

Commentary

Comment on Nwosu, T.I. (2018). *Ethnic Science Fiction in Africa's Political Sphere: the drivers of Technoscience*. International Journal of Political Science and Development. 6(6) 163-168.

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Accepted 24 October 2018

This essay by T.I. Nwosu cites the work that Clyde Wilcox and I did over two decades ago on some of the links between science fiction and politics. So with this full disclosure at the start, let me commend the solid focus on ethnicity and on African politics. Nwosu is passionate and strong on the complex environment of his continent and the need for ethnic authenticity among numerous political centers. It would seem that in theory any sort of global generalization for a “united states” of the continent is illusory, and the need for strong “marriages” among and within clear ethnic centers is essential. Those marriage compromises require wit and grace in order to survive. That seems to me a sensitive and thoughtful theory for the maintenance of a good politics. Nwosu makes the move, then, to story or to fictional anecdote as part of the support system for maintaining the theory. I think both Wilcox, who is a political scientist, and I are delighted to see this line of argument. We want to see a functional politics. We know or strongly suspect that one of the supports for the working out of theory in history has to do with the stories we tell ourselves, the fictional anecdotes that may or may not be totally factual; these supports need to be highlighted as Nwosu wants to highlight them.

The theory references and developments in the essay are strong. The literary development about the stories is less strong. Early in the essay, Nwosu refers to “Ursula”, and the James Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction is evoked with its [url](#) address. These references are way too skeletal for what is needed. In fact, the story reference from just the Christian name of Ursula coincides wonderfully with what is needed as

support here for the excellent theory. It was just half a century ago that Ursula Le Guin published her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and the politics of that story would play perfectly with the intentions here of Nwosu. Not only the diplomacy of a strange ethnic planet Gethen being invited to join the Ekumen of all planets without losing any of its ethnic identity but also the metaphor of “marriage compromise” to make this happen fit with the Nwosu scheme. The diplomat from distant Earth is a black man. He has a wonderful love affair with his counterpart on the alien planet, and gender politics plays into the story in an uncanny way as well. Gender on Gethen is literally fluid. Individuals flow toward any other individual in a sexual attraction where one is male and the other female. Estraven of Gethen adapts his/her gender and sexuality perfectly to that of the diplomat from Earth. The results are political and scientific – what Nwosu labels “technoscience.” This sounds silly, far-fetched, impossible, pure “fake news;” but as a masterful story told by Le Guin it is beautiful and effective. Further, Le Guin, who died just this year, has had a massive effect on other writers of science fiction. So the proposition from Nwosu here about the usefulness of “ethnic science fiction” and the mysterious appearance of “Ursula” early in the essay (I am tempted to call her Saint Ursula) is solid; and it is uncanny how apt the ideas are for this moment in history. The stories themselves including some disciples of Le Guin, however, need to be told more fully – or at least cited properly for the reader to discover. Wilcox and I are hoping to edit more collections in this genre. If we do, the work of Nwosu will certainly be considered for inclusion.