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## CONSTRUCTING AFRICAN FUTURE: AFRICA AND AFRICAN PEOPLE IN POLISH SCIENCE FICTION OF THE SOCIALIST ERA

**Abstract:** The paper's main objective is to analyse the visions of an African future in the Polish Socialist Era science fiction. Speculative fiction played an important part in the cultural landscape of socialist Poland, being integral to the popular culture as well as to communist propaganda. The image of a communist future was a major motif in the early Socialist Era science fiction narratives and also the impressive political forecast of the final worldwide triumph of the Communist Party. These narratives also included some interesting examples of the African future and the African people in the futuristic communist world: the Black communist and astronaut, Hannibal Smith, as the main character of *The Astronauts* [*Astronaucci*, 1951] by Stanisław Lem; the African astronauts in *The Magellanic Cloud* [*Obłok Magellana*, 1955] by Stanisław Lem and the story of the African slaves' rebellion against the capitalists on the space station Celestia in the novel by Krzysztof Boruń and Andrzej Trepka *The Lost Future* [*Zagubiona przyszłość*, 1953]. Lem's novels were also adapted into films: *The Magellanic Cloud as The Voyage to the End of the Universe* (*Ikarie XB-1*, 1963, directed by Jindřich Polák), *The Astronauts as First Spaceship on Venus* (*Der schweigende Stern*, 1960, directed by Kurt Maetzig) – in which the Nigerian actor, Julius Ongewe, appeared as a very first African astronaut in the history of cinema.

**Keywords:** Polish science fiction, Africa, foreign affairs, socialism, future

Political transformations in African countries that took place in the mid-twentieth century undoubtedly constituted a significant reference point for foreign policies of the countries of the Communist bloc, as can be convincingly evidenced by the following remark found in the report of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) from 1961:

Currently, the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America which have freed and are freeing themselves from foreign oppression have also started to play an active role in international

matters. These countries are frequently referred to as neutral ones, although they can only be considered neutral in the sense that they do not belong to the existing military and political alliances.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the report's rhetoric clearly indicates that these countries unambiguously subscribe to the side of peace (that is, the communist side) and that it is necessary to win them over to this side by supporting their efforts towards independence, as well as their political and economic efforts.

In this context, it is worth drawing attention to the interest that the international situation of young African countries arose in political and diplomatic environments of socialist countries. A collection of documents entitled *Foreign policies of African countries* [*Polityka zagraniczna państw afrykańskich*], published in 1970 by Polish Institute of International Affairs [Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych], aimed to "present in a thorough manner various tendencies visible in foreign policy of independent African countries in the years 1945–1965", those being, as the authors of the volume emphasize in their introduction, "both basic tendencies, common for most countries of the continent, and particular tendencies which sometimes remain in the sphere of projects that have not been carried out but which, in their time, had a certain influence on the political shape of the liberating Africa."<sup>2</sup> In the extensive *Introduction* to this volume Tadeusz Łętocha notes outright:

While aiming to eliminate the influences of the former metropolises and other imperial countries, African countries were particularly interested in obtaining financial and technical aid, as well as political support on the part of socialist countries. This aid – as evidenced by numerous contracts – makes it possible for the newly created countries not only to become economically and politically independent from the West, but also to make up for a century of economic backwardness. For African countries, this aid is all the more important given that socialist countries, interested in deepening their cooperation with independent Africa, do not seek extraordinary profits or strategic possibilities in their politics.<sup>3</sup>

Disregarding the ideological rhetoric of this text here, it would be difficult to find a more telling declaration of interest in "deepening [the] cooperation with independent Africa" on the part of the socialist countries, undoubtedly understood also as the possibility for further global expansion of socialism. The key meaning in this project – next to the notions of 'economic backwardness' and 'civilizational development' – will be given to the category of the future, since, as Łętocha aptly notes: "The leaders

<sup>1</sup> *Referat Sprawozdawczy Komitetu Centralnego KPZR* [in:] *XXII Zjazd Komunistycznej Partii Związku Radzieckiego*, Warszawa 1961, p. 38. It is worth noting here that "delegations of democratic national parties from independent African countries: Guinea, the Republic of Ghana and the Republic of Mali" participated as invited guests in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the CPSU. Cf. A. Łopatka, *Idee XXII Zjazdu Komunistycznej Partii Związku Radzieckiego*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 1961, no. 6, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> T. Łętocha (ed.), *Polityka zagraniczna państw afrykańskich. Zbiór dokumentów*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa 1970, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> T. Łętocha, *Wstęp* [in:] T. Łętocha (ed.), *Polityka zagraniczna państw afrykańskich...*, op. cit., pp. 18–19.

of many newly formed countries believe that making up for the century of economic backwardness is only possible by the means of a different model of development from that of Western Europe, as Africa cannot allow itself to stretch this process over entire centuries.<sup>74</sup> And thus, the future that was supposed to come for Africa was not supposed to be simply a future, but, rather, a socialist future.

The evidence for this ideological engagement in cooperation with the newly formed and the only-just-emerging African countries can be found in numerous actions of Polish diplomacy as well as social, youth and party organizations which supported African societies in their striving for independence. Among them, we will find clear political declarations that are of propagandic nature – frequently expressed as particular gestures of social solidarity: the 1948 slogan for May 1<sup>st</sup>, accepted by the Central Committee of Polish Workers Party [Komitet Centralny Polskiej Partii Robotniczej]: “Greetings to colonial peoples fighting for their independence against world imperialism”,<sup>5</sup> the 1959 organizing of the Month of Solidarity with the Youth of Colonial Countries with the participation of invited students from Uganda and Sudan,<sup>6</sup> the creation of Society for Polish-African Friendship [Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Afrykańskiej] (1962),<sup>7</sup> establishing the Polish Committee for Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia and Africa [Polski Komitet Solidarności z Narodami Azji i Afryki] (1965),<sup>8</sup> or producing a cycle of documentary features entitled *Africa 1960* [*Afryka 1960*, directed by Tadeusz Jaworski],<sup>9</sup> but also specific contracts pertaining to economic, trade and scientific and technological cooperation, to mention only: the 1961 agreement on scientific and technological cooperation with Ghana,<sup>10</sup> the 1959 agreement on technological cooperation between Poland and Guinea, the 1961 agreement on cultural and technological cooperation with the Republic of Niger,<sup>11</sup> or, finally, the 1961 creation of Patrice Lumumba scholarship fund “for African youth studying at universities of Poland”.<sup>12</sup> Separate examples of this engagement can be found in official statements made by Polish diplomats, among others, in the United Nations, pertaining to such issues as condemning racial segregation and the policy of apartheid conducted by the government of the Republic of South Africa (e.g., in 1949, 1952, 1954);<sup>13</sup> admitting newly formed African countries: Dahomey, Niger, Upper Volta, Côte d’Ivoire, Chad, the Congo, Gabon and the Central

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> W. Kostecki (ed.), *Stosunki Polski z Afryką 1945–1970. Chronologia*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa 1972, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 246.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 181.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 176.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, pp. 17, 33, 59.

African Republic into the United Nations;<sup>14</sup> “abolishing all forms of slavery and slave trade” (1953)<sup>15</sup> and establishing an atom-free zone in Africa (1965).<sup>16</sup> This support for African striving for independence found its political expression also in socialist awards and decorations given to many politicians and revolutionaries of this region. The Lenin Peace Prize was awarded, among others, to Ahmed Sékou Touré (1961), Modibo Keita (1963), Samora Machel (1976), Sam Nujoma (1974), Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1971), Agostinho Neto (1976), Julius Nyerere (1986) and, obviously, Kwame Nkrumah (1962), who was also awarded the Order of Polonia Restituta, First Class [Krzyż Wielki Orderu Odrodzenia Polski, Polonia Restituta] in 1965.

Indeed, the issue of the influence of Polish – and socialist as such – politics on the development of independent African countries was formulated directly in the text of the *Plan of Work of the 5<sup>th</sup> Department for the Year 1969* [*Plan pracy Departamentu V na rok 1969*]:

As we cannot achieve it on the way of economic penetration due to the limited opportunities of providing aid, we should put greater emphasis on the sphere of foreign policy. Simultaneously, we will make use of our presence to counteract the influence of Western powers, in the first place, the propaganda of the Federal Republic of Germany and to strengthen progressive and anti-imperialist forces.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of adopting such foundational assumptions in the 1970s and 1980s the People’s Republic of Poland successfully continued its economic cooperation with African countries, supplementing and expanding priority areas (industry and trade) with social and cultural issues (scientific and artistic exchange):

As follows from that, students from developing countries were invited to Polish universities, Polish academic teachers worked at Arabic and African universities, academic and technical staff participated in social and economic life, while artistic, sports and academic content connected with the Polish state dominated in media and culture.<sup>18</sup>

The issues connected with the development of African countries and their evolution towards socialist people’s democracies was the subject of overviews and scientific analyses of social and political studies nature in Poland of the time. A good example is Halina Bobrowska’s perceptive article *Black Africa in Search of a Road to*

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> *Plan pracy Departamentu V na rok 1969* [in:] J. Knopek, A. Ratke-Majewska, *Polityka Polski wobec państw Afryki Subsaharyjskiej w świetle planu pracy Departamentu MSZ na 1969 rok*, “Cywilizacja i Polityka” 2014, no. 12, p. 179. Let us explain that the Fifth Department was a department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of Poland.

<sup>18</sup> J. Knopek, *Polityka państwa polskiego wobec krajów rozwijających się w świetle planu pracy Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych na 1973 r.*, “Studia Gdańskie” 2013, vol. XXXIII, p. 125.

*the Future* [Czarna Afryka w poszukiwaniu drogi przyszłości]<sup>19</sup>, devoted for the major part to a meticulous analysis of the notion of *négritude*, the works of Franz Fanon and – above all – the idea of African socialism in the form shaped by Kwame Nkrumah and Léopold Sédar Senghor. Indeed, this issue had been discussed earlier by Andrzej Zajączkowski in his book *Tribe, Race, Socialism* [Plemię, rasa, socjalizm, 1965], with the use of examples from Senegal and Ghana.<sup>20</sup> However, in her reflections Bobrowska introduces – making a reference to Roger Garudy’s *L’apport de la culture africaine à la civilisation universelle* – the category of “the future of man” precisely in the context of the civilizational development of Africa. Analysing the works of Kwame Nkrumah, Marcien Towa and Stanislas Spero Adotevi, the author concludes that contemporary Africa should tie its future to socialism understood as a project to be carried out, as “one ought to see the future over the significance of the myths (it is not about guessing the fate, but about creating the future!)”,<sup>21</sup> for “reality is not what is real but what is possible”.<sup>22</sup> What is interesting, this category is also introduced by Andrzej Zajączkowski in his analysis of political ideas of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Mamadou Dia, as he states that “when formulating the ideology of the nation, neither of them claim what the nation is, but what it is going to be. For them, the nation is a category of the future, and the state societies of the present are a collection of ethnic ‘homelands’, pre-national tribal communities.”<sup>23</sup> In that way, in the People’s Republic of Poland African future becomes not only a question for theoretical reflection, but also for speculative forecasting and political constructing. However, does it also find its image in science fiction stories of the time, stories that treat the progress of the nations towards communist future as historical certainty?

In order to answer this question and trace this thread in Polish speculative science fiction of the era of real socialism, it is, however, necessary to note several significant observations regarding duties and tasks that the new political situation after 1945 posed before literature. In this context, it is worth to quote the words of one of the main ideologists of socialist realism in art, and the Minister for Culture and Art in the People’s Republic of Poland [Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL] government 1952–1956, Włodzimierz Sokorski:

The Szczecin Congress of the Writers’ Association in January 1949 was the first to openly present the issue of fight against formalism and cosmopolitanism as well as fight for the art of socialist realism as an issue of fight for creativity which would, in its content, pertain to

<sup>19</sup> H.H. Bobrowska, *Czarna Afryka w poszukiwaniu drogi przyszłości*, “Przegląd Socjologiczny” 1975, no. 26, pp. 175–218.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. A. Zajączkowski, *Plemię, rasa, socjalizm. Studia nad ideologią współczesnej Afryki Zachodniej*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1965.

<sup>21</sup> H.H. Bobrowska, *Czarna Afryka...*, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> A. Zajączkowski, *Z zagadnień ideologii współczesnej Afryki Zachodniej*, “Przegląd Socjologiczny” 1965, vol. 19 (1), p. 106.

the entire deep process of transformations in our country, and in its goals, become the tutor of a new, socialist human.<sup>24</sup>

And that was, in essence, a repetition of the memorable resolution of the Congress of Literature Writers, which stated outright: “The General Congress expresses hope that the effort of the people who are building a brighter and more fair future of Poland will inspire writers to create work that will constitute a lasting input into the work of reborn Poland.”<sup>25</sup> Sokorski himself specified these recommendations for writers in the following way: “Socialist realism is not a dogma, but, rather, a guideline to comprehend one’s own work of art as a conscious expression of developmental processes of life, translated into the language of artistic imagination.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, his opinion was eagerly echoed by the champions of ideological transformation of society by the means of all available media and channels of communication, who proposed that “science filled with new content based on the rules of materialism should become familiar with the achievements of human thought, arm [people] ideologically and cooperate in bringing up the man of the future.”<sup>27</sup> In all these voices we will find, without difficulty, postulates common to all governments carrying out the assumptions of the communist social project: orientation towards the future, attachment to such cognitive categories as ‘scientific nature’, ‘realism’ and ‘materialism’ and the ancillary – pedagogical function of art and culture, creating a consistent mechanism for modernizing society and bringing up the new man. One can venture to state that the eulogists of this socialist act made fully real in ‘the world of tomorrow’, a world unavoidable due to historical necessity, seemed to describe it keeping in mind Karl Marx’s statement: when writing about the social revolution started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he remarked that it “cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future.”<sup>28</sup>

And yet in this context the literature of the science fiction genre, which forecast the shape of the future things and described this land of tomorrow, was accused by some of the socialist realism critics most active in ideological struggle of “escapism, that is, desertion and general demobilization”<sup>29</sup> when it came to key issues of contemporary times, pertaining to society that was just building socialism. However, such an approach would meet a fairly assertive reaction on the part of the first creators of post-war Polish science fiction. In his sketch entitled, tellingly, *Imperialism on Mars*

<sup>24</sup> W. Sokorski, *Literatura i sztuka Polski Ludowej*, “Wiedza i Życie” 1951, no. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Rezolucja Zjazdu Literatów w Szczecinie*, “Kućnica. Tygodnik Społeczno-Literacki” 1949, no. 5, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> W. Sokorski, *Nowa literatura w procesie powstawania* (Referat wygłoszony na Zjeździe Związku Zawodowego Literatów), “Odrodzenie” 1949, no. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Saperska, *Rola Wszechnicy Radiowej*, 18.03.1950, n.p. [quoted in:] P. Szulc, „Instrument wychowania człowieka socjalizmu”. *Polskie Radio Szczecin w latach 1949–1955* [in:] P. Knap (ed.), *Wokół zjazdu szczecińskiego 1949 r.*, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Szczecin 2016, p. 134.

<sup>28</sup> K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, transl. by S.K. Padover, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/> (accessed: 5.05.2021).

<sup>29</sup> A. Kijowski, *Widmo krąży*, “Życie Literackie” 1954, no. 6, p. 7.

[*Imperializm na Marsie*], Stanisław Lem, already the author of the incredibly popular novel *The Astronauts* [*Astronauci*, 1951], noted in the introduction: “I believe that science fiction literature is, at its essence, a particularly self-shaping branch of realism”,<sup>30</sup> with realism being understood as a situation in which “a writer of (...) science fiction, starting with currently existing developmental tendencies, extends them into the future”.<sup>31</sup> Subsequently, this criterion serves Lem to aim ideological criticism at American science fiction, whose creators “treat the elements of capitalist reality around them as given eternally, constant and unchanging”,<sup>32</sup> while the Western imperialism “is in its death throes” and “has no possibilities for development at all”.<sup>33</sup> As the author of *The Astronauts* notes, “(...) this works in an entirely different manner in a society that is in the process of building socialism. From there, all roads lead towards the future and, thus, horizons stunning with their rich nature that open in front of a writer – creator of science fiction.”<sup>34</sup> This happens as, according to Lem, “the moral goal of socialism is to eradicate exploitation; the goal of communism – to irreversibly and completely demolish, destroy all the ways in which a human limits another human’s freedom, including those that persist in socialism.”<sup>35</sup> while in the case of Western speculative fiction

(...) chaotic scenes of fights within capitalist free competition or societies paralytically stiffened in the grasp of society’s tyranny are basically the only alternatives for *science fiction*. None of the texts I read would even mention any form of socialism, socialization of forces, [or] means of production etc., not even one as far from those existing today as possible.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, it is worth noting that in his forecasts – made on the sidelines of reflections on socialist and capitalist science fiction – Lem also perceives issues emerging inevitably in connection with the independence efforts of the so-called dependent territories: “Demographic pressure, the dynamics of self-liberating colonial peoples may make the production of food into the number one problem of a globally disarmed world.”<sup>37</sup> And thus, speculative fantasy, problematic due to its escapist potential, was ultimately included into the aesthetic and ideological order of socialist realism as a form of criticism of capitalist and imperialist world without a future. Having made these observations, we can also take a closer look at how Polish science fiction of the era of socialism perceived, and perhaps also how – in accordance with the programs of cooperation with developing countries – it tried to forecast and construct the future

<sup>30</sup> S. Lem, *Imperializm na Marsie*, “Życie Literackie” 1953, no. 7, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> S. Lem, *O granicach postępu technicznego* [in:] idem, *Wejście na orbitę*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1962, p. 200.

<sup>36</sup> S. Lem, *Science fiction* [in:] idem, *Wejście na orbitę*, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>37</sup> S. Lem, *Dokąd idziesz, świecie?* [in:] ibidem, p. 211.



of Africa and African people in the upcoming decades and centuries of the inevitable triumph of communism.

This subject appears in science fiction texts written by Polish authors very early, and it returns with surprising frequency on various stages of the development of this literary convention in Poland. Although in a story Stanisław Lem published in 1954, entitled *The Crystal Ball* [*Kryształowa kula*], Africa still appears as a fairly typical colonial scenery full of action adventures: “a mine of incredible events, hot dreams (...)”,<sup>38</sup> in his first novel, *The Astronauts*, published three years earlier the African subject already comes to be presented in a way close to the declarations of Polish foreign policy of the time:

In 2003 there finished a partial transfer of the waters of the Mediterranean deep into Sahara and the water power plants in Gibraltar provided, for the first time, electricity to the Northern African network. Many years had passed since the fall of the last capitalist country. The difficult, painful and great period of just transformation of the world had ended. Poverty, economic chaos and wars no longer endangered the great plans of the Earth’s inhabitants.<sup>39</sup>

In the same novel there also appears – extremely significant in the herein discussed context – the character of Robert Smith, the first astronaut of African origin, who is the narrator and one of the protagonists of the story, and, at the same time, a man of particularly interesting heritage when it comes to the ideological perspective:

My name is Robert Smith and I am twenty seven years old. I was born in Piatigorsk as a son of an engineer of architecture and an airport master. When I thus answered, at school or anywhere else, the question about my parents, it frequently led to smiles and I had to explain that the airport master was my father, and the architect – my mother. My grandfather, Hannibal Smith, arrived in the USSR in 1948 and missed America until his last days, although he never experienced anything but bad things there, as he was a communist and a Negro, a double sin, for which he came to suffer numerous times.<sup>40</sup>

The character of an African American communist, naturalized in the USSR, whose grandson becomes the pilot of an interplanetary ship, comes to be a clear signal of the future of Africa and Africans in the novel, as their civilizational aspirations can only be fulfilled in the world of communist future. Indeed, this plotline has an intriguing follow-up due to the adaptation of Lem’s novel, the film *First Spaceship on Venus* [Ger. *Der schweigende Stern*] made in 1960 in German Democratic Republic [Ger. Deutsche Demokratische Republik – DDR] by Kurt Maetzig: in this film a Nigerian, Julius Ongewe, appears as the first African actor to play an astronaut in science fiction cinema. In Lem’s another novel, *The Magellanic Cloud* (1955), describing the first manned interstellar voyage to the Alpha Centauri system, there appears an Afri-

<sup>38</sup> S. Lem, *Kryształowa kula*, [in:] idem, *Sezam i inne opowiadania*, Iskry, Warszawa 1955.

<sup>39</sup> S. Lem, *Astronautci*, Czytelnik, Warszawa 1970, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 103.



can man – Tembharā – a mechanist and constructor of electron brains;<sup>41</sup> however, he is only a supporting character in the complex plot.

However, the issues connected with African independence and the freedom aspirations of the Africans were problematized to the fullest in an allegorical way in Krzysztof Boruń and Andrzej Trepka's novel *The Lost Future*, published in 1954.<sup>42</sup> This book, a part of a cycle consisting also of *Proxima* (1955) and *Space Brothers* [*Kosmiczni bracia*, 1959], presents the fate of the international communist crew of the space ship *Astrobolid*, sent from the Earth in order to research new star systems. Still, before the novel's protagonists reach the Proxima Centauri System, they will need to face holdovers of Earth's former imperialism, lost in space and sheltered from the socialist alternative on the artificial planet CM-2, known as *Celestia*. On this artificial satellite of the Earth, the elite of the capitalist government "claimed that they would create life filled with happiness and prosperity for all, when in reality, their aim was to rule the world, strengthening their power and riches at the expense of other society members, who they wanted to turn into modern slaves."<sup>43</sup> The basis of this order was supposed to lie in nothing but racial segregation, according to which people of African origin were subjected to the mastery of overseers who "not due to their ability as much as due to their white color of skin or, as the Bible clearly explained it – their humanity, oversaw a group of Negroes."<sup>44</sup> Isolated for many years from socialist Earth, *Celestia* develops in the direction of radical authoritarianism, periodically shaken by violent protests and bloody riots, creating a particular social memory for Africans kidnapped from their native planet and forcefully relocated into space.

"It's an old story, my boy, older than I am. Few still remember it from stories: maybe old Malley, maybe gray Barrow. Yes, my child. This is something you mustn't talk about, it's dangerous. My grandfather died then and many, many others. There was judgment. Terrible judgment. They took all Negroes then. They only left small children, younger than you are. Everyone had to say where they were at that time, what they were doing. But that was not enough for the judges. Whosoever didn't have a person behind them to testify to their benefit had to die. And people were deterred from defending Negroes."

"So there were also good people, grandma?"

"There were. There still are today. Many 'gray ones' help us as much as they can."

"And what happened later? Tell me, grandma..."

"Well... Later the Great White Master pronounced solemnly that since Negroes thought to become equal with people, they are deprived of all rights for all time. And both them and the people have to follow the foremost commandment, which we had to learn by heart: «The Lord of the Cosmos created people in His image so that they were obedient to state government as established by his grace and so that they lived happily on *Celestia*. To relieve them in their work, he gave them Negroes into slavery forever.» And we didn't even want to be equal with

<sup>41</sup> Cf. S. Lem, *Obłok Magellana*, Iskry, Warszawa 1967.

<sup>42</sup> The novel was published as a book in 1954, while in the previous year it had been printed in the "Kurier Polski" magazine.

<sup>43</sup> K. Boruń, A. Trepka, *Zagubiona przyszłość*, Solaris, Stawiguda 2013, p. 428.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

people, God forbid. We never said that we had undying souls. It was John Summerson who shamelessly lied about this, the grandfather of the current Great White Master. He made it up in his own head to ruin us. Who would have such a thing in their head, and back then? We wanted the hunger to be lesser and for women not to be beaten – that’s all. And this was all about very little. A tiny crumb of bread and rights. But people are stingy for the Negroes. They insisted that this was not going to be so. And they inflicted so much death on us.”<sup>45</sup>

This is the social structure and political situation that the interstellar communist mission of the Astrobolid encounters; its “crew consists of Americans, the Chinese, Russians, an English woman, an Australian man, a Belarusian man, a Slovak, a German, a Pole, a Southern African woman and a French man, and even a daughter of a Japanese man and an American Negro woman”.<sup>46</sup> Taking advantage of technological superiority, the novel’s protagonists cause a rebellion on Celestia, they create Black Police, and make it possible for the Africans kidnapped into space to return to Earth. In this extended plotline of one of the first Polish socialist science fiction novels we will easily find both echoes of ideological criticism of slavery (the kidnapping of Africans from Earth into space), the policy of segregation in South Africa and the USA (ghetto and overseers of the Black people), and directly expressed support for the independence efforts of African societies – which are, however, only possible to carry out with the cooperation of the communist international community. Today, it is difficult to resist the impression that what we are dealing with here is an allegorical form of summarizing the foreign policy program of the People’s Republic of Poland and the entire Eastern Bloc, served up as an attractive adventure story.

The problem of colonial legacy and racial segregation returns, after many years, as the main motif in Andrzej Trepka’s *The Totem of the Forest People* [*Totem leśnych ludzi*, 1980], telling the story of humanity’s first contact with alien intelligence. This short novel takes place on the African continent, in a close future, in which:

The Boer Republic of Apartheid [BRA], as the Republic of South Africa had been renamed, didn’t aim to stop at what it had already achieved. Its appetites followed two routes: destroy the remainder of the Negroes in its territory as human hands were superseded by machines, and subsequently, conquer the continent. The Afrikaners wanted to take advantage of the weaknesses of the Black Land: while beyond the borders of the BRA it had long liberated itself from the holdovers of colonialism, it was exhausted with tribal wars, coups, crises, as well as an excess of natural disasters, many a time happening due to overexploitation – in many aspects it did not keep up with the rest of the world.<sup>47</sup>

In this world, we follow closely the peaceful coexistence of an incomer from an alien planet who is performing a strategic reconnaissance on the Earth and a group of Pygmies – seemingly isolated from the political problems of the world situated outside of the rain forest. Interestingly, the envoy of the space civilization seeking

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 151.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> A. Trepka, *Totem leśnych ludzi*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1980, p. 43.

new planets for colonization perceives the life style of native Africans – considered to be uncivilized by the rest of the humanity – as evidence of highly evolved culture: “The way the Pygmies were unified with the element of the original forest did not surprise him in the least. He had once enjoyed the atmosphere of such homeliness in the eternally bright plains of the planet of the sign of three suns.”<sup>48</sup> And yet, despite this isolated position among the tropical forest, the space observer is perfectly aware of the complex character of the social and political situation in Africa:

Rarra knew that the pacifications of the Banthustan and the slums of the poor crouching at the gates of the adorned metropolis and other extermination efforts against non-Boers happened to be a daily task of the police. He also knew that the sowers of terror were only waiting for a good moment to carry the methods of management produced in their country outside the borders of the Boer Republic of Apartheid, smite the continent with them, and then – if it works – the entire Earthly world.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, this situation abounds in meaningful consequences, as for the white supremacists seeking contact with extraterrestrial civilization this incomer from the stars becomes a bothersome dialogue partner: “You put it well,” du Plessis nodded. “I would say that Rarra is a kind of a Negro, who in some inconceivable way turned out to be cleverer and apparently even more valuable than a white man. Still, this would not diminish the fact that he is a Negro.”<sup>50</sup>

In the end, after a number of unsuccessful confrontations and attempts at dialogue with the representatives of ‘apartheid culture,’ the space envoy decides that there is no chance of achieving understanding with humanity, although he consoles himself that

(...) landing in the forest was an extremely fortunate turn of events. Thanks to that, he discovered the only den of proper people on the planet – a valuable relic of a race which probably used to be widely spread at one time, and which, perhaps due to less favorable natural environment, became spiritually degenerated everywhere else.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, he decides that the Earth should be destined for colonization by the alien race, while, at the same time, affirming the right of the native Africans to their own territory and to cultivating their highly developed culture of unification with nature. Therefore, in this parabolic novel the colonizing humanity becomes colonized so that it could experience the fate of dependent territories.

In Wiktor Żwikiewicz’s debut novel *The Second Autumn* [*Druga jesień*, 1982] Africa returns again as the stage for fantastic events – this time, an unexpected attempt at colonizing the Earth by an alien life form that conducts a discreet but ongoing

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 94.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 104.

process of transforming the Earth's natural environment so that it would be suitable for its life needs.

Unexpectedly, the northern regions of Africa became a place favorable to new biological discoveries made by expeditions and local research centers of various nationalities. Among others, in the salt lake zone, especially in the area of Chott Melghir, during investment works of Hydro-Petrol.Co. there was discovered another novelty in the catalog of the achievements of nature on our globe. It consists in an alga, only ostensibly similar to *Volvox* of the *Chlorophyta* taxon, as it does not demonstrate the presence of chlorophyll typical for that and for other plants.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, in this case, similarly to Lem's short story, the exotic nature of the African scenery plays a deciding role: it becomes a reference point for the interference of alien intelligence, inexplicable in scientific categories, that is taking control over our world.

However, the most extensive image of a futuristic Africa can be found in Krzysztof Boruń's story *Little Green Men* [*Male zielone ludziki*, 1985], dedicated in its entirety to mysterious events that take place of one of the countries of this continent, invariably entangled in political disputes with world superpowers that interfere in its life and that are willing to introduce solutions that are strictly colonial and racist in their nature. This lengthy novel takes place in the near future in African Duskland – a fictional country whose social and political descriptions point unambiguously to the Republic of South Africa as its main reference point, as evidenced by the following piece of information regarding the capital of this country:

Prior to June 12<sup>th</sup>, Cameo was a large city with population of almost four hundred thousand – the largest industrial center of Duskland. Metallurgy, machine industry, chemistry, electronics, food processing – they were all equal to world standard. The Morton Plants manufactured not only agricultural machines, but also armored vehicles and weapons, and even rocket missiles for perfectly trained and armed voluntary forces of 'national defense and security' of this 'white fortress' in the African continent. The permanent residents of the city with full citizenship rights were, as in the entire Duskland, white members of the population. The Black work force, commuting from the nearby, densely populated border regions of Patope and Matavi, was used only where wider automatization was not yet worthwhile. The rich resources of uranium, fertile soil and the policy of 'carrot and stick' towards its neighbors ensured a relative stability of Duskland's position until the partisans of Magogo, active in the Yellow Mountains, started to spread enemy propaganda among the Black miners of Patope, driven to the mines in the Mkavo Valley.<sup>53</sup>

In this country take place a number of unexplained events, leading to devastation of main cities and industrial regions as a result of appearing a so-called 'vortex' – a zone of strong physical disturbances which cause the people residing within to have hallucinations, delusions, mystical experiences and beliefs concerning a conspiracy.

<sup>52</sup> W. Żwikiewicz, *Druga jesień*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1982, pp. 19–20.

<sup>53</sup> K. Boruń, *Male zielone ludziki*, vol. 1, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Katowice 1985, p. 129.

Since science is unable to produce unambiguous reasons for the appearance of this zone, numerous theories and hypotheses abound; they concern various factors behind its sudden expansion, including: a failed scientific experiment, tests of a chemical weapon, natural anomaly and finally, an interference of extraterrestrial intelligence. There also appear questions concerning political motivations of people and institutions connected with the vortex: “If the vortex is supposed to be a tool of terror and anarchy, then who does it serve? The fascists or the commies? The fascists attacking the last fortress of racism? Leftist terrorists penetrating large corporations? Or maybe it is some criminal super gang? Why is the truth hidden from the world, then?”<sup>54</sup>

Over the course of the novel, its female protagonist, an activist of an ecological terrorist militant group, must deal not only with the activity of the zone itself, as it produces phantoms and mystical exultations, but also – much more frequently – with the ghosts of colonial past, represented by racist stereotypes that the white inhabitants of Duskland nurture with pleasure. Take, for instance, a chair of a certain great syndicate: “During his long life Africa changed greatly, and, almost as a rule, changed to its detriment. Only Africans, even those who graduated from European universities, ‘remained wild’”.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, quite early it turns out that the true ‘zone’ laying waste to the continent is not the mysterious vortex – which the native Africans perceive as an opportunity for liberation from European influence – as much as the zone of apartheid: the domain of racial divisions inscribed in the politics of the erstwhile colonizers, unwilling to abandon the old areas of their influence:

Our legislation can be an example of humanitarianism for all countries of Africa, and even for Europe and North America. Even in relation to the colored, punishments are usually incomparably more lenient than in other African countries towards their own citizens. Obviously, introducing such progressive and humanitarian rules only became possible when full national, racial and cultural integration took place in our society, when the problem of two categories of citizens disappeared and our relationship with the Africans could develop on a purely market principle, without any political problems. Today, if anyone tries to claim that we are a country of social or racial discrimination, a refuge of backwardness and neocolonialism, a country that keeps breaking human and divine rights, he is simply an impudent liar.<sup>56</sup>

In this case, as well, hope for Africa comes from ‘the outside’ – it is, indeed, brought by the extraterrestrial vortex as well as anarchist and ecological groups from Europe, supported by ‘the world’s progressive countries,’ going against colonial legacy. Boruń’s novel, similarly to the hereinbefore discussed Andrzej Trepka’s book, inscribes itself perfectly into the ideological perspective of the people’s democracies of Central and Eastern Europe of the time, which, on the one hand, unambiguously supported the independence strife of young African countries with both diplomatic action and cultural politics, but, on the other, they were inclined to perceive Africa

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, vol. 2, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem, p. 26.

as their own zone of influence – an area for developing the international socialist project and its political priorities, among which a particular place, since 1965, was given to the African atom-free zone. However, this does not change to a slightest degree the anti-racist and anti-colonial message, clearly emphasized in both novels, which was in accordance with the diplomatic politics of the People's Republic of Poland – aimed, primarily, at the doctrine of apartheid in South Africa, but also at the practice of racial segregation still present in many fields of life in the USA. Interestingly, in both novels there can be found echoes of numerous Polish academic and popular science publications dedicated to the situation of native peoples of South Africa and their current political situation. It is worth mentioning here such books as *Apartheid: A Legal and Political Study of Racism in South Africa* [*Apartheid. Studium prawno-polityczne rasizmu w Afryce Południowej*, 1967]<sup>57</sup> or *The "White Empire" of South Africa* [„*Białe imperium*” *Południowej Afryki*, 1974],<sup>58</sup> whose authors unambiguously criticized social and political as well as historic foundations of racism in South Africa, contributing significantly to the spread of anti-racist and anti-colonial attitudes – also among authors and readers of science fiction literature. This might have also influenced the fairly ambivalent approach of the Poles of the time of People's Republic of Poland to African culture and political problems of this continent, aptly summarized by Andrzej Chodubski, who wrote about the stereotype of Africa functioning for years in Polish culture and noted in his conclusion that although it reveals “a positive image of Africa and its cultural specificity”, still, “from the perspective of civilizational development the continent appears to be a backward, poor reality, mired in various spheres of pathological phenomena.”<sup>59</sup>

It is also worth mentioning here that in Polish science fiction texts published after the system transformation of 1989 the subject of African future and political emancipation of former dependent territories disappears almost entirely, although Africa remains in the sphere of interests of speculative fiction writers. The best example of this trend can be found in the novel *The Third Civilization* [*Trzecia cywilizacja*, 1998] written by Adam Wiśniewski-Snerg, one of Poland's most valued science fiction authors. This novel, following the convention of a lost civilization story, focuses on the once fashionable subject of ‘gnosis of the Dogons’ and the contacts between this African community and an extraterrestrial intelligence:

The gnosis of the Dogon people is not limited to astronomy and matter. It conveys stories of how people came to Earth from a group of stars around Sirius. One of the stories treats about

<sup>57</sup> J. Balicki, *Apartheid. Studium prawno-polityczne rasizmu w Afryce Południowej*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1967.

<sup>58</sup> Z. Dobosiewicz, T. Łętocha, M. Malinowski, „*Białe imperium*” *Południowej Afryki*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1974.

<sup>59</sup> A. Chodubski, *O polskim stereotypie Afryki oraz jego zmienności*, “Forum Politologiczne” 2006, no. 3, p. 34.

aliens from the planet, whose sun, before its explosion, was ‘Po-Tolo’. The people traveled through space in a ship called the arc in the gnosis.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, however, the image of Africa that emerges out of this fantastic story is closer to an ethnographic description of societies of a traditional kind than to a futuristic image of civilizational development of this continent that we know from science fiction of the socialist era:

In Africa of old there was no religion, law, morality and science as separate, autonomous branches of culture. There was one agglomeration of conviction that was everything. Their beliefs functioned in consciousness, just as science functions in our consciousness. They were a general theory of nature, explaining phenomena that couldn’t be understood in common sense categories. This theory of nature was at different levels of complexity in different tribes. Sometimes it encompassed the entire space – everything that exists. An African person did not feel fear, their world was comprehensible because it was explained. For them, their beliefs expressed an absolute truth.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the perspective of an African future disappears, while there return imaginary visions of the continent’s pre-colonial past and cultural legacy of its native civilizations – considered as societies having not only their particular spiritual connection with the cosmos, but also with its intelligent inhabitants.

This gradual decline in the interest in African future, understood as a task for socialist modernizing project, was also undoubtedly connected with the increase of doubts regarding the effectiveness of subsequent stages of the international introduction of communism. The increasing popularity of Polish social science fiction and its leading creators, such as Janusz A. Zajdel, also resulted in Polish speculative fiction authors beginning to take a particularly attentive look at the potential future of Poland, inscribing it into utopian and dystopian prognostic models. In time, the descriptions of local social, economic and political crises, as well as parabolic stories of enslaved Central European nations (either conquered by aliens or dominated by corrupt government elites) took the place of exotic African future in Polish science fiction. In turn, in the new geopolitical order that arrived after 1989, Poland, heading boldly towards the West, loses her interest in African issues, perceiving them – again, in a slightly condescending manner – as the problems of poor countries of the global South, which remain the back country of civilization, a back country wherein pre-modern myths served in an Orientalist framework in adventure stories such as *The Third Civilization* come to life.

To summarize the herein presented reflections regarding constructing African future in popular science fiction texts of the era of the People’s Republic of Poland, I will attempt a few sentences of conclusion. Firstly, therefore, the African subject matter is a clearly visible problem field in Polish science fiction, appearing since the

<sup>60</sup> A. Wiśniewski-Snerg, *Trzecia cywilizacja*, C&T, Toruń 1998, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.



early 1950s in the context of images of the future implying an international triumph of the socialist social project. Secondly, in those texts, Africa becomes not only an exotic scenery of fantastic events, but also a field of political conflicts, connected, among others, with the emancipation of dependent territories and rejection of the doctrine of colonialism and racism. Thirdly, African people and their native culture are consistently shown as metaphoric anti-colonial figures – ones seeking escape out of the sphere influenced by capitalism (e.g. as members of a spaceship crew carrying the message of communism and fighting holdovers of old imperialism). Fourthly, finally, speculative plots of socialist science fiction remain, in those regards, fully compatible with the foreign policy of the People's Republic of Poland and the actions of Polish diplomacy, presenting an anti-colonial and anti-racist position in the international arena. Taking into account all these conclusions, one should remember, however, that the herein discussed texts constituted a fairly emphatic example of socialist protectionism of the countries of people's democracy, which assumed that African emancipation can only take place in the name of the ideals of socialism – with the mediation and participation of the countries of the Eastern Bloc, which consistently perceived Africa as the sphere of their own influences. And, hence, it is possible, I believe, to claim confidently that one of the leading subjects of these novels was constructing 'someone else's' future in accordance with the political interest of one of the sides that, at the time, were engaged in the Cold War.

Translated by Ewa Bodal

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