



WHEN DID HOSPITALITY GET SO HOSTILE?

The US Latinx Diaspora as an American Dystopia
in Sabrina Vourvoulias's *Ink*

The relationship between speculative fiction and social critique has long been a focal point for literary scholars. As a genre that often extrapolates from contemporary issues to imagine alternative futures, speculative fiction provides fertile ground for exploring societal structures, power dynamics, and the lived experiences of marginalized communities. However, the genre's historical roots have often been framed through a narrow, Eurocentric lens, which has minimized the contributions of authors from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. In recent decades, critical discourse has begun to expand, challenging these omissions and highlighting how speculative fiction can serve as a powerful medium for addressing the complexities of identity, oppression, and resistance within diasporic and marginalized communities.

The study of speculative fiction's history and development often necessitates an engagement with critical debates surrounding its literary evolution. These discussions frequently identify Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and the American science fiction pulp magazines of the 1930s¹ as cornerstone texts that shaped the genre's emergence and trajectory. These foundational works,

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1 The 1930s saw the rise of several influential American science fiction pulp magazines that shaped the genre's early development. Among these were *Amazing Stories*, launched by Hugo Gernsback in 1926; *Astounding Stories* (later renamed *Astounding Science-Fiction*), which debuted in 1930 and gained prominence under John W. Campbell Jr.'s editorial leadership from 1937, marking the beginning of science fiction's "Golden Age"; *Wonder Stories*, another Gernsback creation in 1929; and its successor, *Thrilling Wonder Stories* (1936). To learn more about pulp magazines and their historical context, see Brian Attebery's chapter titled "The Magazine Era: 1926–1960" in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*.

while undeniably influential, reflect a canon dominated by white authors, which has shaped perceptions of speculative fiction's origins and historical lineage. For much of its history, scholarly discourse has tended to marginalize or overlook the contributions of authors of color, whose works challenge and expand the boundaries of the genre in profound ways.

Despite its potential to critique societal structures, speculative fiction often reflects the systemic biases of its creators. As Afrofuturist critic Isiah Lavender III observes, "Science fiction often talks about race by not talking about race, makes real aliens, has hidden race dialogues. Even though it is a literature that talks a lot about underclasses or oppressed classes, it does so from a privileged if somewhat generic white space" (*Race* 7). This critique underscores how traditional speculative fiction has historically sidestepped direct discussions of racial identity and inequality, often using alien or other metaphorical constructs as stand-ins for real-world issues.

Yet, as Lavender III also compellingly argues, "Blackness is science fictional in the sense that these flights of fancy have used science to create the fiction of race as it is applied to black people—indeed, to all people of color" (*Afrofuturism* 9). Here, Lavender's observation highlights how science fiction is deeply entwined with the constructed nature of race itself. The genre becomes a lens through which the social fabrication of race can be critiqued, with Blackness embodying a uniquely "science fictional" condition—one shaped by centuries of pseudo-scientific racial hierarchies and cultural alienation.

These insights reveal the dual capacity of speculative fiction: while it has often perpetuated exclusionary perspectives, it also provides a powerful platform for interrogating and deconstructing the social constructs of race, identity, and power. Writers from marginalized communities have embraced this potential, using speculative fiction as a space to reclaim agency, explore alternative futures, and resist hegemonic narratives. Through these efforts, contemporary speculative fiction reimagines its historical framework and becomes a transformative medium for social critique and inclusivity.

As science fiction critics and writers delve deeper into the intersections of race and genre conventions, they continue to uncover works by authors of color who envisioned diverse worlds and alternative futures long before Samuel R. Delany, often credited as the first widely recognized African American science fiction author, published his debut novel *The Jewels of Aptror* in 1962 (Broderick 59). These discoveries highlight a previously underacknowledged legacy of nonwhite authors within speculative fiction, whose contributions challenged

the genre's Eurocentric narratives and laid the foundation for its ongoing transformation.²

Contemporary authors and scholars of science fiction are building on this legacy by promoting inclusivity and rethinking how the genre frames racial difference (Ferreira 13). As Lavender notes, "While otherhood is not exactly a new term, its meaning for sf is innovative because it attempts to change how racial difference is viewed by exposing the history and practice of discrimination operating inside and outside the genre simultaneously while also studying ways writers have used sf to expose and combat racism" (*Race* 8). This insight underscores the genre's capacity to serve as both a mirror and a critique of systemic inequities, illustrating how its speculative elements can amplify discussions about race, discrimination, and resistance. By connecting the past with the present and future, science fiction by authors of color explores the alienation and marginalization often experienced by racialized individuals in predominantly white societies. These themes resonate deeply within the speculative framework, which frequently engages with concepts of otherness, displacement, and identity. For these authors, the genre becomes a potent vehicle for confronting historical and contemporary injustices, blending metaphor with critique. Through their work, they envision futures that challenge the status quo and offer alternative possibilities, asserting the role of science fiction as a vital space for advocacy, reimagination, and transformation.

This transformative potential is further illustrated through the lens of contemporary speculative fiction movements, which emphasize the genre's capacity to reflect diverse racial and cultural experiences. As Joy Sanchez-Taylor outlines in her study *Diverse Futures: Science Fiction and Authors of Color*, four major speculative fiction and racial studies movements currently shape the field in the United States: Afrofuturism, Indigenous Futurism, Asian American speculative fiction, and Latinx speculative fiction (16). Each of these movements engages with unique cultural histories and sociopolitical struggles, using speculative elements to reimagine futures from perspectives often excluded in mainstream science fiction. Afrofuturism, for instance, reclaims Black cultural narratives and interrogates the intersections of race, technology, and power, while Indigenous Futurism envisions futures rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems and resilience.

2 To learn more about overlooked and marginalized science fiction authors of color, see Silvia Kurlat Ares's chapter, "Science Fiction in Latin America: Reading a Hidden Landscape," in *Peter Lang Companion to Latin American Science Fiction* or Darrell B. Lockhart's *Latin American Science Fiction Writers*.

Similarly, Asian American speculative fiction challenges stereotypes and highlights diasporic experiences, and Latinx speculative fiction addresses issues of migration, identity, and colonial legacies. These movements not only diversify the speculative fiction landscape but also reinforce its role as a critical site for resistance and reimagination, demonstrating how science fiction continues to expand beyond its traditionally Eurocentric framework to include voices that reframe and enrich the genre's possibilities (Córdoba and Maguire 19). By foregrounding these movements, authors and scholars alike illuminate the transformative power of speculative fiction as a tool for interrogating systemic inequities and imagining alternative worlds shaped by justice, inclusion, and cultural specificity.

Latinx speculative fiction, often referred to as Latinofuturism, represents a rich and growing field of literary and cultural production. It encompasses a diverse range of speculative narratives created by Latinx writers, including those from Chicanx, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and other Latin American diasporic communities. This body of work frequently draws on the lived experiences of marginalized groups, including immigrants and borderlands communities, such as those situated along the US–Mexico border. By blending science fiction, fantasy, and magical realism with specific cultural and historical influences, Latinofuturism offers a space for reimaging identity, resistance, and survival in the context of colonialism, displacement, and systemic inequities.

The theoretical framework of Latinofuturism builds significantly on Catherine Ramírez's adaptation of Alondra Nelson's foundational definition of Afrofuturism. Ramírez refines this concept to reflect the specificities of Chicanx culture and its intersections with technology and futurism. As she explains:

Drawing from Nelson's definition of Afrofuturism, I define Chicanafuturism as Chicano cultural production that attends to cultural transformations resulting from new and everyday technologies (including their detritus); that excavates, creates, and alters narratives of identity, technology, and the future; that interrogates the promises of science and technology; and that redefines humanism and the human. (*Deus* 77–78)

In this definition, Ramírez highlights the importance of examining both the material impacts of technological advancement and the cultural narratives that arise in response to these changes. By addressing identity and futurity, Chicanafuturism not only critiques dominant technological paradigms but also reimagines new possibilities for representation and agency. Ramírez further situates Chicanx experiences within

broader frameworks of marginalization and exclusion. She observes that, much like African Americans, Chicanx individuals have historically been excluded from dominant definitions of humanity and objectified within scientific and technological discourses. She notes:

Like African Americans, Chicanos have been barred from Western definitions of the human and denigrated [...]. They, too, have been excluded from and objectified by discourses of science. And they are also generally associated more with a primitive and racialized past than with the technologically enhanced future. Yet, new technologies have transformed Chicanos just as much as they have transformed African Americans and they have enabled us to articulate (to enunciate and link) past, present, and future identities. (*Deus* 77)

Ramírez further emphasizes the transformative power of new technologies in shaping Chicanx identities, asserting that “new technologies have transformed Chicanos just as much as they have transformed African Americans, and they have enabled us to articulate (to enunciate and link) past, present, and future identities” (*Deus* 77). This observation speaks to the ways in which technological advancements serve not merely as tools but as mediums through which marginalized communities can redefine their narratives and assert agency within both historical and futuristic contexts.

Ramírez’s insights highlight the dual imperative of Latinx speculative fiction: to confront the historical erasure of Latinx experiences from dominant narratives of modernity and progress while simultaneously constructing counter-narratives that place these communities at the forefront of technological and cultural innovation. By bridging temporal dimensions—linking the past, present, and future—Latinx speculative fiction actively challenges systemic inequalities, reconfigures dominant cultural paradigms, and reimagines possibilities for identity, community, and resistance. Through this lens, Latinofuturism not only critiques existing structures of exclusion but also expands the boundaries of speculative fiction itself. It becomes a transformative space where Latinx voices can engage with questions of futurity and belonging, imagining vibrant, alternative futures that both acknowledge historical injustices and envision new modes of cultural and technological integration. This dynamic re-envisioning aligns Latinofuturism with broader movements such as Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism, positioning it as a critical framework for understanding how speculative fiction can amplify marginalized voices and advocate for a more inclusive future.

Building on the foundational insights of Chicanafuturism, Latinofuturism extends the critical exploration of technology and its impact

on marginalized communities by questioning the promises of science, technology, and humanism for Chicanas, Chicanos, and other people of color. Ramírez notes that Chicanafuturism “articulates colonial and postcolonial histories of indigenismo,³ mestizaje,⁴ hegemony, and survival” (*Afrofuturism* 187), framing these histories as central to its speculative narratives. This articulation not only interrogates the exploitative dynamics embedded in technological progress but also reclaims the voices and experiences of those excluded from dominant discourses on modernity and futurism.

Much like Afrofuturism, which centers the diasporic experiences of African peoples and examines the legacy of slavery in relation to technology, Latinofuturism highlights the displacement and erasure of Latinx communities through themes of migration, indigenismo, and mestizaje. These speculative works foreground the dual realities of being simultaneously depicted as technologically uninformed and exploited as disposable labor—reduced to “human machines.” However, while Afrofuturism often navigates the African diaspora’s engagement with technology and media, Latinofuturism situates its critique within the framework of migrations across and within the Americas. This locational specificity enables Latinofuturism to challenge traditional narratives of progress by presenting alternative, radical futures that decenter Eurocentric visions of technological advancement.

In addition to reimagining collective futures, Latinofuturism serves as a powerful tool for critiquing contemporary societal fears and injustices. Dystopian works within this genre offer piercing examinations of the sociopolitical dynamics surrounding immigration crises, surveillance, and authoritarian responses to demographic changes. These speculative narratives underscore the violent potential of extremist ideologies, portraying the real-world consequences of surveillance technologies used to monitor and control Latinx populations. Such stories not only warn against the encroachment of authoritarianism but also explore the human cost of systemic fear and violence.

Building on the thematic concerns of surveillance, authoritarianism, and the exploitation of Latinx communities, dystopian Latinofuturist narratives offer powerful critiques of the systemic inequalities embed-

3 *Indigenismo* is a political ideology prevalent in several Latin American nations that centers on the interconnectedness between the nation-state and the indigenous nations and peoples within its borders.

4 The term *mestizaje*, derived from Spanish, refers to the cultural and ethnic blending that occurred in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, following the onset of Spanish colonization.

ded in contemporary society. These works frequently use speculative settings to draw attention to the lived realities of marginalized populations, blending political commentary with imaginative storytelling to illuminate urgent societal issues. A notable example of this critical engagement is Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* (2008), a film that envisions a near-future world where Chicana laborers are transformed into cyborg-like workers, embodying the commodification of human labor and the disposability of immigrant bodies in US society. Similarly, novels like *America Libre* (2009), by Raul Ramos y Sanchez, depict an alternate history in which escalating tensions culminate in another US civil war, ignited by the tragic killing of a young Latina by undercover detectives in San Antonio. Such narratives reveal the fragility of societal cohesion and highlight the racialized violence inherent in enforcement practices. Among these dystopian works, Sabrina Vourvoulias's *Ink* (2012) stands out as a significant exploration of fear, discrimination, and systemic oppression. The novel's speculative premise, where individuals are marked with tattoos that denote their social status, serves as a compelling metaphor for the dehumanization and control of immigrant communities. As the central focus of this academic article, *Ink* offers a profound critique of surveillance and authoritarianism, shedding light on the sociopolitical forces that marginalize Latinx populations.

Sabrina Vourvoulias is a multifaceted writer whose work is deeply informed by her diverse heritage and professional experiences as a journalist, newspaper editor, and blogger. Her upbringing and familial background—an American father of Greek immigrant descent raised in Latin America and a Mexican-born mother who later lived in Guatemala before becoming a US citizen—profoundly shape her creative endeavors (*Ink* 14). These cultural intersections provide a rich foundation for her speculative fiction, particularly her novel *Ink*. First published in 2012 and republished in 2018, *Ink* addresses the fraught realities of immigration through a dystopian lens, blending speculative fiction with sharp political commentary.

The narrative of *Ink* explores the insidious rise of totalitarian immigration laws in the United States, laws that purport to enhance border security while exposing the contradictions of a society dependent on immigrant labor. Central to the story is the implementation of an "identity law" that mandates biometric tattoos on immigrants' wrists in lieu of formal documentation. These tattoos, color-coded to signify differing immigration statuses, serve as permanent markers of alienation and exclusion. Through this premise, Vourvoulias critiques the dehumanization inherent in such policies, portraying

the tattoos not only as tools of control but also as symbols of the systemic marginalization of immigrant communities.

In *Ink*, the color-coded tattoos serve as stark visual markers of the immigrant hierarchy established under the totalitarian “identity bill.” A black tattoo denotes temporary status, green represents a work visa or permanent residency, and blue signifies naturalized citizenship. These individuals, collectively referred to as “Inks,” become physically branded as “other,” symbolizing their exclusion and dehumanization within the rigid framework of the law. By embedding these identifiers into the skin, the system enforces a perpetual state of surveillance and stratification, stripping Inks of individuality and reducing their identities to their immigration status.

The novel centers on four protagonists: one Ink and three non-Ink characters, each offering a distinct perspective on the violence and systemic oppression shaped by restrictive immigration policies. The narrative structure alternates between sections, with each segment named after the protagonist whose viewpoint dominates the chapters within it. This technique enables Vourvoulis to explore how individual experiences and social positions affect perceptions of privilege and vulnerability in a dystopian United States.

The non-Ink characters—Finn, Del, and Abbie—offer contrasting yet interconnected insights into the struggles faced by Inks. Finn, a journalist, investigates issues related to the internment of Inks, bringing an analytical lens to the unfolding crisis. Del, a carpenter, uses his skills to assist activists working to defend Ink rights, embodying the role of a hands-on ally. Abbie, the daughter of a sanatorium supervisor, transitions from a place of relative privilege to active involvement in organizing efforts to liberate the Inks, reflecting a journey toward awareness and solidarity.

Mari, the sole Ink protagonist, provides the most visceral account of the violence and trauma endured by the Ink community. Through her narrative, the novel delves into harrowing experiences of rape, forced internment, and separation from loved ones. Yet Mari’s story also emphasizes resilience and spiritual fortitude, embodied in her connection to her nahual, her spiritual twin. This element of magical realism introduces a dimension of cultural resistance and emotional survival, highlighting the importance of spiritual and ancestral ties in the face of systemic dehumanization. By weaving together these perspectives, Vourvoulis underscores the intersections of identity, power, and resistance, crafting a narrative that interrogates the impact of institutionalized violence while celebrating acts of solidarity and cultural resilience.

The biometric tattoos and the treatment of Inks in the novel serve as a stark allegory for real-world systems of oppression, both in the United States and globally. These practices parallel historical ideologies such as the “one-drop rule” and anti-miscegenation laws, which sought to police racial purity and discourage relationships between different racial or ethnic groups. The novel takes this to a dystopian extreme, where even individuals with only partial “INK blood”—whether from one parent or a single grandparent—are subjected to oppressive regulations. These individuals are forced to conform to the ink codes of conduct and are marked with the indelible tattoos that signify their identity. As Mari, the Ink with a blue tattoo, poignantly states: “My father was American. His blood. It guarantees my citizenship, but in that just as in this, it turns out his blood isn’t strong enough to undo the taint of my mother’s” (57).

The mechanisms of control over Inks extend beyond symbolic markers to encompass physical segregation and systemic disenfranchisement. Population control measures include enforced curfews, segregated buses, and highway identity checkpoints, all of which restrict mobility and reinforce their status as second-class citizens. Inks are further oppressed by cultural erasure; they are mandated to speak English, with the use of any other language being prohibited. This linguistic domination reflects an attempt to strip them of their cultural identity. The dehumanization is further amplified by the requirement that utensils used by Inks in restaurants be destroyed to prevent so-called contamination with non-Inks.

The brutality of these measures is underscored by the role of extremist groups such as “Cleanse America,” which abduct Inks and deport them inhumanely by abandoning them at the border. This chilling depiction of vigilante violence underscores the novel’s critique of xenophobic and racist ideologies, illustrating the extreme lengths to which society might go to uphold systemic oppression. Through these parallels, the novel highlights the enduring relevance of historical and contemporary systems of exclusion, urging readers to reflect on the intersections of identity, privilege, and resistance in the face of institutionalized injustice.

The black tattoos assigned to individuals with temporary visas symbolize an oppressive system of surveillance and control, as they are embedded with GPS trackers that monitor movements and enforce restrictions. These tattoos encode personal data linked to a centralized database, exacerbating the vulnerability of Inks, whose legal status can be altered at a moment’s notice. This dynamic illustrates how bureaucratic systems weaponize technology to dehumanize and dis-

enfranchise. For Mari, her blue tattoo, which signifies US citizenship, carries a similar weight. As she reflects: “Blue lines filled with the story of her life—the way government sees it. They don’t look remotely like blood, but they make me wonder if this is the kind of wound that never stops bleeding” (39). The tattoo, though ostensibly a mark of privilege, becomes a source of existential pain, emblematic of her subjugation within a system that reduces her identity to state-sanctioned data. However, even Mari’s nominal citizenship fails to shield her during a wave of anti-immigrant violence, highlighting the fragility of status in the face of xenophobic fervor. In one chilling episode, Mari is attacked and forcibly deported alongside others, underscoring how state and mob violence converge to erase the protections ostensibly afforded by legal designations. Del, a white citizen who sympathizes with Inks and works alongside them, describes the practice of labeling temporary workers by the names of their countries or regions of origin. As she recounts:

When the tattoos were first instituted, the black tats—temporaries—rotated in six months at a time [...]. We don’t even bother to learn their real names, we mostly call them by the name of their country of origin. Since Chato likes to hire as many Mexicans as possible—and they all can’t be called ‘Mexico’—we call them by Mexican regional names. Right now, we’re on our third Puebla and second Michoacán, along with Liberia and Haiti, Honduras, the third Jalisco and Salvador. (102)

While Del’s intentions may not be overtly malicious, this casual erasure of individual identity perpetuates dehumanization. By reducing individuals to fungible labels based on geographic origin, the practice mirrors the broader structural ethos of objectifying labor and stripping individuals of their humanity. This confluence of surveillance, systemic racism, and dehumanization reflects the novel’s critique of a society where technology and ideology converge to sustain and normalize oppression. The tattoo system becomes a powerful symbol of control, rendering individuals as nothing more than entries in a database while stripping them of agency and reducing their existence to commodified utility.

In the dystopian future depicted in *Ink*, political authorities and institutions extend their control over individuals far beyond traditional governance, employing a range of biopolitical strategies to regulate health, reproduction, and sexuality. Biopolitics, as conceptualized by Michel Foucault, refers to the exercise of power over life itself through the human body, encompassing practices such as surveillance, population control, and biometric identification. This system relies on what Foucault describes as “technologies of control,” mechanisms

that pervade societal structures such as healthcare and law enforcement, compelling individuals to conform to prescribed norms of existence.

The novel provides a harrowing vision of a future America where biopolitics functions as a tool of racial and xenophobic oppression, particularly targeting non-white immigrants and communities of color. Racism, as Foucault observes, “is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (258). In *Ink*, this biopolitical division manifests through the systematic identification and control of Inks, positioning them as existential threats to the nation’s “life, health, strength, and longevity” (Foucault 259). Biometric identification emerges as the foundational mechanism for this control, but it is only the beginning. Tattoos and surveillance systems not only mark individuals but serve as the infrastructure for more invasive and radical forms of governance. Under the guise of ensuring national security, the government implements increasingly oppressive policies, underscoring how the apparatus of biopolitics transforms bodies into sites of power and contestation. The novel’s portrayal of bodily regulation and surveillance critiques the ways in which state power commodifies and subjugates marginalized groups, reflecting broader anxieties about the dehumanizing potential of biopolitical governance in contemporary societies. It challenges readers to consider the ethical implications of such technologies and policies, particularly their capacity to entrench systems of inequality and dispossession under the rhetoric of security and order.

When people already become desensitized to injustice, the government sets up “inkatoriums,” “sanatorium-internment centers” that act as quarantine sites for inks. In *Ink*, the government’s implementation of “inkatoriums”—sanatorium-internment centers ostensibly established for quarantine and medical treatment—illustrates how state systems weaponize public health as a tool of oppression. These centers are marketed to the public as necessary, temporary health measures to contain disease outbreaks allegedly more prevalent among the “Ink” population. However, their true function lies in the isolation and dehumanization of immigrants. The inkatoriums exploit public fears of pandemics to erode societal empathy and justify the segregation and ultimate erasure of those marked as “other.”

Initially presented as spaces for medical care, these facilities devolve into sites of irreversible containment where detainees are never released. The narrative escalates with the government’s introduction of forced sterilization programs under the guise of disease control. While initially targeting individuals with communicable or genetically transmittable

conditions, the sterilizations become widespread, indiscriminately targeting all detainees, including children and infants. This policy recalls historical eugenics practices, particularly those of the early twentieth century, where medical science was wielded to enforce racial purity and suppress marginalized populations.

The inkatoriums represent more than just physical containment; they signify the systematic stripping of civil rights. Individuals with black or green tattoos face deportation under an executive order, while those with blue tattoos—previously signifying citizenship—experience a downgrade in their legal status. The degree of their rights becomes contingent upon cooperation with the state, including providing information on others, further fracturing community solidarity.

Sherryl Vint's theoretical framework on the intersection of imperialism and science offers a critical lens through which to view these developments. Vint contends that the politics of empire are deeply inscribed on the bodies of marginalized populations through the application of medical technologies (75). These technologies, particularly those related to outbreak management, have historically been used to racialize disease and fuel anxieties around "the other." The concept of "dread life," as introduced by Vint, encapsulates the fear and devaluation of lives deemed dangerous or expendable under imperial logics (81).

In *Ink*, the conflation of disease management with sterilization and population control reflects domestic policies that parallel imperialist operations abroad. The inkatoriums symbolize a biopolitical apparatus that weaponizes health to dehumanize and disenfranchise, perpetuating systemic inequalities under the guise of public safety. This chilling narrative compels readers to interrogate the ethics of medical practices and their complicity in upholding systems of power.

In the novel, the subjected body emerges not only as a site of biopolitical control but also as a potential locus for revolutionary transformation. Vourvoulias portrays acts of coalition and grassroots resistance, offering readers a vision of alternative modes of political defiance. For instance, citizens conceal tattooed immigrants in their attics to shield them from the "civil patrols," evoking historical parallels to resistance movements such as those protecting refugees during wartime. Similarly, the "FedEx Brigade" protests at Hastings City Hall, publicly displaying images of the disappeared on placards, foregrounding the collective struggle to reclaim visibility and humanity in the face of systemic erasure. Vourvoulias's narrative challenges racialized medical discourses that seek to justify surveillance, containment, and biometric categorization of marginalized populations. *Ink* extends beyond speculative fiction to offer strategies for resistance that resonate in contemporary contexts.

The body, though exploited by oppressive regimes as a means of control, becomes a powerful tool for subversion and rebellion.

The novel critiques the ways in which racialized and minoritized bodies are historically excluded from the category of “the human,” framed as being governed by instinct and emotion rather than reason and valued only as sources of labor and profit. Science fiction, in this context, becomes a medium for interrogating the violent legacies of racialization while exploring the emancipatory potential of the body. Despite the pervasive biopolitical control in the narrative, Vourvoulias embeds hope through the depiction of a burgeoning resistance that reimagines embodiment, care, and connection in ways that transcend state-imposed limitations. She demonstrates how these forms of resistance manifest as magic—a force deeply tied to cultural knowledge, spirituality, and creative ingenuity. *Ink*’s integration of magic further complicates traditional binaries between science and fantasy, encouraging readers to question the hierarchies of knowledge that privilege certain forms of understanding as inherently superior. Magic in *Ink* is portrayed not as an esoteric or supernatural force but as a range of skills and abilities wielded by ordinary individuals. From computer hacking and chemistry to painting, journalism, and spiritual faith, these diverse talents contribute to the resistance movement, illustrating how resistance is a multifaceted endeavor. For example, the development of synthetic “instaskin” to disguise tattoos reflects Western scientific principles while simultaneously destabilizing the rigid distinction between science and magic. Vourvoulias further intertwines magic with indigenous knowledge systems through the portrayal of shape-shifting *nahuales*⁵—spiritual protectors that guide the protagonists. These *nahuales* underscore the novel’s theme that revolution must take place on multiple levels: physical, emotional, and imaginative. Their belief that actions in one realm influence all others encapsulates the interconnectedness of resistance, challenging readers to see imagination and creativity as forms of political agency.

Ultimately, Vourvoulias’s portrayal of the body as a site of revolutionary potential encompasses not only physical strength but also mental, emotional, and spiritual resilience. The novel urges readers to recognize that transformative struggles for justice demand holistic approaches, combining the power of reason, emotion, and cultural

5 In Mexican culture, the concept of *nagual* (or *nahual*) refers to the belief in a spiritual connection between humans and animals, often associated with the ability of certain individuals, especially sorcerers or shamans, to shape-shift into animals. For more insight, see the article on *Nagual* at Encyclopedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nagual>.

heritage to envision and enact a more equitable world. By collapsing the boundaries between magic and science, Vourvoulias critiques epistemic hierarchies and advocates for pluralistic ways of knowing—ways that are vital to confronting and dismantling oppressive systems.

Demophobia, or the fear of demographic change, is a persistent phenomenon that transcends historical and cultural boundaries, rooted in the anxieties surrounding shifts in social hierarchies and the redefinition of power dynamics. Speculative fiction serves as a critical lens through which these anxieties can be examined, offering a space to interrogate their origins and evolution. By blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination, speculative narratives illuminate how societal fears manifest in policy, culture, and collective memory. This is particularly evident in *Ink*, where Vourvoulias foregrounds the dystopian implications of demographic fears and technological surveillance.

Reflecting on the reception of her novel, Vourvoulias noted that when *Ink* was first published in 2012, some readers found its premise implausible, remarking that the dystopia she envisioned seemed far-fetched for the United States. However, by the time of its 2018 republication, the narrative’s resonance with real-world events had grown markedly. As Vourvoulias observed, “countless messages from readers pointed to real-life concordances” (*The Guardian*), illustrating how speculative fiction can defamiliarize the present and urge readers to reexamine issues with fresh urgency.

The novel’s depiction of biometric tattoos and internment centers evokes historical practices of racial subjugation, such as the branding of enslaved individuals or the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Similarly, its portrayal of the erosion of constitutional rights—where even “assimilated Inks” are stripped of their protections—mirrors contemporary patterns of marginalization. What once may have seemed speculative now appears disturbingly plausible, particularly in light of revelations that corporations like Amazon and Palantir have collaborated with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE),⁶ providing the technological infrastructure for tracking and deporting individu-

6 For a deeper understanding of the collaboration between Amazon, Palantir, and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), refer to the article from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s *Technology Review*. The piece, titled “Amazon Is the Invisible Backbone Behind ICE’s Immigration Crackdown,” examines how these companies have facilitated ICE’s immigration enforcement practices. It sheds light on the role of technology companies in shaping contemporary immigration policies and their ethical implications. For further details, see the full article here: www.technologyreview.com/2018/10/22/139639/amazon-is-the-invisible-backbone-behind-ices-immigration-crackdown/.

als. The scenes in *Ink* depicting mass raids, deportations, and children restrained in detention centers echo chillingly similar real-world events.

While these elements feel ripped from today's headlines, it is worth noting that *Ink* was published before Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Trump's overtly xenophobic rhetoric and policies, including the 2017 travel ban (Executive Order 13769) and efforts to dismantle asylum protections for Central American migrants, intensified the visibility of anti-immigrant sentiment. However, as Vourvoulias herself remarked in *The Guardian*: "Where we stand now—poised on the precipice of a real-life immigration dystopia—cannot be laid entirely at US President Donald Trump's feet. Former US presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton all helped escalate the criminalization of undocumented immigrants in the US—but it is Trump's unabashed ill will against immigrants that might finally drive us over the edge." During Obama's presidency, immigration policies also reflected troubling patterns of enforcement, with 1.5 million deportations recorded during his first term, surpassing the deportation records of George W. Bush's two terms. By the end of Obama's tenure, the total number had reached 3 million, highlighting the bipartisan complicity in creating a system that criminalizes undocumented immigrants.⁷ Vourvoulias's critique thus transcends partisan lines, offering a broader indictment of US immigration policies and their long-standing racialized underpinnings.

Although *Ink* might be categorized as supernatural dystopian fiction, the narrative increasingly feels less futuristic and more hyperreal when read in 2024. Its speculative elements now resonate as urgent commentaries on current and historical realities. As Vourvoulias observed, "My dystopian immigration novel is not as far-fetched anymore" (*The Guardian*), a sentiment that underscores the genre's ability to hold a mirror to society, revealing uncomfortable truths about its trajectory. Through its exploration of demographobia, surveillance, and systemic oppression, *Ink* challenges readers to confront the precarity of human rights and the consequences of societal desensitization to injustice. It is a call to vigilance, reminding us that what may appear speculative today could easily become reality tomorrow.

7 The data referenced are drawn from Eric Garcia, "Biden Is Playing the Obama Game on Immigration Now," *The Independent*, 18 June 2024, and Sarah Pierce, "Obama's Record on Deportations: Deporter-in-Chief or Not?" *Migration Policy Institute*, 26 January 2017. For further details and additional information, consult the articles available at the following links: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-deportation-numbers-obama-biden-b2649257.html and www.migrationpolicy.org/article/obama-record-deportations-deporter-chief-or-not.

Abstract: This paper examines Sabrina Vourvoulias' *Ink* (2012), a Latinofuturist dystopian novel that explores the intersection of migration, race, and systemic oppression within a near-future authoritarian United States. Drawing on the long-standing tradition of migration as a central theme in speculative fiction, *Ink* presents a society where immigration control is enforced through a highly intrusive and dehumanizing system. In the novel, migrants are permanently marked with tattoos that signify their legal status, transforming them into visible "others" whose rights and freedoms are stripped away through a series of biopolitical measures. The narrative follows the experiences of individuals whose bodies become sites of control and exploitation, as the government uses the rhetoric of disease and public safety to justify the further marginalization and sterilization of non-white migrants. This study situates *Ink* within broader conversations about migration, xenophobia, and biopolitics in contemporary US society, highlighting how the novel critiques current immigration policies and the racialized processes of exclusion. The paper also explores how Vourvoulias uses speculative elements—such as the fictional tattooing process and the creation of spaces like the "Inkatorium"—to address the lived realities of Latinx migrants and their experiences of alienation. By combining elements of dystopian fiction with real-world political dynamics, *Ink* offers a powerful commentary on the fragility of belonging in a society marked by hostility toward immigrants. Ultimately, this paper argues that *Ink* serves as a crucial intervention into the speculative fiction genre, one that forces readers to confront the dystopian dimensions of Latinx migration in the US. It challenges the boundaries between hospitality and hostility, offering a compelling vision of resistance and survival within an increasingly hostile, racialized system.

Keywords: diaspora, race, dystopia, Latinx, chicanafuturism, *Ink*, speculative fiction

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