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Photo: Duarte Amaral Netto

Bridging Afrofuturism and Arab SF: Locating the Contemporary Algerian SF within the Postcolonial Speculative Fiction

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Abstract | Afrofuturism synthesizes Science Fiction (SF) with African attributes resulting in a cultural celebration through futuristic visions encompassing popular art forms including literature, music, cinema, etc. Nevertheless, the term has inherently been associated with black Africa, disregarding the remaining ethnic and racial groups within the same continent. Intriguingly, black authors comprise the exclusive producers of any artistic work associated with Afrofuturism despite the potential enrichment that nonblack African cultures may add to the subgenre. This paper explores the reasons behind the unshared influence of the black diaspora SF authorship on their African counterparts, particularly apparent in the themes treating racial and gender issues. This article also examines the similarities and differences between Arab SF and the African one in order to situate Algerian SF within the postcolonial SF scene in general, and Afrofuturism in particular. To achieve such purposes, this paper juxtaposes Arab SF with Afrofuturism by reflecting on their colonial and postcolonial experiences respectively. Moreover, we inquire about the intriguing lack of such literary

endeavour in the Arab world, specifically in North Africa, taking into consideration the historical commonalities witnessed throughout the continent, which should have promoted similar artistic expressions.

Keywords | Science fiction; Postcolonial; Afrofuturism; Arab SF; Algerian SF.

Resumo | O Afrofuturismo sintetiza a Ficção Científica (FC) com atributos africanos, resultando numa celebração cultural através de visões futurísticas que englobam formas de arte popular como a literatura, a música, o cinema, entre outros. No entanto, este termo tem vindo a ser intrinsecamente associado à África negra, pondo de parte outros grupos étnicos no continente. Curiosamente, toda a produção artística relacionada ao Afrofuturismo é criada exclusivamente por autores negros, apesar do potencial enriquecimento que culturas africanas não negras poderiam oferecer ao subgénero. Este artigo explora as razões por detrás da ausência de partilha de influências entre a diáspora de FC negra e a restante autoria africana, algo que é particularmente evidente em temas que lidam com questões raciais e de género. Este artigo examina também as semelhanças e diferenças entre a FC árabe e africana, por forma a situar a FC Argelina no espectro da FC pós-colonial em geral e no Afrofuturismo em particular. Assim, este artigo justapõe a FC Árabe com o Afrofuturismo ao refletir sobre as suas respetivas experiências coloniais e pós-coloniais. Adicionalmente, questiona-se a estranha ausência deste impulso literário no mundo árabe, concretamente na África do Norte, tendo em consideração as semelhanças históricas existentes por todo o continente que deveriam ter impulsionado expressões artísticas similares.

Palavras Chave | Ficção científica; Pós-colonialismo; Afrofuturismo; FC Árabe; FC Argelina.



Introduction

Owing to its boundless ingenuity and compelling aesthetics for over two hundred years of existence, Science Fiction (SF) expanded into several subgenres attracting writers from different backgrounds. One of its modern literary strands is Afrofuturism, a compound term alluding to an African pertinence and a concern for the future. Nevertheless, contributions by black African writers within the body of Afrofuturist works are predominant. Tracing its origins in the African American literary scene and later on appropriated by their African counterparts, scholars chiefly associate

Afrofuturism with black authorship disregarding the potential enrichment that nonblack African cultures may have added to it, especially the ones in the North African region.¹

It is worth mentioning that Afrofuturism writers are predominantly black, upholding their racial identity together with their history of slavery and alienation as distinctive factors on which the subgenre stands. However, this does not substantiate an exclusive association of Afrofuturism with blackness, considering that the “Afro” part of its compound name is under no circumstances interchangeable with the latter.² In academia, there are some apparent attempts to delimitate Afrofuturism exclusively to black narratives, and seminal texts dedicated to defining and exploring the genre act as evidence for such claim. For instance, in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013), Ytasha L. Womack delineates the role of Afrofuturists declaring, “Whether through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing, Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future” (7). Womack instinctively disqualifies nonblack Africans’ relevancy to the subgenre. Further, in *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-blackness* (2015), scholar Anderson Reynaldo identifies a new wave of the subgenre describing it as “the early twenty-first century techno genesis of Black identity reflecting counter histories...” (10). Anderson adds an updated definition, which for the most part, fails at acknowledging a broader and more inclusive perception of Afrofuturism. Moreover, the marginalizing of nonblack African SF authors is remarkably noticeable in most Afrofuturist anthologies. To illustrate this, we reviewed the lists of contributors from three notable works including Ivor W. Hartmann’s SF series *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers* (2012-2018), Billy Kahora’s *Imagine Africa 500* (2016), and Bill Campbell and Edward Hall’s *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2016). The anthologies share between them eighty-five contributors among which we could identify only one Arab writer³ and no North African ones, hence demonstrating editorial choices that do not actively recognize North African/Arab writers as integral to Afrofuturism.

This has resulted in an ironic situation. On the one hand, Afrofuturism is a subgenre that essentially delves into issues of discrimination and differences, and on

¹ The region consists of Arab speaking countries including Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Mauritania and Egypt.

² North African countries account for 18.14% of the continent’s population. See <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/northern-africa-population/>

³ Rabih Alameddine is a Lebanese writer and the only Arab contributor in Bill Campbell and Edward Hall’s *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2016).

the other hand, Afrofuturism scholars tend to overlook nonblack African SF contributions. Thus, not only contradicting the movement's core objectives but also ignoring the foundations of contemporary SF, the latter proved to have apparent affinities with postcolonial literature. In the same line of thought, novelist Adam Roberts elucidates on the role of SF in modern societies and the characteristics that connect the latter with postcolonial literature by arguing that:

[...] the key symbolic function of the SF novum⁴ is precisely the representation of the encounter with difference, Otherness, alterity...in societies such as ours where Otherness is often demonized, SF can pierce the constraints of this ideology by circumventing the conventions of traditional fiction... an end that postcolonial literature shares. (28)

Although Roberts addresses the whole genre, Afrofuturism as a subgenre produced exclusively by diaspora and postcolonial subjects has proven to be even more embracing of his words. However, in order to understand how Afrofuturism connects western SF and Postcolonial literature, one must look further into their similarities.

One of the most apparent commonalities between SF and postcolonial literature is that they were both subject to academic oversight. For decades, scholars labelled both subgenres as being literarily unaesthetic assuming that they were both destined for unsophisticated readers, merely meant to entertain, in the case of SF, or to address colonial histories from a postcolonial viewpoint. Fortunately, by the second half of the 20th century, both fields witnessed a major surge of practitioners and theorists who constructed their contributions to the subgenres on previously established philosophies, mythology, and literary traditions. This resulted in the advent of two politically and socially motivated literary trends with unequivocal academic merit and esteem. The shared themes and concepts between the two practices constitute the common grounds that define both subgenres, demonstrating an unparalleled display of sympathy with the "marginal and the different" (Roberts 18). Eventually, such similarities appealed to audiences consisting mainly of science enthusiasts and postcolonial zealots, who later on tactfully merged both fields in a new form known as Afrofuturism. The latter functioned as a distinct tool conjoining subject matters in both fields. Interestingly, critical SF works stress the perpetuation of imperial practices, racism, and gender discrimination, arguing that no matter how advanced the human race may become,

⁴ A term used by SF scholar Darko Suvin in his *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) to describe the scientifically plausible innovations used by SF narratives.

prejudices and exploitation would never cease unless thoughtful social remediation takes place, which is a similarly omnipresent idea in Postcolonial studies.

Afrofuturism: Past and Present

Bringing together distinctive traits of SF with African cultural attributes, Afrofuturism is an artful celebration of the African history through futuristic visions that are consistently aware of their past and present while encompassing every modern art forms including literature, music, cinema, fashion, painting, etc. The emanation of the Afrofuturist movement is difficult to determine due to the numerous instances of the latter in works dating as far back as the second half of the 19th century. Notably, Martin Delany's *Blake or the Huts of America* (1859) is a proto-SF novel described by prominent African-American SF author Samuel R. Delany as "about as close to an SF-style alternate history novel as you can get" ("Racism and Science Fiction"), and his work is widely acknowledged as the first SF novel published by an African American. Furthermore, prolific novelist Pauline Hopkins published *Of One Blood* (1902), fictionalizing a technologically advanced and culturally superior Ethiopia, treating racial issues and diverse social issues in a pioneering fashion intending to "raise the stigma of degradation from [the Black] race" (13). Her work remains an important proto-SF feminist novel that inspired future generations of African SF writers. This reveals the extent to which SF resonates with African diaspora authors, offering them a unique platform on which they can transcribe their past and present concerns, while speculating on alternative realities or future expectations. Other leading figures who explored the possibilities SF had to offer to African American authorship are Sutton Griggs, Frances Harper,⁵ and acclaimed Harlem Renaissance figure W. E. B. Du Bois, only to mention a few.

Despite the enduring relation between SF and African American writers, amid a white-dominated genre, their efforts were often unacknowledged. While the aforementioned works were authentic attempts in dealing with the fractured racial realities of the time, they were also a response to the virulent racist ideologies found in a plethora of 19th century SF, predominantly based on the pseudoscientific superiority

⁵ See: Griggs, Sutton E. *Imperium in Imperio*. Modern Library, 2003; and Harper, Frances E. W, and Koritha Mitchell. *Iola Leroy: Or, Shadows Uplifted*. Broadview Press, 2018.

of the Caucasians. For instance, Louis Tracy's *The Final War* (1896), and King Wallace's *The Next War: A Prediction* (1892) are conspicuous examples of the pervasive white supremacist frame of mind that prevailed during that period. Both novels revolved around the premise of a black insurrection against the whites and its ensuing fears, predicting an inevitable racial war as the sole outcome. Unfortunately, this malign racial bigotry in SF did not abate in the following decades. In the same line of thought, scholar Gregory E. Rutledge claims that "... the systemic racism of the FFF [Futurist Fiction and Fantasy] industry that persisted for many years, among other things, the resulting cosmology of constraint limited and limits the exploratory aspirations of many (diasporic) Africans" (236). Such prevalent restrictions ironically proved only to incite African writers to appropriate the genre and transcend its boundaries by employing its idiosyncrasies to serve the postcolonial literary narratives.

At the peak of the pulp fiction era during the early decades of the 20th century, fiction was flourishing, particularly SF. The pay-per-word tradition of the pulp magazines, which indulged quantity at the expense of quality, led to the emergence of a myriad of SF productions. However, racial representation in SF was remarkably missing due to two notable factors, the first one being the racial views and tensions of that time, and the second one is the low number of SF works by Black authors who hardly managed to obtrude the highly white-dominated field. In 1920, acclaimed African American writer and social activist W. E. B. Du Bois published a short SF story entitled *The Comet*. The story depicts the intricate relationship between a black man and a white woman as the last surviving humans after a comet collided with planet Earth unleashing deadly toxic gases. Du Bois depicted a near future post-apocalyptic vision imbued with social and racial themes that remain to this day relevant. Yet, he was not the only Harlem Renaissance figure to find an inventive story-telling platform in the SF genre. A decade later, George S. Schuyler published what would be later considered the first true Afrofuturist novel *Black no more* (1931), a poignant satirical account in which a black man becomes white through a scientific transformation process. Du Bois and Schuyler's SF efforts remain among their most memorable productions, inspiring the future African American generation of writers to explore even further the possibilities the genre has to offer to the diaspora communities in terms of an aesthetic social expression.

In the second half of 20th century, postcolonial theories became one of the most dominant academic frame of thoughts. Not long after regaining independence, intellectual voices arose in celebration of their history and native cultures, whilst condemning the atrocities inflicted by western imperialism. This led to a shift in attitudes in their motherlands, especially among the diaspora communities. Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, among many others, instilled the structures of postcolonial studies through landmark theories such as otherness, hybridity, diaspora, etc. ⁶ SF writings explored similar ideas throughout its history. For instance, xenophobia, estrangement, and colonialism are recurring themes that date back to the early works of Mary Shelley, Jules Verne and H.G Wells. Thus, it was natural for many diaspora and postcolonial writers to take interest in a genre that shares such central subject matters, eventually broadening its scopes to different unexplored grounds by implementing their own cultures, history and social experiences.

Decidedly, the most remarkable feature of SF is its ability to meld with other genres, since it is common for SF authors to combine their futuristic plots with different literary genres such as adventure, horror, romance, etc. Even though this is not idiosyncratic to the genre, the fact that it offers unfathomable prospects attracted writers from all backgrounds who found in it creative ways to subtly discuss present-day's most challenging themes. Unarguably, such distinct traits resonated with postcolonial writers who profited from the genre's flexibility, not by simple appropriation, but through establishing a distinct subgenre known as Afrofuturism. Illustrator Tim Fielder defines it as "a mode of operation in which you take any kind of action...and infuse it with Afrocentricity" (00:35-00:50). Fielder's delimitation of Afrofuturism to Afrocentricity seemingly does not exclude anyone who falls under the umbrella of the latter. Yet, African countries with chiefly black populations and similar diaspora communities are solely associated with the term, except for few names originating mainly from South Africa who managed to claim status within the circle. For example, award-winning novelist Lauren Beukes, despite being white, is often shortlisted as an Afrofuturist writer and widely praised for her social commentary about issues related to race and gender in Africa even though this association remains an infrequent case. Moreover,

⁶ See: Said, E.W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Penguin Books Limited, 2016; Fanon, F. et al. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, 2008; Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

when dealing with the remaining various ethnic and racial groups within the continent, particularly in the north where the majority of its inhabitants are of Berber descent identifying as Arabs,⁷ Afrofuturism takes a one-dimensional understanding of its Afrocentricity discarding the contributions of the latter from its bodies of work. A problematic situation, given the fact that both Arab speculative literary tradition and the African one have proved to have much in common.

The History of Arab Science Fiction

It is difficult to determine the exact period in which Arab Science Fiction (ASF) emerged since the genre, just like in the west, overlapped with previous literary traditions (Campbell 50). Since ancient times, Arab literature has incorporated fantastic elements in several renowned works that still stand noteworthy today such as *One Thousand and One Nights* (1704).⁸ In *الخيال العلمي في الأدب* (*The Imaginary Science in Literature*) (1994), literary critic Muhammed Azzam defines ASF as any writing by Arabs that blended popular philosophies and theological principles related to creation to come up with a plausible basis for proto-SF works (14). Such a form of writing has undoubtedly taken an already existing vast reservoir of fantasy-oriented literary tradition as its main foundation while considering themes related to Arabness as a central focus. Further, identifiable proto-SF components are distinct in *Aja'ib* or *Mirabilia* literature, a form of writing in which Arabs coupled science and speculative literature.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Arabs witnessed remarkable scientific advancements in various domains, and this reflected on their literature that often sought to meld knowledge, religion and scientific discoveries within speculative tales. For example, works by the prominent Arab author Al Jahiz introduced Islamic tropes to *Aja'ib* literature in numerous works that include *كتاب الحيوان* (*The Book of Animals*)⁹ and *كتاب البيان والتبيين* (*The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration*) (Campbell 50). Yet, Zākārīyā ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī's *عجائب المخلوقات وغرائب الموجودات* (*Wonders of Creation and Oddities of Existence*),¹⁰ based on earlier renowned works from 12th

⁷ For more information about North African Berber heritage, see: www.britannica.com/topic/Berber.

⁸ Also called *The Arabian Nights*, it is a collection of Middle Eastern and Indian tales of uncertain authorships.

⁹ The first known mention of the book appears in a text by the Arab philosopher Al-Kindī (d. 850).

¹⁰ Zākārīyā Ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (c. 1203–83) there is no precise date of publication of his manuscript

century texts, remains the most representational of Mirabilia literature. Furthermore, Ibn al-Nafis' *Theologus Autodidactus*¹¹ and tales like *Sindbad the Sailor* are examples of a rich proto-SF Arab tradition that later attracted considerable academic attention (50). Additionally, Ada Barbaro¹² argues that despite the interest of ASF in the fantastic, which contradicts the tropes of western SF that aimed for plausibility and credibility, there were still some comparable features such as the descriptions of physically and temporally distant worlds, demonstrating an unarguable similitude between the two traditions.

Admittedly, contemporary ASF suffers from an acute lack of interest from both academic and popular readership, positioning it considerably behind its western counterpart. In 2013, a group of journalists, authors, and academics gathered in the fifth edition of *Nour Festival*,¹³ under the slogan “Reimagining ASF”, to discuss the reasons behind the neglect of the genre in Arab world. During the event, speaker Ziauddin Sardar argued that such disregard for SF in the Arab and Muslim societies today is, in fact, indicative of their technological decline. Moreover, Sardar believes that contrary to the premise of SF, which reflects on present-day apprehensions and concerns via progressive and futuristic narratives, Arab literature is “backwards-looking,” (apud. El-Mohtar) mostly focusing on past glories. In contrast, El-Mohtar argues, “the legacy of colonization in the Middle-East was a force to be reckoned with when writing science fiction—that science fiction is as much about curating the past as it is about imagining the future, and that the latter is not possible without the former” (“From Sindbad to Sci-Fi”). El-Mohtar’s insight on how historical consideration can edify contemporary ASF goes along with the principles of Afrofuturist literature, in which authors essentially construct their narratives based on their history and past experiences. Apart from this, Yasmin Khan suggests that “the Muslim psyche is craving new types of stories — ones that can inspire and empower the co-creation of more inclusive futures” (apud. Ansar). In other words, only a proliferation in ASF can remedy the lack of representation of Muslims and Arabs in SF, with works imbued with positive portrayals far from the exotic otherness and stereotyping of most Western SF.

¹¹ This novel was written sometime between 1268 and 1277.

¹² Author of *La Fantascienza Nella Letteratura Araba* (2013)

¹³ An annual festival held in London celebrating contemporary art, film, literature, music and performance from the Middle East and North Africa.

Nevertheless, navigating between religious beliefs and SF elements such as time travel, extra-terrestrial life forms, parallel universes, etc., could be controversial due to the religious constraints that at times can contradict the aforementioned SF fundamentals. Yasser Bahjat¹⁴ believes that the lack of mediatisation and religious censorship are currently the primary obstacles to the progress of SF in the Arab world (apud. Morayef). Despite the dictated limitations, some ASF authors are redefining the genre with works transcending gender and political discrimination. For instance, artist Larissa Sansour co-directed the SF short film *In the Future, They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2016), through which she expresses her views as a Palestinian vis-à-vis the Israeli occupation and its ensuing effect on her peoples' heritage. Charged with political commentary, the film explores themes of identity and belonging. Similarly, Iraqi SF anthology *Iraq + 100* (2016) is a collection of ten stories imagining how the country will look like in a hundred years after the US invasion in 2003. Speaking about the book, co-editor Hassan Blasim declared that "it was difficult to persuade many Iraqi writers to write stories set in the future when they were already so busy writing about the cruelty, horror and shock of the present, or trying to delve into the past to reread Iraq's former nightmares and glories" (Blasim). Yet, contributors succeeded in delivering SF narratives covering a vast array of themes envisioning the country's future, while providing an Iraqi perspective on its current situation.

From a golden age replete with proto-SF tropes to its present-day inadequacy, ASF is reinventing itself to meet the standards of contemporary SF by exploring the futuristic horizons of Arab communities who are much in need of onward looking perspectives. SF has not only found proliferation in the Middle East but has also reverberated in North Africa, noticeably in Algeria, where the genre is increasing in popularity.

The Emergence of Algerian SF

During the colonial occupation of Algeria, speculative fiction witnessed a pervasive lull as an idiosyncratic anti-colonial thematic that marked most of the literature of that time. As a result, there are no documented instances of the Algerian SF genre during that period. It was not until the post-independence era that the first

¹⁴ ASF author and co-founder of Yatakhayaloon, a league of authors and readers founded in 2012 to promote the subgenre.

published works in the genre emerged, namely Safia Ketou's collection of short stories *The Mauve Planet* (1983). While the bulk of Algerian SF is relatively scarce in comparison to its African/Arab counterparts, the recent decades marked an increase in the numbers of Algerian writers venturing in the genre, attracting a well welcoming readership, enticed by the prospects of relatable SF narratives.

Laureate of the prestigious Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2011, Prix du Roman Arabe in 2012,¹⁵ and Le Grand Prix Du Roman De l'Académie Française in 2015, former Algerian official Boualem Sansal is a controversial novelist known for his harsh criticism of the Arab theocracies and the support they receive from the supposedly democratic western countries. In an interview Sansal declared that "Bouteflika¹⁶ est un autocrate de la pire espèce [...] C'est pourtant lui que les grandes démocraties occidentales soutiennent..." (Hammouche),¹⁷ Sansal's worldviews are certainly apparent in his most acclaimed novel *2084: the end of the world* (2015). Sansal's opus is a tribute to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Set in a similarly dystopian setting, the narrative delves into the malfeasance and deception of autocratic and religiously extremist regimes that reject any form of nonconformist thoughts. The story unfolds within the established kingdom of *Abistan* after a nuclear holocaust, a satirical representation of present-day radical Islamic states, led by Abi, the prophet of the god *Yolah*, and assisted by the *Just Brotherhood* congregation whom he created to enforce his teachings. Abi's vision of a new era where "another world had been born, on an earth that was cleansed, devoted to truth, beneath the gazes of God and of Abi; everything must be renamed, everything must be rewritten" (Sansal 13), exemplifies a fictional radical theocracy that might not be far from present-day reality. For instance, in the novel, punishments to any form of heresy are carried through either public beheadings or death by stoning performed in dedicated stadiums, mirroring the harsh truth and extreme practices in some contemporary Islamic states. After his encounter with a secret group of freethinkers, the protagonist Ati, along with his friend

¹⁵ The prize money was withdrawn due to Sansal's visit to Israel to speak at the Jerusalem Writers Festival. See Toi, et al. "Award-Winning Algerian Author Denied Cash Prize for Visiting Israel." *The Times of Israel*, 30 June 2012, www.timesofisrael.com/known-algerian-writer-denied-cash-prize-after-visiting-israel/.

¹⁶ Former Algerian president for four consecutive terms between 1999 and 2019, he resigned after nationwide protests erupted against his candidature for a fifth term.

¹⁷ "Boutaflika is an autocrat of the worst kind [...] though it is him that the largest western democracies support". Translation done by the author.

Koa, embark on an intriguing investigation to penetrate the mysteries of *Abistan*, just to unveil the unfathomable historical and religious distortions on which the reign of totalitarianism operates. Overall, bearing one of the most enduring traits of SF, namely a vision of a plausible future, Sansal's dystopia is a blend of satire, polemics and futurist literature that paints a daring outlook on North African social and religious history. The novel received numerous critical accolades from esteemed literary magazines. For instance, *The Times Literary Supplement* describes it as being a "...abhorrence of a system that controls people's minds, explaining that the religion was not originally evil but has been corrupted. A moving and cautionary story", while *The Guardian* praised it as "A powerful novel that celebrates resistance" (Hazelton). Such recognition can only attest to the literary merit contemporary Algerian SF can achieve.

For a better understanding of the condition of SF in Algeria, we conducted an interview with Abderezzak Touahria, another passionate Algerian SF author, who to this day wrote three novels in the genre. Albeit writing exclusively in Arabic, Touahria professes that he drew substantial inspiration from Jules Verne's¹⁸ works. Notably, in 2019 Touahria won the President's Award for his latest work *شيفا مخطوطة القرن الصغير* (*Shiva the Manuscript of the Little Horn*) (2018), which also earned him an invitation to participate in the 2018 *International Science Fiction Conference* in France at Jules Verne's house. The events of the novel revolve around a twenty-nine-year-old Biology graduate, Ishaq Jamili, a son of a Russian mother and an Algerian father. Pursuing his keen interest in studying mysterious natural phenomena, shortly after his graduation Ishaq decides to join a group of Russian researchers in a scientific expedition to explore Antarctica. Along with his companion Tanya, they find themselves involved in a series of mysterious encounters leading them down to the second layer of the Earth called the mantle, where they unveil shocking revelations about the history of humankind and the existence of other races, the all, disclosed within the *Shiva Manuscript*. The narrative introduces readers to intriguing and strange worlds while founding its premise on several modern scientific theories.

During the interview, Touahria stated that he has chosen SF "since it provides futuristic readings based on current events", adding that "...the genre liberates the

¹⁸ Prolific French author whose writings laid much of the foundation of modern Science fiction.

authors' as well as the readers' imagination with what goes in line with the prevailing theories in the scientific community," (Touahria), a defining feature of Hard SF.¹⁹

Contrastingly, his approach to the genre is rather a rare occurrence in the fantasy-oriented Arab and African SF writings as they often tend to verge into the Science Fantasy²⁰ subgenre and his aforementioned work attests to such idiosyncrasy. As an Arab-Muslim author, Touahria is well aware of the cultural and religious constraints his craft may face. Speaking of which, he argues that:

The most challenging difficulties that I have faced in our Arab Muslim community is the issue of restricting my imagination and not exceeding the values of religion, customs and traditions, which have a sensitive place in our society. Therefore, I had to navigate around such elements in order to earn my readership. (Touahria)

Touahria carried on suggesting a solution for such creative shackles, adding "...the Arab and Muslim culture could act more as a distinguishing element rather than a limiting one, thus giving SF an Islamic dimension that could bring more validity to the genre since it has a logical aspect, mostly apparent in the holy *Quran*."²¹ Finally, Touahria expressed his intentions to translate his works to English in order to export and promote Algerian SF with the hope of inspiring future generations of Algerian writers to venture into the genre.

Locating the Algerian SF within the Afrofuturist Discourse

While the origins of Arab and African SF may seem distant, the postcolonial conditions of both cultures inspired similarities in their concerns and motives. Admittedly, both subgenres aptly transcended basic mimicry of the established western SF by providing a quintessential uniqueness to the genre drawing much from central cultural elements such as religion, folklore, and traditions, thus earning an undeniable place in the body of SF.

Interestingly, North African SF in general and the Algerian one in particular, constitute some kind of a middle ground where both trends coalesce. Overall, Algerian

¹⁹ Hard SF is a category of science fiction characterized by the concern for scientific accuracy and logic.

²⁰ A mixed genre that simultaneously combines tropes and elements from both science fiction and fantasy.

²¹ Touahria is referring to the study and analysis of scientific principles within the *Quran*. See Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi's *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qu'ran* (1999) and Faisal Fahim's *The Quran: (With Scientific Facts)* (2013).

literature stands as an exemplar of a tradition that blurs the confines of belonging to a specific literary cluster. In fact, several Algerian authors who excelled in both Arabic and French literature, are often recognized as Africans, yet this is not the case when it comes to Algerian SF. As mentioned earlier, B. Sansal, Abderezzak Touahria, as well as others like Sherif Arbouz²² and Riadh Hadir,²³ are Algerian SF authors who chose the genre as their main artistic outlet. One can relate the motivation behind such choice to the limitless horizons and versatility of plot construction SF offers. The authors' substantial exposure to SF in written and film forms is undoubtedly another instrumental factor that lead to the production of authentic SF in the sense of the genre's definitional elements and originality of plots that directly contextualize the Arab, Muslim and Algerian worlds within futuristic settings.

Nonetheless, after analysing the themes imbued within Algerian SF, we found out that such narratives are not associated with Afrofuturism but rather with Arab SF, a possible reason behind such disassociation could be the lack of focus on racial discrimination, a central theme in Afrofuturist works. Indeed, North African countries did not experience slavery and displacement, at least not to the same extent as the black African regions, and these historical disparities, which are recurrent subjects in Afrofuturist literature, create a rupture between Arab SF and Afrofuturism. However, Algerian SF can connect both traditions, if considered from a locational and historical perspective. The country's geographical placement, colonial past and cultural history belonging to the Arab and African worlds, provides original and raw material that can forge distinctive SF narratives, simultaneously offering a broader creative scope for the Afrofuturist tradition, while helping redress the declining Arab SF scene.

Conclusion

By the turn of the 21st century, Afrofuturism and Arab SF evolved into a postcolonial tour de force by producing literary traditions that transcend the boundaries of the conventional imitation and appropriation of a western genre. Established in the African American diaspora literature, the Afrofuturist movement found unequivocal resonance in the African continent and beyond. The implementation of long-lasting pre-

²² Author of *La Fantastique Odyssée (The Fantastic Odyssey)* (2011), and *La Grande Énigme (The Great Enigma)* (2012).

²³ Author of the dystopian SF novel *Pupille* (2017).

and postcolonial concerns and the cultural heritage onto futuristic settings elevated the SF genres to unexplored and exciting heights. As revealed previously, Arab SF shares a similarly rich experience with its African counterpart. Contemporary Arab SF writers are equally aware of the unique contribution their culture could bring to the genre. However, geographical placement and, more importantly, racial differences make the association of the Arab SF and Afrofuturism an unlikely one, bringing us to the argument of this paper which is the necessity to acknowledge Algerian SF, generally thought of as part of Arab SF, as belonging to the Afrofuturist genre as well. Algeria shares comparable historical aspects with most African countries, namely, western colonialism and the ensuing postcolonial conditions. Algerian SF writers, as others from all over the continent, expressed their views on the past and their concerns for the future of their cultural and racial identities through inventive texts that melded history, cultures and futuristic settings. Despite the cultural heritage that conventionally categorizes Algerian SF writers as belonging solely to the Arab world, their Africanness, which transcends single racial classifications, must incite an active recognition within the subgenre by including Algerian SF in the body of Afrofuturism, whether in anthologies, magazines, courses, etc., consequently, establishing a remarkable connection between the Arab and African SF.



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