

## Speculative Fictions of A Divided World: Reading Octavia E. Butler in South Korea

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### I. Interoduction: Science Fiction, Space, and World-Making

The great writer and literary critic Samuel Delany defines science fiction as the genre that uses the narrative device of the future to offer “a significant distortion of the present that sets up a rich and complex dialogue with the reader’s here and now” (165). While Delany refers here to time and temporality, space and spatiality are also central to how science fiction significantly distorts the present. Indeed, insofar as the genres of science fiction and fantasy—today often conjoined under the umbrella term speculative fiction—fundamentally depend on world-making, on creating compelling secondary worlds, space and spatialities are also central to their operations. In what follows, I suggest that especially since the 1990s, what I am calling speculative fictions from below or visionary fiction (Brown and Imarisha 2015) has much to contribute to the lively conversation about space and the spatial turn currently taking place across multiple fields of study in different parts of the world.

In Anglophone contexts, the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction are inseparable from histories of nation-states, colonialism, and imperialism in which spaces are remade, often in violent and exploitative ways. The imaginary voyages of Jonathan Swift and global contagions, last men, and Frankenstein monsters invented by Mary Shelley, as well as the utopias and dystopias devised by Sir Thomas More and others, all respond to these long histories of the spatial reshaping of a divided world. Fredric Jameson, author of *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), writes suggestively about how utopias, for instance, depend upon a spatial distancing from our world, a foundational breaking away, which means utopia is always a kind of spatial enclave made possible by leaving or pushing some people outside it. This spatial externalization of the other, this enclave existence, can shore up settler colonialism, xenophobia, and rac-

ism, the imagining of the other as an alien, an invader, a contaminating force, and so forth, as we often see especially in 20<sup>th</sup> century Cold War science fiction. What is more, the inverse of utopia which today is much more popular globally—dystopia—also fundamentally depends upon a spatial logic that divides up the world in ways that significantly distort the divisions, hierarchies, and boundaries of our own world.

This has led some to wonder whether science fiction and fantasy are quintessential genres of the colonizer, easier for readers and viewers to enjoy who come from colonizing nations, and less pleasurable and illuminating for those who have been colonized. In the United States, in an article from the *Atlantic* magazine that recently circulated widely on social media, entitled “Why Science Fiction Keeps Imagining the Subjugation of White People,” comics scholar Noah Berlatsky, for instance, claims that “sci-fi is often obsessed with colonialism and imperial adventure, the kind that made the British Empire an empire and that still sustains America’s might worldwide.” Inspired by his reading of John Rieder’s book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (UPNE 2008), Berlatsky emphasizes that science fiction “doesn’t just demonstrate future possibilities, but future limits—the extent to which dreams of what we’ll do remain captive to the things we’ve already done.” Others have argued that this limiting obsession with colonialism and imperial adventure has made science fiction unpopular specifically in South Korea over most of its history.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, I argue that the late great Octavia E Butler’s work is an example of a Black diasporic speculative fictional practice from below that harshly illuminates and meaningfully responds to migration and demographic change; an emergent neoliberalism and ongoing imperialism and colonialism; the destabilization of national boundaries through global forces such as climate change; the eventual depletion of fossil fuels; and

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<sup>1</sup> In 2001, Sellar suggested: “South Korea offers a striking example of a highly industrialized society saturated with technosocial change” but without, until recently, “more than marginal localization of the SF genre in literary or cinematic form.” He speculates that one of the biggest reasons why is that “many of the most common of popular SF tropes are strongly rooted in the specific circumstances, viewpoint, and language of European colonial and naval history and literature—the colonizers, not the colonized” (5). I believe examples of these genres from different times and places will offer different possibilities and limits and that it is reductive to make the huge generalization that science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction are simply and only genres of the colonizer.

the volatility and violence of the global economy. Reading Butler also requires us to think about how different kinds of technology reshape our sense of place, space, and the environment. In all of these ways, I suggest, Butler's work anticipates and joins an emerging conversation about global inequalities, international and transnational divisions and connections, and climate change in recent science fiction and fantasy films in global mass culture, including some involving significant contributions by Korean cultural producers, most famously, *The Host* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2013), both directed by Bong Joon Ho.

## II. Korea in the Octavia E. Butler Archive/ Science Fiction in South Korea

In speaking of Butler's work, however, I will not limit myself to the body of her short stories and novels published between the late 1960s and 2006. When Butler died in 2006 at the way too young age of 58, she left over 350 boxes of manuscripts, letters, ephemera, and other material to the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Willing her papers "not to a university, but to the Huntington Library because they asked for them and because Pasadena is my home town," she told an interviewer in 2003 that "whatever I put together and mark will go to them" (Schweitzer 24). "She was a towering intellect who took copious notes about everything, and she kept it all," says Sue Hodson, the archivist at the Huntington who acquired the papers. "She had an amazing system for organizing her subject files. She read voraciously and clipped newspapers, magazines, and journals night and day. The collection is a feast of information and insight into the mind of a writer, and into the writer's process" (Lowe 2009).

Here and elsewhere, in two books I am currently completing, one on climate change and science fiction, the other on science fiction archives and what they tell us about the future, I argue that Butler's archiving activity is itself a significant form of cultural work. Connecting this archiving activity to African American memory practices such as scrapbooking, I theorize Butler's position as what she named a Histo-Futurist, salvaging bits of the past, extrapolating them into the future, and thereby presenting visions of the future that help us understand our present and confront its deepest problems. I suggest that Butler's fiction and creative archiving activity from the late 1960s through her untimely death in 2006 illuminate spaces of danger and possibility within our current neoliberal

moment of globalization. Her work thereby anticipates the emergence of a transnational constellation of science fiction and fantasy fiction, films, music, and other forms of culture produced in the wake of her death that imagines otherwise the world as well as the spaces that divide and connect us.

Today, 10 years after her untimely death, Octavia E. Butler is now, finally, famous as a writer of speculative fiction. Butler struggled to make a living as an author from the 1970s through 1995, when she received a MacArthur “genius” Fellowship that gave her work legitimacy and recognition even outside science fiction and fantasy circles. In the last 20 years or so, her fiction has frequently appeared on high school and college reading lists in the United States, especially her 1979 time travel novel *Kindred*, which hurls its 1970s protagonist back to the time of slavery and a Maryland plantation peopled by her Black and white ancestors. *Kindred* is probably the most canonical Butler text, perhaps because of its focus on rethinking history and slavery. But several of Butler’s other speculative fictions continue to reward study, particularly her 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower*, which reimagines by significantly distorting the conditions that fueled the 1992 Los Angeles uprisings, thereby fitting Delany’s definition of science fiction as a significant distortion of the present. As a visionary Histo-Futurist, Butler’s memory-work and speculative imaginings extend beyond the pages of her novels, connecting problems of racial capitalism and education to longer histories of struggles over sexuality, gender, race, labor, colonialism, imperialism and state power.

Interestingly, Korea comes up several times in the archive of the Octavia E Butler Papers at the Huntington Library, including in the dozens of boxes containing Butler’s correspondence with letter writers from many different parts of the world. On November 14, 2002, for instance, she received a letter from Hae Jae Lee, Director of the Sookmyung Women’s University Library in Seoul. Although in 2002 Butler was sadly fewer than four years away from her premature death, she had achieved a huge reputation as one of the great woman writers of the world. Or at least so it would seem from the evidence provided by this letter. In anticipation of the university’s upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary in 2006, the Director wrote to Butler to tell her that the Central Library at the university had newly opened its World Women’s Literature Center on November 30<sup>th</sup> of 2000 with the aim of researching and growing women’s literature. Imagining Butler as an important contributor to such a world women’s literature project, the Director invited Butler to be part of the center in

hopes of making the latter “an internationally renowned birth bed” of women’s literature, asking her to donate signed copies of her work so that they could “exhibit them in our gallery and let the world see them through our website” (Taehakkyo 2002).

It is striking that nothing is said here of science fiction, fantasy, or speculative fiction in this noteworthy example of Butler being recognized in Korea as a world-renowned woman writer in the opening years of the millennium. The letter suggests that Butler is such an internationally significant woman writer that adding her work would be a major contribution to the WOWLIC center. It also points to worldwide feminist and women of color networks in which Butler was an important figure. But the missing reference to science fiction, fantasy, or speculative fiction in the letter would seem to support the oft-repeated thesis that science fiction has historically been unpopular in South Korea. In a dissertation on Dr. Who fandom in South Korea, Hyo Jin Kim complicates this thesis by building on S. Han’s work to divide the history of science fiction in South Korea into 4 episodes: “1900 to 1940 when SF print materials were imported during the Japanese occupation”; then “wider expansion to the public (1950s-1960s); the drastic decline of SF literature (1970s-1980s); and the restoring of SF literature (late 1990s).” He joins other critics and scholars in arguing that if for most of the twentieth century science fiction in South Korea, despite some notable exceptions, was largely an unpopular genre and one associated with military occupation and colonizers’ cultures and languages, since the late 1990s there has been a boom in science fiction in South Korea due to new media and changing social conditions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hyo Jin Kim argues: “The history of the SF genre and SF culture in South Korea is short. According to Han (2012), the history of SF in South Korea may be organized in four eras: the beginning of SF literature (1900-1940s), the wider expansion to the public (1950s-1960s), the drastic decline of SF literature (1970s-1980s), and the restoring of SF literature (late 1990s). The first period, the beginning of SF literature, occurred from 1900 to 1940 when SF print materials were imported during the Japanese occupation. Therefore, most imported literature was translated. In this period, SF literature did not become popular because Korean readers were not familiar with western popular culture. The second period, from 1950 to 1960, is called the wider expansion to the public. After independence from Japan, SF literature was actively promoted. The first Korean SF novel came out and several science fiction magazines were published. Also, a Korean SF writers club was organized in this time period. The third era, from 1970 to 1980, saw a drastic decline of SF literature. During this time period, South Korea was under a military dictatorship and in the process of industrialization. Because of

The silence about science fiction in this 2002 letter to Octavia Butler, then, may be due to the fact that the fortunes of the genre were just on the brink of change in South Korea at this time.

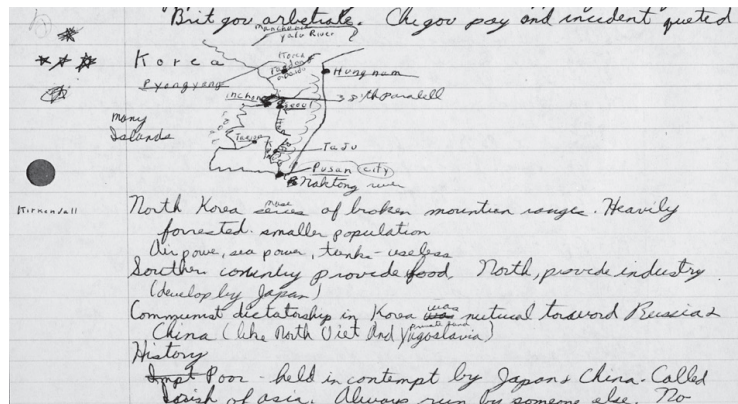
The most visible sign of that change and the boom on the global stage would certainly have to be in the film industry. As Sellar points out in his articles and on his blog on science fiction, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the release of several impactful science fiction films in South Korea. Writing in 2011, he names the 2003 film *Save the Green Planet* and the 2006 *The Host* as two examples of South-Korean made science fiction that it is “difficult not to see” in “radical political/ historical terms” as calling attention to the dramatic division between the “wretched majority” and their “natural enemies, the repressive, exploitative elites (Korean and American alike).” Along with the 2001 independent film *Nabi (The Butterfly)*, there is also an emphasis on ecological destruction in many of these films. This trend continues in the hugely successful 2013 global blockbuster *Snowpiercer*, an international co-production directed by Bong Joon Ho that was a big hit in Korea, the United States, and many other parts of the world. Loosely based on the popular French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige*, this film explores the topics of climate change, global inequalities, and class divisions, and the possibilities and failures of traditional models of revolution, significantly through its set design and “scenes that tell stories” (McDowell 2011) all of which have important spatial dimensions.

I will return to Korean director Bong Joon Ho’s internationally co-produced global science fiction blockbuster later, but for now I want to revisit the question of how Korea figures in Octavia E. Butler’s archive by calling your attention to a map of Korea she sketched while taking notes in 1967 as a student studying Asian history at Pasadena City College in California [Fig. 1]. Our own location here in Busan appears on her map, above several handwritten lines of transcriptions of lecture notes. At the time Butler

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social circumstances at the time, practical roles of literature were emphasized over aesthetic ones. As a result, SF literature was largely treated as children’s literature. The last period, restoring SF literature, occurred in the late 1990s under the influence of emerging new media such as personal computers (PCs), the Internet and changing social conditions. Han (2012; cited in Kim) described the social changes in 1990s as “growth of people who spent their adolescence in the 1970s, the end of the cold war and the coming of postmodernism, and the thirst for scientific knowledge” (p. 219). In this time period, SF fandom became established, and the first SF expert magazine, *SF Magazine*, was published. Publication companies printed many foreign SF classics and SF theory books.”





[Fig. 1]

drew this map of Korea, she was 20 years old and in her second year of studying at a community college in Pasadena, the economically and racially divided small city where she grew up. The worlds she created in the fiction she published over the course of the next five decades respond to larger global histories, as one might expect from a writer whose first academic major was International Education. And fourteen years after the end of the US/Korea War, the Cold War context for Butler's history lesson about Korea is evident in her sketch of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel line and in the attention to military aspects of Korea's history and to Korea's relationship to Russia and China in the notes. Underneath, the lecture notes she transcribed show her interest in the colonial history that shaped modern Korea: Butler chose to record her professors remarks that Korea was "poor" and "held in contempt" by imperialist powers Japan and China and that Koreans were called (by whom, we are left to wonder) "the Irish of Asia." These notes suggest her concern with the power relations of colonialism and imperialism even at a young age, before she had begun to publish the short stories and novels that would later bring her international fame.

More than a decade later, she also kept in her archive of research materials on "Education and Intelligence" a 1982 *Los Angeles Times* article entitled "Japan tries to mollify Seoul over Changes in Textbooks" that had "whitewash[ed] Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule of Korea."<sup>3</sup> Her interest in the power relations of colonialism and imperialism and how they shaped larger global histories is evident throughout the archive, and she did not shy away from seeing the US as an empire, especially in rela-

<sup>3</sup> These articles can be found in Box 297 (Subject Files—Books and Miscellaneous), Folder 4 (Education and Intelligence. ca. 1983), Octavia E. Butler Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

tion to the Vietnam War and in Central America. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the previously mentioned *Atlantic* article “Why Science Fiction Keeps Imagining the Subjugation of White People” singles out Butler’s 1980s *Xenogenesis* trilogy as an exception to an either overtly or ambivalently imperialist Anglophone sci-fi tradition: the article recognizes how Butler’s story, told from the perspective of a Black woman who survives an alien invasion, “cannily inverts and crosses identities of colonized and colonizers, self and other.”

### III. Achiving Disaster: Climate Change, US Militarism, Neoliberalism

Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, which appeared in the 1990s, also introduce another core concern that deepens in her work over the course of time and that connects Butler’s speculations to recent South Korean science fiction films: the problem of ecological collapse and climate change, which she predicted from early on would be one of the major world problems to emerge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Butler understood ecological collapse and climate change precisely as global forces whose damage would not be confined to a single part of the world even though she also imagined that the worst of their impact would be unequally distributed and would hit the poor hardest. She thought deeply about how ecological collapse and climate change might transform the spaces humans inhabit and tried to imagine alternate worlds they could make in response to and in the wake of disaster.

This is evident throughout the Butler archive in thick files in the research materials she kept on topics such as “Social Conditions,” “Disaster,” and “The Environment.” Butler’s “Disaster” files include material from 1965–2005 and focus on many different kinds of disasters, notably tornadoes and hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, droughts, and fires, along with manifestly human-made disasters such as the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the 1992 Rodney King verdict. “The Environment” folders, on the other hand, include dozens of newspaper and magazine articles published between 1975 and 2004 that overwhelmingly emphasize human agency in bringing about the catastrophic climate changes on the horizon. Butler saved a 1988 article about the depletion of the ozone which emphasized that protecting it must be “international responsibility” as well as early 1990s pieces that warned of the coming extinction of millions of animals



and of the necessity of taking “prompt action to curb global warming.” Late 1990s articles in the archive track melting Antarctic glaciers that “could flood coastal areas, scientists say,” or “link” to “global warming” storms such as those so common in her “Disaster” files. She underlined in green predictions about how warming ocean and air temperatures will feed extra energy into hurricanes, increasing their maximum intensity by as much as 60% and creating super-strong hurricanes. Explaining the purpose of all this research in an Author’s Interview in 1993, Butler called herself a “news junkie who can’t help wondering what the environmental and economic stupidities of the 80s and 90s might lead to.”<sup>4</sup>

This research material strongly shapes her famous 1990 *Parable* novels, which struggle to imagine the worlds that could emerge in the wake of multiple disasters caused by the globally and ecologically destructive policies and limited imaginings of the architects of our neoliberal present. We can also see these concerns even earlier, in the *Xenogenesis* novels, which imagine the possibilities that might emerge in the wake of disaster after humans blow themselves up in a nuclear war. Butler was compelled to write the novels in response to the facile optimism, what Lauren Berlant (2011) might call a kind of cruel optimism and what is also a sort of fascist utopianism, of the 1980s, when President Ronald Reagan dreamed of winnable star wars, as Butler famously remembers in John Akomfrah’s imaginative documentary about the black sci-fi diaspora, *The Last Angel of History* (1996). Butler also kept track of how US weapons and military testing devastated other parts of the world that were subject to these forms of imperialism, notably the Marshall Islands in the Pacific. Butler kept in her subject files on “Science: Nuclear Power” (1989) a *Los Angeles Times* article called “Raining Warheads: Kwajalein Missile Range in Pacific Readied for Testing of Star Wars” that pointed out the long history of the Marshall Islands as a site “where the nuclear age began in earnest” and where multiple waves of militarism and specifically the testing of nuclear weapons had created refugees whose home islands are too radioactive for habitation.

She also connected struggles over nuclear weapons in the Asia-Pacific Islands to the struggles of Black people in the United States by keeping articles, in a file called “Black People” from the year 2000 (Box 347, Folder 14), about a large Seattle protest on Martin Luther King Day

<sup>4</sup> See Author’s Questionnaire, Jan. 27 1993. OEB 94 in Box 8, “Manuscripts by Octavia E. Butler — Asylum — Blindsight: novel: notes.” Octavia E. Butler Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

“focused on US inequality” and “military policy”; protestors from the anti-nuclear weapons group Ground Zero “were arrested when they held aloft a banner with King’s picture and a quote by him and blocked the entrance to the base, which houses Trident submarines and their nuclear missiles.” In these ways she connected the concerns specifically of Black people in the US around 2000 to protests over US militarism in Asia.

The volatility and violence of the global economy and its effects on national boundaries and the world are also evident in Butler’s *Parable* series. But Butler was thinking about neoliberalism and globalization well before the 1990s moment when this particular convergence of forces became widely visible, as her archive richly reveals. In a folder entitled “Economy, 1977-1999” (Box 295, Folder 1), Butler kept articles with titles like “Global Money—Free Flows, Free Falls,” which speculated that “Never in history has the planet been populated by so many capitalists, and never before have they had the ability to transfer entire fortunes across borders in the blink of an eye, thanks to technology.” She also preserved a 1980 article about how the greatest threat to world peace is malnutrition, thereby intervening in a militarist discourse pitched at the level of the world by emphasizing how economic inequalities were a greater threat than the culprits of stereotype, the national enemies manufactured again and again in one moral panic after another. As well, she kept a 1990 newspaper piece marking the fact that the rich-poor gap was the widest in 40 years; Butler underlined in blue how Ronald Reagan’s tax cuts were the cause of it all, in one of many examples of Butler predicting a worsening of disaster in the wake of the austere, constrained, and nasty dystopian worlds that were right-wing utopias for Reagan, Thatcher, and neoliberals around the globe. The widening gap between rich and poor is most visible in Butler’s *Parable* series in scenes of groups of persecuted and or displaced people on the run from various murderous forces, especially those connected to right-wing governments bent on ecological destruction and more.

The harsh, austere world that is too poor for lights, cell phones, public schools, and many other things that are still essential to our world looms ominously at the beginning of Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, the visionary novel that urban geographers such as Mike Davis argued so effectively critically distorted 1990s gated communities and the increasing privatization of the public; in other words, the divided world of the 1992 Los Angeles area uprisings. This is the world Butler’s protagonist Lauren lives in at the outset of her novel, “an un-privileged enclave” as she called it in a 1988 notebook entry (Box 180, OEB 3238). At this point Lauren still

dwells inside the ill-fated gate with her parents and brothers, before fire is the phoenix that burns out the old way of life and makes it necessary for Lauren to discover the possibilities that might emerge in the wake of disaster. As she moves north up the abandoned highways, dressed as a man, looking for another world that might be possible in the ruins of the one she has known, she begins to collect people and form a community made up of disposable, beaten down, vulnerable folks of many different races and national origins. Avoiding the transnational corporations that are poised to take in and exploit especially white workers who are willing to endure new forms of slavery, Butler's roving, multi-racial enclave of resistance knows better than to put their faith in the monsters of corporate capitalism.

In her planning for the novels, Butler conceived of Lauren Olamina as a kind of refugee and in doing so doubtless drew on her extensive research files on refugees and displaced people, which notably included several articles about the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees in Camp Pendleton California, just up the highway from where I teach at the University of California, San Diego. These materials prompted her to think about how migration and demographic change perpetuated new forms of slavery and disposable labor around the world. Her *Parable* novels are full of people who have been forced to endure various kinds of slavery, from indentured labor to sex slavery to border-works where companies take advantage of the deregulated zone to push workers ever harder and authorize the worst abuses, in a significant distortion of labor conditions in the US-Mexico northern borderlands in the wake of the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

In keeping with the neoliberal accord that emerged, despite their differences, between Democrats and Republicans, the Clinton nineties produced more of these attacks on welfare and the homeless as well as NAFTA, the international agreement that allowed corporations more freedom and flexibility than persons in crossing geopolitical borders and that helped to create infamously exploitative *maquiladoras* in border zones. Meanwhile, privatization continued apace, so much so that in her speculative notes in the archive Butler predicted that the 2020s would be the decade of collapse in which humans would witness sea level rise, dryness, heat, crop failures, institutions no longer working and existing only to collect taxes and fees and arrest people to exploit their labor. Connecting these episodes of globalization to her *Parable* novels, Butler imagined this period as "the Burn" and *Earthseed* as "the head of the Phoenix, rising." In other words, Butler imagined globalization from above as a kind of scorched earth disaster, one to which her imaginings of alternate

worlds and communities and other, more sustainable ways of living responded. If her imagined community of Earthseed in the *Parable* novels is Phoenix rising, this is because in order to rise, a phoenix first must burn, as Butler's text also tells us. In these ways, Butler's visionary fiction and Histo-futurist archiving show us how changing technologies and new forms of globalization that often uncannily resemble older ones make possible new inequalities, new divisions, and new solidarities.

#### IV. Conclusion: Imaging Other Worlds in the Wake of Disaster

This brings us back to the world of Bong Joon Ho's *Snowpiercer* and some of the other recent science fiction films that I have suggested starkly dramatize global inequalities and imagine a world transformed by climate change, ecological collapse, and untrammelled capitalism. I am not trying to suggest that these films provide a simple way out of science fiction's and fantasy's limiting obsession with colonialism and imperial adventure. Certainly *Snowpiercer* is an action film that offers limited ways of rendering the complexities, particularly of gender, class, race, and sexuality, upon which Butler meditates in her fiction. It is also the case that films are composed of scenes that tell stories, for good and for bad, in fundamentally different ways than literature does. Most strikingly, the filmmakers' decision to have the vast majority of characters in *Snowpiercer* speak English because all of the most popular films in the world previously had been in English also reveals perhaps the biggest limit of this particular example, along with the decision to make the star, former Captain America Chris Evans, the main revolutionary agent of change throughout most of the film.

But in this international co-production some might say South Korean stars Song Kang-ho and Go Ah-sung, who play rogue father and daughter security experts and drug addicts, steal the show after being liberated from the prison car in which both are being held. The film also calls attention, if in a sentimental way, to the significance of Blackness in larger global economies as it emphasizes the heartless use of a small Black child to replace a crucial part of the engine that no longer exists in this post-apocalyptic world. Perhaps the most interesting move the film makes, aside from its stunning set design that spectacularly pictures global inequalities, is to imagine that a Korean girl and a Black boy could be blasted laterally out of the train, beyond traditional models of leadership

and revolution that center white men committed to relentless forward linear motion no matter what, even though that forward motion keeps reproducing austerity for most, deep inequalities, ecological destruction, and disposable labor. In dreaming of another trajectory beyond the relentless, forward-moving motion of the machine and its white man engineers, Octavia E Butler and the best science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction invite us to stop in our tracks and extrapolate from the past and present to imagine all the other worlds that are possible when we do.

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### Abstract

This essay offers the late great Octavia E Butler's work as an example of a Black diasporic speculative fictional practice from below that harshly illuminates and meaningfully responds to migration and demographic change; an emergent neoliberalism and ongoing imperialism and colonialism; the destabilization of national boundaries through global forces such as climate change; the eventual depletion of fossil fuels; and the volatility and violence of the global economy. I argue that reading Butler's published work and her extensive archive of papers housed at the Huntington Library also requires us to think about how different kinds of technology reshape our sense of place, space, and the environment. In all of these ways, I suggest, Butler's work anticipates and joins an emerging conversation about global inequalities, international and transnational divisions and connections, and climate change in recent science fiction and fantasy films in global mass culture, including some involving significant contributions by Korean cultural producers, most famously, *The Host* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2013), both directed by Bong Joon Ho.

Key Words: Archive, Science Fiction, Space, Climate Change, Globalization

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