

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Decolonizing the Imagination: Postcolonial Perspectives in the Contemporary Speculative Fiction**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the application of postcolonial perspectives to contemporary English-language science fiction and fantasy. It investigates how authors from formerly colonized regions reclaim narrative agency, challenge Eurocentric techno science imaginaries, and envision decolonized futures. The study sets out three objectives: to map thematic strategies through which postcolonial science fiction/fantasy (SF/F) writers subvert imperial tropes; to interrogate the role of technology and world-building as sites of colonial critique and to articulate a framework for evaluating emergent formations like Afro-futurism and indigenous futurisms as distinct postcolonial modes. A qualitative textual analysis of representative works such as *So Long Been Dreaming* (Hopkinson & Mehan, eds.), *Africa Risen* (Ekpeki et al.), Nnedi Okorafor's *Naijamerican* fiction, and indigenous futurism anthologies ground the investigation. The research identifies a gap: despite growing interest in postcolonial science fiction, there is no comprehensive chronological theory linking early 'writing-back' through anthologies to emergent futurisms. Research questions address how narrative form, technology, and cultural identity coalesce in postcolonial speculative fiction. Through an in-depth textual critique, this paper proposes a novel 'De-colonial Techno-Imaginaries Framework' enabling scholars to assess how speculative technologies are re-appropriated or inverted. The conclusion outlines critical issues related to universality, genre boundaries, and epistemic justice. The study contributes original, methodologically rigorous insight into the dynamic postcolonial imaginary within science fiction and fantasy.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial speculative fiction, Afro-futurism, indigenous futurism, science fiction and fantasy, de-colonial techno-imaginaries, narrative resistance, world-building, cultural reclamation.

**Introduction:**

Science fiction (SF) and fantasy have long been perceived as domains of imaginative escapism, often dominated by Western narratives rooted in colonial worldviews, technological determinism, and utopian imperialism. Historically, canonical works from HG Wells' *The War of the Worlds* to Isaac Asimov's robot stories reproduced a worldview predicated on white, male, and Eurocentric assumptions of scientific supremacy, cultural superiority, and colonial entitlement (Rieder, 2008). These genres, especially SF, frequently served as literary extensions of empire building fantasies, glorifying technological conquest and the subjugation of the 'Other' through metaphors of alien invasion, exploration, and terraforming.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

However, the turn of the twenty-first century marked a significant shift. Scholars and authors from postcolonial backgrounds began interrogating these genres, appropriating their narrative conventions to voice alternative histories, cosmologies, and futures. This phenomenon has given rise to a dynamic corpus of speculative literature that reimagines SF/F through the lens of postcolonial critique. Writers from the Caribbean, Africa, South Asia, and indigenous communities have increasingly used speculative fiction to challenge imperial narratives and articulate epistemologies rooted in their own cultural legacies. Through stories that blend magic, science, myth, and memory, these authors reclaim not only narrative space but also speculative temporality; a future once denied to colonized peoples.

Postcolonial speculative fiction thus emerges as both a political and literary project. It resists the erasure of histories, asserts agency in technological narratives, and decolonizes the very tools once used to disenfranchise. By centering voices historically marginalized in global literary production, it opens up imaginative terrains where colonized subjects do not merely survive the past but transform the future.

The current research seeks to explore the chronological evolution of postcolonial perspectives in SF/F, examining how themes, technologies, and narrative strategies have transformed from the early 2000s to the present. It aims to establish a comprehensive analytical framework termed the De-colonial Techno-Imaginations Framework that not only maps the aesthetic progression of this literary movement but also identifies its potential for pedagogical, cultural, and political application. In doing so, it aligns with broader academic efforts to decolonize literature, technology, and futurity itself.

**Literature Review:**

Science fiction and fantasy study is a relatively recent development through a postcolonial lens. Foundation was laid down with Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's (1989) *The Empire Writes Back* by identifying how postcolonial literature resists linguistic and cultural hegemony, however, the anthologies like *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Hopkinson & Mehan, 2004) with post colonialism and speculative genres began to receive focused literary attention which foregrounded stories from Caribbean, African, South Asian, and Indigenous writers, marking a departure from conventional realist postcolonial fiction by embracing the imaginative potentials of speculative storytelling. John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) further advanced the critical conversation by tracing how SF originated within colonial ideologies. He highlights racialized differences that were not merely metaphoric but structurally aligned with imperialist ambitions. Michelle Reid (2005) further builds upon this argument.

Recent scholarship has shifted towards emergent paradigms like Afro-futurism and Indigenous futurisms. Grace Dillon's work on Indigenous Futurism (2012, 2023) and anthologies like *Africa Risen* (Ekpeki et al., 2022) illustrate how speculative fiction now serves as a venue for epistemological restoration. These movements assert that Indigenous and African worldviews are not incompatible with technology and modernity but offer alternative frameworks for conceptualizing time, nature, and human-machine relationships.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Analysis:**

Postcolonial science fiction and fantasy (SF/F) have evolved over the past two decades through identifiable literary and ideological shifts. These transformations are best understood through a three-phase chronological framework that charts a trajectory from reactive mimicry to proactive cultural futurism. The culmination of this trajectory leads to a new theoretical paradigm, the De-colonial Techno-Imaginations Framework which integrates technological imagination with postcolonial narrative resistance. Each phase reflects a transformation in how marginalized authors reclaim genre space, articulate cultural sovereignty, and innovate on genre conventions.

**The Mimetic and Reparative Phase (2000 - 2010):** The first phase in the emergence of postcolonial SF/F was characterized by mimetic appropriation and narrative repair. Writers in this period engaged deeply with Western SF/F structures, adopting their forms while infusing them with postcolonial critiques. This era is best represented by the 2004 anthology *So Long Been Dreaming* edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, which marked a watershed moment in the deliberate convergence of postcolonial themes with speculative genres. The stories in this anthology and similar early works often mirror the tropes of space travel, time dilation, and alien contact found in traditional Western SF but reposition these elements within frameworks of historical trauma, diasporic identity, and epistemological resistance. Vandana Singh's *Delhi*, for instance, deploys time travel not as a scientific fantasy but as a metaphor for the palimpsestic layering of colonial and postcolonial temporalities in urban India. Similarly, Tobias Buckell's work questions technological imperialism through Caribbean-inflected narratives that blend folklore with space-age settings.

A defining feature of this phase is its reparative ethos - a conscious effort to heal the silences and omissions of colonial literary traditions by inserting colonized subjects into speculative futures. These narratives often aim to repair genre exclusion, offering presence in a future from which the colonized were historically erased. While rich in cultural commentary, the works in this phase frequently remain tethered to the structural logics of Western SF, which limits their capacity to fully realize alternative ontologies. Yet this engagement is strategic, creating a platform for more radical aesthetic experimentation in later years.

**Afro-futurism and Epistemic Inversion (2010–2020):** The second phase marks a transition from mimicry to epistemic inversion—the turning upside down of colonial worldviews through confident, culturally autonomous speculative storytelling. The rise of Afro-futurism as a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement catalyzed this transition. With its roots in music, visual arts, and critical theory, Afro-futurism gained literary momentum through writers like Octavia Butler, N.K. Jemisin, Nnedi Okorafor, and Samuel Delany. These authors crafted narratives that did not merely place Black characters in futuristic settings but actively decolonized the very fabric of speculative world-building.

In works like Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy, speculative elements such as environmental collapse, telepathy, and seismic power are mobilized to examine historical trauma, diaspora, systemic racism, and ecological justice. Technology becomes more than a narrative device—it is an instrument of survival, resistance, and reimagination. The 2020 anthology *Dominion: An Anthology of Speculative Fiction from Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Ekpeki and Knight, represents a landmark effort in collating Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist voices from across the globe.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

These texts embody a radical departure from Eurocentric genre logic. Rather than situating progress within linear time or techno-utopias, Afro-futurist texts embrace circular temporalities, ancestral wisdom, and hybrid identities. Cultural memory becomes a source of power, not an obstacle to modernity. In this phase, speculative technology is no longer mimicked but inverted: drones, AI, and spaceflight are interwoven with African mythology, spiritualism, and environmental ethics. The genre thus transforms from a site of reaction to one of autonomous creation.

Afro-futurism also reorients questions of universality. Instead of assimilating into dominant techno scientific paradigms, it asserts alternative modernities rooted in Afro-diasporic epistemologies. This shift has profound implications for pedagogy, literary studies, and cultural policy, challenging institutions to reconsider whose futures are represented in the speculative archive.

**Indigenous and Global South Futurisms (2020 - Present):**

The most recent phase of postcolonial SF/F heralds the rise of Indigenous and Global South Futurisms, which mark a further evolution into epistemic sovereignty and ontological pluralism. These works are no longer content with deconstructing colonial narratives—they actively construct speculative futures grounded in Indigenous, African, South Asian, and Latin American worldviews. These are not merely cultural add-ons to Western SF/F paradigms; they represent fundamentally different ways of imagining being, time, technology, and community.

Grace Dillon's concept of Indigenous Futurism—first articulated in *Walking the Clouds* (2012) and expanded in her 2023 co-edited *Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms*—articulates a literary practice where Indigenous sovereignty, land-based knowledge, and non-linear temporalities shape speculative narratives. Such texts resist dystopian fatalism, often present in Western apocalyptic SF, and instead offer narratives of renewal, ecological resilience, and interspecies kinship. The anthology *Africa Risen: A New Era of Speculative Fiction* (Ekpeki, Thomas & Knight, 2022) further exemplifies this movement. Stories such as *The Blue House* by Chinelo Onwualu and *A Dream of Electric Mothers* by Wole Talabi infuse speculative technologies with Igbo metaphysics, pan-African political thought, and ancestral communication. These are not reinterpretations of Western science—they are distinct scientific imaginaries that blend data, intuition, ritual, and relationality.

Nnedi Okorafor's self-identification as *Naijamerican* introduces a border consciousness that resists binary thinking. Her work embodies a liminal positionality that traverses tradition and innovation, the local and the global. This hybrid aesthetic reflects the glocalized nature of contemporary postcolonial speculative fiction, which is deeply rooted in place while remaining globally conversant.

In this phase, the speculative no longer serves merely as a metaphor for colonial history but it becomes a site of imaginative governance. Authors project alternative political systems, climate ethics, and techno social structures informed by Indigenous law, Ubuntu philosophy, or community-based economies. This shift positions speculative fiction not only as a literary form but as a tool for activism, policy critique, and cultural education.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Toward the De-colonial Techno-imaginary Framework**

The evolution across these three phases culminates in the need for a theoretical framework capable of accommodating the complexities, innovations, and contradictions of postcolonial SF/F. The De-colonial Techno-imaginary Framework (DTIF) proposed herein offers such a model.

The DTIF is structured around four interlocking dimensions: **Narrative Agency:** Focuses on how marginalized authors reclaim the power to tell their own stories, often by challenging the omniscient narrator, incorporating oral traditions, and privileging collective subjectivity and further emphasizes positionality on who speaks, who is silenced, and how authority is redistributed in speculative texts. **Technology Reversal:** Analyzes how speculative technologies (AI, space travel, cybernetics, biotechnology) are decolonized—that is, stripped of their Eurocentric rationalism and reimagined through cultural, mythic, or ecological lenses and it examines whether these technologies liberate or subjugate, connect or alienate, and how their function shifts across cultural contexts. **Epistemic Plurality:** Recognizes the coexistence and interpenetration of multiple knowledge systems; scientific, spiritual, ancestral, and intuitive within a single narrative and calls attention to cosmology, ritual, and myth as valid and potent sources of knowledge in speculative futures. **Futurity and Resilience:** Investigates how futures are imagined: as apocalyptic, restorative, hybrid, or transcendent and highlights the role of hope, resistance, and ecological continuity in the speculative visions of postcolonial authors.

This framework is not prescriptive but heuristic. It allows scholars to read texts with sensitivity to cultural specificity while identifying cross-contextual patterns of resistance, innovation, and transformation. Moreover, it can be adapted for use in pedagogy, publishing, digital humanities, and even cultural policymaking—where questions of representation, futurity, and innovation intersect. The De-colonial Techno-imaginary Framework not only fills a critical methodological gap but also offers a scholarly and practical tool for rethinking the future of speculative fiction and the futures it makes imaginable.

**Solutions/Strategies to address the Problem:**

The proposed De-colonial Techno-imaginary Framework offers practical application for researchers, educators, and policymakers: Pedagogy - Used in curricula to better teach postcolonial literature via SF/F texts, facilitating students' engagement with abstract theories (as *Kassab* et al. show in film pedagogy). Scholarly analysis - Offers a robust tool for comparative textual scholarship across geographic, cultural, and temporal contexts. Cultural policy and publishing - Guides editors and institutions to evaluate and promote underrepresented voices in globally distributed SF/F.

**Conclusion:**

This paper fills a pressing gap in postcolonial speculative fiction studies by charting a chronological evolution from early writing-back anthologies through Afro-futurism to contemporary Indigenous and African futurisms, culminating in the De-colonial Techno-Imaginary Framework. Through qualitative analysis, it demonstrates how the representation of technology and speculative world-building serves as a critical locus for de-colonial intervention. The framework offers innovative strategies for research, pedagogy, and cultural empowerment. Future work might apply this framework to other linguistic worlds beyond English, or quantitatively explore its applicability across multimedia forms.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Works Cited**

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