like Gomez and Due, Butler's depiction of a black, female main vampire character challenges the white, male vampire figure found in many writings, but her description of the white Ina as a genetically flawed, imperfect species also places vampires on a similar level with humans. Rather than being portrayed as dominant, sexualized figures or human saviors, the Ina must work with humans and accept genetic modification in order to ensure their survival. Ali Brox describes Butler's vampire characterization as a deliberate shift in ideas about the monstrous:

Butler's vampires do not embody the fears and anxieties of the society they infiltrate; rather, Butler shifts the monstrosity from the figure to the social ills

themselves. In other words, the Ina who attack Shori and her family are not monstrous because they are vampires, but they are monstrous because of the anti-human rhetoric they direct toward their symbionts and Shori's mixed-blood status. (395-96)

The vampire typically signifies an evil or othered being that is compared to a human “norm”; however, Butler’s vampires are not necessarily monstrous or othered. Instead, Butler plays with the contemporary fascination with vampires as advanced beings by making the Ina an imperfect species capable of their own social issues. Butler’s choice to make her protagonist a mixed-race, mixed-species character not only challenges previous depictions of monsters, it also serves as a commentary on intolerance as a social ill that limits inhibits humanity’s ability to survive and adapt to new circumstances.

Butler’s combination of a recognizable fantasy figure with references to genetic manipulation and mutualism creates a world that blends themes of magic and science. Some Ina believe that their species evolved from humans, while others argue that Ina originally came to Earth from another planet. Both theories create a fuzzy origin for the Ina that makes them a multifaceted species; they can be viewed as vampires, evolved humans, and aliens, respectively. Fusing genres also works to destabilize readers’ preconceived notions about humanity: “Butler’s Ina create instances of defamiliarization, which work to destabilize dominant discourses. Seen through vampiric eyes, humanity’s tendencies towards jealousy, racism, and patriarchy are magnified, but also transformed into biological shortcomings that can be transcended through higher reasoning” (Lacey 387). Butler’s SFF text allows her readers to experience race as both a societally created myth and a scientific, biological aspect of human beings. Rather than directly challenging racist views, Butler uses the metaphors available in SFF to expose her readers to many different depictions of race, blending racial misconception with biological fact to educate

readers about the many ways racist ideologies continue to affect the lived experiences of ethnic peoples.

Shori becomes Butler's biological experiment to inject blackness into the myths of the vampire and a "pure" human race. As a black, hybrid figure, Shori represents Butler's attempt to combat depictions of racial and ethnic mixture as negative and depictions of white males as cultural saviors. Shori is a young, black, female Ina/human hybrid. She originally appears to be helpless due to an attack that leaves her with amnesia. Described as childlike, Shori meets Wright, a white man in his twenties, who offers her a ride. Once Shori is in the car, it immediately becomes clear that she is more than a helpless child. When Wright tries to force her to stay in the car so he can take her to a hospital, Shori realizes that she is more powerful than he is: "I understood him a little better now that I'd had my hands on him. I thought I could break his wrist if I wanted to. He was big but not that strong. Or, at least, I was stronger" (10). Butler plays with racial and gender roles by making Wright, a white man, susceptible to Shori's powers of persuasion. In opposition to traditional vampire lore, Wright is not turned into a vampire or completely mesmerized. In fact, Butler pokes fun at traditional vampire lore by allowing Shori to debunk traditional vampire myths: she can walk in sunlight, she can see her reflection, and she picks up a cross. Butler makes it clear from the beginning of the text that *Fledgling* will challenge societal assumptions about the figure of the vampire, as well as racial and gender stereotypes.

Butler further problematizes human/Ina classifications by making Shori a mix of human and Ina DNA. Butler looks at genetic manipulation as a way to break humanity down into its cellular components, combating an essentialized view of humanity. She utilizes genetic manipulation in *Fledgling* to make Shori a hybrid character that embodies the advantages of two

species. Fittingly, the human advantage that Shori gains is black skin, a direct reference to early U.S. views of racial eugenics.³⁵ The “one drop” rule that resulted from theories of racial eugenics turned black blood into a biological contaminant and created a fear of intermingling utilized by authors of “passing” novels. From the earliest writings of slaves in the U.S., black writers have fought to dispel the theory that having black skin makes one inferior or non-human. Although racial theories have since been revised, there remains an ideal in U.S. culture that race is a natural or essential aspect of identity rather than a socially constructed category, as evidenced by a persistence of racially-charged language in media and politics. Such conflicting views about racial identity create issues for ethnic American authors, who are constantly forced to address racist views while also combating the notion of a stereotypical, essentialized notion of black racial identity.

Fledgling employs the trope of genetic manipulation to invert views of racial eugenics; instead of a deficiency, black blood becomes a source of salvation through Butler’s depiction of Shori as a black human/Ina hybrid.³⁶ Shori’s black skin gives her advantages over other Ina, such as being able to tolerate sunlight, yet it also causes her to become the target of racism. Shori and her companions assume that she is a target because of her black skin; however, Butler

³⁵ The word “eugenics” stems from the Greek word *eugenes*, or well-born. Typically, eugenics programs are grouped into two categories: positive eugenics and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics programs seek to improve humanity by creating “superior” individuals with the best possible genetic traits. Negative eugenics seeks to prevent the creation of “inferior” humans, typically through sterilization or, at the extreme, extermination. Negative eugenics programs have severely affected ethnic peoples, from sterilization programs in Puerto Rico to the extermination of Jewish peoples in Nazi Germany. For more information, see *The Pure Society* by André Pichot.

³⁶ Fears about the consequences of genetic manipulation are not new to literature; the enduring popularity of texts such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is a testament to literature’s fascination with the biological sciences and a fear of the monstrous effects of using science to manipulate the human form. Theories about the effects of radiation on the human body during the Cold War led to an increasing fear in the U.S. about the effects of scientific advances on humans. In the late 1950s, a French biologist named Jean Rowland published an inquiry titled *Can Man Be Modified?*, a text that would result in arguments about the possibility of using science to modify the human body. Rowland posited that biology would one day be able to usher in a new race of “artificial mutations” which would cause “new races of living creatures to appear on the earth” (Turney 139-140, qtd. in Turney 140). Later advances, such as the discovery of the DNA structure, would create a dialogue from the 1960s to the present day about the consequences of molecular biology.

complicates the Ina's reaction to Shori by conflating their views of race and humanity. Though the Ina need a symbiotic relationship with humans in order to survive, some Ina view humans as inferior and describe Shori's mix of human/Ina genes as a contamination of their species. The human/Ina relationship is symbiotic, yet conflicted, much like the historical relationship between black slaves and white slave owners.³⁷ Butler uses the reaction to Shori's presence as a metaphor for the persistence of racist views in present day U.S. society.

Shori's black skin makes her a curiosity for many of the Ina, who are either fascinated by her genetic gifts or horrified by the idea of Ina genes being merged with that of a "lesser" species. The Gordon family is described as curious to meet Shori because of her dark skin (133). They are able to see her black skin as an asset. However, many of the Ina view Shori's hybridity as an abomination. Butler conflates blackness and humanity, so that at times the Ina are discussing Shori as more human, while at other times she is specifically referred to as black. During the trial against the Ina responsible for the death of Shori's family, Milo Silk refers to Shori as a "clever dog" (238) and when sentenced to banishment, states "Murdering black mongrel bitch. . . . What will she give us all? Fur? Tails?" (300). Both references point to the history of racial eugenics and the view of black humans as animal-like. Shori must thus contend with three separate aspects of her identity: Ina, human, and black. Butler's characterization of Shori represents a more complex version of identity that she links to the survival of the human and Ina species. Humans and Ina alike must learn to accept Shori as a hybrid in order to save the Ina race and survive.

Racial eugenics revolve around the ability to control genetic opportunities, either by encouraging positive genetic traits or discouraging negative ones. Before the possibility of

³⁷ I am not suggesting that black slaves and white slave owners both benefited from the system of slavery; however, slaves were dependent on their owners for their physical needs.

artificial genetic manipulation, the only way to influence human genetics was to control human procreation. Butler links the idea of procreation to power in *Fledgling*; Shori's ability to pass on her genetic enhancements drives the plot of the novel. Shori's family is killed because some Ina fear that Shori will breed, forever changing the Ina species. One of the humans sent by the Silk family to kill Shori states that he was told to kill her because they "Couldn't let you and you . . . your kind . . . your family . . . breed" (173). The Silk family views Shori's presence and ability to pass on her light-tolerating ability as a threat to Ina "purity." Not all Ina, however, view Shori as a threat or an abomination. The Gordon family agrees to protect Shori so that she will mate with their sons, giving their family a distinct genetic advantage. Shori's genetic advantages and breeding potential make her both a threat and an ally, giving her the potential power to construct a new species that challenges the current hierarchies of the novel.

Hybridity in *Fledgling* is linked to survival. Gregory Jerome Hampton argues, "To be identified as a hybrid in Butler's fiction is, often times, synonymous with becoming a survivor and a signifier of the future" (192). Shori is an Ina/human hybrid, yet she also represents the creation of a new species (as evidenced by her ability to pass on her human genes to her offspring) that marks a space for positive depictions of blackness. Ali Brox notes that while Shori is a biracial figure, discussing her only in terms of a black/white binary is misleading: "While readers may perceive Butler's heroine, Shori, in biracial terms, the hybrid figure proves valuable for discussing Shori's identity and expanding the conversation beyond a rigid binary of black and white, vampire and human" (391). While it is important to acknowledge how Butler utilizes hybrid figures as representations of biracial or multiethnic figures, it is equally important to note that Shori is not simply biracial; the inclusion of Ina genes and Butler's commentary on the history of black dehumanization creates multiple identifications for Shori, who must contend

both with views of racism and speciesism. The human and Ina who cannot accept Shori are depicted as fanatics who will destroy the Ina race. Butler links survival to genetic hybridity, indicating that in order to survive, humans and Ina will have to accept new racial and species identifications. *Fledgling* is a continuation of Butler's interest in hybrid species as an avenue for survival which began in her *Xenogenesis* series. In each of her texts, hybrid characters embody society's fear of change while representing more complex possibilities for representations of race in SFF.

Mutualism

One of the main differences between Shori and the traditional vampire figure is her concern for the humans she bites. Butler describes the Ina/human relationship as one based on mutualism. The definition of mutualism is twofold. The most common biological definition is a symbiosis between two organisms, or a mutually beneficial relationship. However, an alternate definition of mutualism is "the doctrine that mutual dependence is necessary to social well-being" ("Mutualism"). Butler employs both definitions of mutualism by creating a social and biological dependence between humans and Ina. Humans who are regularly bitten by Ina live longer, healthier lives than ordinary humans, a clear biological advantage. Ina also need to feed on humans to stay healthy, so human/Ina pairings would be considered a biologically mutualistic relationship between two species. Once bitten, Ina and human symbionts are bound to each other. Humans can sometimes survive without Ina; although they usually die, they can survive if they are adopted by another Ina quickly, typically a female. In fact, Shori saves her father's and brother's symbionts after their death by biting them and binding them to her. Ina, however, cannot survive long-term without humans; Shori learns from Hayden, an Ina elder, that the Ina were almost eradicated as a species because of "an Ina specific epidemic illness that made it

difficult or impossible for our bodies to use the blood or meat that we consumed” (195). Butler creates biological shortcomings in the Ina to equalize Ina and humans. The Ina could be viewed as an “advanced” species that has the right to rule over biologically “unevolved” humans. Yet Butler makes these two species equally interdependent, creating a system where both parties contribute important biological functions. Butler’s metaphor for mutualism becomes the basis of her views on white/black racial relations.

Mutualism also plays a vital role in maintaining the balance of Earth’s ecosystem. The breakdown of mutualistic relationships results in severe consequences: “each species on Earth is involved directly or indirectly in one or more mutualistic partnerships; some are involved in hundreds...mutualism breakdown has the potential to expand and accelerate effects of global change on biodiversity loss and ecosystem disruption” (Casey 1459). Every species on Earth depends on mutualistic partnerships; breaking these species partnerships has the potential to destroy all life on the planet. Butler is able to use the idea of an ecosystem defined by thousands of mutualistic partnerships and expand it to the idea of human relationships and human/Ina relationships. Shori is the savior of the Ina species because she represents the embodiment of mutualism—human and Ina DNA working together in one body to the benefit of both species. Butler’s depiction of Shori and human/Ina relations becomes a commentary on the need for humans to stop defining themselves in terms of hierarchy and begin to recognize the importance of mutualistic relationships. Mutualism is linked to survival; as a hybrid, Shori is able to survive because she is more open to mutualistic relationships.

Butler also connects the idea of mutualistic relationships to social stability. Shori’s father, Iosif, cautions her to take care of her symbionts so her relationships will be mutualistic:

. . . treat your people well, Shori. Let them see that you trust them and let them solve their own problems, make their own decisions. Do that and they will

willingly commit their lives to you. Bully them, control them out of fear or malice or just for your own convenience, and after a while, you'll have to spend all your time thinking for them, controlling them, and stifling their resentment. (73, ellipsis added)

Iosif's words describe the consequence of misusing the Ina/human relationship, an imbalance in their mutualistic relationship that would cause harm to both her symbionts and Shori.

Throughout *Fledgling*, Shori shows concern for her symbionts' physical and emotional wellbeing, unlike the Silk family, who use humans as pawns in their vendetta against her and her family. Butler uses a comparison of healthy and unhealthy human/Ina relationships to highlight the benefits of mutualistic relationships, and the consequences of non-mutualistic relationships.

Fledgling highlights the advantages of racial and species intermixture by having the Ina and humans live in hybrid, mutualistic communities. Ina and their human symbionts have a communal living arrangement; multiple humans live with and share an Ina host. Ina need to feed on several humans to be satiated, resulting in a need for humans to accept the idea of living together and sharing their Ina. Since Ina can choose to feed on males or females of any race, Ina households become blended, multiracial families. The Ina/human living situation also challenges gender and sexual roles; Inas can choose to bite male or females, creating pansexual households (Strong 40). Butler is sure to note the discomfort of human symbionts like Wright towards their new living arrangements to demonstrate that Ina households are not utopic; rather, human/Ina households challenge humans to put aside racism and homophobia. The symbionts must accept diverse sexual and racial living situations in order to live peacefully and survive. Butler reverses the idea that mixing races will result in dystopic communities, replacing it with the idea of communal, multiracial/multispecies households that can be run by male or female Ina.

As a hybrid human/Ina, Shori recognizes the interdependent relationship between humans and Ina; though she possesses superior strength and the power of persuasion, she does not seek to

control others. Ruth Salvaggio argues that a reoccurring theme in Butler's works is cooperation and the responsible use of power: "Though Butler's heroines are dangerous and powerful women, their goal is not power. They are heroines not because they conquer the world, but because they conquer the very notion of tyranny" (81). The fact that Shori encourages her symbionts to make their own choices, despite the fact that she could easily control them, demonstrates Butler's view of evolution and genetic enhancement as linked to embracing mutualistic social and personal relationships. The humans and Ina/alien species in Butler's works must accept their need for each other and for flexible identifications, or suffer the consequences. Butler creates characters defined by their interdependence, characters that must be able to work together to expand the boundaries of humans and Ina.

Race as Construction

Butler moves away from a focus on African American culture and black/white racial arguments in *Fledgling* and, instead, uses themes of genetic manipulation to highlight the constructed nature of race and humanity. Shori's first realization of her race does not include any awareness of African American racial or cultural history:

"I'm . . ." I stopped. I had been about to protest that I was brown, not black, but before I could speak, I understood what he meant. Then his question triggered another memory. I looked at him. "I think I'm an experiment. I think I can withstand the sun better than . . . others of my kind . . . I don't know who the experimenters are, though, the ones who made me black." (Butler 31, second ellipsis added)

By focusing on Shori first as an Ina and erasing any connection to African American culture, Butler erases the need to immediately address African American racial history. Rather, she works to close the gap between races and species by using genetic manipulation to treat race and humanity as societal constructions. When Shori states that she doesn't know who "made her black," race becomes one more aspect of her overall genetic makeup, not an essentialized part of

her identity. As a human/Ina hybrid, Shori has been “made” part human by the Ina, a move that deconstructs race into its biological components, closing the gap between race and humanity.

Fledgling continually works to challenge ideas of racial essentialism. When Shori meets her father for the first time, Butler again dismantles perceived racial differences:

He was a tall, spidery man, empty-handed, and visibly my kind except that he was blond and very pale-skinned—not just light-skinned like Wright, but as white as the pages of Wright’s books. Even so, apart from color, if I ever grew tall, I would look much like him. (61)

Despite the fact that Shori’s father is white, she immediately notes the similarities between them, rather than the differences. Race becomes simply one more aspect of identity as Shori begins to identify herself as a member of the Ina species. The fact that Shori’s father is differentiated from Wright, a human, through his description as being unnaturally white also points to Shori and her father’s difference from humans. By focusing on species and genetic makeup, Butler creates a space for a black, female main character while confining discussions of U.S. racial politics and the racial politics of SFF to the novel’s subtext. Instead of using direct references to African American history and racism, Butler follows the tradition of authors such as Ursula K. LeGuin, who notes the ability of SFF to create a metaphor for present day social issues. Butler’s racial metaphor of two conflicting species addresses issues of racism while still leaving room for alternate depictions of racial identification.

Towards the end of the novel, Butler directly references black/white human racial issues. When Wright meets Joel, he is angry that Shori’s new symbiont is black. When he complains, his housemate Brook comments on the Ina view of race, “They’re not human... They don’t care about white or black” (162). The Ina are described as not making distinctions between races, much like descriptions of racial utopias in early twentieth century SF. However, Butler demonstrates that some of the Ina do have racist views, negating the view of Ina as a superior,

non-racist species. During the trial against the Inas who killed Shori's family, one of the Ina references U.S. racial history: "You want your sons to mate with this person. You want them to get black, human children from her. Here in the United States, even most humans will look down on them. When I came to this country, such people were kept as property, as slaves." (272). This scene is the first mention of African American history and human racism. Butler waits until the end of the novel to describe the history of racism against African Americans, a deliberate strategy that moves the plot away from descriptions of the historical past. Instead, Butler is able to use racial metaphor and subtext to address issues of racism throughout the novel, saving more specific arguments about racism and U.S. racial history for the end of the novel. Her negation of the Ina as a non-prejudiced, utopic species demonstrates that even "advanced" species can have difficulty overcoming racist views.

The trial against Shori's attackers becomes a metaphor for the future of the Ina species. Rather than debating who is responsible for the attack on Shori's family, the Ina Milo Silk uses the trial as an opportunity to question Shori's status as an Ina by doubting her ability to heal herself and implying that her physical differences (skin color, height, strength) make her more human than Ina. Melissa J. Strong notes that the fact that Shori decides to testify, despite her memory loss, indicates that she is taking control of her agency; she refuses to be portrayed as a child or victim, negating the often-used stereotype of the tragic mulatta (32). Shori uses the trial to prove her ability to take on the leadership responsibilities of an Ina woman. The fact that the majority of the Ina side with Shori, despite the fact that some of them are still hesitant about the changes she represents, demonstrates the possibility of Ina and humans eventually embracing racial and species difference. The Ina who attacked her and her symbionts are sentenced to

banishment and mutilation, marking a new era where racism and speciesism will no longer be tolerated.

After the trial, Shori demonstrates her superiority by defeating the Ina woman responsible for the death of one of her human symbionts in a fight. Shori overtakes the larger Ina woman and rips out her throat, stating “She would do no more screaming for a while” (306). The reference to silence symbolizes the silencing of rhetorics of racism and looks ahead to a world where diversity is embraced and celebrated. The fact that Shori now has the ability to overcome an older, powerful Ina shows that she is learning to control her advanced abilities. Her strength is unusual for her size and age, which hints that Shori’s hybridity may allow her to become stronger than the “pure” Ina. If Shori continues to gain strength, she will soon become the marker for all other Ina and will enact drastic changes on the Ina species. Just like the symbiont humans, the Ina must overcome their fear of hybridity in order to gain the advantages Shori represents.

Fledgling is Butler’s final work of SFF and one of her greatest contributions to the genres. Her choice to conflate issues of race and humanity combats the depiction of ethnic peoples as non-human and gives authors a model for discussing race without allowing an essentialized view to dominate the text of the novel. By creating a strong, black protagonist, Butler represents the multi-faceted issue of race relations in present-day U.S. society and allows for positive depictions of blackness and otherness in SF texts. One of the benefits of the SFF genres is the ability to bring new races or species into being, which creates a more diverse representation of the future. Past SFF works have not yet fully realized this potential; instead, the “aliens” in some SFF works become stereotypical representations of ethnic peoples.³⁸ *Fledgling*

³⁸ A number of SF critics have commented on SF’s history of using aliens as stereotypes of indigenous or ethnic peoples, including Nalo Hopkinson, Gary Westfahl, and Brian Attebery.

demonstrates how authors can use SFF tropes to look at more complex representations of racial and ethnic identity.

Critics continually comment on the difficulty of discussing race in the wake of genetic discoveries that prove that humans are a species with more commonalities than previously imagined. However, it is impossible to erase decades of racism and the social struggles of peoples from marginalized racial groups. As more ethnic American authors move into the genre of SF, they will have to consider how to create depictions of race and culture in futuristic settings while still acknowledging an important history of racial injustice. *Fledgling* is an important example for ethnic American SF authors looking to find a voice in today's more flexible definition of the SFF genre.

“Phantom Overload”

While Butler and Older both include hybrid, undead characters of color in their writings, their choice of how to include references to race and ethnicity differ. Butler focuses more on challenging outside stereotypes of blackness, while Older focuses on the internalization of historical trauma in Spanish-speaking cultures. One of the reasons for this difference is the history of fantastic writing by Spanish-speaking authors. Authors from Spanish-speaking cultures frequently write texts that include elements of the fantastic, usually classified as magical realism. Such texts are typically defined by a connection to a cultural past or indigenous origin. However, contemporary critics have begun to examine the history of Latin American SFF writing in an attempt to highlight how Latin American authors have contributed to the SFF genres. Recent Latina/o and Chicana/o works with connections to SFF, including Junot Díaz's *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Sabrina Vourvoulias's *Ink*, and Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*, indicate that Latina/o authors are not only becoming more recognized in the

SFF genre, but are also acknowledging themselves as SFF authors. Older's choice to write SFF connects his text to a history of Latino and Latin American SFF writing while combating already existing cultural beliefs in the fantastic, linked to specific cultural beliefs in death and spirituality, which contribute to the internal colonization of Spanish-speaking cultures.

“Phantom Overload” is the final tale in Older's collection of short stories, *Salsa Nocturna Stories* (2012), a collection following the adventures of Gordo, a Cuban musician who can see ghosts, and Carlos, a half-dead Puerto Rican soulcatcher working for the New York Council of the Dead.³⁹ Carlos is between worlds; he died and somehow came back to life, gaining the ability to communicate with both the living and dead. He is considered a curiosity by the dead and living, a grey-skinned Puerto Rican man who is not quite alive. Carlos challenges the authority of the Council of the Dead, a controlling, racist bureaucracy that satirizes present-day U.S. political systems. He does not approve of how the council treats certain groups of ethnic ghosts, as well as its questionable political aims. He actively works against the council at times, yet remains employed by them. Older refers to Latino fantastic cultural beliefs in his writing, such as a belief in ghosts and the power of saint-like historical figures; however, his inclusion of a zombie-like narrator and the fantasy of a ghost bureaucracy creates an alternate New York that makes it clear that “Phantom Overload” is not purely a work of magical realism. His work also incorporates elements of horror and detective/noir tales, making it a text that blurs the boundaries of multiple genres. Older's work depicts ghosts as representations of an ethnic cultural past, but also includes a variety of SFF elements, creating a space for Older to move beyond the

³⁹ I realize that discussing one short story in a collection could be viewed as not discussing the collection in depth; however, I felt that “Phantom Overload” is Older's most successful integration of SFF and Latina/o cultural themes. The majority of Older's short stories in *Salsa Nocturna* read more like detective stories or traditional ghosts stories of haunting/possession. As the last story of the series, “Phantom Overload” brings together all of the collections' characters in a larger-scale view of cultural haunting and hybrid identities.

“haunting” of past ethnic history towards a history where ethnic peoples have more control to change and modify cultural beliefs.

Older sets his story in a not-too-distant future where New York City is separated into different districts, most of which are controlled by the Council of the Dead. “Phantom Overload” tells the story of a neighborhood in New York that has become overrun with ghosts. Typically, ghosts appear in random towns after they die and eventually make their way into the afterlife. An “overload” of ghosts in an area can cause issues for the living. One of the Remote Districts, or areas that reject interference from the council, has applied for help getting rid of the ghosts that are overrunning their town. The Latin American ghosts have discovered how to travel in the afterlife and have all come back to be with their ancestors in New York. Carlos is tasked with assessing the situation and preparing the way for the council’s soulcatchers to come in and get rid of the ghosts. However, the situation gets complicated when Carlos discovers that the district’s representative, Silvan, has misrepresented the situation to allow the council to gain control of the area. The ghosts are not overrunning the area; they co-exist peacefully with their relatives. Carlos eventually has to convince the ghosts to go into the afterlife after the ghosts have a fight with the council’s soulcatchers, resulting in the death of several living residents. His position as a hybrid ethnic/living/dead figure allows him to serve as a bridge between the living and dead, a metaphor for maintaining a connection to cultural history.

“Phantom Overload” expresses a Latino, specifically Nuyorican, experience of New York City. Older frequently makes references to different Spanish-speaking cultures and New York City landmarks and also pokes fun at the internal differences between Spanish-speaking cultures that an outsider might not understand. Early on in “Phantom Overload,” Carlos discovers that the district representative he thought was Mexican is actually Ecuadorian:

“Turns out you’re not Mexican,” I tell Silvan when we reach the top of the trash-strewn hill where he’s waiting for us. “You’re Ecuadorian.”
“I know,” says Silvan. “But you fucking Dominicans can’t tell the difference.”
“I’m fucking Puerto Rican.” (127)

Older makes it clear that his Latino culture is an important part of the stories he tells and the landscapes he employs. However, he also celebrates the diversity of Spanish-speaking cultures, a move that connects to contemporary studies of race and ethnicity which point out that often, members of Spanish-speaking groups resist being categorized together into the umbrella terms of “Spanish” and “Latina/o,” preferring instead to be identified by their country of origin.⁴⁰ Grouping certain Spanish-speaking groups into the catch-all category of Latina/o, while more specific than past categorizations such as “Spanish,” still fosters the thinking defined by Werner Sollors as “collective fictions” which result in the creation of “imagined communities” or groupings based on the assumption of essential, unchangeable traits. Sollors counters such an essentialist definition with the idea that nations (and, consequently, ethnicities) are constantly being debated and changed by the diverse population of members who identify themselves with the ethnic group. He also notes the role of literature in shaping both an ethnic groups’ perception of themselves and the way those not associated with the ethnic group define the ethnic group: “Texts are not mere reflections of existing differences but also, among many other things, productive forces in nation-building enterprises” (xv). Latina/o literature encompasses many different Spanish-speaking groups (as well as second and third generation ethnic peoples who may not speak Spanish); therefore, trying to categorize peoples or texts as solely Latina/o

⁴⁰ Critics such as Marta Caminero-Santangelo and Suzanne Oboler have done extensive studies of ethnic categorizations within Latina/o cultures, concluding that blanket terms tend to be applied to Latina/o peoples by those outside the cultures, while those within the cultures tend to identify themselves and others by their country of origin. For more information, see Caminero-Santangelo’s *On Latinidad: U.S. Latino Literature and the Construction of Ethnicity* (2007) and Oboler’s *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives* (1995).

becomes difficult, especially in diverse ethnic spaces such as New York, where people of many ethnicities interact and influence one another.

The fact that Older discusses the differences between different Spanish-speaking groups, while still showing these groups as linked by certain cultural similarities, demonstrates a more complex, contemporary depiction of Latina/o culture. Older's dual narrators are Puerto Rican and Cuban, two groups known for having very different U.S. immigration experiences. Marta Caminero-Santangelo notes that critics frequently exclude Cuban Americans from definitions of Latina/o culture because Cubans are defined by exile (507). Because Cubans are viewed as having a strong cultural connection with their homeland, as well as members who do not identify as Americans, they are not considered as part of the Latina/o experience (typically considered peoples who have connections to both an ethnic and American identity). However, many Spanish speaking cultures share the experience of exile or forced immigration and the experience of being grouped together as "Spanish" by non Spanish-speaking groups and U.S. politicians. Older's textual joke between Carlos and Silvan is a reference that can be appreciated by anyone associated with a Spanish-speaking ethnic group. Carlos is a true testament to the diversity of U.S. Spanish-speaking cultures; he is Nuyorican, drinks Dominican coffee, works with Ecuadorian and Cuban associates, and communicates with Latin American ghosts. Older uses the setting of New York City, a place that is known for bringing together a number of different Spanish-speaking groups, to paint a broader, more inclusive representation of Latina/o ethnicity and culture. Setting his stories in a contemporary setting, rather than the essentialized historical/cultural past of a single ethnic group, more accurately expresses his contemporary experience as a Spanish-speaking Nuyorican.

Undead Histories

Older recognizes the vexed history of Spanish-speaking cultures which result in conflicting representations of cultural histories. After his meeting with the Council about the ghost situation, Carlos tells his friends, Gordo and Jimmy, that the councilman made him look like Malinche:

“Who’s Malinche?” Jimmy asks.

“The chick that helped a couple white guys on horses take down the whole Aztec empire,” I say Jimmy looks crestfallen. “Or got kidnapped and forced into being a historical scapegoat, more than likely.”

Gordo looks very sad all the sudden. “It’s always easier to blame one of our own.” (126).

Older references La Malinche, a Nahuatl woman who is rumored to have participated in the Spanish conquest of Mexico, as a way of commenting on historical uncertainty. La Malinche, originally named "Malinalli" or "Ce-Malinalli," lived as a slave among the Chontal Maya and served as a translator for Cortés during his conquest of Mexico.⁴¹ She eventually converted to Christianity and married one of Cortés’s officers (Downs 398). The fact that she and Cortés had a child, one of the first Mestizos⁴² in Mexican history, makes her a figure linked to historical intermixture and uncertainty. Malinche is a historical figure that Older connects to the vexed historical situation that some U.S. Spanish-speaking cultures are experiencing today.

Like Pocahontas, Malinche is a silenced female unable to write her own history. Historical representations are often created by outside observation, similar to the way that colonizing groups write the histories of colonized ethnic groups. Kristina Downs notes that when historical figures are unable or not allowed to leave behind a written record then their

⁴¹ As a slave among the Chontal Maya, Malinche spoke both Nahuatl and Spanish. Cortés needed Malinche to communicate with Montezuma or any of the Nahuatl groups, making her an essential part of his communication with the indigenous groups of Mexico. For more information, see Kristina Down’s “Mirrored Archetypes: The Contrasting Cultural Roles of La Malinche and Pocahontas” (2008).

⁴² Mixed race people European and Indigenous American ancestry.

representation can become appropriated by the dominant culture: “both women are silent; both were illiterate and as such left no record of themselves. Instead, we must rely on primary sources recorded by those around them” (399). Pocahontas and Malinche are both good examples of the effects of historical myth; without primary sources written by the women themselves, historical records make both women out to be polar opposites. Historians depict Pocahontas as a helper, an Indian princess who plays an important role in the colonization of the Americas. Conversely, Malinche is commonly depicted as a traitor and temptress. The difference in depiction of the two women is related to the perception of their roles. Pocahontas assists settlers of the “New World,” typically represented as an uncivilized, barely occupied land. Adapting the story of a native woman into U.S. cultural history also helps U.S. historians to differentiate U.S. cultural history from that of England (401). Malinche, on the other hand, is involved in a violent conquest of occupied land. Down argues that Malinche’s participation in war as a translator for Cortés affects her historical representation:

Neither indigenous nor European mindsets from the sixteenth century allowed women a role in warfare and her involvement therefore becomes a subversive act. A woman would not have ordinarily played such a central role in a sixteenth century military campaign, but Malinche's skills as a translator made her indispensable to Cortés. . . . Familiar with the Spanish sexual desire for indigenous women, the Chontal Maya gave Malinche to Cortés, along with several other women, as a tribute to avoid a Spanish military campaign against them (Karttunen 1994:5). Her very introduction to Cortés then was shaped by the violence, both military and sexual, of the conquest. In this violence, she takes on the role of sexual victim but also military victimizer. Her ultimate alliance with the Spanish and the Spanish success in the conquest put Malinche in the position of taking part in the destruction and domination of her own people. (401, ellipsis added)

Malinche’s introduction to the Spanish and her assistance to them is more complicated than the story of Pocahontas. She occupies a position of both victim and victimizer, making her more difficult to categorize in Mexican historical accounts. Her participation in a violent conquest,

both of the land and of her body, create a narrative of victimization less likely to be accepted. This complexity has caused descriptions and opinions of La Malinche to change over time as different social and political perspectives have emerged. To date, she has been described in Mexico as an evil temptress, a disloyal Mexican, an Aztec princess, a victim, and a symbolic mother of the New Mexican people (Cypess 12-13). These different, often conflicting views of Malinche demonstrate the historical confusion that occurs when trying to revise historical accounts of colonization.

Older's reference to Malinche in "Phantom Overload" creates a theme of the consequences of cultural haunting throughout the text. The ghosts haunting the remote district become a metaphor for the historical ghosts that haunt colonized Spanish-speaking groups. The fact that Malinche is represented as an important figure in Mexican mythology and her association with other mythological figures creates a depiction of her as a cultural specter, a historical ghost who haunts the Mexican peoples. The figure of Malinche is often associated with other negative cultural figures, such as the weeping mother figure, La Llorona.⁴³ She also serves as a contrast to positive cultural figures, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe. The fact that she represents the violent birth of Mexico as a colonized nation turns her into a figure that continues to influence the national imaginary. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz notes that the myth of Malinche as violated mother (*La Chingada*) has had a profound effect on Mexican culture:

The person who suffers this action [violation] is passive, inert and open, in contrast to the active, aggressive and closed person who inflicts it. The chingón is the macho, the male; he rips open the chingada, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world. The relationship between them is violent,

⁴³ The La Llorona figure is typically portrayed in Mexican and Chicana/o culture. She is depicted as a weeping woman crying over the children she has killed in a fit of rage, another representation of a woman betraying her culture.

and it is determined by the cynical power of the first and the impotence of the second. (77)

Paz argues that colonized peoples become more than victims; as sons of Malinche, Mexican culture becomes stripped of its masculinity to become a passive acceptor of violence and assimilation. Because Spanish-speaking cultures are often defined by the concept of machismo—the man as representing a strong head of the family who is also its protector—Paz’s definition of Mexican culture as stripped of its masculinity is a significant commentary on how colonization has devastated Mexican cultural history. He goes on to note that the conflict represented by the figures of Cortés and La Malinche continue to haunt Mexican cultural beliefs: “The strange permanence of Cortés and La Malinche in the Mexican's imagination and sensibilities reveals that they are something more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved” (87). According to Paz, Mexican culture is haunted by the figure of Malinche, the traitor/mother who is both revered and reviled. The conflict that needs to be resolved for a number of Spanish-speaking countries is how to move beyond a history of internalized colonization and the representation of Spanish-speaking cultures as passive victims internally and by outside groups, such as the U.S., who continue to exploit the economic condition of Spanish-speaking countries. As a Puerto Rican and member of the Latino community, Older is concerned with depicting the lived conditions of Spanish-Speaking groups both in the U.S. and outside. However, Older also realizes the need to move beyond narratives of victimization, the history that haunts Latina/o cultural history and inhibits authors from portraying other aspects of Latina/o cultural history.

Older also recognizes the complexity of Latino cultural representation; he must find a way to balance exorcizing the ghosts of Latino history while still maintaining a connection to Latino culture. The most typical association of the terms *malinche* and *malinchista* in

contemporary Mexican culture is that of a traitor; specifically, the terms are most often linked to betrayal of the nation: In “Yo Soy La Malinche,” Mary Louise Pratt defines *Malinchista* as “a common term for a person who adopts foreign values, assimilates to foreign culture, or serves foreign interests” (Pratt 860). Language usage connects the figure of Malinche to that of a native informer, one who either gives away cultural secrets or forsakes their cultural heritage. Such a usage can also be applied to contemporary immigrants or diasporic peoples, creating a cultural disconnect between people living in Spanish-speaking countries and those who choose to migrate. When Carlos states that he has been made to look “like Malinche,” he is referring to himself as a traitor on many levels. As a Latino man, he could be viewed as an assimilated Puerto Rican. As an employee of the Council of the Dead, he is betraying both his Latino culture and his half-living status. The council members are predominantly white and are often characterized as racist. Even in death, the ghosts have maintained racial power structures, with the wealthy, white ghosts in positions of power ready to colonize predominantly ethnic areas. Carlos is sent in to assess the situation and prepare the way for the council’s soulcatchers, causing him to fulfill the roles of cultural moderator and native informant. Like Pocahontas or Malinche, he is expected to be a bridge between dominant and native cultures. He eventually participates in purging the Mexican ghosts from the area, causing him to question his decision to work for the council. Carlos views himself as a subversive figure working to better the situation of ethnic ghosts; however, the fact that he eventually has to talk the Mexican ghosts into leaving links him to a betrayal of Spanish-speaking peoples.

Cultural Haunting

Older’s description of the Mexican ghosts connects the fantastic aspects of Spanish-speaking cultures with the more contemporary notion of cultural haunting. The ghosts in Older’s

tale represent a literal “haunting” of the living by the dead; like Malinche, they have become negative reminders of the cultural past. The fact that they are dead signifies a violent cultural history of colonization. The ghosts in “Phantom Overload” cannot coexist with the living; if they are left in the town, it will eventually be destroyed. The ghosts signify a connection to a cultural past; however, the fact that they have a negative influence on the town demonstrates a need for Spanish-speaking cultures to move beyond an internalized history of colonization. Carlos, however, is conflicted about the need to separate past and present culture; When he first encounters the phantom overload, or an overabundance of ghosts, he feels sympathetic: “My first instinct is to leave Phoebus and Jimmy behind and go for a jaunty stroll down a street where for once, the two disparate halves of me happily cohabit” (127). Carlos is able to sympathize with the ghosts on multiple levels; as a Latino, he understands the ghosts’ desire to connect with family and culture. Like Shori, Carlos’s hybrid body represents the merging of two different modes of existence. Consequently, he is better able to accept the idea of living and dead coexistence. Carlos’s depiction as hybrid speaks to a desire in contemporary Spanish-speaking cultures to bring together past, present and future, to acknowledge a cultural history of colonization while still celebrating what the culture has become and can become in the future.

At the end of the story, Carlos is forced to convince the ghosts to leave. After the council soulcatchers kill living hostages in an attempt to escape being ambushed by the ghosts, Carlos speaks to the ghosts to convince them to do what is right for their living family members:

“I know you just came here to be with your families, to carry on in an afterlife that’s harmonious with the living. And believe me,” I had been in this let’s-clean-this-mess-up mode but I’m suddenly choking over my words, “I want as much as any of you to see that happen, here in New York.” They believe me. Even I believe me. I guess it’s ’cause it’s true, but still—I’m startled. “But it’s not time yet. There’s more work to be done. Foundations to be laid.” (133)

The fact that Carlos reasons with the ghosts to get them to leave indicates a desire to protect the living from their cultural past and yet still move forward towards alternate descriptions of culture. His desire to see a harmonious integration of living and dead connects to his desire to find a space where his hybrid identity will be accepted. As the embodiment of past and present, Carlos represents Spanish-speaking cultures that are engaged in revising or rebuilding cultural identities in the present to include aspects once considered negative, such as an indigenous history or issues of colonization. Carlos is the literal embodiment of a contemporary Spanish-speaking future, one that draws from past and present.

Older uses the conflict between Carlos and Silvan as a metaphor for the issues of cultural haunting and betrayal. At the end of the story, Carlos tracks down the man who betrayed the ghosts, Silvan, with the intention to kill him. He is stopped by Gordo, who repeats his admonition that it is easier to blame one of our own. Gordo reminds Carlos of the need to move beyond a binary of citizen/traitor; contemporary Spanish-speaking cultures cannot afford to alienate those who have immigrated to other countries or who work with outside agencies. Like Carlos, Silvan is forced to work within a system of oppression, yet blaming him does not erase the issues of racism and unequal resources within the ghost bureaucracy. Both men represent a perceived betrayal—a Malinche—through the lens of cultural history. However, both men also represent an opportunity to change perceived views in Latino and Spanish-Speaking cultures. Carlos’s decision not to kill Silvan and his reference to a day when the living and dead can coexist demonstrate a desire to overcome the effects of internal colonization and create a new, more accepting cultural history.

“Phantom Overload” represents an important shift in Latina/o SFF towards an acceptance of SFF genres and themes as part of a Latina/o cultural heritage. As a Latino, Older represents a

hybrid ethnicity; that fact that he chooses to combine SFF and magical realism shows his multiethnic influences and the history of fantasy writing in Spanish-speaking cultures. As a Nuyorican, Older also highlights the interactions of Spanish-speaking cultures and the diversity of New York City. Carlos's undead status represents an important debate for people of Spanish-speaking heritage living in the U.S.: how to maintain a connection to a cultural heritage while still moving forward towards fluid depictions of Spanish-speaking cultures. The fact that Carlos can communicate with the living and dead allows him to embrace all sides of his cultural identity. However, the fact that Older chooses to have the Latin American ghosts leave for the good of the living community demonstrates the danger of cultural stagnation; Spanish-speaking cultures must not focus on past cultural events at the expense of the future. Older's work shows how Latina/o authors can utilize influences from multiple sources without sacrificing a connection to their cultural heritage. His choice to write SFF allows him to create a future that highlights the consequences of internalized colonization and a fear of hybridity.

Does Undead Equal Future Uncertainty?

Butler and Older both utilize the SFF genres to represent a contemporary view of U.S. ethnicity. From new ethnic immigrants to second and third generation citizens, ethnic Americans each have widely different experiences with and connections to their race, ethnicity and cultural history. Depicting hybrid characters allows both authors to expand the boundaries of race and ethnicity, moving beyond static representations or binaries. Each author also uses SFF themes to move away from a primary focus on race or ethnicity in their texts; Butler puts aside references to African American culture, instead focusing on human/Ina relationships, while Older uses the concept of soulcatching to force the cultural past out of his story. The hybrid elements of both texts suggest bodies in flux; a literal representation of ever-changing ethnic and racial identities.

The choice to represent race and ethnicity in SFF texts has the possibility to create a space for race and ethnicity in SFF, as well as a space to explore complex or contradictory representations of race and ethnicity that challenge essentialist descriptions. Butler and Older identify with the SFF genres because they recognize that their identities and cultural experiences cannot be contained within one racial category or genre.

Rather than setting their texts in a distant future, both authors use settings that seem relatively familiar, employing one fantastic element of difference. It is possible that Butler and Older choose not to set their SFF texts too far in the future because they are uncertain about what will happen to race and ethnicity in the future. Since SFF has a history of writings depicting “race-blind” futures, or futures where issues of race or ethnicity have been overcome,⁴⁴ SFF authors who choose to depict futures with racial/ethnic elements run the risk of creating static, essentialist depictions of race and ethnicity in the name of inclusion. Setting texts in a distant future or on another planet also requires more explanation of technology and alien races, which may take away from depictions of social issues. Butler and Older each use a realistic setting to create futures that could happen tomorrow; however, the futures they imagine focus both on highlighting racial/ethnic issues and creating complex depictions of race/ethnicity. Butler imagines a future where issues of race can be overcome in the name of a diverse, mutualistic society. Her future is not race-blind, but it also does not focus solely on issues of race. Older’s future focuses on overcoming ethnic issues within Spanish-speaking communities and embracing a hybrid, multiethnic experience. Both futures are significant in that they do not allow for static depictions of race and ethnicity.

⁴⁴ In his introduction to the Science Fiction Studies special issue of Afrofuturism, Mark Bould argues that a “race-blind” future still dominates the SF genre. See my full discussion of race-blind futures with examples in the introduction on page thirteen.

The undead figure has, at times, served as a metaphor for cultural fears about othered groups. Butler and Older's undead representations highlight the ways that undead figures can also serve as metaphors for an acceptance of change. Shori and Carlos are each tentatively accepted by their communities by the end of the narratives. Shori is given her rightful place as an Ina woman and begins to build her interracial human/Ina community. Carlos's plea to the ghosts is accepted and the council member responsible for the conflicts is killed. Both circumstances point to the beginnings of change and the acceptance of hybridity. Butler and Older take a SFF trope typically used to depict mindless hordes of othered people threatening civilization and turn it upside down; the "civilized" beings become the monsters while the hybrid undead characters become the rational beings advocating for necessary social change. Though neither author fully articulates what their changed societies will look like, this move towards texts that encourage and highlight new racial and ethnic possibilities is significant. *Fledgling* and "Phantom Overload" demonstrate important ways that ethnic American authors can contribute to the representation of undead figures, race, ethnicity and the overall genre of SFF.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPACE TRAVEL AND FOURTH WORLD REPRESENTATION IN CELU

AMBERSTONE'S "REFUGEES" AND ROSURA SÁNCHEZ AND BEATRICE PITA'S

LUNAR BRACEROS 2125-2148

The constraints of traditional points of view in mainstream SF have it both ways: you're an alien if we invade your realm from our far-away homeland, and you're an alien if you come to our homeland from far away. Indigenous people thus experience a double bind. They become other as a colonized culture, and they become other as a diasporic culture.

—Grace L. Dillon

For many people in self-avowedly multicultural nations such as the United States, their status as migrants, be it forced or economic, recent or later generational, means that "home" has become a complex, multiple and sometimes fraught notion.

—Helen Addison-Smith

This chapter looks at themes of space travel and diasporic relations in Celu Amberstone's "Refugees" and Rosura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*. "Refugees" tells the story of a group of Canadians who are relocated to a new planet by aliens after the destruction of Earth. The refugees refuse to trust the aliens or the indigenous human population who were brought to the planet previously. *Lunar Braceros* is the story of a mixed-race group of people who sign contracts to work on the moon. The braceros quickly learn that they have been brought to the moon under false pretenses and that their lives are in danger. Each text takes a different approach; while "Refugees" sets its story on a distant planet, *Lunar Braceros* takes place on the more familiar terrain of the moon. "Refugees" includes an alien presence, while *Lunar Braceros* focuses on a dystopic portrayal of humanity. However, both texts represent a contemporary view of space travel which focuses on the consequences of the characters' displacement from Earth. Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita suggest that moving humans to another

planet does not erase the painful experiences of colonization and diaspora. These authors demonstrate how ethnic SF/F texts can offer a hybrid, post-colonial consciousness to depictions of space travel and alien encounters.

“Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* bring together the experiences of indigenous and migrant⁴⁵ peoples in the spirit of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's Fourth World theory, described as “a conceptual place where the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas meet with the diasporic communities” (7). Gómez-Peña argues that the metaphor of the Fourth World is necessary to “oppose the old colonial dichotomy of First World/Third World” and to represent the multinational, multiethnic space of the present-day Americas:

In the Fourth World, there is very little place for static identities, fixed nationalities, “pure” languages, or sacred cultural traditions. The Members of the Fourth World live between and across various cultures, communities, and countries. And our identities are constantly being reshaped by this kaleidoscopic experience. (7)

By arguing for a more complex, multifaceted ethnic and cultural tradition, Gómez-Peña is able to highlight spaces influenced by the cultural practices of many ethnicities. Such a theory works well for discussion of ethnicity and culture in SF/F; “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* each depict Fourth World scenarios where different cultures or species are brought together and forced to redefine their ethnic or cultural identities.

One of the most important aspects of Gómez-Peña's Fourth World theory is that it creates a space in which indigenous and migrant peoples can come together to expose the consequences

⁴⁵ While I realize that the terms “migrant,” “exiled,” and “immigrant” each refer to different ethnic and cultural groups, each with their own experience of displacement, for the purposes of this reading I will refer to these groups as migrant peoples, meaning peoples who have moved from one country to live in another. I will use the term “indigenous” to refer to the first peoples of the American and “Native American” to refer to specific institutions that effect indigenous populations in the U.S., such as Native American reservations. I ultimately argue that indigenous peoples and migrant peoples should both be considered diasporic; I choose to use this categorization because both groups are defined by movement (whether forced or voluntary) and a connection to a lost homeland. I will further define my argument for indigenous peoples as diasporic later in the chapter.

of colonization. Colonization is described by Aimé Césaire as a total domination of the social functions of an indigenous culture by an occupying culture:

This is worth being insisted upon: a civilization is a coordinated ensemble of social functions. There are technical functions, intellectual functions, and functions of organization and coordination. To say that the colonizer substitutes his civilization for the native civilization can only mean one thing: that the colonizing nation ensures to the colonized nation, that is to the natives in their own country, the fullest mastery over these different functions. (135)

Césaire argues that the process of “civilizing” a native population becomes an excuse for the colonizing culture to devalue and, ultimately, gain control of the political, economic, and social functions of another culture (138). An indigenous culture thus finds itself “emptied” of its culture, forced to adapt to new cultural circumstances in order to survive (131). Césaire’s description of colonization as resulting in a loss of indigenous culture links it to the experience of diaspora, where peoples must work to maintain their cultural values while living in new spaces. Migrant peoples often also have an unequal relationship with the dominant culture of their host country. Whether the decision to move is by choice or force, the unequal relationship between the dominant and indigenous/migrant cultures creates similar issues for indigenous and migrant cultures. Such a relationship is presented in the connections between indigenous and migrant cultures that occur in “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros*; at specific points in both texts, indigenous and migrant peoples work together to create safe spaces and preserve cultural traditions.

Often, diaspora is presented as opposed to indigenous cultures. Since many indigenous peoples are viewed as “stress[ing] continuity of habitation, aboriginality, and often a ‘natural’ connection to the land” (Clifford 252), they are viewed as the opposite of migrant cultures, which are defined by a loss of connection to their homeland. However, Thomas Foster notes that Gómez-Peña’s Fourth World theory speaks to the similarities in the present-day social conditions of both groups:

The basis for this seemingly paradoxical linkage is a non-national understanding of these groups, since in many modern nation-states native peoples have been dispossessed of their original land claims and have begun to use Fourth World to identify themselves with other such populations across national boundaries. In this way, Gómez-Peña redefines the meaning of indigenous so that both migrant and native groups can be understood as occupying a ‘conceptual’ rather than a material space, and the main characteristic of conceptual space is that it is not defined by clear boundaries between insides and outsides. (46)

Gómez-Peña argues that indigenous peoples and migrant peoples share similar diasporic experiences. Indigenous and migrant peoples have both been forced to move away from their homelands and are defined by a desire to rebuild cultural traditions that have been purged as a result of colonization.

Peña’s Fourth World theory creates a space that opens borders and focuses on the ways that people from different cultures and countries interact and influence each other. It is a theory that focuses more on the individual experiences of contemporary ethnic peoples, rather than a static, essentialized idea of ethnicity and culture. Such a theory works well for discussions of ethnicity in SF because the experience of space travel is an experience of displacement. There are no borders in space; rather, the characters in “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* must cope with being relocated over vast distances. Although there are instances where characters are confined to a planet or to a certain area, there are not the permeable borders discussed in most criticisms of border culture. James Clifford notes that this distance and lack of movement is a major difference between borderlands and diaspora theories:

. . . borderlands are distinct in that they presuppose a territory defined by a geopolitical line: two sides arbitrarily separated and policed, but also joined by legal and illegal practices of crossing and communication. Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population. (246, ellipsis added)

Border cultures are defined by a specific geographical space; a place of contact and influence that both separates the two cultures and causes them to interact in close proximity. Border theorists define border cultures in terms of a specific location, whether it is Gloria Anzaldúa's discussion of the U.S./Mexico border in *Borderlands/La Frontera* or Mary Louise Pratt's broader discussion of "contact zones" defined as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (4). Conversely, diasporas are defined by a larger distance from a homeland and the inability to return, whether temporarily or permanently. They are also differentiated from immigrant cultures by a lack of assimilation; while immigrants might be assimilated into a host culture over a period of decades, diasporic peoples never fully integrate into their host environment. I argue that the distance between planets, or between Earth and the moon, should be considered a larger physical space. If transnational cultures, separated by an ocean, are considered diasporic, certainly groups of peoples separated by vast stretches of space are a representation of diaspora at its extreme. The situations of displacement and lack of assimilation in "Refugees" and *Lunar Braceros* are prime examples of how ethnic SF texts can be used to depict the conditions of diasporic peoples.

Although no one would argue that indigenous and migrant cultures are exactly the same, it is important to note the similarities between these cultures in order to recognize the continuing effects of colonialism and diaspora on present-day ethnic groups and the global economy.

Bhabha notes that Postcolonial studies works to remind society of the effects of colonialism and give voice to peoples whose cultures have been unfairly defined as less advanced:

Postcoloniality, for its part, is a salutary reminder of the persistent "neocolonial" relations within the "new" world order and the multinational division of labour. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance. Beyond this, however, postcolonial critique bears witness to those countries and communities . . . constituted, if I may coin a phrase, "otherwise than modernity". Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-*

modernity may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to “translate”, and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity. (9)

Bhabha’s argument about “contra-modern” countries and communities demonstrates a key assumption about modernity that postcolonial writings work to counteract. Often, technology is linked to cultural views about civilization; cultures which have access to and use technology are viewed as civilized, while those who do not are labeled as less modern. Bhabha notes that postcolonial criticisms and writings work to challenge assumptions about modernity. “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* are two SFF texts which represent a postcolonial view of modernity; both texts challenge assumptions about modernity by drawing connections between indigenous and migrant cultures to demonstrate how both cultures resist present-day assumptions about the superiority of “modern” cultures. One of the most useful aspects of SFF is its ability to allow authors to posit alternate futures and question the future costs of present-day technological “advances” and the suppression of alternate world views. The landscapes of “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* have access to technology, yet each text contains a group that either resists or refuses to be defined by technology. While there are other SFF texts which question the costs of technology, Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita’s texts also highlight indigenous/diasporic communities to challenge cultural assumptions about groups not typically viewed as modern or technologically advanced. “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* prove that SFF writing is one way ethnic American authors can enter the conversation about U.S. cultural assumptions and policies currently affecting indigenous and migrant groups.

The Final Frontier

In his introduction to *Space and Beyond: The Frontier Theme in Science Fiction*, Gary Westfahl explains that the 1940s and 50s marked the end of the American frontier. With no more

uncharted territory within the U.S. to map, and many foreign countries “in no mood to play host to adventurous Americans” (2), stories of the American frontier became nostalgic markers of a bygone era. Westfahl notes that the Russian and American launches of orbital satellites revitalized American interest in exploration:

If Earth no longer offered frontiers to inspire and strengthen Americans, space might provide those frontiers. America could once again send people into unknown territory—first as pioneers, like Lewis and Clark, and later as settlers, ready to establish new homes and exploit new resources. The characteristic American saga of exploration, expansion, and renewal could resume, this time in a new and virtually limitless arena. (2)

The idea that humans would dominate and conquer space travel, possibly meeting other intelligent alien species, created a boom in SFF writings about space travel. However, the fact that there have been no large-scale discoveries of life on other planets or mass migrations of peoples to other worlds since the beginning of space exploration means that many SFF writers are beginning to question whether space really is “the final frontier.”

Westfahl goes on to argue that a re-examination of frontier rhetoric has also caused SFF authors to rethink stories of exploration and colonization: “As we now realize, the American conquest of the frontier looks like quite a different story from the viewpoint of Native Americans, and rhapsodizing about the salutary effects of civilizing unknown territories becomes not only politically incorrect, but frankly risible” (3). This shift in views about colonization has caused SFF authors and critics to revisit the history of colonial SFF writing and to question how to write stories of exploration and first contact without perpetuating colonial stereotypes. Nalo Hopkinson connects the history of SFF stories of colonization to the difficulty ethnic SFF authors often face when trying to represent their cultural history or experiences in SFF writings:

Arguably, one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives, and as I’ve said elsewhere, for many of us, that’s not a thrilling adventure story; it’s non-fiction, and we are on the

wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere. To be a person of colour writing science fiction is to be under suspicion of having internalized one's colonization. (7)

Rather than depicting space travel as idealized and alien species as curiosities, some ethnic SF authors explore how to utilize the SFF genre to depict alternate views of colonization.

Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita understand the consequences of past U.S. explorations on the indigenous populations of the U.S. and Mexico; therefore, each author represents the negative effects of migration and colonization on both the mainstream and indigenous populations in their texts.

Rather than using the theme of space exploration as positive—humans bravely exploring space and “discovering” alien species—“Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* represent space travel as harsh and human beings as unsuited to their new environments. Amberstone depicts her “refugees” as humans forcibly removed from Earth and “settled” on the planet Tallav’Wahir, a planet already occupied by previously displaced indigenous humans. Both groups of humans were relocated by a race of aliens known as the Benefactors, a lizard-like species who state that they saved the humans from their dying planet. The narrator of “Refugees,” Qwalshina, cannot understand why the new humans refuse to adapt to life on Tallav’Wahir and why they continue to question the motives of the Benefactors. The refugees’ inability to accept their new home eventually results in several deaths when some of the refugees try to escape. “Refugees” demonstrates two views of displacement: the humans who refuse to accept the new environment as home, and those who attempt to adapt by rebuilding their culture in a new environment.

Amberstone makes it clear, however, that adaptation does not come easy; the “native” population of Tallav’Wahir is not perfectly attuned to their environment and experiences hardship as a result. One of Qwalshina’s first comments in the text is about her blood being an

“alien color on this world” (161). Shortly after, she explains that her people need the new refugees to replenish their gene pool: “Tallav’Wahir is kind, but there is something in this adoptive environment that is hard on us too. We aren’t a perfect match for our new home, but the Benefactors have great hopes for us” (163). Amberstone’s alien planet is not simply a different environment that humans need to adjust to; it is a harsh, alien environment that is having a negative effect on the humans that are currently residing there. Qwalshina and her people continue to try to adapt to the planet Tallav’Wahir throughout the story, symbolized by Qwalshina’s blood offerings to the planet. However, Amberstone suggests at the end of the story that adaptation will have great costs and may even be impossible. Amberstone links the concept of adaptation and survival to comment on “First World” peoples’ inability to accept alternate cultural views. Although they may not be successful, the fact that Qwalshina and her community, former indigenous-race Earth peoples, continue to try to adapt to their new planet demonstrates a stronger sense of survival, an ability learned as a result of their experiences with colonization. Amberstone’s description also destabilizes the stereotype that all indigenous peoples are perfectly attuned to their environment.

Like Amberstone, Sánchez/Pita depict the challenges of survival and adapting to new environments. *Lunar Braceros* describes the moon as a harsh environment, far from the depictions of the Apollo 11 mission as a brave conquering of the lunar surface. The braceros, a title stemming from the informally named bracero program of Mexican migrant workers in the U.S. during and after World War II,⁴⁶ consist of people unable to find work in a dystopic future

⁴⁶ The reference to braceros specifically refers to the working conditions of contracted (and later, illegal) Mexican workers between 1942-1964. The braceros program began with a series of agreements between the U.S. and Mexico that allowed workers to be contracted out and hired by U.S. planters in need of manual labor during WWII. Mexican workers had come across the border to help U.S. farmers during WWI, and the Mexican workers brought to the U.S. during WWII were depicted as helping the war effort through their support of U.S. agriculture. During the early braceros programs, the braceros made up only 5-10 percent of agricultural labor, much less than contemporary

where corporations control most of the world's resources. People who cannot find work are forced to live on reservations and work for free, creating a cycle of poverty that is impossible to escape. The braceros consist of mostly ethnic and poor white people looking to avoid the reservations or jail; instead, they choose to become contract workers for corporations that are dumping nuclear waste on the moon or mining for moon minerals. In return, the corporations promise to deposit salaries that the braceros can access when they return to Earth, which would allow the lunar braceros to escape their current economic situations. Many braceros dream of using the money to improve their economic situations or to help family members escape the reservations, similar to the way that twentieth century braceros agreed to come to the U.S. to better the economic situations of their families in Mexico.

Those braceros contracted to work on the moon must endure extreme temperatures and long workdays. Several braceros describe the work as dangerous and highly physical. The moon's fourteen hour days and harsh weather conditions mean that the braceros must work when the conditions allow and live in underground bunkers for long periods of time (Sánchez/Pita 43). The braceros are also monitored by audio and video equipment at all times, making the moon environment akin to the reservations most of them were trying to avoid. Once the braceros discover that the corporations are planning to kill them at the end of their contracted work period to avoid transportation and salary costs, the moon environment becomes a prison and some of the braceros become mentally compromised. Sánchez/Pita link the situation of the moon braceros to the condition of twentieth century migrant workers in order to demonstrate how physically and

undocumented workers in the U.S. today. Eventually, the braceros program lost traction when former braceros, who knew how to find work in the U.S., came across unofficially (encouraged by U.S. farmers, who wanted to hire them without the hassle of federal paperwork). Deteriorating economic conditions in Mexico encouraged more workers to migrate, despite strengthened border patrols and regulations in the U.S. and Mexico. In 1954 alone, one million undocumented workers crossed into the U.S., leading to U.S. roundups. For more information about the Mexican braceros of the twentieth century, see Deborah Coen's *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (2013).

psychologically scarring it can be to come into a harsh, restrictive environment not by choice, but by economic need. Sánchez/Pita's decision to use the word "braceros" to describe the contracted moon workers thus links the situation of the lunar braceros to a history of exploited U.S. labor and, as described by Lysa Rivera, "US consumerism's demand for invisible—and therefore easily disposable—forms of intense physical labor" (426). The braceros must fight to expose the plans of the corporations, which have been previously successful because of the nature of bracero labor—peoples who are contracted to work under the radar of the law and therefore have no voice or rights.

One of the reasons that adaptation in "Refugees" and *Lunar Braceros* is so difficult is because of a refusal by the dominant culture in each text to adapt their social views to new environments. In both texts, humans are transplanted to new environments, yet very few humans are willing to give up cultural assumptions or appreciate other cultures' values. Helen Addison-Smith argues that biological and social changes are linked in the process of adaptation:

Taking as its cues scientific discourses such as those of evolution, anthropology, and biological determinism, adaptation to a particular environment is often constructed as a principle determinant of an extraterrestrial's biology and his/her/its socio-cultural formations. . . . It could be expected therefore that a dramatic change in a human's biology to suit a particular environment would also lead to a similar degree of change in their socio-cultural reality. (18, ellipsis added)

Addison-Smith argues that any change in environment must come with a change in social/cultural views; otherwise, humans may not be able to adapt successfully to the new environment. Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita each imagine space travel and life off-world as harsh, hostile environments that have negative physical and psychological effects on humans. Both texts also link the harsh physical environments to social issues that restrict the relocated humans from adapting to their new environments, suggesting that social issues are the biggest

hindrance to adaptation. Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita suggest that when human beings bring the race, class, and political issues of their former environments into a new environment, whether it be another country or another planet, there is little chance for successful integration or adaptation to new environments.

Cultural Manipulation and Colonial Economies

Colonization can be viewed as the opposite of adaptation; one culture, asserting its superiority, invades another people's territory and proceeds to enforce their political and cultural views. Often, the motivations for colonization are linked to economic gain. In "The Great Confinement," Foucault notes that in the seventeenth century, confinement became linked to economics; a confined people could be used as a cheap labor force in times of economic instability. Confinement was also used as a social tool to prevent uprisings of lower-class citizens (131-32). Foucault's point about class structures also applies to colonized peoples; by confining people to a controlled area, a conquered people can be manipulated into working for low wages, or even for free as slaves.

Two of the largest instances of U.S. colonization are indigenous removal practices and the acquisition of Mexican lands after the U.S./Mexican War. In both cases, the U.S. government actively worked to remove native populations from specific regions and, in the case of indigenous peoples, to relocate these peoples to smaller, specifically allocated lands. There were even many similarities in the language and enforcement of indigenous and Mexican land treaties:

In both cases, the territorial acquisitions were sealed by solemn and idealistic treaties that belied the harsh realities of conquest. In exchange for the transfer of land and sovereignty by Mexico, the United States promised in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago that it would 'inviolably respect' the established private property rights of Mexican citizens in the conquered territory and provide them with 'guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to the United States.' Indian tribes, in turn, relinquished large tracts of lands in exchange for financial

compensation and treaty guarantees that smaller ‘reservations’ of land would be maintained as homelands for the tribes. (Klein 202)

Indigenous and Mexican peoples each endured the consequences of broken treaty promises, which were often justified by U.S. officials through the use of racist ideologies. President Andrew Johnson commented in an address to Congress that the Indian Removal Act “[would] place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters” (qtd. in Ferraro). Christine A. Klein also notes in “Treaties of Conquest: Property Rights, Indian Treaties, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago” that Mexicans living in the newly ceded lands were also subjected to racial prejudice, often depicted as foreigners monopolizing U.S. resources: “While they were awaiting American citizenship, former Mexican citizens’ rights and property were insecure and subject to discriminatory attack. During the California gold rush of the mid nineteenth century, for example, the fear that ‘foreigners’—many of whom were native to California—would monopolize gold profits prompted violence, harassment, and vigilantism against those of Mexican descent” (215-16). Anti-Mexican sentiment and differing cultural views of land ownership resulted in many Mexican land claims being denied in U.S. courts.⁴⁷ The colonialist assumption that the U.S. had a right to lands around and west of the Mississippi, referred to as Manifest Destiny, has affected indigenous and Chicano peoples economically and culturally from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Indigenous and Mexican peoples have also experienced cultural manipulation, or instances in which the U.S. has worked actively to change aspects of their cultures. U.S. colonist assumptions that indigenous peoples did not have concepts of land ownership, property rights, and trade agreements led to the stereotype of indigenous peoples as “savage” or “simple.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ For more information, see Paul W. Gates’s “Adjudication of Spanish-Mexican Land Claims in California” (1958).

⁴⁸ Robert J. Miller presents an extensive argument about the complexity of indigenous cultural practices in *Reservation ‘Capitalism’: Economic Development in Indian Country* (2012).

Indigenous peoples were subjected to forced assimilationist practices, such as conversion to Christianity and the Indian Boarding School movement (1880-1920). Such movements were devastating to indigenous culture; indigenous children were often separated from their parents and prevented from speaking their native language in an attempt to assimilate them into U.S. culture quickly. Although Mexicans also experienced U.S. colonization, the assimilation of Mexicans living in ceded Mexican lands was more complex. Some upper-class Mexicans embraced the change in government and even encouraged intermarriage, believing that creating strong ties with prominent U.S. citizens would allow them to ensure the safety of their land claims. Manuel G. Gonzalez notes that upper-class Mexican racial prejudices against lower-class mestizos caused some Mexicans to look at intermarriage with Anglos as a positive “whitening” of their culture (91). However, most Mexicans living in ceded lands ultimately lost their land claims; some even went to the extreme of becoming bandits in retaliation for their harsh treatment by U.S. Anglos. Although Mexicans have their own vexed history of indigenous colonization,⁴⁹ Mexicans living in what is now the Southwest U.S. found themselves in a similar situation as indigenous peoples, fighting for their legal rights and trying to find a way to come to terms with U.S. colonization.

Lunar Braceros and “Refugees” both depict the consequences of U.S. colonialist practices on migrant and indigenous peoples, particularly the effects on freedom of movement and land ownership. In *Lunar Braceros*, Sánchez/Pita create situations in which people are confined to specific areas and manipulated. The first is the government-regulated reservations. The confinement of the reservation workers in *Lunar Braceros* occurs because of high unemployment rates; workers unable to find a job to support themselves are forced to live on

⁴⁹ See the chapter “Spaniards and Native Americans Prehistory—1521” in Gonzalez’s *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (2009).

reservations and work for low wages, allowing the government to limit the rights of lower class peoples while creating a cheap labor force. The government controls all aspects of reservation life. Reservation workers are monitored at all times and are never allowed to leave the reservations; workers who do not follow the rules are severely disciplined. Lydia, the narrator, describes to her son how one man was punished physically and mentally for trying to escape: “One man was locked up within a cell for a whole year; he was fed and allowed to clean himself, but no one talked to him and he lived in isolation; when he got out he had gone crazy. Isolation can kill you; we are social animals and need to interact with others; if that is taken, we are no longer human” (51). The dehumanizing aspect of the man’s punishment is similar to treatment of colonized peoples or slaves in the U.S. The government keeps control of the Reservation population by restricting their environment; although the reservation workers outnumber the government-paid guards, the fear of death or punishment becomes enough to control an entire population.⁵⁰

The Reservations described in *Lunar Braceros* are a purposeful combination of Native American reservation and Southern plantation, and Sánchez/Pita link the dehumanizing aspects of colonization to the theme of non-human species available in SFF. When describing the reservations, Lydia explains that “the state created internal colonial sites, the Reservations. We became a controlled laboratory labor force, like lab rats, a disciplinary society that was useful to the state” (14). The comparison of the reservation workers to lab rats highlights the dehumanization of colonization and confinement. Because the reservation workers are confined, they can be manipulated into working for the state in exchange for life and a small amount of resources. Lysa Rivera notes the figure of the colonized subject is similar to that of the cyborg,

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault goes into an extensive reading of the connection between different means of discipline and their economic efficiency in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (1977). He notes that confinement is crucial to discipline because it allows for more efficient control of a population with the least amount of manpower.

“one whose labor is extracted by US capitalism at the expense of [their] very humanity” (421).

The Reservation workers are forced to question their humanity when deprived of choice, a theme that reoccurs throughout *Lunar Braceros*. Lydia’s discussion of isolation as dehumanizing is also a reference to U.S. slavery and the history of using eugenics as a way to justify slavery.

In “Refugees,” the native people of Tallav’Wahir and the new refugees brought from Earth are both confined by the Benefactors, who control all means of space travel. When the refugees ask to leave they are told they cannot because Earth is uninhabitable. When some of the refugees ask to travel to Earth to see the destruction, they are denied. Convinced that they are being lied to, some of the refugees try to force their way onto a Benefactor ship. The ship, however, turns out to be a sentient being that kills the intruders. The fact that the Benefactors control all means of space travel and refuse to share them with the humans creates a situation where human beings are being held against their will. While the benefactors claim to have the humans’ best interests in mind, the fact that they do not let the humans have agency creates an unequal colonizer/colonized relationship.

Beyond economic exploitation through goods and trade, colonization also involves economic exploitations of the body—either by moving or confining bodies for labor or by manipulating bodies for economic gain. James T. Clifford notes that early anthropologists described the field as a “laboratory...a place of controlled observation and experiment” (99). Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues in “Science Fiction and Empire” that colonization resulted in “free zones, where new techniques and instruments could be tried out by companies and bureaucracies far from the constraints of conservative national populations” (233). By confining and controlling the living situations of peoples, the governing forces of both texts are able to create what Foucault terms “docile bodies” or bodies “that may be subjected, used, transformed,

and improved” (180). The humans in “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* find that their bodies are not under their control; they can be genetically manipulated, “enhanced” with implants, moved, and confined without their consent.

The Benefactors manipulate the humans on Tallav’Wahir, who are not in control of their bodies. When it is obvious that the relocated peoples are negatively affected by the alien environment, evidenced by a series of stillborn births, the Benefactors bring in new humans to help “reseed” the population. The Benefactors claim that they are helping the humans, but the importing of new genetic material also allows them to repopulate the planet with new genetic material. The Benefactors also implant communications technology to allow the different groups of humans to be able to communicate with each other and the Benefactors. The implants represent a physical manipulation of the refugee’s bodies, enacted without consent, akin to human sterilization programs in territories such as Puerto Rico.⁵¹ The fact that the implants are designed to enhance communication creates an ironic situation; the violation of the body that the refugees’ experience allows the new refugees to communicate with each other, which results in their attempting to escape the planet. Although the Benefactor’s motives are not clear, the implants represent a violation of the refugees’ bodies justified by the Benefactor’s belief in their superiority as a species. In “Refugees,” the Benefactors serve as a metaphor for the history of inhumane colonial practices.

Lunar Braceros includes several instances where peoples have their bodies manipulated for profit. The braceros are implanted with monitors and a com system, an extreme form of surveillance that they can only disconnect for a few minutes at a time. After Lydia and Frank discover the bodies of the former bracero team, believed to be back on Earth, stuffed into waste

⁵¹ In the early twentieth century, sterilization was made free and legal in Puerto Rico while other birth control options were restricted. Betsy Hartmann notes in *Sterilization and Abortion* that by 1968, one-third of women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico had been sterilized.

containers on the moon, they both see a mirage of Frank's dead brother while driving on the moon's surface. When Lydia discovers that the mirage is being transmitted by the com system, she realizes that the technology the braceros are implanted with can also be used to manipulate their bodies. She tells Frank "Someone's messing with our minds" (67), indicating that their bosses are using the implant technology as a form of psychological control or manipulation. Part of the braceros' plan to escape the moon involves being able to circumvent the surveillance technology designed to monitor them at all times. The braceros eventually discover that implant technology is also being used to maintain social order on the moon. After they overpower the supervisor who has been monitoring them, he suffers from a seizure caused by an implant in his head. The supervisor admits that he is being coerced into helping the corporation monitor and dispose of the braceros, but also notes that he has come to enjoy his small amount of control, even though he will never be allowed to leave the moon. The social order of the moon mirrors that of a territory or colony, with the social order of an absent corporation being enforced by lower-level bureaucrats who are themselves coerced into compliance.

The most extreme example of cultural manipulation in *Lunar Braceros* is the corporations' harvesting of organs from a Brazilian indigenous culture. Before she is recruited to work on the moon, Lydia discovers that her partner, Gabriel, has been murdered by representatives of the corporation he was working for. Gabriel, a scientist, discovers that the project he joined in Brazil to create synthetic tissue is actually harvesting the organs of the local indigenous population. He meets with the villagers to warn them but is later captured, interrogated, tortured, and ultimately killed. Gabriel is killed because he interferes with the corporation's ability to manipulate the indigenous population for profit. The indigenous peoples are recruited under false pretenses of aid for their communities; they have no knowledge of the

organ harvesting. After Gabriel meets with an indigenous leader to expose the tactics of the corporation, the tribal leaders refuse to participate in the study any longer and retrieve their damaged people from the lab. Sánchez/Pita's example, while extreme, is not far from the U.S. funded experiments on African Americans in Tuskegee, Alabama in the 1930s or in Guatemala in the 1940s. From 1932-1972, 399 African American tenant farmers were purposely left untreated for syphilis; the survivors were paid 37,500 dollars and health benefits ("Justice" 287). In the 1940s, more than 1300 Guatemalans were intentionally exposed to syphilis, gonorrhea, and chancroid without their consent. While U.S. officials condemned the experiments, no reparations were ever made to the survivors. The fact that no U.S. politician or corporation official in these two circumstances was subject to criminal charges demonstrates how little attention is paid when the U.S. government or a corporation manipulates and kills ethnic peoples. *Lunar Braceros* uses a dystopic SFF setting to expose the ways governments and corporations manipulate cultures through lack of access to knowledge and promises of resources.

Although the indigenous communities of both texts have found ways to protect their cultural values by isolating their communities from the dominant culture, this isolation also restricts indigenous economic conditions. At certain points, the indigenous communities are forced to negotiate with outside communities and confront exploitative economic structures. The Chinganaza people work communal land and sell crafts and surplus food to obtain other necessities, such as electricity to power computers and satellite receivers. The people of Tallav'Wahir also produce crafts to be sold to the Benefactors. Grace L. Dillon notes, "the products of Qwalshina's master weaving recall reservation economics. Like Navajo blankets and other Native curiosities that fetch a profit, Tallav'Wahir commodities reflect the tourist gaze upon the postcolonial exotic" (234). Qwalshina's statement that "Some of the benefactors pay

high prices for our artwork on their Homeland” does not explain whether the people of Tallav’Wahir are allowed to participate in trade or economic decisions (168). Robert J. Miller argues that indigenous peoples have engaged in trade successfully for centuries, either by producing surplus agricultural items and bartering with other tribes or by working to produce objects of value to sell. However, he notes that one result of colonization is a loss of freedom to set value to items of trade; consequently, Native American groups were often severely underpaid for goods. One example is the Navajo Nation in 1981 being paid \$0.15-0.38 cents a ton for coal, while the average American supplier was paid \$70 a ton (38). Losing the ability to control trade and set prices usually creates what economists term an economic dependency, defined as “a particular condition that peripheral areas, primarily Third World countries, suffer when they engage in international trade and become nearly subservient to the stronger economic areas and remain underdeveloped and impoverished” (28). There is no indication in “Refugees” that the peoples of Tallav’Wahir are receiving compensation for their goods (at least not the “high prices” Qwalshina describes). Qwalshina’s depictions of her weaving describe it as more of a hobby, which she is honored to have valued by the Benefactors. The Benefactors are also the only trade partners for the people of Tallav’Wahir, meaning that even if Qwalshina was paid for her goods, she would not have the power to set her own prices. The economy of Tallav’Wahir is based on economic dependency; Qwalshina and her people are completely dependent on the Benefactors for trade and resources.

The economic situations of the reservation workers and the indigenous peoples in *Lunar Braceros* are also based on economic dependency. Because the reservation workers are literally trapped in a space controlled by the government, they experience what economists define as “leakage” or “a situation where money leaks away from the local economy of a town, city, or

state sooner than expected and sooner than is optimal” (Miller 4). Miller explains that leakage occurs when a local economy is unable or not allowed to function properly:

Ideally . . . money should circulate in the local economy where it was received or earned five to seven times before it spins out of that community. Leakage usually occurs because consumers cannot buy the goods and services they desire in local areas. (4, ellipsis added)

Because the reservation workers can only purchase goods available on the reservation, their lives are marked by an extreme and total economic dependency. In *Lunar Braceros*, Lydia describes a situation in her childhood where she takes her little sister to the reservation mall to buy a movie. She notes that there is no money on the reservation; everything the reservation workers or their children purchase is on credit and is automatically deducted from their wages. Because the government controls both the price of goods and the salaries of the workers, the workers end up owing more money than they can earn. Lydia describes some of the families as unable to support themselves when there are multiple children and only one parent working. Children in these families are forced into work at young ages to help support the rest of the family. Such a situation mimics the living conditions on present day Native American reservations, which are plagued by much higher unemployment rates than the national average—the average being around 50 percent, as opposed to the 9-10 percent US average (Miller 2). Many present day Native Americans are not able to afford basic living standards (phone, electricity, running water) because of their inability to find work and pay the high reservation prices. Sánchez/Pita’s depictions take reservation economics to its extreme, yet the situation they describe is not that far from the situations of present-day reservations in the U.S.

The indigenous community in *Lunar Braceros* attempt to circumvent the crippling economic dependency created by the Cali-Texas government and corporations by forming small trade groups and only purchasing specific goods from outside the local community. Like early

American indigenous groups, they own and work communal land, and yet reserve the right to own property and manage their economic needs. A common misconception of early European settlers in the Americas is that indigenous groups were nomadic and had no concepts of land ownership and trade, when indigenous groups had, in fact, owned land and created sophisticated trade networks that spanned North America (Miller 22). Indigenous peoples bartered excess goods or manufactured goods to trade, such as clothing and blankets. The indigenous groups of *Lunar Braceros* are able to resist total economic dependency by forming trade networks similar to those of early indigenous peoples, yet they are still isolated from the main U.S. economy.

Indigenous and migrant contributions to the U.S. economy have been largely ignored, mostly due to cultural stereotypes about indigenous and migrant peoples being opposed to capitalist or modern ideologies (Alexandra Harmon et al. 701). Indigenous groups are often depicted as not valuing trade, while migrant contributions to the U.S. economy are downplayed by a culture that undervalues “disposable” labor. *Lunar Braceros* and “Refugees” both demonstrate the consequences of colonial assumptions about indigenous and migrant peoples; both groups have been forced into economic dependency, perpetuating contemporary stereotypes about ethnic groups taking undeserved resources from the U.S. government. Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita’s texts use the landscapes of the moon and other worlds to draw attention to the economic disparities which continue to affect indigenous and migrant peoples in the U.S. Instead of characterizing indigenous and migrant peoples as victims, both groups are moved to an alternate environment that highlights their resourcefulness and ability to survive.

Indigenous “Homes”

The colonization of the Americas is often linked to the cultural appropriation of indigenous life. Helen Addison-Smith argues that early U.S. colonists adapted aspects of indigenous culture to differentiate themselves from their European ancestry:

. . . not only were Native Americans’ lands and resources colonized, their identity was adopted and transformed in order to be strategically utilized by colonists to strengthen their claims to be ‘native’ Americans. The formation of a uniquely North American identity can thus be understood as an adaptation of European identity through the absorption of ‘Indian’ identities: a new ‘adapted’ identity was created specifically to fit this new nation. (18, ellipsis added)

By appropriating indigenous cultural stories into the literature and political rhetoric of the early American nation, Americans were able to create a new national history that allowed the nation to distance itself from its European forefathers. The result was the figure of the “vanishing Indian” portrayed in many popular U.S. texts, such as James Fennimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*. In order for the U.S. to move on and become a “modern” nation, the indigenous population needed to be absorbed, and the atrocities committed during the colonization of the Americas needed to be suppressed. Americans could admire the indigenous population’s “primitive” way of life while writing a new American history of progress through expansion and the taming of the American frontier.

Early SFF texts reflected the cultural views of their times by creating scenarios where white colonizers encountered “primitive” alien species, in effect turning indigenous peoples into aliens. Brian Attebery notes that early SFF sought to erase the presence of indigenous peoples and ease the anxieties about encountering alien others:

Troublesome natives could also be eradicated from Earth by transforming them into aliens. When American writers such as Edgar Rice Burroughs sent their heroes to other planets, the beings they encountered on those worlds were frequently Native American in disguise—or, more precisely, reworkings of Cooper’s Indians. (390)

Such a depiction of alien life creates a situation where othered peoples become doubly othered; not only are indigenous or ethnic peoples not present in SFF depictions of future humans, they also recognize themselves as othered in the depictions of primitive alien life. Indigenous and ethnic cultures are thus both erased and manipulated, their cultures used by SFF authors as a convenient way to create exotic, alien cultures to be viewed by their audiences.

Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita respond to previous depictions of indigenous peoples in SFF texts by specifically elevating indigenous life and cultural values in their texts. Both texts compare the resilience of indigenous cultures to the destructive tendencies of “modern” life. Such a portrayal exposes a societal rationale that Charles Taylor terms “the primary of instrumental reason,” defined as the modern rationality of finding “the most economical application of means to a given end” (5). Taylor argues that such a viewpoint creates a situation where all people in a given culture could potentially be judged by their earning potential, leading to justifications of uneven wealth distributions (5). Such a viewpoint also leaves out necessary societal expenditures that may not create profit, such as environmental policies. The idea that making decisions based solely on economic gain creates negative consequences appears in both “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros*. Each text uses the idea of indigenous cultures’ respect for their environment as a way to critique modern culture and demonstrate the advantages of an indigenous lifestyle. The indigenous peoples in both novels survive, in part, because of a respect for the lands they inhabit.

One example is the conflict in “Refugees” between Qwalshina and Sleek, one of the newly arrived humans, which becomes a metaphor for the conflict between indigenous and modern lifestyles. Sleek is not impressed with the way Qwalshina and her people live, calling them “ignorant savages” and implying that they are forced to live in poverty while the

Benefactors explore the galaxy with their advanced technologies. Qwalshina explains to Sleek that her people are not being forced to live an indigenous lifestyle:

“We know about the high technologies,” I told her quietly. “We use what you would call computers, air cars, and other technical things too. But to help you make the repatterning, we decided that a simple lifestyle would be best for all of us for a time. There is no shame in living close to the land in a simple way, daughter.” (165)

Qwalshina’s words imply that the humans living on Tallav’Wahir are able to choose which technologies they wish to use, but that, ultimately, living in harmony with the land is necessary. The Benefactors state that they had to relocate Sleek and the other refugees because Earth was destroyed. Qwalshina implies that this destruction was caused by the bad choices of the humans living on Earth and describes the planet as “a fiery cloud of poisons, a blackened cinder” (162). Immediately after her comment about living with the land, Qwalshina chides Sleek for her disdain: “Our Benefactors teach us that technology must never interfere with our communion with the Mother, lest we forget the Covenant, grow too greedy, and destroy our new home” (165). The implication is that humans must learn to live in harmony with the land in order to avoid the disaster that happened on Earth. The destruction of Earth paints modern humanity as greedy and selfish, with no consideration for the consequences of their actions. Qwalshina’s words describe the Benefactors as teachers and the people of Tallav’Wahir as superior because of their mindfulness and relationship to their environment.

The indigenous population of South American that Lydia and several of the other braceros escape to after leaving the moon is also depicted as superior to the rest of Earth, which has been ravaged by the pollution and wastefulness of the corporations and modern life. Lydia describes their home, Chinganaza, as a space defined by centuries of survival:

What we have in Chinganaza, Pedro, was won over many years. . . . It was the growth of the indigenous movement throughout the 21st century that allowed the

Amazonian populations to limit the incursions planned by transnational mining, oil, and natural gas enterprises and kept them from destroying all the biodiversity of the area and from displacing thousand of indigenous villagers. This movement is what enabled the general autonomy of Chinganaza and its maintaining certain traditions . . . while the other indigenous cantones took the road of so-called modernization. (21, ellipsis added)

Lydia's explanation of Chinganaza's survival links it to maintaining an indigenous lifestyle by avoiding the incursions of modern corporations and their pollutants. Like the people of Tallav'Wahir, the Chinganazans use some technology, such as computers and other communication devices, to keep in contact with other communities and the outside world; however, their first concern is maintaining the land by growing their own crops and avoiding technologies that will pollute and destroy the land. The mindfulness that constitutes many indigenous cultures is what ultimately allows them to survive.

Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita's texts both stress the superiority of an indigenous lifestyle over "advanced" modern societies in order to reverse cultural stereotypes of indigenous cultures. Both texts call attention to the ways indigenous cultures link their individual identities to a sense of respect for their environment and community, allowing for a greater possibility for adaptation to new environments:

Aboriginal notions of personhood root identity in a person's connections to the land and environment. . . . Thinking about the person as fundamentally connected to the environment dissolves the opposition between nature and culture. The human predicament then becomes one of working with powerful forces both within and outside the individual. Approached with respect, the natural environment provides not only sustenance but also sources of soothing, emotion regulation, guidance, and healing. (Kirmayer 88-89, ellipsis added)

The ability of certain indigenous cultures to respect new environments and utilize the land as a way of connecting members of a community is one reason why the indigenous populations of *Lunar Braceros* and "Refugees" are able to adapt more easily to new environments while maintaining their cultural values.

Interplanetary Diaspora

In “The Future of Race: Colonialism, Adaptation and Hybridity in Mid-Century American Science Fiction,” Addison-Smith notes that members of diasporic communities represent hybrid identities: “The diasporic subject’s sense of homeland is displaced, attached to a place to which one feels a sense of belonging, but where one does not live—it becomes a part of one’s identity rather than an actual place. Diasporas create hybrid subjects, people who combine cultures and ‘ethnicities’ to create new identities” (27). A member of a diasporic community must decide how much of a connection to their homeland to maintain while trying to adjust to living in a foreign environment. The struggle to maintain two identifications can leave diasporic subjects with multiple or conflicting identifications. Addison-Smith argues that such diasporic confusion becomes multiplied in SFF texts; humans colonizing other worlds become hybrids, allowing authors to question the fundamental nature of humanity (27). In “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros*, Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita relocate diasporic communities to other planets to complicate essentialized views of civilization and humanity. Both texts represent alternate views of humanity, forcing readers to question what it means to be human away from Earth. In “Refugees,” the humans struggle to maintain a connection to both their culture and humanity, while in *Lunar Braceros*, the resistance movement must decide how to enact social change in order to rebuild lost cultural connections. The characters’ struggle to maintain their humanity mimics the identification difficulties of present-day diasporic peoples.

The braceros and the population of Tallav’Wahir are displaced peoples who are trying to cope with a loss of their former homes and preserve aspects of their cultural identity in the face of large-scale shifts in humanity. In Amberstone’s text, the new human refugees are unable to accept the loss of Earth; this refusal causes the narrator, Qwalshina, to examine her acceptance of

the Benefactor's choices. The Benefactors instruct the people of Tallav'Wahir to take the refugees' Earth belongings, in order to prepare them for their new lives. However, Qwalshina begins to question this decision when she finds one of the refugees grieving over the loss of his wedding ring: "I went back to bed with a troubled heart. The little ring was such a small memento. Did we do right to make them give up everything? Our Benefactors advised it, but..." (167). The arrival of the refugees begins to break down Qwalshina's belief in her assimilated way of living and thinking; however, she continues to uphold her belief in Tallav'Wahir and the Benefactors. When approached by one of the refugees who has heard a rumor about Earth not being destroyed, Qwalshina assures him that the rumor is not true, stating, "There are others from Earth Mother here too, rescued from the disaster as you were. Our Benefactors only wish good for us. And, no matter our origin on Earth, we are all one people now, the children of Tallav'Wahir" (171). Eventually, the refugees' grief over the loss of their home allows her to question whether Tallav'Wahir was ever her home and if the Benefactors have been telling the truth about saving them out of compassion. Qwalshina becomes angry at the refugees for causing her to question her existence: "This new emotion I feel frightens me. What if we are living a lie—what if the people from Earth are right? I hate them!" (178). The refugees' connection to their home creates an inability for them to assimilate to their new environment and causes Qwalshina to compare the refugees connection to their former home with her forced connection to Tallav'Wahir. The reality is that Qwalshina also feels a loss of connection to her "home," her roots on Earth, and is thus unable to fully connect to her new home. Amberstone employs an alien environment to represent the grief of diasporic peoples who are forced to relocate. The Benefactors become a metaphor for colonial or governmental powers keeping diasporic groups from returning to their homes. However, the death of the refugees also represents Amberstone's

warning that holding on to an essentialized view of ethnic identity can have equally negative consequences.

In *Lunar Braceros*, the braceros' connection to their lost former lifestyle and culture is used as a lifeline for their fight against injustice. Even when Lydia is placed in jail for protesting the reservations, she continues to work to expose the government's "revising historical accounts not favorable to the Cali-Texas government," demonstrating her commitment to social justice (38). She and her fellow protesters, who are still fighting by the end of the novel, are not simply protesting injustice; they are protesting the erasure of their cultural history and experience. Lydia tells the story to her son Pedro in the hopes that "one day what was being purged could be accessed and restored" (39), suggesting a desire to rebuild lost cultural connections. The braceros and reservation inhabitants are not trying to assimilate into the culture of Cali-Texas because the New World Order has no place for them. Instead, they are fighting to retain or return to a cultural moment where they had more freedom—of movement and of choice. They know that they will never be accepted as equals or given a choice—not in Cali-Texas and not on the moon. *Lunar Braceros* creates the ultimate diasporic environment in which certain races and classes of people are entirely rejected, manipulated and abused. Lydia and the other members of the resistance will ultimately have to decide how to rebuild lost cultural connections while creating new communities in the face of large-scale corporate and political control. Lydia describes the struggle as "not an individual battle. . . . It will be a collective struggle, a class struggle" (118, ellipsis added). The resistance becomes a multiethnic community working to preserve cultural connections. In the face of cultural erasure, the ethnic peoples of *Lunar Braceros* put aside cultural differences and create diverse ethnic communities that more accurately reflect the diversity of contemporary ethnic populations in the U.S.

Alien Experience

Patrice Caldwell notes that, overall, SF views of aliens tend to fall into two categories: the friendly alien who comes to save humanity or the bad alien who comes to destroy humanity.⁵² She argues that these simplistic depictions of aliens do not allow for equal alien/human relations and mainly serve to depict heroic humans or alleviate fears about human deficiencies. She concludes by noting how contemporary ethnic authors, such as Octavia Butler, are beginning to examine new ways to represent alien/human relations and stories of first contact in order to “[expose] the paradox of our readiness to accept life beyond our planet and our disinclination to confront the more alien dimensions of life within our own human experience” (101). Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita’s depictions of aliens follow in this tradition of more complex depictions of aliens and alien/human relations.⁵³ *Lunar Braceros* uses wishful thinking about the possibility of alien life to point out the irony of human relations, while “Refugees” depicts a multifaceted alien/human relationship that reverses the helpful, advanced alien species stereotype. Both authors ultimately use references to aliens and alien/human relationships as metaphors for present-day power relations.

Lunar Braceros and “Refugees” present two widely different views of aliens. *Lunar Braceros* juxtaposes space travel and the possibility of encountering alien life with the restrictive environments of the reservation and the moon; the Reservation people and braceros often dream of meeting aliens with advanced technology, a more enlightened species that could save them

⁵² Although some critics may argue that the alien depictions in SFF series such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* are more complex, there is still an underlying element of bad alien vs. good alien. The Vulcan race in *Star Trek* make first contact with humans and help them to begin space exploration. In addition, several of the helpful alien races in *Star Wars*, including the Wookies and Ewoks, are depicted in simplistic, animalistic terms and serve as foils for the brave humans.

⁵³ I recognize that there are no actual aliens in *Lunar Braceros*; instead, the possibility of alien life is used at the beginning of the novel to represent an escape from the social issues created by humanity. These symbolic aliens are employed by Sánchez/Pita to challenge the assumption that space travel and contact with alien species will erase social issues for people of color.

from the mistakes of the government and corporations. At the beginning of the novel, space represents freedom, a place beyond the restrictions of the government and corporations.

However, Lydia and the other braceros quickly discover that the moon has become a mini version of the Cali-Texas nation-state. Lydia notes that the issues that put the braceros' lives in danger are linked to capitalism and colonization:

As a spatial fix for capital, the Moon project wasn't turning out to be too cost-effective, although at an ecological level the relocation of waste was definitely giving Earth some breathing room. . . . At a social organization level the Moon modules were turning out to be recapitulation of Earth history. What was clear was that much like on Earth, on the Moon the lab director had the power to determine life and death. (59, ellipsis added)

The braceros do not find freedom or advanced intelligence on the moon; instead, they find the same restricting ideologies of profitability and class structure that they faced on the reservations. The higher-level executives of the moon project view the braceros as social “waste”—a waste of money to pay and transport—which is evidenced in the depiction of the former braceros being found dead in waste containers. *Lunar Braceros* uses the SFF themes of space travel and the desire to meet advanced civilizations to highlight the irony of the Braceros' situation; people of color finally leave Earth only to find that space travel does not consist of new societies and friendly aliens; in fact, the self-contained social structure of the moon creates more opportunities for social oppression.

“Refugees” uses the alien presence of the Benefactors to question the cost of contact with an alien species. The Benefactors appear to be the kindly alien race that saves humanity from the consequences of their poor choices. However, it becomes clear as the text progresses that the Benefactors have complete control over the humans, their environment, and their very existence. Because the Benefactors have advanced technology, they feel justified in deciding the fate of humanity. In the face of total domination by an advanced alien species, the refugees are forced to

question what they will have to compromise in order to exist. The Benefactors discuss the possibility of interbreeding the refugees with “another compatible species”—essentially treating the humans like livestock and forcing them to compromise the genetic patterns that define them as human. Amberstone employs the SFF tropes of alien contact and genetic manipulation to highlight the contradictory nature of identity. Are the Benefactors evil colonizers trying to manipulate the humans of Tallav’Wahir for their own benefit or an advanced species trying to help humanity survive its shortcomings? The refugees physically attack the Benefactors out of fear of what they will become if they continue to live away from Earth. The humans hold on to a static, essentialized view of humanity that is an important aspect of their identity. This struggle represents the struggles of diasporic peoples, especially indigenous peoples, to preserve a cultural identity after forced migration. However, like Vizenor’s, Amberstone’s choice to write a SFF text allows her to examine the consequences of an inability for diasporic groups to accept change and adapt to new environments. “Refugees” embodies the liminal space between the contradictory identifications inherent in diasporic culture. *Lunar Braceros* and “Refugees” each uses the metaphor of advanced alien species to compare the diasporic desire to recover/rebuild cultural heritage and the fear of assimilation or change. While it is important for ethnic communities to continue to preserve cultural tradition, Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita place their characters in situations where a complete recovery from cultural and social trauma is impossible in order to explore other possible configurations of ethnicity and culture. These authors ask how ethnic cultures can create a space that balances cultural tradition and the possibility for adaptation.

Conclusion—Is Decolonization Possible?

Césaire argues that addressing the consequences of colonization can be difficult because of the long-lasting psychological effects on the colonized culture: “And here it must be clearly understood that the famous inferiority complex in the colonized, which some take pleasure in pointing out, does not come about by chance. It is a result sought by the colonizer” (140). In order to rebuild a colonized culture, there must first be an acknowledgement of the political, economic, cultural and social issues created by colonization. Grace L. Dillon notes that indigenous cultures are also contending with the effects of colonization:

It might go without saying that all forms of indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of “returning to ourselves,” which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. This process is often called “decolonization,” and as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) explains, it requires *changing* rather than *imitating* Eurowestern concepts. (10)

SFF allows authors to imagine what a decolonized society could look like, if members are willing to move beyond the effects of colonization and adapt to the new needs of their communities.

Ultimately, the braceros and the humans of Tallav’Wahir represent two different solutions to overcoming the effects of colonization. *Lunar Braceros* argues that people can enact change through organized resistance while continuing to pass on cultural memories and values to future generations. The braceros are able to overcome the corporation’s plans to kill them by overcoming racial or ethnic differences and working together. Towards the end of the novel, Lydia and George leave Chinganaza, risking their lives to continue protesting the corporations and Reservations. The end of the novel depicts her son, Pedro, as eager to join them, though he

does not even know if they are alive. Pedro represents humanity's future—an eager young man who can continue his parents' fight while also embodying their cultural history and memories.

“Refugees” takes a bleaker view. The Benefactors, upset over the humans' attempts to escape Tallav'Wahir, hold a meeting to decide the fate of all the humans on Tallav'Wahir. Some of the Benefactors argue that humanity is inherently flawed and should be destroyed so Tallav'Wahir can be reseeded. Others argue that Qwalshina and the other previous implants should be allowed to continue living on the planet and perhaps interbred with another species. The humans are not allowed to participate in the decision and wait anxiously for the Benefactors to tell them if they will be allowed to continue as a species. In the face of possible annihilation, Qwalshina still continues the tradition of giving her blood to the land; however, the repetition of the final line—“My blood is red, an alien color on this world”—makes the gesture seem futile, an archaic peoples clinging to tradition and unable to enact social change. Amberstone's future represents the consequences of a diasporic peoples' unwillingness or inability to change and adapt to new homelands. “Refugees” and *Lunar Braceros* demonstrate the difference between nostalgia, which causes damage to diasporic populations, and a proactive maintenance of culture coupled with an ability to adapt to new environments.

The desire to recover and rebuild lost cultural connections is a common concern for colonized and diasporic peoples. Dillon notes that the diasporic situation created on Tallav'Wahir questions the costs of recovery when combined with an inability to adapt to new circumstances: “All are aliens on Tallav'Wahir: the reptilian race of benefactors, the established albeit diasporic Native community, and these new ‘fosterlings’ who protest displacement from their home and question the Benefactor's motives. The tensions associated with intermingling diasporic and indigenous, *autochthonous* existences inspires contemplation: Where *is* home?”

Who is routed?/rooted?...Who can adjust?" (230). SFF themes work well to answer questions of adaptation and survival through their ability to move humanity away from Earth, creating situations where humans must confront new environments and species. Amberstone and Sánchez/Pita demonstrate that it is possible to write SFF that exposes the injustices of colonization while still valuing adaptation. Their texts balance a preservation of cultural values and traditions with a need for survival.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: “AN IMAGE OF TOMORROW”

When new groups enter the community (SF), they make themselves felt. They struggle for power—not only for a place on the geography of the fan community, but also for a place in the literature . . . the changing fandoms demand their own voice in the genres, and their members take their places in the industry to provide the products their members want to see.

—Camille Bacon-Smith

Science fiction is a genre which is continually evolving, and as it encompasses a wider range of writers and readers and it will reach a point where writing from or about a racial minority is neither subversive nor unusual but rather one of the traits which makes it a powerful literature of change.

—Elisabeth Anne Leonard

Although there are more options for SFF fans of color today than there were in the 1960s when Samuel Delany called for more racial and ethnic representation in SFF, there is still more work needed to truly integrate narratives of race and ethnicity into SFF. Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, I participated heavily in SFFs “geek” culture. SFF books allowed me to travel to different worlds, to imagine what it would be like to live in space or have magical powers. My friends who also read SFF introduced me to the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Anne McCaffrey, Frank Herbert, and C.S. Lewis. The SFF section of Barnes and Noble was a treasure trove of witches, wizards, and aliens. I considered myself an oddity, a Latina girl who, through circumstance, happened to have a large number of white friends and was, therefore, privy to the mostly-white worlds of SFF. It was not until I read Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* that I understood I was not alone; there was at least one other Latino person who understood geek culture and dreamed of world building. This realization finally caused me to question why there were not more novels featuring characters like me, which led to a discovery of the works of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany and the beginning of a passion for ethnic SFF. Since this

moment, I have worked exhaustively to uncover works of SFF written by authors of color, in the hopes that other young people of color will one day see themselves represented at SFF conventions and in the SFF section of bookstores. My studies have involved hours of combing through SFF discussion boards, talking to SFF scholars at conferences, and contacting other SFF fans to discover new or lesser-known ethnic SFF works and anthologies.

I specifically chose to engage in a multiethnic study of SFF because I wanted to show that ethnic SFF is not limited to one race or ethnicity. One of the issues for ethnic SFF is that it is often overlooked or fragmented into multiple literary categories. Although critical works and anthologies on ethnic speculative literature are beginning to surface, there is still a need for further study, particularly in multiethnic speculative fiction. Bringing together SFF works from peoples of multiple races and ethnicities creates a more comprehensive look at the contributions of people of color to SFF; in particular, the ways that they challenge race-blind depictions of the future by creating hybrid, fluid depictions of race and ethnicity, opening discussions about the ways that race and ethnicity can adapt to present-day identifications.

The issues that my dissertation speaks to are ones of access and representation. Each of the previous chapters has discussed the ways that authors of color utilize SFF to draw attention to the ways colonization has affected and is continuing to affect representations of race and ethnicity. The struggles of peoples of color to gain equal access to resources and representation in the national consciousness is ongoing; by depicting this struggle in futuristic settings, ethnic SFF writing asks its audience to consider how the futures being depicted serve as metaphors for present-day racial and ethnic issues. Alternatively, SFF writers of color are struggling for representation within the SFF genre and for depictions of race and ethnicity that more accurately depict present-day racial and ethnic identifications. Ethnic SFF bridges the gap between past

representations of colonialism and present-day needs for fluid racial and ethnic representations. However, SFF audiences cannot read texts that they are unaware of. Therefore, I will take some time to speak to the main medium that is affecting access to ethnic SFF: the internet. This study would not have been possible without the internet. It is a culmination of many ethnic SFF “geeks” who, like me, grew up reading canonical SFF and who are now fighting for more representation of race and ethnicity in all aspects of the genre. Many of the texts I chose to address in this study were discovered by searching SFF message boards or ethnic SFF websites, where fans of ethnic SFF are beginning to come together and share information about ethnic SFF works. However, there is still no large, comprehensive online resource for ethnic SFF; I often found myself searching for hours to locate ethnic SFF references. The internet is an important resource for fans of ethnic SFF, and it is possible that as ethnic SFF becomes more prominent, the number of ethnic SFF websites and blogs will increase.

I would like to point to one example of a contemporary ethnic SFF anthology to discuss the larger implications of my study. Recently, Bill Campbell and Edward Austin Hall created a multicultural anthology of speculative fiction titled *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2013). In the introduction, Hall notes the lack of diversity in futuristic settings and his desire to create an anthology that would fill a much-needed gap in the study of speculative fiction. He also notes that the project was funded through a crowdfunding campaign, where 650 people contributed over \$15,000.00 to fund the project. The fact that a multiethnic speculative fiction project could be funded by advertising on the internet demonstrates the small but growing community of ethnic speculative literature readers who are advocating for more representation of race and ethnicity in speculative texts. Campbell and Hall’s anthology includes stories by ethnic authors as well as stories featuring ethnic characters. One of the greatest contributions this

anthology makes is the inclusion of Latina/o authors, including Junot Díaz and Daniel José Older. Although this collection is a great contribution to the ethnic speculative fiction community, it is not comprehensive. For example, there are no Latina, Chicana, or Native American authors in the anthology. To date, there is no comprehensive anthology of ethnic SFF, but the publication of *Motherhood* signals a growing critical understanding of need to highlight connections in ethnic SFF writing. Drawing attention to similarities in ethnic SFF writing may force SFF publishers to acknowledge the influence of ethnic authors on the genre, leading to more widespread publishing. Such exposure is necessary for understanding not only the ways that race and ethnicity can be represented in futuristic settings, but also how it can influence current critical racial and ethnic discussions.

One of the struggles ethnic SFF authors and directors face when trying to create SFF featuring peoples of color is the stereotypes associated with the genre. Although SFF has become more diverse in recent decades, it is still viewed by some as a popular genre for white males. Such a depiction alienates peoples of color in two main ways: ethnic authors may hesitate to be associated with a genre that is not viewed as serious literature, and they may also be wary of contributing to a “white” genre. One of the contributing factors to the lack of ethnic identification with SFF is social and political disparities associated with technology. During the Civil Rights movement, African American musicians and authors highlighted the disparity between “the corporate profiteering of the US space program” and “the impoverishment of black urban communities” (Bould 177). Mark Bould cites lyrics from Gil Scott-Heron’s song “Whitey on the Moon” (1970) as an example of African American sentiment towards the ideal of space travel: “I can’t pay no doctor bill (but Whitey’s on the moon)/Ten years from now I’ll be payin’ still (while Whitey’s on the moon)” (qtd. in Bould 177). For a person of color dealing with

economic and social disparity in the 1970s, the narratives of progress touted by proponents of the space race served as a reminder to ethnic peoples of the social disparities between racial and ethnic groups.

Junot Díaz notes in an interview with *Wired.com* that although “geek culture” is becoming popular in the U.S., it is still a minority with a smaller fan base. Díaz received widespread attention after the publication of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a novel featuring a Dominican-American SFF loving nerdy main character. After *Oscar Wao* won the Pulitzer Prize, Díaz expressed his desire to write a SFF novel. When asked whether SFF is becoming more popular in the Dominican Republic, Díaz stated, “. . . in the Dominican Republic . . . these pursuits of comic books, of video games, of science fiction and fantasy—these things are considered children’s pursuits. Now, by everyone? No. But in serious circles? Yeah, I think that there’s that kind of generalization, that unhelpful, distorted generalization” (qtd. in Adams). People of color, already marginalized and alienated in U.S. culture, may be hesitant to also experience the social and economic marginalization of being associated as SFF authors. Díaz notes that the U.S. “. . . is a country that still has a very clear pecking order in how it likes to dole out privilege. I guess what I’m saying is that the day I see someone who’s writing the *Hulk* comic up for Guggenheims, or the kid who’s writing strictly military science fiction being inducted into the American Academy of Arts, then I’ll be like, Damn, yeah. This whole social economy of who is out vis-à-vis geeks has altered” (qtd. in Adams). Díaz’s comments speak to the difficulties ethnic SFF authors face when they are categorized as SFF authors.

Although these difficulties are significant, authors and directors of color are beginning to embrace the possibilities of SFF. In Drew Hayden Taylor’s Canadian indigenous play *alterNatives*, the main character, an indigenous SFF author, discusses the advantages of writing

SFF: “I like the concept of having no boundaries, of being able to create and develop any character, any environment or setting I want. . . . People want me to be ground-breaking, and I will be. But I’d rather do it my way, by becoming a financially comfortable writer of sci-fi who happens to be aboriginal” (qtd. in Dillon I). SFF is associated with being a genre of possibility; therefore, ethnic SFF authors are able to employ SFF writing to create alternative ethnic narratives, avoiding the expectations of publishers and audiences for historically-based ethnic narratives.

Ethnic SFF authors and directors are also able to create SFF that challenges stereotypes about peoples of color and technology. In an interview with *Crossed Genres* magazine, Alex Rivera, the director of the SFF independent film *Sleep Dealer* (2008), states that one of the influences for his works is his experiences using technology to connect to his ethnic heritage:

I grew up in up-state New York in a house that was connected, primarily by technology, to Latin America. The connection that I had through my father to Peru was mediated largely by the television, the telephone, and home videos which were exchanged. I knew that I had Peruvian blood and Peruvian family, but my experience of that other place was very mediated.

That’s become something that I’ve explored in a lot of my work—the way in which immigrants who live transnational lives, in families divided between two countries and typically between the so-called first world and so-called third world—how immigrant families use technology to stitch their families back together and to create a lived experience that crosses borders. Looking at the way in which technology can destroy borders, from an emotional and experiential point of view, and the ways in which immigrants use technology specifically. (“Interview”)

Rivera’s statement makes an important point about race/ethnicity and technology; as technology becomes more available to groups which have not previously had access, it becomes a medium that can close the distance between diasporic groups and their homelands. Rivera demonstrates how ethnic SFF works challenge the idea that peoples of color have no connection to technology.

One of the ways ethnic SFF authors and directors can combat the negative stigma associated with creating SFF is through the internet. The availability of affordable technologies allows ethnic SFF fans to create and advertise their works, negating the need for a publishing contract. Electronic fanzines such as *Axxón*, a SFF fanzine based in Mexico that publishes SFF writing from authors worldwide, are making SFF publication more accessible for peoples of color. Other internet-friendly mediums include small films and webseries. In 2010, DeWayne Copland and Scoff F. Evans created a black SFF superhero webseries named *CV Nation*. When asked about their reasons for creating the series, Evans states, “Very often black characters are either completely marginalized or they’re like chocolate kiss versions of white characters...I wanted to create something where we get to save the world, we get the girl, or we make the decisions. All of that. You know everything the white dudes get to do” (Northern). While the Civil Rights Era did see the creation of comic books featuring black characters, such as *Blade* or the *X-Men Series*, Evans’s comment is significant. *CV Nation* is a series about black superheroes written by two African American men. The ability to post their work on the internet gives Copland and Evans access to a fan base and creative control over how to depict a community of predominately black SFF characters.

Ethnic SFF is slowly gaining critical attention. The internet creates a platform for access and dissemination of ethnic SFF works, and a way for peoples of color to connect to each other and their ethnic heritage. The ability to create and download ethnic SFF works online may expose a larger audience to these works and gives ethnic SFF authors and directors more control over their creative process. The future of multiethnic SFF lies in authors and directors being able to experiment with racial and ethnic depictions, creating works that depict their specific racial or

ethnic identification, instead of creating characters that align with current essentialized depictions of racial and ethnic identity.

Ethnic SFF Fandom

Because SFF fandom is so influential to the genre, it is important to note the ways that ethnic SFF fans are changing the face of the SFF genre. Most ethnic SFF authors started participating in the SFF genres as fans. Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler and Junot Díaz have each discussed the extensive SFF reading that inspired their writings. These writings can be viewed, in part, as a reaction to the lack of ethnic representation in SFF writings and their interest, as fans, in having SFF texts that reflect more diverse populations. Ethnic SFF writing also influences SFF fandom by creating a potential to draw fans that may not participate in the genre otherwise. The SFF fan community does not simply read SFF; it actively participates in the worlds and characters portrayed in SFF writing, movies, and T.V. shows. This participation creates a relationship between SFF creators and fans where fans help to advertise SFF works at events such as SFF conventions. It is impossible to discuss the implications of ethnic SFF writing without discussing the influence of ethnic SFF fans.

One of the defining features of SFF is its strong fan base, a community of peoples who become involved with the SFF worlds created by its authors. The popularity of online SFF communities and SFF conventions such as Comic-Con demonstrates how involved SFF fans are in the creation and dissemination of SFF works. In recent years, ethnic fans have become more present online and at U.S. conventions; these fans are fast becoming a potential fan-base for ethnic SFF authors. In the U.S., websites such as *Scifilatino.com*, *BlackScienceFictionSociety.com*, *Blacksci-fi.com*, *iafrofuturism.com*, *afrofuturism.net* and personal blogs such as *labloga.blogspot.com* allow ethnic SFF fans a cheap, effective way to

share their interests in ethnic SFF by creating platforms for discussing and publishing new ethnic SFF works.

As an example of the impact that internet platforms can have on ethnic SFF communities, I want to look specifically at the website *SciFi Latino*. The website is a blog created by Sophia Flores, a SFF fan living in Puerto Rico, to discuss SFF created by or featuring Latinas/os. The site discusses T.V. shows, movies, and books that involve “a Latino participating in a significant category.” The site also discusses English and Spanish language media. At the top of the site is a digital collage of Latina/o SFF T.V. and movie characters. This collage draws attention to the extensive contribution Latina/o actors have made to SFF T.V. series and movies. Flores uses the blog to advertise new Latina/o SFF works and to chronicle her experiences as a Latina SFF fan. There are many pictures and blog entries featuring her participating in her local SFF community. In addition to the website/blog, Flores has also opened Facebook and twitter sites with the *SciFi Latino* heading. This use of multiple internet mediums allows Flores to reach a larger audience; fans of her blog are directed to her Facebook site and Twitter account via links. The Facebook site currently has 204 likes and the Twitter site has 682 followers. While this is a small number compared to the overall U.S. population, the creation of sites like *SciFi Latino* allows ethnic fans of SFF to connect and share information and resources. Such a move creates a community of ethnic SFF fans and works to combat stereotypical views that people of color are not SFF fans and that, therefore, there is no market for SFF featuring ethnic characters.

It is significant that Flores is from Puerto Rico; as a gateway between U.S. and Spanish-speaking cultures, the U.S. unincorporated territory is a prime location for the fusion of ethnic cultures and SFF. Puerto Rico hosts its own annual Comic Con event and even has smaller-scale SFF conventions such as the bi-annual Kaisen Festival sponsored by Paquines, “a non-profit

organization founded to gather fans of comics, anime, science fiction and other hobbies in Puerto Rico” (Gonzalez). The foundation also hosts cosplay photo shoots and events. Cosplay, or costume play, is an important aspect of SFF fandom; fans work for months creating complicated costumes to display their love for specific SFF characters. Jason Bainbridge and Craig Norris note that cosplay is often marked by two important features: the possibility for playing with notions of identity and group participation: “the possibilities of cosplay . . . to disrupt individual identity—playing with gender, race and reality—have expanded. They now include the building of a communal identity through the embodiment of desire, via costume and performance” (6, ellipsis added). Fans of different races, ethnicities, and genders find common ground in a mutual appreciation of SFF characters and their desire to accurately portray these characters in front of an audience of peers. For Puerto Ricans to be participating in Comic Cons and cosplay gives them a significant presence as SFF fans. Cosplayers invest a lot of time and money into the portrayal of their characters; the costumes take weeks to make and the cosplayers often have to travel to other states and pay hotel and convention fees. Conventions such as Comic Con invest a lot of money into cosplay competitions to appeal to SFF fans. Additionally, the recent publicity given to cosplay through the T.V. show *Heroes of Cosplay* on the Syfy channel is also making cosplay profitable, which gives cosplayers power in the SFF marketplace. Like Campbell and Hall’s crowdsourcing project, the internet and SFF fan communities provide a space for ethnic SFF fans to come together and support the SFF projects and products they are interested in.

The internet may well be the most important technological advance for ethnic SFF fans and authors. By allowing fans and authors to come together in support of common interests, the internet is building new communities of SFF fandom daily. The different, inexpensive internet platforms available to SFF fans of color allow them to quickly reach a large number of people,

which is crucial for critics and authors who wish to create fan bases or fund potential projects. SFF conventions and organizations are another medium for advertising new SFF authors and directors. In-person communities of SFF fans also meet through conventions and cosplay competitions worldwide. Both levels of community building give SFF fans a voice in the SFF marketplace, which has a large impact on the types of SFF books, films, comic books, and T.V. shows that become profitable. If SFF fans advocate for more SFF featuring and written by people of color, then the SFF genre may shift to accommodate this new demand.

Final Thoughts

Representation of the future will always be speculation, a magnified image of past and present social circumstances. Race and ethnicity may change, they may be reconfigured or reimagined by SFF authors, but they will always be present in some form. SFF has the potential to be a powerful force in the conversation of what role race and ethnicity will play in the future. One of the purposes of my study has been to demonstrate how ethnic SFF complicates and enhances representations of race and ethnicity. Such depictions are necessary if critics are to argue for the relevance of racial and ethnic identifications in the twenty-first century. In an age where discussions of genetics and post-race identifications are depicting race and racism as products of the past, definitions of race and ethnicity must adapt to the political and personal needs of peoples of color today. Toni Morrison argues in “The Site of Memory” that the purpose of her works is not to create fantasy, but instead to distinguish between “fact and truth” (93). Ethnic SFF authors can reinvent their truths by creating racial and ethnic identifications that not only correct misconceptions, but imagine the potential for race and ethnicity to move away from essentialized depictions and survive as fluid, hybrid identifications.

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