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"Liminal Figures of Futurity": Mohale Mashigo's Use of Speculative Fiction in *Intruders*

Kathie Birat

I'm afraid of everything that contagion can change. Of discovering that the structure holding up civilization as I know it is nothing but a house of cards. I'm afraid of annihilation, but also of its opposite: that fear will eventually pass without leaving any trace of change behind.

Paolo Giordano, *How Contagion Works: Science, Awareness and Community in Times of Global Crisis*

- 1 At the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, in March 2020, Paolo Giordano, in his short essay, captured the spirit of the crisis that at the time was only beginning to reveal its capacity to call into question "civilization as we knew it" to use Giordano's terms. In his short but cogent reflexion on the physical and psychological damage being wrought by an unknown virus, he revealed the relevance in a time of crisis of postcolonial concerns with the ways in which "the personal and the global are intertwined" (2020, 32). The very length of the essay's title in English is indicative of Giordano's preoccupation with the pandemic as a sign, or rather a symptom, of the complexity of the modern world and man's incapacity to deal with that complexity: "Personal and global are intertwined in such enigmatic ways that they leave us exhausted even before we can try following a single thread" (32).
- 2 Pandemics and plagues have long been the subject of fiction, and critics have not failed to cull examples from the archives since the outbreak of the pandemic. However, the very scope of the imagined disaster, which Giordano captures so concisely, has led to a deeper interrogation concerning the capacity of fiction to imagine "what comes next." Giordano admits that the combined effects of climate change and patterns of disease propagation "may be little more than an inconvenience in wealthier societies, but

pose[s] a serious threat in some countries" (2020, 32). This is probably the most crucial aspect, from a postcolonial point of view, of any investigation of the notion of crisis, seen from a global perspective.

- 3 The definition of what constitutes a crisis depends on the perspective from which one is observing the world. In her collection of short stories entitled *Intruders*, the South African author Mohale Mashigo¹ offers a vision of crisis which captures the difference between a South African definition of a "major event" and Giordano's use of the pandemic as a symbol of a global crisis. At the beginning of a story entitled "Ghost Strain N," which revolves around the transformation of young people into what the narrator calls Ghosts, but which appear to be zombies, through drug use, the narrator says: "By the time official announcements had been made, hearts had been eaten and whole neighbourhoods evacuated. You see, a major event is really just a string of small, overlooked events holding hands" (Mashigo 2018, 26). Mashigo's collection of stories, which she defines as "speculative fiction," can be seen as an example of the questions raised by visions of the future coming from areas of the world that can be defined as postcolonial. Her choice to write in the speculative vein suggests her concern with the future of Africa, a question which she pointedly evokes in the introduction to the collection:

Our needs, when it comes to imagining futures, or even reimagining a fantasy present, are different from elsewhere on the globe; we actually live on this continent, as opposed to using it as a costume or a stage to play out our ideas. (xi)

While it is possible, and even indispensable, to situate Mashigo's adoption of the short story form in the context of what Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie have termed "post-transitional South African literature" (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010, 2), the questions raised by her use of the term "speculative" extend well beyond the South African context and suggest the pertinence of examining the collection in the light of the issues underlying any perception of the future in postcolonial terms. Recent publications on the social and political implications of climate change, increasingly seen as a synecdoche for all of the crises threatening mankind, suggest that those who have been marginalized in the past may well be victimized in the future. This is the point of view adopted by Andrew Baldwin, who identifies climate refugees as "our yet-to-come Other par excellence" and considers that "we need to expose the invisible racism at stake in the discursive phenomenon of climate change migration and climate refugeeism" (2020, 301). It is also the logic underlying Malcolm Ferdinand's suspicion of approaches to climate change based on the idea of a return to nature, which he sees as the continuation of colonial fantasies.²

- 4 The emphasis on the notion of crisis has accentuated the gap between global and local levels of expression and interpretation. I believe, however, that it can be argued that Mashigo's speculative stories, like much recent fiction, take on a particular pertinence when viewed through the tension between a global and a local perspective. The way in which Mashigo has adopted the notion of crisis, as well as the codes of the speculative, from a global context and narrativized it within a South African frame gives her stories both a wide legibility and a powerful thrust as a specifically African and South African reflexion on the possibilities of imagining the future. The specificity of her approach can best be understood by examining theories which consider the postcolonial dimension of reflections on the future and those which focus on the African context. It will then be possible to consider how these two frames shed light on Mashigo's

strategies for exploring a global dilemma in a way that respects the specificities of a local context.

- 5 *Intruders* is a collection of eleven stories involving characters living in a world on the cusp of an immediate but undefined crisis that propels them into an uncertain future. "Ghost Strain N" revolves around the friendship between two boys, one of whom has become "a living-dead thing," one of the Ghosts who has succumbed to an outbreak of drug addiction:

Nyapope was just another name for an opportunist. Where society left a gap, this opportunist took over. It was an opportunist that slipped into your hand, lied to your heart and ate your brain. Scientists were calling it a virus; Koketso didn't believe that – he had seen with his own eyes its genesis. (Mashigo 2018, 39)

Koketso's response to the crisis developing in a country which has become "a Ghost Town where most of what made people feel secure, fell away" (40) is to "carry his best friend [...] in a coffin in the backs of various stolen cars" (41). The three stories called "Untitled" follow Bonolo's departure in a space ship in an end-of-the-world context:

The sun was definitely still in the sky, but angry clouds that looked like a frustrated artist's splashes of paint blocked it. People stood in the streets, looking at the sky with curiosity, which grew into panic when it became apparent that the experts didn't have any answers. (59)

In "The High Heel Killer" a woman who has killed her male persecutor finds herself sprouting wings: "Once they sprouted I knew that impossible was just a matter of experience" (149).

- 6 Mashigo's use of the word "intruders," both as a title and as a way of designating a number of her characters, provides a thematic thread linking her stories to a common preoccupation in postcolonial literature, the fate of those who are excluded or marginalized through the effects of colonialism. In several stories, the characters are designated as intruders because they have been orphaned, like the two girls Busi and Bellinda in "BnB in Bloem." Mam' Gladys, the woman responsible for placing the girls in foster homes, describes them as children "who had, from pure survival, developed an internal homing device for the unbelievable and frightening things that existed" (Mashigo 2018, 80). She entrusts them to a couple "who hunted monsters," asking the couple to "help them use their unwanted gift" (80). The gift proves to be a talent for hunting down and killing monsters, an activity they pursue in killing Werewolves and Veras, a type of monstrous woman whose specialty is taking revenge on men who have been violent with women:

Mam' Gladys was listing all the deaths of women in Bloemfontein before the Vera appeared, and the death of men following its appearance. 'This Vera won't stop killing. You know what to do. Nibe be careful please.' With that Mam' Gladys hung up. (85)

Both orphanhood and monstrosity, in the form of the Vera, stand metonymically for the violence of life in South Africa: "Mother Four took them back to the children's home precisely because Bell insisted on acting like a feral child. She wouldn't use utensils and once ate a scab while looking Mother Four in the eye" (87).

- 7 Jane and Lewis Gordon point out in their study of monsters and disaster that disaster often results from the failure to read signs: "The failure to heed warnings, to read signs properly, is catastrophic" (2009, 8). Since, for instance, in ancient Roman astrology, "the configuration of the stars stands as an occurrence of its own, [...] we see an event whose signification is another event. [...] But since the sign and its signification stand as a continuum of ill-fated events, its appearance is, from the outset, bad" (7).

Furthermore, according to the authors, "The disaster produces victims who are a continuation of the initial sign; they in effect become signs, carrying, like plague, disaster wherever they go. They become, in other words, monsters" (9). This continuum between sign and signification explains the conflation of disaster and guilt, the victim being seen as the cause of his own misfortune.³ Mashigo's Vera is a monster of the type described by the Gordons; as a sign signifying violence against women, she is both victim and monster; the perception of Bell as a "feral child" produces the same ambiguity. It is not difficult to see how the ambivalent status of these victims of a violent past could also be seen in terms of Agamben's *homo sacer*, the figure of the man banished from society, "an interstitial figure that resides between the *polis* and the *oikos*" (Downey 2009, 113). Agamben's definition of the *homo sacer* makes his exclusion not an accident, but the founding principle of a relation defined by the paradoxical inclusion of that which is excluded. Agamben's complex definition of the interdependency of exclusion and the *polis* has been widely used to study the ways in which the modern state has assumed greater control over the lives of its citizens through the imposition of the "state of exception."

When life and politics – originally divided, and linked together by means of the no-man's-land of the state of exception that is inhabited by bare life – begin to become one, all life becomes sacred and all politics becomes the exception. (Agamben 1998, 48)

Mashigo's intruders, like Agamben's *homo sacer* and the Gordons' monsters, emerge from the interstices of the no-man's-land generated by a situation of crisis. The Ghosts evoked in "Ghost Strain N" are drug addicts who are invisible simply because people refuse to acknowledge their presence:

Fear and trauma make you accept little lies to silence the truth because when the truth is young people breaking into homes, tearing hearts out of people's chests and eating them, anything is better than admitting that life will never be the same. Even the police denied that Ghosts were impervious to bullets, the way they just kept walking – not even stumbling when hit – in search of drugs, hearts, and sometimes both. (2018, 37)

The Ghosts clearly function like zombies (the narrator calls Koketso's drug addict friend Steven a "living-dead thing" [37]), a term increasingly used in connection with the effects of slavery and other forms of dehumanization.⁴

- 8 The analysis of migration in terms of its postcolonial dimension, as an image of the othering processes of the future itself, is one of the major themes that has emerged in the exploration of the social impact of climate change. While such models are powerful and persuasive, their pertinence can only be assured through the establishing of a balance between global models and local contexts and conditions. From a postcolonial point of view, finding a balance between the pull of theory and the complexity of local contexts is not a simple task, a point which has been dealt with extensively by Neil Lazarus and the Warwick Collective (Lazarus 2011a; 2011b). In the case of African writers like Mohale Mashigo, it is important to explore the impact of general theories in an African context.
- 9 The question of speculative fiction and its pertinence in an African context has already received critical attention. In an essay entitled "Black to the future," which Mashigo quotes in her introduction, Mark Dery suggests that "the sublegitimate status of science fiction as a pulp genre in Western literature mirrors the subaltern position to which blacks have been relegated" (1994, 180). Moradewun Adejunmobi considers, from a postcolonial perspective, that there is a congruence between "representations of

alien encounters and the politics of colonialism" that finds expression in films like *District 9* and *Avatar*, which can be seen as "allegories of colonial encounters" (2016, 266). Magali Armillas-Tiseyra likewise sees African science fiction as partially engaged with the past through what she calls "speculative histories" which "shed new light on the past, using the critically disruptive potential of SF not to offer a blueprint for a putatively 'better' future but – crucially – to unsettle received ideas about Africa in the present" (2016, 274). Nedine Moonsamy notes that the utopian capacity of science fiction "assumes greater significance in a postcolonial context, like Africa, where various liberation struggles and nations were, and are, ideologically informed by future-oriented utopian ideals" (2016, 329). A recent discussion of what Rebecca Duncan calls "the increasingly prominent 'speculative' impulse in contemporary South African literary production" attempts to situate "the eco-speculative imaginaries within the patterning of racist ideology, economic unevenness, and geographical organisation that has shaped both South African and modern world history" (2020, 67). This ambitious and inclusive view corresponds to the tendency to view postcolonial societies in a global perspective, sustaining Rob Nixon's assertion that the ecological catastrophes of recent years "disproportionately jeopardize the livelihoods ... of the global poor" (qtd. in Duncan 74). Duncan includes Mohale Mashigo in a list of writers who practice what she calls "irrealist" strategies, adopting the term used by the Warwick Research Collective to characterize narratives meant "to conceptualise circumstances in which the coordinates of a recognisable reality have become unstable, have shifted and reconfigured into a new formation" (76).⁵

- 10 Viewing Mashigo's stories from a global and African perspective of victimization and resistance does not preclude the necessity of paying heed to the local context. While the South African environment and the literary context of apartheid and the post-apartheid period do not explain Mashigo's work, they can shed useful light on her specificity as well as her relation to the context in which she writes. The literature of the post-apartheid period has been termed "post-transitional" and the ways in which it has moved "beyond binary conceptions" extensively analysed (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010; Samuelson 2010; Frenkel 2013). Rebecca Fasselt, Corinne Sandwith and Khulukazi Soldati-Kahimbaara see it as a "transitional moment" and the short story is considered as "a viable genre for the depiction" of such a moment, partly because of its "inconclusiveness" as a form (Fasselt et al. 2014, 6). The aesthetic options available have been explored through an examination of writers within the frames of realism, modernism, post-modernism and magic realism (Lazarus 2011b; Grzeda 2013; Poyner 2020). The originality of Mashigo's stories can be best understood by exploring the pertinent elements of the South African context in the light of the pressures exerted by an increasingly global frame; their specificity lies in the relation between these two scales, or levels.
- 11 The way in which Mashigo uses the speculative dimension of her fiction creates a relation between the local and the global which not only reflects the reality of life in the capitalocene,⁶ but which also precludes any recourse to the causality associated with realism as it has traditionally been understood. While it could be argued that the "irrealism" of events like the sprouting of wings in "The High Heel Killer" are related to magic realism, the stories do not mobilize a traditional framework in ways that would suggest an opposition between modern and folk explanations for events.⁷ On the contrary, there is a deliberate blurring of the boundary between the local South African context and the cultural and social codes of a modern world relying heavily on the

media and technology. Causality is thus telescoped in ways that short-circuit social and historical reasoning. At the beginning of the story "Untitled i," in which Kamo organizes escape in a spaceship for her sister Bonolo, the notion of an ecological crisis is evoked in a paragraph firmly rooted in the mundane and the local. The first line of the second paragraph sets the scene: "Rhulani, the woman who was renting space in their backyard, where she'd built a shack, was sitting on the stoep peeling potatoes" (2018, 58). The reference to renting space in someone else's yard and the use of the word "stoep" situate the scene in the spatial framework of South Africa. By the end of the paragraph, the focus has shifted to a global crisis with allusions to the dimming of the sun:

People stood in the streets, looking at the sky with curiosity, which grew into panic when it became apparent that the experts didn't have any answers. *'What good are these bloody smart people if they can never give us answers when we need them?'* (59; original emphasis).

Kamo's arranging of her sister's escape by spaceship thus takes place in a narrative frame which does not elaborate on the connection between the necessity for renting space in other people's yards and the possibility of leaving the earth on a space ship. The apocalyptic context – "It's the end. They've been talking about it for weeks" (63) – produces a converging of the local and the global. The same type of meshing of the distant and the immediate is given spatial form in the story "The Parlemono," in which a restaurant which received its name from an Italian prisoner of war has been renamed Café Ferdi by the man's son. The restaurant has become a vault which people can walk into in order to re-experience the past:

Brooke gave a deep sigh and opened the fridge. Instead of a cold breeze, she was greeted by a warm summer one. She was tempted to take her poncho off but she resisted. Inside the fridge was the façade of a theatre where she was going to star in her first play. She watched a younger (her hair hadn't yet grown into a difficult-to-style afro) version of herself and Sidwell sitting on the stairs outside the Windybrow Theatre in downtown Johannesburg. She was wearing harem pants and a red T-shirt with Robert Sobukwe's⁸ face on it. (52)

In this case, as suggested by Brooke's T-shirt, the past has been watered down by the adoption of life-styles affected by a globalized culture, which bury "the blood and sweat of those who had built the city" (49):

The Vault Keepers' League is perhaps the most well-hidden group in the world. It is made up of people from all over the world, existing in hidden buildings and working easily forgotten jobs. [...] Vault Keepers have been around for as long as cities and villages have been witness to human pain and kindness. (55)

The conflation of global and local perspectives is achieved partly by the characters themselves through references to a culture filled with television and movies as well as mobile phones and text messaging. Koketso, the young boy in "Ghost Strain N," faced with the epidemic of the Ghost Virus, the social effects of which are chillingly similar to those of the Covid-19, relies on his B-movie culture to sustain hope:

Koketso held on to hope and everything he had ever seen in B-Grade movies about an unlikely hero making it to the end in one piece. [...] Many years of watching B-grade (and sometimes C-Grade) action films prepared him for the kind of athleticism and quick thinking that would keep him alive. (41)

- 12 One of the effects of the relation created by Mashigo between the local and the global is a particular focus on the ordinary reality of South Africa. In an often-cited essay, Njabulo Ndebele, in the context of apartheid, argued for the necessity of rediscovering the ordinary rather than allowing South African literature to be reduced to "the

representation of the spectacle" (1994, 41). While subsequent critics have distanced themselves from Ndebele's remarks, taking them as a sign of his attachment to realism as the only possible aesthetic,⁹ it can be argued that Mashigo, like other writers, has modified the place of the real by observing it through the magnifying lens of the speculative. Severed from the intricate interweaving of material detail and personal perspective that defines realism, everyday life takes on the strange glow created by ultimate necessity, in this case associated with an atmosphere of impending crisis. In "Ghost Strain N," reference is made to the practice of trainsurfing:

Trainsurfing was by far the most exciting (and stupidly dangerous) hobby that Steven introduced. Once a week they would take a train instead of a taxi home from school. Once inside, they would slide out of the windows onto the top of the train. Keketso only took part because he had worked out that the likelihood of them being electrocuted was low, given the slow speed of the train on their way home. (28)¹⁰

In the same way, in "The High Heel Killer" the difficulty of everyday life for women, of moving around in the city between home and office under the threat of verbal or physical aggression, is brought into sharp relief by the protagonist's sudden refusal to accept the conditions of her life:

Witness the city turn against us! There were many potential witnesses: Ray-Ban Guy, Aus' Maneo who sells braaied mealies in the morning, school kids who constantly argue about artists I've never heard of ... Why then did I feel frightened when I realised the conversation behind me was about me? The two male voices slapped city sounds away from my ears like a mother does when her child reaches for the pots before supper is ready. (144)¹¹

The pain evoked by the narrator in her transformation into a winged creature mirrors the pain she felt as a vulnerable woman in Johannesburg:

Everything hurt, it was difficult to breathe. The bone-like stubs were getting longer. I killed Ray-Ban Guy and now my body is turning against me. While in the holding cell, my shoulder was on fire. (145–46)

Mashigo is not simply juxtaposing the global and the local by placing her stories in a frame borrowed from widely-used generic codes. Two or multiple worlds are not juxtaposed as a collage of disparate realities. They are drawn into a single narrative line by the agency of the characters, whose actions trace a trajectory that defies the distinction between local realities and personal and collective aspirations. Far from being focused on personal subjectivity, these actions, precisely because they are actions and not simply thoughts or feelings, affect the public sphere in ways that recognize the role of personal trajectories in a collective reality. What might appear to be mere speculation on the possibility of action in a dismal world becomes transformative action, thus releasing the hidden potential of the represented world. It is in this light that the reader is invited to see Keketso's relation with his friend Steven, whom he carries around "in a coffin in the backs of various stolen cars" (41), or Bonolo's travel to another planet.

- 13 The role of agency in the speculative dimension of Mashigo's stories can be seen more clearly in the light of Brady Smith's discussion of two novels by Lauren Beukes, a South African author who has pushed the speculative dimension of fiction, in its technical intricacy, much further than Mashigo. While in *Intruders* technology is not presented as being sophisticated enough to produce the "hybrid, urban form of nature," what Smith also calls the "mediatized biosphere" (2016, 348) of Beukes's *Moxyland*, the stories raise similar questions of agency. As Smith says in speaking of Beukes's novels: "The futures these novels imagine are therefore ones in which urban infrastructure has become entirely coexistent with nature, incorporating the spiritual and material worlds in the

architecture of human social and biological existence" (352). In terms of agency, this means "coming to terms with the myriad ways in which human agency is enmeshed and in fact constituted by the agency of nonhuman entities as well" (353).

- 14 Mashigo's characters are defined by their will to act, their refusal to be deterred by the malevolent forces that are presented as having reached a critical level in her stories. While their actions are not the result of the convergence of the human and the non-human in a cyberpunk perspective, their capacity to act emerges from the vital forces of the community itself. Koketso, the sometime "trainsurfer," transforms his gift for living on the edge into a strategy for countering the destructive power of the epidemic of drug abuse which is destroying the community. He works in a mortuary run by people whose ineptitude leads them to mix up corpses: "frequently they would give Koketso the wrong corpse" (2018, 30). This ineptitude is simply a minor form of the pervasive blindness that prevents people from seeing what is happening to their country and society. Koketso's desire to save, or at least preserve his friend Steven, the only person who puts colour in his life, reveals his capacity not to behave differently from others, but to grasp the essential detail in the surrounding environment that will make survival possible:

Was Steven so far gone that some other group of frightened, angry people would see fit to kill him, rather than let him eat the hearts of people? He didn't come to any satisfactory conclusion but he knew what had to be done, and packed a bag. Filled it in a hurry with knives, a knobkerrie, his mother's church shawl, toilet paper, other things he thought would be important, and all the canned food he could find. (36)

- 15 One of the final scenes, in which Koketso and Steven share an improvised meal, shows how Koketso is able to mobilize Steven's talents as a chef, even after he has become a ghost:

Steven stared vacantly at the scene in front of him. Three words inspired hope and desperation: 'O senya oil.' It was nothing profound or even remotely touching. Steven, the gifted culinary genius, scolded his friend for wasting grapeseed oil. Somewhere inside the Ghost was a stubborn young man who fought the rot and emptiness, just to stop the wasting of grapeseed oil. (Mashigo 2018, 45)

Koketso's ironical remark about the vegetarian sausages that they are eating – "Nyaope boys have turned us into vegetarians" (44) – reveals a reordering of the relation between man and nature of which other traces can be found in the story. All of these manifestations of disorder revolve around the zombie theme, which functions as a metonym for the material and social deterioration of the community. The zombies give agency to drugs, death and the negative forces undermining the community:

In just a few months things had fallen apart all over the world. Many people had died – their corpses quickly incinerated because films and TV shows taught us that the undead could create more undead. (39)

In relation to the zombification of his friend, Koketso's actions are not simply a form of resistance or resilience. They involve reassigning agency as a social force in the face of a situation in which human agency in itself is called into question.

- 16 The frontier between the human and the non-human is treated in a more conventional way in the story "Little Vultures," which involves genetic tampering. The first-person narrator describes herself as "my family's first genomicist" and explains that she "turned Baby A into reality":

Two females made a baby and it was an abomination according to those who were spokespeople for the gods. Men who worshipped Science questioned my methods but really they were questioning their own failures. (Mashigo 2018, 112)

The examination of the nature and effects of human agency in a South African context is in this story as extensive as in "Ghost Strain N." Mashigo explores the characters' desire for self-transformation in an ironical way by inserting their actions in the broader frame of genetic manipulation. The past of South Africa is evoked through references to the narrator's successful breeding of a quagga, a type of Zebra that disappeared in the nineteenth century, probably due to competition with domestic animals introduced by Afrikaners. The boundaries of human communication are explored through her capacity to hear people's thoughts, giving intrusion a neurological, but also a metafictional dimension: "Mme also impressed on me that I had to learn to 'mind my own business' because listening in on people's thoughts was intrusive, and everyone was entitled to their secrets" (117). While the story might be seen as involving a rather conventional warning about hubris, it could also be interpreted in the light of the narrator's concern with women's agency, a question which is given dramatic emphasis through the idea of scientific skills that ultimately do not resolve their problems as women. Although the danger of "crossing a line" is present in Violet's attempts to use the butterfly DNA to produce a baby, the need for compassion and the importance of human relationships as a source of agency plays a role similar to "Ghost Strain N."

- 17 Mashigo's way of using speculative fiction makes it possible for her to reveal the potential of South African life to generate a future which will not simply be a pale reflection of possibilities elaborated elsewhere. Tampering with the future proves to be a way of perceiving the past and the present in a different light. The world produced through her stories is not the private or subjective perception of a sensitive character. It is a world generated, perceived and transformed by the characters' capacity to find the future within themselves. These are not internal epiphanies, private perceptions that illuminate a character's internal landscape. They are public interventions in the world that do not leave reality intact. Mashigo's use of speculative fiction corresponds to Eric Smith's remarks about the "inherently *public* orientation" of science fiction (2012, 3), an assertion that could be compared with Grzeda's comment about magic realism's "realism-derived faithfulness to the socio-political context" (2013, 177). In this respect, her fiction shares the "optative and performative" character that Rita Barnard sees in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (2007, 149). Far from allowing the South African context to be subsumed in a global crisis, *Intruders* illuminates a local sense of crisis by envisaging ways in which it may empower the future.

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NOTES

1. Mohale Mashigo is the author of a novel, *The Yearning*, published in 2016 by Picador Africa, which received the prize for best first novel from the University of Johannesburg in 2016. She is also the author of books for adolescents and children and has written scenarios for *Kwezi*, a series of comics featuring South African super heroes. She is in addition a singer/composer; her album "Invincible Summer" was released by Black Porcelain in 2013. In 2020 Mashigo was a writer in residence at the University of Lorraine after being selected for the Ariel residency program for 2020–2021.
2. As exposed in *Une écologie décoloniale* (2019), in particular in part three.

3. This explains Andrew Baldwin's argument that future climate migrants will be seen as pariahs. He points out that in a world made ungovernable by the chaos generated by climate change "the climate migrant is invented precisely in order to render the ungovernable governable" (2017, 301).
4. Jean and John Comaroff have used the zombie as an image of the effects of "global economic forces" on the labor force in South Africa. In their article "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism," they show how real fear of zombies has arisen in South Africa as a result of the displacement and exploitation of workers: "The fear of being reduced to ghost labor, of being abducted to feed the fortunes of a depraved stranger, occurs alongside another kind of spectre: a growing mass, a shadowy alien-nation, of immigrant black workers from elsewhere on the continent" (2002, 789). There is a "constantly reiterated suspicion, embodied in the zombie, that it is only by magical means, by consuming others, that people may enrich themselves in these perplexing times" (792). It is thus that they reach the conclusion that "Zombies themselves seem to be born [...] of colonial encounters" (795). Jon Stratton, who quotes this passage from the Comoroffs, links this vision to Agamben's "bare life" and applies the notion to displaced people and the xenophobia that characterizes modern society in his discussion of the presence of zombies in recent films (2011, 276, 277). The same vision underlies Andrew Baldwin's use of the monster as a metaphor for the climate migrants of the future, the subalterns who occupy "a space of monstrous ambiguity" (2017, 301). Derek Paul Lee uses the figure of "the epistemological zombie: a figure deprived of cultural consciousness" (2020, 157) as a metaphor for "the hyperbolic intensification of homo sacer, the living dead man of the modern postcolony who is rendered monstrous by biopolitical forces" (162).
5. The other writers mentioned are Sarah Lotz, Masande Ntshanga, and Louis Greenberg. Lotz's short story "Home Affairs," included in the collection *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers Vol I* (2012) is analyzed in Nedine Moonsamy's article "Life Is a Biological Risk: Contagion, Contamination, and Utopia in African Science Fiction." Masande Ntshanga's story "Space" is included in the collection *Twenty in 20: The Best Short Stories of South Africa's 20 Years of Democracy* (2014). He is also the author of the novels *The Reactive* (2017) and *Triangulum* (2019). Louis Greenberg is the author of, among others, *The Beggars' Signwriters* (2006) and the novels *Green Valley* (2020) and *Dark Windows* (2018), all of which have affinities with science fiction and dystopian fiction.
6. The term capitalocene, first used by the American sociologist Jason W. Moore in 2015, has found itself in competition with the term anthropocene as a way of designating the effects of human action on the planet. While it emphasizes the inequality produced by the colonial system of financial exploitation of resources, the authors of the entry in the *Dictionnaire critique de l'anthropocène* point out that it does not account for precapitalist systems of exploitation (Argounès and Pelletier 2020).
7. Mashigo refers to the orally transmitted folktales that inspired her imagining of the character in this story in her interview published in this volume. She explains that fantasy and speculation find a natural grounding in the folk tales from the past.
8. Robert Sobukwe (1924-1978) founded the Pan African Congress in opposition to the apartheid system. After leading a nationwide protest against the Pass Law in 1960 he was sentenced to prison, where he spent nine years, six of them on Robben Island.
9. Ashraf Jamal criticizes the tendency to "pay lip service to the everyday, constructing the ordinary as a cameo in a bigger picture" (2010, 17).
10. Mashigo comments on the practice of trainsurfing and its relation to "living on the edge" in her interview.
11. Mashigo's vision of urban South Africa is similar to that of Zakes Mda as described by Rita Barnard. Barnard discusses the way in which Mda in *Ways of Dying* uses urban sites like docks and taxi stands as "crucial sites for the investigation of the intersecting stories of urban lives." She

sees Mda as signaling a shift from documentation "to a concern with the city as a dynamic entity" (2007, 152). Zakes Mda has played an important role in Mohale Mashigo's development as a writer (see interview).

ABSTRACTS

In her collection of short stories, *Intruders* (2018), the South African writer Mohale Mashigo uses a speculative lens to consider the future of Africa in a time of impending crisis. While her stories illustrate the postcolonial other as a potential future victim in a perspective suggested by Agamben's state of exception, they also demonstrate a balancing of the global with the local and a sense of agency that are specific to the author and to the situation of post-transitional South Africa.

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Keywords: Mohale Mashigo, South African short story, crisis, speculative fiction

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