LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

The (Infra)Structural Limits and Utopian Horizons of *Lagos_2060*'s Africanfuturism

Hugh C. O'Connell

University of Massachusetts Boston

Abstract:
This essay maps the relationship between two relatively nascent sf discourses – Africanfuturism and world-sf – in order to think about the notion of African futurity in relation to the contemporary global world-system. Taking Nnedi Okorafor's definition as a starting point, it examines how Africanfuturism dovetails with what Mark Bould, following in the path of Warwick Research Collective, has recently argued for as a properly world-sf, whereby due 'to sf's global perspectives and its commitment to building coherent imaginary worlds, it frequently maps out, responds to, critiques, and/or champions the world-system.' One way of forging this connection is through a focus on infrastructure. If infrastructure entails a number of overlapping valences with their own internal contradictions, then it also provides a key object for thinking the similar contradiction within sf world-building between the neoimperial implications of the developmentalism of the futures industry on one hand, and the postcolonial decentering of utopian sf world-building on the other. In order to concretize these ideas, the essay concentrates on sf coming out of Nigeria, since it is one of the most prominent sites of production and content for the post-millennial boom in African sf, and focuses particularly on the Ayodele Arigbabu-edited anthology *Lagos_2060: Exciting Sci-Fi Stories from Nigeria* (2013). Doing so, the essays argues, allows us to limn the neoliberal limits and utopian horizons embedded within Africanfuturist world-building.

Keywords: Africanfuturism; African Science Fiction; Utopianism; postcolonial science fiction; infrastructure; African Futures.

Author contact: hugh.oconnell@umb.edu

In October of 2017, Nnedi Okorafor, the most critically lauded author of the African sff boom, sent Twitter into an uproar with the critical provocation that: 'If we are going to use the word Afrofuturism, African writers from within Africa should be the majority when listing examples of it.' Responding to the questions and calls for clarification that followed, Okorafor doubled-down on her initial criticism: 'I'm saying I don't think I care for the word. It's been an [African] American rooted thing from the beginning. […] And either we redefine it or quit using it.' Following her own line of argument, she's since begun to refer to her sf writing as Africanfuturist, which, as she clarifies in another Tweet from November 2018, is 'not synonymous with Afrofuturism.'

A little over a year later, Okorafor produced a blogpost laying out the central tenants of Africanfuturism.[1] While recognizing the similarities, she separates Africanfuturism from Afrofuturism, stating that 'Africanfuturism is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view.' Developing this line of thought, Okorafor (2019) attests that:

> Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent (black people) and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa. It's less concerned with 'what could have been' and more concerned with 'what is and can/will be.' It acknowledges, grapples with and carries 'what has been.'

For Okorafor, as well as some other critics and artists, what is at stake is the way that the Americentric foundations and dominant worldview of Afrofuturism either occlude other Afrodiasporic experiences and differences (cf. Hopkinson 2017; Chude-Sokei 2015), or as Noah Tsika (2013) and Okorafor have suggested, elide experiences within Africa itself. In order to start thinking about a specifically African futurity, a generative form of Africanfuturism is necessary.

This essay, then, focuses on mapping the relationship between two relatively nascent sf discourses – Africanfuturism and world-sf – in order to think about the notion of African futurity in relation to the contemporary global world-system. As Goldstone and Obarrio (2016: 9) note, Africa's future is caught within the web of the current globalized and financialized world-system:

> Capitalist expansion on the continent, after all, is today, after structural adjustment, dominated by the volatile temporality of speculative financial capital, land grabbing, and extractive projects. These accelerated temporalities and their short-term logic impact current forms of government and development programs, as well as the disrupted fast pace of popular economies also subsumed by financialization.

Taking Okorafor's definition as a starting point, this essay examines how Africanfuturism dovetails with what Mark Bould, following in the path of the Warwick Research Collective, has recently argued for as a properly world-sf, whereby due 'to sf's global perspectives and its commitment to building coherent imaginary worlds, it frequently maps out, responds

to, critiques, and/or champions the world-system' (Bould 2017: 18). As I'll argue below, focusing on infrastructure offers one way of forging this connection.

Infrastructure entails a number of overlapping valences with their own internal contradictions – the political (through the control of populations as well as citizens' demands on government) the temporal (moving across the past, present, and future through retrofitting and modernization) the economic (entailing both material development and finance), and the discursive (the visions and desires for futurity that infrastructure undergirds or that it fails to produce). As such, it provides a key means for thinking the similar contradictions within sf world-building between the neoimperial implications of futures industry developmentalism, on one hand, and the decentering of the futures industry by utopian postcolonial sf world-building on the other.

In order to concretize these ideas, I'm concentrating on sf coming out of Nigeria, since it is one of the most prominent sites of production and content for the post-millennial boom in African sf, and focusing particularly on the Ayodele Arigbabu-edited anthology *Lagos_2060: Exciting Sci-Fi Stories from Nigeria* (2013). Significantly, Lagos serves as the neoliberal financial and commercial center for Nigeria and Western Africa, forming a prominent node in the contemporary world-system. As such, it provides a rich source of inspiration for the utopian and dystopian dialectics of the Africanfuturist imagination – a theme many of the works in *Lagos_2060* draw on. As Brian Larkin remarks, 'Lagos has become, perhaps, the most discussed, photographed, reviled, and celebrated city in Africa, a condensed signifier for the state of African urbanism and its uncertain futures' (2018: 195). By focusing on the paradoxical registers of infrastructure, these stories offer mediations of the world-system and developmentalist modernization, grappling with what Larkin refers to as infrastructure's 'unbearable modernity' (Larkin 2013: 332).

Africanfuturism as world-sf

If infrastructure, as almost all commentators note, is marked by unevenness – by alternating utopian and dystopian affective valences as well as overlapping, oscillating temporalities – then it also invokes another register of unevenness that is constituent of Africanfuturism, that of the combined and uneven development of the global capitalist world-system. Noting the geopolitical and financialized determinations on infrastructure, Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin describe infrastructure as 'capital that is literally "sunk" and embedded within and between the fabric of cities, […] represent[ing] long-term accumulations of finance, technology, know-how, and organizational and geopolitical power' (qtd. in Anand, Gupta and Appel 2018: 9). Africanfuturist sf often registers these overlapping relations of political economy in its world-building and emphasis on infrastructure, thereby making it productive to think about Africanfuturism from within the geopolitical vocation of world-sf.

World-sf offers a mediation of the combined and uneven development that is characteristic of capitalist modernity itself, whereby, in the words of the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), 'Modernity might be understood as the way in which capitalist social relations are 'lived' – different in every given instance for the simple reason that no two social instances are the same [,…thereby] recognizing that capitalist development does not

smooth away but rather *produces* unevenness' (2015: 12). As James Ferguson and other critics of modernization assert, one of the key ways this unevenness is predicated is through the ideology and subsequent products of developmentalism, in which large-scale infrastructural projects in the name of modernization not only reflect a Western telos, but are often foisted upon the global south as a way of boosting profits in the global north, whether through material construction, extractive economic practices such as financing and debt-servicing, or a mixture of both.

To be clear, then, in concert with WReC and Bould, rather the notion of a literary sf world-system, I'm arguing for a world-sf that is responsive to the conditions of the global economic world-system. As John Rieder (2018: 338) has recently stressed,

> It is worth emphasizing that the word 'world' in terms like 'world market' and 'world economy' marks an analytic, not an isomorphic, function. The 'world' of a world market or world economy in Wallerstein's world systems theory is a construction that is never to be confused with the world as reality […]. To theorize world literature on the model of core, periphery, and semi-periphery is to construct it as an analog of capitalism's symbiosis with colonialism, since the allocation of capital, resources, and power that differentiates core and periphery in the contemporary world system is the result of several hundred years of prior colonial and imperial history.

In other words, world-systems – and its attendant language of core, periphery, semi-periphery – are exclusively related to the realm of political economy and can't be unproblematically applied to culture; to do so forces a conceptual error. Even as we recognize that culture can register or offer symptomatic expressions of the world-system, we must also recognize that there is no peripheral literature or culture. There are only core-periphery relations of political economy and such 'worlds' stand as a way of mapping and giving analytical figurations to these specific relations.

Historicizing the African SF Boom: Utopian Form vs. Global Ideology

One of the more pressing questions for scholars, after realizing that there are notable examples of sf scattered throughout the history of African literature (cf. Bould 2013), is why the recent boom (O'Connell 2019: 687-95)? Eric D. Smith (2012) and Matthew Eatough (2017) approach this question by relating the development of a robust sf tradition to changes in the world-system from the bifurcated Three Worlds model to the properly global late capitalist world-system. Taking a broader approach, for Smith, the rise of postcolonial sf to the dominant non-mimetic form in contemporary postcolonial literatures reflects changes in the formal aesthetics of postcolonial literature writ large, encompassing the transition from magical realism to sf. As Smith (2012) argues, magical realism mediates a society undergoing an alteration in its mode of production, particularly as precapitalist modes are still in tension with the forced impositions of imperial capitalism. However, as capitalism formally subsumes other practices and is then universalized and concretized through economic globalization, the promise of alterity once held by precapitalist modes is submerged. In short, the reification and ossification of a once capacious and exhilarating

magical realism and its replacement with a postcolonial sf, Smith contends, marks the transition from colonialism to full globalization, and it is now the sf form that holds the possibility for expressing anti-capitalist utopian futurity from within the peripheries of the world-system as 'a continuation of and enduring validation of [sf's] unfinished modernist/utopian project' (9).

Eatough (2017) fleshes this more general narrative out with particular emphasis on the African context, arguing for a tripartite scheme that traces literary aesthetic development from anti-colonial realism (1960 - 70s), through the rise of the fantastic during the Structural Adjustment era (1980s - 90s), to the sf period of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) in the 2000s. Following Jennifer Wenzel, he argues that fantastic literature became the expressive mode of the SAP era, and he presents 'the fantastical elements of these fictions [as] a direct response to the structural contradictions that were being enacted by economic globalization' (241). However, Eatough argues that this 'attraction to the fantastic never extended into science fiction [… since for the writers] of the SAP era, science fiction was too closely associated with American neocolonialism to function as a critique of economic globalization' (242). For Eatough, the introduction of PRSs in the 2000s initiates two signal changes within Structural Adjustment that are then directly related to the development of the African sf market: (1) A focus on the largely foreign training and expertise of a professional, STEM-oriented technocratic Afropolitan class, and (2) a notably novel focus on the 'long term visions' and future orientation of the poverty reduction projects, whose goals could only ever be imagined taking fruition in some displaced future that they themselves inaugurate (245-6). Eatough ties the growth of sf, in terms of both production and reception, to this notion of the technocratic and institutionally grounded long-term notion of futurity. As a new economic reality comes to the forefront of social and political life – one that 'adapt[s] notions of social and economic justice to the logic of structural adjustment by means of a rhetoric of "long-term visions"' (246) – new forms of fiction arise to narrate and render the novel experiences that this engenders.

What I find compelling when taking Smith's and Eatough's work together is the way that they both bring our attention to African sf as an instantiation of a properly world-sf through their attentions to shifts in the world-system. Moreover, despite both Smith and Eatough working within the same broad marxist framework, their relative differences in focus point toward the differing valences of the contradiction between development and utopianism in African sf's world-building. If Smith is largely invested in pointing to the utopian potential within the *sf form* adopted and adapted by postcolonial sf, then Eatough focuses on how the development of an *African sf market* relates to the logic of post-millennial global development. As I'm suggesting, we can read these differences as two sides of a constitutive contradiction that Africanfuturism often wrestles with, in which the very form of African sf world-building is simultaneously situated within and against the developmentalist logic of the futures industry *and* the properly utopian sf form.

If such long-term projects as the PRSs depend on a notion of the science fictional long-term of futurity, then they replicate the way that financialized development itself is a predation on futurity – a capturing and reduction of futurity as qualitative difference – rather than an opening of possibility, that is, of futurity as alterity, qualitatively distinct

from our own baleful experience of capitalist realism. Yet in registering such issues at the level of form, they also offer mediations that allow for a greater cognitive mapping and demystification of the global world-system and its local, uneven, differentiated instantiations within specific African settings. In other words, the turn to sf as the principle non-mimetic, speculative form can *neither* be dissociated from capitalist developmentalism *nor* simply reduced to it.

Africanfuturism therefore acts as an imaginative supplement that confronts the anthropological and sociological limits examined by Goldstone and Obarrio (2016), offering the sort of 'untimely intervention' that they are looking for (17). Africanfuturism accomplishes this through a renewed interest in futurity that speculatively breaks through the present epistemological impasse of what they describe as the 'long-term political imaginations of the future [that] seem to be engulfed by a continuous present, composing a mélange of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial fragments' (13). As a speculative genre, Africanfuturist sf proposes a futurity that is connected to the present; it is thus entwined with the world-system by focusing on the limits that such political economic realities set on the future. At the same time, however, it is also utopian in its desire for a futurity that could negate the prevailing inimical vicissitudes of the present by pointing towards the absolute horizons of utopian desires, and thus oriented towards the future's possibilities for alterity. It is a dialectical literature in which each of these valences confront and reconfigure the other, a literature of both utopian limits and horizons.

world-sf and the Ubiquity of Crisis: Financialization and the Futures Industry

Africanfuturism as a form of world-sf marks the advent of a truly global economic world-system. As such, it wrestles not only with the triumph of global capitalism, but the transition to financialization and futures speculation that have rendered the sign 'Africa' as a space of 'absolute dystopia' in Kodwo Eshun's (2003: 292) words, one that needs to be forever managed by the speculative capitalist activities of the global north that he calls the 'futures industry' (290). In this sense, the futures industry exemplifies and furthers the combined and uneven development characteristic of the neoimperial, global world-system. As the editors of *African Futures* note, 'The savage logics of extractive capital and a new scramble for African land, oil, and minerals have brought a gallery of transnational players to the continent's doorstep: corporations and venture capitalists that resemble the concession of companies of yesteryear, a strategically charitable China, US oil and antiterrorism interests, a burgeoning development-humanitarian-spectacle complex' (Goldstone and Obarrio 2018: 11). The futures industry contributes to the course and shape of the neoimperial modernization of Africa through various development schemes (with all of their pseudo-utopian futurist undertones). Rather than utopian futurity, however, they perpetuate arrangements that result only in the permanence of primitive accumulation, in which African futures are continuously dispossessed and appropriated with the net result of further immiseration.

Such futures industry projects often elide the distinction between financialization and infrastructural development, poverty relief and neoimperialism. The futures industry thus depends upon a notion of perpetual crisis that moves from the developmental

modernization ideology that conceives of an Africa in crisis to be solved, to the notion of Africa *as* crisis, a site to be forever managed. As Janet Roitman (2016) notes, the notion of crisis is endemic to the global north's conception of Africa.: 'Although crisis typically refers to a historical conjuncture […]—or to a moment in history, a turning point—it has been taken to be the defining characteristic of the African continent for some twenty years now' (23-4). For Roitman, this isn't just an economic or political assessment, but one of epistemology: 'Crisis serves particular narrative construction and particular truth claims' often in in the service of 'establishing a particular teleology. […] Evoking crisis entails reference to a norm because it requires a comparative state for judgment: crisis compared to what?' (25). If we add to Roitman's critique Evan Calder Williams' changing notion of crisis under late capitalist financialization, where crisis is no longer a transformative historical event – 'a historically unique transition phase' (27) – but instead that which interrupts to produce more of the same (Williams 2010: 4-6), we can see how the interjection of crisis is used to justify intervention while also accounting for the mechanism of accumulation for the global north that underwrites the futures industry.

This transition to financialization and its accelerationism in the west and the concomitant advent of the futures industry as a means of predation on African futurity through the twinned forces of finance and infrastructural development have had a number of overlapping effects. As my focus is on Nigeria and particularly Lagos, I want to mention just a few key aspects in this context that are important for the recent flourishing of Nigerian sf: urbanization and the development of Lagos into the largest financial metropolis in Africa; the development of the export oil economy; the imposition of SAPs and later PRSs and their reduction of funds for social development and lack of restrictions on foreign capital controls; the speculation in arable land for principally global north investors; and what Jane Guyer following Samir Amin refers to as the global north's 'new inroads into the global economy by dispossession—that is, in the twenty-first-century version: through extractive industries, land acquisition from the peasantry, and new forms of labor control' (2016: 66). While these policies (along with corrupt comprador politicians, military coups, domestic financial elites, and rentier economies, etc.) have long contributed to the problems of the Nigerian state and the expropriation of truly utopian postcolonial futurities, there's also been a palpable counter-discourse: the discourse of the failure of these very policies. Between these two discourses of development and failure there arises an uncertain futurity (and thus possibility) that is at the heart of Africanfuturism's vexed relationship with modernity.

The Paradox and Fetish of Infrastructures

How then are we to conceive of infrastructure in this difficult matrix of Africanfuturism and crisis, global world-systems and the futures industry, (neo)imperial developmentalism and utopian world-building? As this special issue emphasizes, the notion of African futurity – whether fraught and dystopian, hopeful and utopian, or some combination of the two – needs to take into account the material instantiation and discursive notions of infrastructure. Outside of the purportedly ideologically neutral and objective STEM disciplines, infrastructure studies has largely been sociological and anthropological in

approach. Following Susan Leigh Star's (1999) influential work, it often takes place through the form and practice of ethnography, that is through concrete investigations of real projects and their effects. In other words, there's something uncomfortable in situating infrastructure studies – a concrete, material, and practical sociological field – alongside sf studies, a field predominantly focused on the imaginative and speculative. How do we conceive of the largely sociological question of African futurity within the science fictional and literary Africanfuturism?

One way is to consider that sf has long been interested in infrastructure – from its Golden Age STEM-oriented extrapolation of current scientific capabilities in the hard sciences, to J. G. Ballard's interest in the psychological transformations wrought by urban infrastructures in novels like *High Rise* and *Concrete Island*, to cyberpunk's mapping of digital networks. In this light, Larkin's diagnosis of the difference between technology and infrastructure could equally serve as a description of how sf employs technology not simply to highlight that technology itself, but to imagine and build sociologically and psychologically complex worlds: 'What distinguishes infrastructures from technologies is that they are objects that create the grounds on which other objects operate, and when they do so they operate as systems' (2013: 329). That is to say, sf – 'governed by the ontological dominant' in Brian McHale's well-known formulation (59) – takes up the proleptic and discursive aspects of infrastructure through the form and practice of sf world-building, expressing the desire for futurity through concrete infrastructural development, at once mediating its limits and horizons. If infrastructure extols a complex temporality, seeking to unite the past, present, and future through generative products that are as much about retrofit and backwards compatibility as they are about future potentials, much the same could be said of the sf form itself as it turns the present into a mock past from which to imagine (and as imagined by) the future, as in Fredric Jameson's influential account (2005: 288-9).

This is to suggest, then, that while we must not deny the materiality of infrastructure, neither should we forget its discursive functions – its projection of the notion or concept of futurity, whether from the point of view of governmentality and political authority, or from the bottom up through the citizens' desires for the futurity that infrastructure promises and thus the demands that they make on government. Sf works on a similar two-pronged approach in which infrastructure often functions as the material base propping up a realistic, fully 'cognitively' authenticated future as well as providing the affective dystopian or utopian valences of these societies (classical utopian and dystopian sf is all about the infrastructure that allows these societies to congeal). As an estranging, discursive, and speculative form, it therefore brings infrastructure from the background to the foreground – not simply to make the invisible visible, but to bring the ideological and taken-for-grantedness of infrastructure to the level of conscious debate and desire. As Larkin reminds us about the canonical position of infrastructure's oft repeated invisibility: 'Visibility and invisibility are not ontological properties of infrastructures; instead, visibility or invisibility are made to happen as part of technical, political, and representational processes' (2018: 186). Thus, drawing on Jacques Ranciére's work on the politics of fiction, Larkin argues that both artworks *and* infrastructure hold the potential to open up 'spaces

of transformation and disruption' by offering the means of mediating resistance and articulating new forms of collective life (2018: 188).

In short, sf as '*the* ontological genre *par excellence*' (McHale 2004: 59) not only depends upon infrastructure for its world-building, but is also, then, often imbued by the competing paradoxes inherent in infrastructure itself. As much recent work in infrastructure studies highlights, paradox and ambiguity underwrite the desire and ideology of infrastructure. In a 2015 overview of the relatively recent turn to infrastructural studies in the social sciences and humanities authored by a large multidisciplinary working group (Howe et al. 2015), the authors present three contradictory paradoxes at the heart of infrastructure. Their first principal paradox, ruin, suggests that 'even as infrastructure is generative, it degenerates' (552). In this sense, infrastructure is a harbinger of futurity *and* death: 'As a "ruins of the future," the construction site occupies a temporal space between the hopes pinned upon future infrastructures and the actualization of that promise. This is not only a transitional state, but a condition in its own right, a space between the past and the future' (553).

Their second paradox, retrofit, opens up 'an ontological oxymoron' at the heart of infrastructure, such that 'retrofit is an attempt to bridge timelines—from the past to the present and from the present to the future—but the need to retrofit, retool, and refurbish infrastructures makes clear that infrastructural solidity, in material and symbolic terms, is more apparent than actual' (Howe et al. 2015: 553). With the final paradox, risk, the authors draw our attention to the desire for infrastructure to 'mitigate risk,' while simultaneously noting that any new project, of necessity, 'introduces new risks' (556). Focusing on the environment makes this double-bind of infrastructural risk especially apparent, since '[i]nfrastructures, paradoxically, both mitigate and magnify precarity in the Anthropocene' (555). These same paradoxes constituent of infrastructure with their odd temporal vacillation can be related to the paradox of developmentalist modernization and utopian world-building in Africanfuturism, as all of these paradoxes seem to inhere in the very narratives of many of the contributions to *Lagos_2060*. Consequently, I'm arguing that, more than just a response to larger cultural trends of a global sf, the boom in contemporary Nigerian sf produces an sf imagination that oscillates between these promises and failures of development-futurism as expressed in infrastructural world-building, limning their utopian compromises and possibilities, their limits and horizons.

Lagos_2060: Utopian Decentering and Ambiguous Futurity

The *Lagos_2060* project was initiated in 2010, the same year that *Nigeria Vision 20:2020* was published outlining Nigeria's own Poverty Reduction Strategy development plan, noted by Eatough for its significance in the development of Nigerian sf. Both were intended as proleptic texts, proffering visions of a future Nigeria. While *Nigeria Vision 20* foregrounded poverty reduction, we must not forget that these documents are principally concerned with capitalist development, 'where the economy becomes the protagonist' in Aimee Bahng's (2018: 123) words. As such, the *Nigeria Vision 20* website boasts: 'By 2020 Nigeria will be one of the 20 largest economies in the world, able to consolidate its leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena.'

That is, it points predominantly towards GDP growth and aspirations of joining the G20, which often have little to do with resolving wealth and welfare inequalities.

Premised on a similarly extrapolative and proleptic logic, *Lagos_2060* can be seen as offering something akin to fictional 'ethnographies of the near future' (Guyer 2007: 410), through its mix of first-person narratives, direct address, and stories that are generally focalized through protagonists in a way that produces the feeling of the immediacy of personal reflections on future development. It was initially constituted as a 'workshop process conceived to commemorate Nigeria's golden jubilee and aimed at stimulating an interest in science fiction writing' as a way of prompting new thinking about Nigeria's future (xi). Throughout the stories, this notion of self-directed futurity is largely produced by imagining the sort of STEM-based institutional projects that would lead to similar outcomes outlined by the PRS blueprint.

In the volume's 'Prelude,' Ayodele Arigbabu describes the initial workshop as 'an unusual scenario planning exercise' (xii) in which 'the participants asked ourselves, what will Lagos evolve into in the next fifty years, taking into consideration the mega-city's rich history and on-going urban renewal efforts by the state government?' (xi). By grounding its sf extrapolations with reference to Lagos' status as a mega-city and already-existing development plans, the collection foregrounds not only the temporal paradoxes of infrastructural development but the larger global economics involved as well. As Onyanta Adama (2018) argues, infrastructural mega-projects, such as The Lagos Megacity Project (LMCP), create 'urban imaginaries' that 'encompass repositioning the city on the competitive landscape and reimagining and recreating urban space not only in the eyes of city planners but also for the investor or developer' (259). The *Lagos_2060* project thus evokes the kind of infrastructural modernization that combines internal developmentalist desires with those of the futures industry and international finance.

To situate this within the larger African sf boom, *Lagos_2060*'s mission statement, while engaging with the vicissitudes of globalization, reads very differently from Ivor Hartmann's (2012) near contemporary anthology *AfroSF*, which posits sf as a necessary rejoinder to the outside control of African futurity. Conversely, *Lagos_2060* at first appears rather inward looking, invoking a similar notion of crisis as stagnation that is condemned by Roitman and promulgated by the futures industry. 'Science Fiction,' Arigbabu writes,

> provides an amazing avenue for catharsis, especially in an environment that has suffered stagnation for such a long time. […] The political stagnation Nigeria suffers can be interpreted within the context of a creative writing process; the nation's development has been stifled by a lack of imagination. The country remains bogged down in the present, enslaved to its past and quite shy of the future. With science fiction, writers who dare the future, give courage to others. (*Lagos_2060* 2013: xi)

Yet, such an inward focus simultaneously reflects a particularly Nigerian point of view that has seen the nation's infrastructure deteriorate over the last several decades. As Matthew Gandy (2006) details, this infrastructural failure (including crumbling roads, severely inadequate sewage systems, lack of access to potable water, and a deficient energy supply, among others) is the product not only of colonial underdevelopment but also the

postcolonial nation's 'inherited governmental structures of "decentralised despotism"' (379). This results in 'a lack of imagination' stemming from the political and historical failures related to the building of Nigeria's infrastructure: 'most people have never experienced functional public services so that any political mobilisation for change cannot simply be predicated on the memory of Lagos before its rapid deterioration during the 1980s and 1990s,' a situation only exacerbated by the 'mix of generalized hopelessness and disenfranchisement under years of military rule' (387). Moreover, as Onyanta notes, the mixture of political rivalry between regional and national governing bodies over funding allocations for development projects (264-7) makes the neoliberal practices of engaging Private-Public-Partnerships (PPPs) not only necessary but also attractive to outside financiers and development firms (257-8), such that the external futures industry notion of crisis and internal Nigerian experience of governmental failure coalesce in contemporary 'urban imaginaries' related to infrastructural development.

Seeking to overturn these conjoined notions of crisis that overwhelm the 'urban imaginaries' of Lagos, *LAGOS_2060* instead positions Lagos as the new 'Mecca of innovation' (*Lagos_2060* 2013: 197), in the words of the story 'Mango Republic.' In this vein, Arigbabu references Rem Koolhaus and the Harvard Project on the City, stating that these 'theorists postulated that all other cities are aspiring towards Lagos' self-correcting, chaos driven urbanization patterns. They had discovered a closely guarded secret known to only a select few. They had found out that Lagos is the centre of the universe' (xi-xii). Through this guiding 'Prelude,' we arrive at a contrasting, paradoxical situation in which Lagos is both under a crisis of stagnation *and* the site of futurity, while reorienting globalization's center of gravity such that the 'future of Lagos is closely linked to the future of the world given the rapid rate of urbanization in Africa, the shift in the economic center from the West and the reality that globalization has become' (xii). The volume's stories thus reflect the manifold, overlapping realities of multiplying center-periphery relationships in global late capitalism that extend far beyond the older geopolitical national blocs of the three worlds model or colonizing metropole and colonized periphery, with Lagos multiply mapped and remapped as a center within the more peripheral Nigeria, as well as a semi-peripheral economic locale compared to the more central financial hubs of London and New York. And this, of course, could be further extended to the internal divisions within Lagos itself.

We can therefore read this 'Mecca of innovation' as a multivalent statement that encapsulates both the utopian and dystopian registers of the volume: its oscillation between radical utopian difference and pseudo-utopian capitalist driven progress. In this sense, the stories that comprise the volume intermix utopian desires with dystopian ends. On the utopian end, there's a double decentering – a wish to decenter the foreign core economies of the global world-system as the only progenitors of futurity by reversing the dynamic of the futures industry, coupled with a simultaneous desire to decenter local narratives of Afropessimistic crisis and failure. As Larkin notes, 'The detritus of failed infrastructural projects bears witness to a certain structure of feeling that constitutes the postcolonial state's imaginative investment in technology' (2018: 333). Such stories play into this similar desire to negate the overlapping discourses of failure – imperial and neoimperial – and to

reinvigorate the 'imaginative investment in technology' at the level of culture by displacing it to the future.

Yet, despite this, many of the stories often culminate in dystopian or at best ambivalent projections of what such a future Lagos would be like. Rather than utopian visions of the future, then, most of the stories critique aspects of the present by extrapolating, if not a fully dystopian future, then a future that despite being more in Lagos' local control will continue the problematic aspects of neoliberal development that lead to environmental and economic disaster. In the words of the protagonist from 'Mango Republic': 'Lagos may have become a place where dreams come true but this was a long time in coming. The city had come to this pass through painful evolution and the people who lived through it had bitter tales to tell' (*Lagos_2060* 2013: 194).

Rather than moving through each story programmatically, I'll instead focus on a set of overriding themes that emerge through this dual optic of utopian decentering and dystopian developmentalism: oil, independence, land and real estate development, and their environmental impact. Treating the project as a whole – as a collectively imagined vision of Lagos' development – reveals the way that concerns with infrastructural development versus localized autonomy permeate the entirety of the stories and how their narratives not only resonate with the concerns of infrastructure but turn on the paradoxes outlined above.

Most, if not all, of the stories are preoccupied with the centrality of oil for Nigeria's economy and its role in environmental devastation and the immiseration of Nigerian citizenry and thus the desire for new energies infrastructures to replace oil. There is also the added concern of Lagos' outsized need for energy and the revenues from the oil trade for other infrastructural developments that makes Lagos dependent upon and separate from Nigeria's national government, which controls these. This relationship emphasizes the various levels of center and periphery that cut across and through national boundaries in the global capitalist world-system. Consequently, the stories often revolve around the production of new energy sources and posit energy *as* independence for Lagos, decentering the global *and* national oil and energy markets while also surpassing the global north nations as the premier sites of scientific innovation.

This concern over energy infrastructures, then, leads simultaneously to another key narrative concern: Lagos' independence from Nigeria as both a desire and fear. It's significant to note that, although referencing Nigeria's independence in 1960, the collection is titled *Lagos_2060*, and reflects a shift in the general usage of 'Lagosian' related to infrastructural development and autonomy: 'In the 1970s, "Lagosian identity" was described as an urban lifestyle to which rural immigrants adapted […]. More recently, "Lagosian" discourse is usually associated with invocations of municipal autonomy vis-à-vis the Federal government's interference and control, which manifests in many aspects of urbanization processes, such as water […], infrastructure […], market […] and transport' (Xiao 2021: 1481).

For example, in Rayo Falade's 'Coming Home' – an interesting twist on the time-travel narrative in which a college-aged woman, Tola, returns to visit her father on the tenth anniversary of an independent Lagos after growing up in the US with her Mother – Nigeria is presented as a stagnant, corrupt 'third world country' (*Lagos_2060* 2013: 177) in

comparison to the developed, contemporary, 'hypermodern' Lagos. The temporal shifts of futurity and hypermodernity are noted through the utopian promises of infrastructure: 'You remember the stories your mom told of a time when that bridge […] and not the underwater train was the major link between the Mainland and the Island, how it was also scary because sometimes at night, robbers would lay siege on the bridge an even throw people over. […Y]ou cannot think of any robber who would dare attack a car; with the defence mechanism the robot drivers have' (172). Productivity and development are at the forefront of the narrative, forming a textual anxiety pitted against the stagnation that Arigbabu highlights in the 'Prelude'; for example, Lagos' move towards independence was triggered by corruption in Nigeria's governance, anger at not receiving enough money from the central government 'to sustain herself even though she generated most of it,' and fears of 'Lagos going to ruin like the other states' (175). The narrative conceit, however, is that this division is upheld by a ruthless efficiency: in Lagos any corrupt politician is brutally, publicly executed (and indeed a public execution provides the main festival event that the father and daughter are attending).

This ruthless efficiency becomes a motif in the story, connected to development and independence. In this same story, Lagos achieved its freedom from Nigeria by developing nuclear weapons and somehow using them to destroy Nigeria's largest oil reserve, again echoing the tension between the national and regional governments over the allocation of oil revenues in relation to local autonomy. However, the weapons themselves become a sign of local developmentalism turned destructive as Tola thinks: 'now you understand why it seemed that Lagos had become an independent, developed country over night. Nuclear weapons! Wow! You think' (*Lagos_2060* 2013: 177). Throughout the story, then, the fears over being able to sustain hypermodern development in Lagos rebound as a critique of the means used to achieve these ends in which the promises of infrastructural futurity – safety and modernization – reveal a cold, destructive, technocratic efficiency undermining their gains.

The destruction of Nigeria's oil infrastructure in 'Coming Home' rebounds in a number of other stories that link Lagos' independence to its reliance on energy sources to power its 'hypermodern' development. However, rather than eliminating oil, other stories examine the development of post-oil technologies. For example, Ayodele Arigbabu's contribution, 'Cold Fusion,' likewise finds Lagos and Nigeria at the tipping point of a civil war, due to Lagos' control over a new energy source that utilizes seawater to produce cold fusion batteries. In the story, cold fusion is presented as the key to Lagos' independence, highlighting Lagos as a seat of technological innovation:

> it seemed a pretty simple bit of technology to me, scientists in Lagos had, in collaboration with Indian scientists, devised an ingeniously cheap means of generating electricity from sea water. It was like the car battery that had been in use for over a century, only replace the acid with sea water and voila – an incredible source of electrical energy presents itself. So they rejigged the car battery with an improved version of a technology the Americans had been making noise about for a long time with not results to show, and made even more noise over it. Big deal! It

> was much later that I began to understand the implications of the cold fusion batteries. (2013: 144)

This new power source allows Lagos' independence from the unreliable national power grid, while also fueling more neoliberal infrastructural development: 'Soon industrial-sized cold fusion batteries were introduced by the Lagos Metropolitan Government run Eko Energy Corporation (EEC) for the manufacturing industries that had started mushrooming in Lagos since massive tax breaks and other incentives were offered to fledgling manufacturing companies' (144). The story reaches a narrative resolution when the war is prevented by two powerful business interests (one Muslim, one secular). However, the desire to impede war is due to economics and a need to stave off the futures industry financial-developmental profiteering from the ensuing crisis: 'We cannot afford to have a war. The Americans are waiting on the wings to pick the pieces after we're done bombing ourselves. Their aid and rescue missions to save the warring African savages will aid and rescue their own economy by getting to the bottom of our Cold Fusion technologies' (162). Rather than a solution that resolves the internal political divisions, détente is only achieved to stave off outside pressures.

Drawing on similar concerns, Terh Agbedeh's 'Mango Republic' presents Lagos as a sort of fortress utopia after global warming has decimated the surrounding regions. In this post-oil world, Lagos becomes a geopolitical beacon of innovation: 'The whole world was working on alternative fuel research but we were the first to strike real gold' (190). The alternative sources take a number of forms as the city is powered by a solar dome (190), 'biomass from the sewers' that run turbines to produce power (190), and water, as in 'Cold Fusion,' is 'attenuated […] to power cars, trains and other machinery, but it was also used as a healing agent. […] Water was originally meant to be life, and with a little creativity this was so' (190). As Larkin attests, the 'belief in the power of infrastructural development was, if anything, an even greater part of nationalist struggle than of colonial rule. This was especially the case in Nigeria after the oil boom of the 1970s, which ushered in what Michael Watts (1992) has referred to as a frenzy of infrastructural building' (2018: 192). Across the stories of *Lagos_2060*, the development of energy infrastructure continues to hold as a promise towards futurity even as the older projects of postcolonial national development lose ideological sway. The promise of Lagos' 2060, then, is seen as being both over and against these earlier infrastructural visions: a desire to escape their failure, while still drawing on their animating ideological energy, which they seemingly cannot shirk.

This leads to the third thematic: the imbrication of economic and real estate development, and particularly for *Lagos_2060*'s infrastructural futures imaginary, the Eko Atlantic Island project. These concerns are forecast in the initial mission of the volume with its animating position in Lagos' contemporaneous 'on-going urban renewal efforts' (xi). Land reclamation, the development of skyscrapers, and the expropriation of arable land from farmers to sell to the global north permeate all of the stories and continue the oscillation between development and futurity as caught between the futures industry and locally determined infrastructural futures.

Combining the notions of energies futures and political autonomy with real estate development, in 'Cold Fusion' the Atlantic Eko City is described not only as a feat of technical infrastructure, but as national pride:

> I noticed that the strong air of pride that permeated the city still held sway. Everyone felt proud in Eko Atlantic City, the rich and powerful businessmen and politicians and the not-so-rich-and-powerful everyday people who kept their businesses and their politics in shape. Everyone felt proud, even the buildings were designed with pride in mind. Decades ago, a bunch of businessmen and politicians decided to build a city every African would be proud of, they chose to build it on the ocean under the pretence of reclaiming land that had been eaten away by ocean surge, but the real reason for pushing the frontiers of the engineering and architectural skills of the era was pride. (155)

As Larkin notes, such modes of infrastructure 'emerge out of and store within them forms of desire and fantasy and can take on fetish-like aspects that sometimes can be wholly autonomous from their technical function' (2013: 329). This is especially the case with skyscrapers, which are particularly encountered with awe in the stories as multivalent signs of futurity and fear, independence and corruption.

In 'Cold Fusion,' the Eko Atlantic mixes this fetishistic notion – the ideal of pride captured in postcolonial infrastructural development recast for the global world-system – with the notion of economic autonomy, which has been hampered by foreign investment in Nigeria and Lagos. As Guyer illustrates, the devaluing of local African currencies by the influx and circulation of hard global north currencies continues well beyond the 2008 crisis as extractive neoimperial practices continue apace (2016: 72-3). In this story, the Eko Atlantic City project, then, begins as a notion of national pride that stems from competition with Emiratis and the similar land reclamation projects in Dubai. Yet, more importantly, its motivation reveals a desire to strengthen the naira, whose local purchasing power is undercut by the flood of foreign currency through oil development and other extractive capitalist practices.

The story describes the originators of the Eko development project as 'fed up of only being able to find what their money could afford them in foreign countries. They were tired of the patronizing way the Emiratis would sidle up to you when they knew you had a stack of money to burn on their real estate deals' (155). However, despite the project originating with South Energyx Nigeria Limited, rather than national development, it is a global project funded by private investment (national and foreign) propped up by a vast array of government incentives (Adama 2018: 269). As an exclusive enclave for the wealthy and privileged international business class, rather than a utopian form of infrastructural nation-building, the Atlantic Eko project reflects the further neoliberalization of development where government subsidies support private investment at the public's expense.

In 'Mango Republic' the city's utopian futurity is predicated on a similar infrastructural development plan based on reclaimed land, representing a key example of infrastructural world-building that replaces the foreign speculation in land with internal

development projects. As with 'Cold Fusion,' and redolent of the Atlantic Eko Project, the dream of such development is 'to build a model for the best business district in the world' (183). However, here – in a critique of the utopian city-state form – the infrastructure of the city is coordinated under notions of governmentality aimed at producing the most efficient citizens to keep the project running smoothly.

Recalling the introduction, Lagos is recentered as the seat of innovation and economy: 'it has made the city the envy of other cities all over the world. People have come from far and near to learn how the machinery of Lagos is oiled to make it work so well. That has been a source of revenue because nothing is free, commerce takes precedence over all else' (183). However, unlike the ambiguous ending of 'Cold Fusion,' in 'Mango Republic' the seawater that saves and powers this community also destroys it in a narrative conclusion that posits the sea's destruction of Lagos as a penalty for the hubris of land reclamation and neoliberal development: 'But the damage had already been done long ago with the first tipper of sand used to reclaim land from the sea' (197). The entire city, a fortress utopia, is surrounded by dangerous water: 'It was juicy, messy like an overripe mango waiting for that nudge to fall to the ground and rot. It was the retribution of the land when well-known laws were not obeyed' (198). In this, it echoes Martin Lukacs' (2014) condemnation of the Atlantic Eko Project as the dream of 'disaster capitalists' who 'have seized on climate change to push through procorporate plans to build a city of their dreams,' producing 'enclaves for the ultra rich ringed by slums lacking water and electricity.' What begins in the form and register of a classical utopia predicated on infrastructural modernization ends as a foreboding dystopian parable of neoliberal development.

These factors, then, are all tied together in my final central concern: environmentalism and global warming. For as the authors of 'Paradoxical Infrastructures' note, infrastructures 'both mitigate and magnify precarity in the Anthropocene. […] Particularly as we confront the ends of certain kinds of energy and climate capacity, infrastructure comes with the recognition, in bleak terms [… that] "the infrastructures of modernity are killing us"' (Howe et al. 2015: 555). In most of the stories, as with the ending of 'Mango Republic,' the reclamation of land for the development of economic business hubs is presented as an initial act of replacing the outside development schemes of the futures industry, only to ultimately rebound as a form of hubris which nature punishes: 'Their pride got the better of them and they decided to build a city of the future in their backyard. They raped the ocean and it obliged them by giving birth to a dream city' (155).

However, these environmental concerns also show up in other interesting ways that tie them to infrastructural development. Okey Egboluche's 'Animals on the Run' combines a narrative about the fears of the robotic replacement of human workers with the development and urbanization of Nigeria and Lagos that lead to a loss of natural habitats for animals. This is initially critiqued through land speculation as the replacement for oil speculation due to the end of fossil usage. Large corporate landowners either sell their lands, or the government seizes land in order to develop cash crops to sell elsewhere (58, 60): 'They said our oil pollutes the air. Now they also use our crops to produce fuel while we have little remaining for us to feed on' (60). The story similarly situates the Eko Atlantic City development as a site of critique: 'the Lagos Mega City infrastructural development project including the Eko Atlantic City was carried out years ago without adequate plans

for the maintenance of the ecosystem' (64). However, the re-development of land and infrastructure is further criticized as the loss of natural habitats leads to animals rampaging the city in hordes, killing many.

Drawing on the same critique of developmentalism and environmental consequences, in Afolabi Muheez Ashiru's 'Amphibian Attack' the development of nuclear power stations to replace oil results in a meltdown. Consequently, a new pro-solar governor comes into power through the support of the Bright Life Company who become 'major stakeholders in his government' (5). In the same vein as many of the stories' desires to decenter the global north and recenter Lagos as the hub of innovation, the Bright Life Company are initially presented as a utopian venture

> at the forefront in scientific research in Africa as well as respected round the world. The company's main focus was medicine, pharmaceuticals and genetics but they also dealt in agricultural and engineering products. The company came to world attention when in 2053, they came out with drugs that could cure sickle cell and AIDS. The company was also on the verge of launching drugs that could eliminate cancer cells without damaging non-cancerous cells in the body. (5)

Predictably, in the end it's revealed that it was Bright Life that caused the meltdown to gain political power and who then introduced the frogs that killed several citizens so that they could profit from getting rid of them. It becomes a story of infrastructural development run amok through a mixture of governmental malfeasance and greed: 'They had been given tax breaks and research grants. Not to talk of construction funds for fixing the state after the nuclear disaster. Come to think of it, it was after he became governor that the company branched into engineering and construction!' (39). Realizing he had merely been a pawn in their ascension to power, the governor (very oddly) pulls out a remote detonator and kills himself and the Bright Life leadership. However, the story doubles down on its anti-utopian sentiments with its closing words: 'The explosion was not designed to destroy the company. It only took out the top management. There isn't much worry about. Their future is still bright' (40), underlining what Gandy diagnoses as the lack of governmental legitimacy in the citizenry's eyes.

Conclusion

At first what is striking about these stories is their seeming inability to conceive a truly utopian future for Lagos in 2060, 100 years after achieving independence (itself a utopian event). Indeed, independence and autonomy (from oil, Nigeria, the futures industry, political corruption, poverty) appear to be the overriding concerns driving the narratives while also undermining their conclusions. Yet rather than a failure, this is the work of the critical utopian impulse housed within Africanfuturist world-building itself. The stories turn on the countervailing political and affective modalities of infrastructure. As Larkin argues, infrastructures 'represent both promise and its failure at the same time' (2013: 334); such a double bind reveals why they may be at the heart of an Africanfuturist sf project like *Lagos_2060*.

In sf world-building, the function of infrastructure is to give the appearance of futurity. It must make the usually invisible infrastructure visible in order to highlight its material necessity as well as its ideological valences such that the future is both (1) a literal, quantitative-progressive term (the year 2060) indelibly linked to and arising from the present, and (2) an aspirational, qualitative term registering alterity, difference, and separation from the now. That the stories so often oscillate between utopian and dystopian worlds predicated on this very instantiation of future-signifying infrastructure brings us back to the dialectic of limit and horizon: infrastructure as the site of politics and conflict, drawing attention to the larger socio-political structures undergirding such materialist (thought of as apolitical, autonomous) projects.

In other words, the various authors of the *Lagos_2060* project, whether consciously or not, offer a critique of the kind of developmentalist, technocultural logic that futurity as capitalist development is based on, while simultaneously undermining certain key aspects of Golden Age sf narrative thinking that they adapt. The utopian register that is constantly evoked in principle but then undermined through narrative process is a mixture of Africanfuturist autonomy and decentering, witnessed not only through the negation of global north superiority (whether that be economic, scientific, or cultural), but also by opening up possible futures from a Nigerian standpoint. Yet, in doing so, they don't simply extract utopian-nationalist visions unproblematically, but instead similarly critique the internal conditions that mirror and/or exacerbate the external blocks, tying together the larger structures of the world-system.

As Guyer's work reveals, for these Lagosians attempting to imagine their future through infrastructural development plans, development is not simply development, but a mode of desiring economic autonomy and decentering: 'the indeterminacy and political maneuvering around the value of ordinary Africans' daily money in the era of globalized markets, in multiple currencies, must figure prominently in any understanding of their present and future as producers and consumers' (2016: 68). Following the havoc unleashed on African currencies during the period of structural adjustment, such internal development schemas as imagined by the *Lagos_2060* project can be seen as a desire to displace the futures industry and their external financing and debt-servicing (especially since contemporary conditions in Nigeria make foreign investment necessary for large-scale infrastructural development). Displacing external development schemas and investors is thus a means of superseding the devastation that such 'hard' currencies cause on soft currencies and thus their communities. Critics like Aimee Bahng, Sherryl Vint, and Steven Shaviro argue that speculative fiction at its best works in the opposite valence of speculative capital by opening up the future as a site of alterity rather than foreclosing the future as a site of investment for the present. As the stories here illustrate with their focus on infrastructure, in order for speculative fiction to take on this progressive valence it must tarry with both ends simultaneously. As such, infrastructure, from the point of view of Africanfuturism, is cast as speculation itself – both capitalist and science-fictional at the level of world-building.

In this, the collective project of *Lagos_2060* can be seen as confronting the systemic drive of neoliberal development as the block on Lagos' autonomy: not only the older utopian impossibility of delinking given the stories' presentations of Lagos as a virtual

island utopia, but a newer impossibility rooted within the promises and failures of globalization and development. In other words, Lagos, Nigeria, Africa are not the solely determinate problems confronting 2060; it is the world-system and the universalization of its logic that's been foisted upon them and then internalized in their own future planning *and* sf world-building that frustrates and recontains their utopian dreams. Ultimately, it's a reminder that island utopias and fortress utopias, as so many of the stories reveal, are still captured by the larger seas that surround them.

Notes

[1] Republished as "Africanfuturism Defined" in Africanfuturism: An Anthology, ed. Wole Talabi, Brittle Paper, 2020. http://brittlepaper.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Africanfuturism-An-Anthology-edited-by-Wole-Talabi.pd.

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