

Apocalypse Reimagined: Visions of Decolonial Hope and Holistic Environmentalism in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014)¹

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Abstract: This paper explores *Lagoon* (2014), an Africanfuturist novel by Black American author Nnedi Okorafor, as a reworking of apocalyptic rhetoric that reconfigures Christian eschatological hope from a decolonial perspective. Dominant Western conceptions of hope—historically influenced by philosophical traditions deeply indebted to Judeo-Christian theology—remain wrapped up in anthropocentric and individualistic bias. Yet, since the late twentieth century, postcolonial and decolonial scholarship has shown a growing interest in the redefinition of hope through alternative, non-Western epistemologies. Thus, this study aims to explore how *Lagoon* subverts the biblical text of Revelation to challenge classical notions of hope by decentring hegemonic discourses and imagining, in turn, decolonial futurities. To do so, the textual analysis is framed through the lens of hope studies and decolonial theory, while incorporating insights from ecocriticism, posthumanism, and speculative fiction. Ultimately, this paper argues that *Lagoon* can be read as a secular eschatological utopia appropriating apocalyptic rhetoric to instil hope for a renewed and posthuman future where planet solidarity is achieved through epistemic plurality—including Western and non-Western systems of knowledge—and the cooperation between human and non-human entities.

Keywords: Decolonial hope; Africanfuturism; *Lagoon*; Revelation; African epistemologies.

ESP Reimaginar el Apocalipsis: esperanza decolonial y ecología holística en *Lagoon* (2014) de Nnedi Okorafor

Resumen: Este artículo analiza *Lagoon* (2014), novela de la autora afroamericana Nnedi Okorafor, como una relectura de la retórica apocalíptica que, desde una mirada decolonial, reconfigura la noción cristiana de esperanza escatológica. Las concepciones occidentales de la esperanza, moldeadas por tradiciones filosóficas con fuertes raíces judeocristianas, suelen estar marcadas por un sesgo antropocéntrico e individualista. No obstante, desde finales del siglo XX, los estudios poscoloniales y decoloniales han mostrado gran interés por redefinir la esperanza a partir de epistemologías no occidentales. Así, este estudio explora cómo *Lagoon* subvierte el texto bíblico del Apocalipsis para cuestionar nociones clásicas de la esperanza al descentrar discursos hegemónicos e imaginar, a su vez, futuros decoloniales. Para ello, el análisis textual se enmarca en los estudios sobre la esperanza y la teoría decolonial, e incorpora perspectivas de la ecocrítica, el poshumanismo y la ficción especulativa. En última instancia, este artículo defiende que *Lagoon* puede leerse como una utopía escatológica secular que reapropia el discurso apocalíptico para sembrar esperanza en un futuro renovado y poshumano, donde la solidaridad medioambiental se alcanza mediante la pluralidad epistémica—que incluye sistemas de conocimiento tanto occidentales como no occidentales—y la cooperación entre entidades humanas y no humanas.

Palabras clave: Esperanza decolonial; Futurismo africano; *Lagoon*; Apocalipsis; Epistemologías africanas.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Reconfiguring Hope: From Christian Eschatology to Decolonial Utopianism. 3. Reworking the Canon: Apocalyptic Rhetoric in *Lagoon*. 4. Decolonial Hope: West African Cosmologies and Temporalities. 5. Conclusion. 6. References

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1. Introduction

In a world haunted by rampant inequality, ecological collapse, resurgent authoritarianism, and the enduring legacy of (neo)colonialism, the question of hope as the desire for and the imagination of a better future becomes not only an urgent impulse, but a political act of resistance. Scholars like Skrimshire (2008), however, have drawn attention to a generalized attitude of indifference, disbelief, and suspicion towards hope and traditional narratives of faith in the face of unprecedented threats. Within contemporary discourses, (Western) dominant conceptualizations of hope—traditionally shaped by philosophical discourses deeply indebted to Judeo-Christian theology—remain wrapped up in anthropocentric, humanistic, and individualistic bias. Even though these secularized conceptualisations can be traced back to multiple biblical references within the Christian canon, the Christian rhetoric of hope is epitomized in the book of Revelation (Bowes, 2022). Long framed as a virtue of resilience in the face of adversity, Christian eschatology locates ultimate salvation in a glorious kingdom to come. Yet, this deferral, with its linear conception of time and its emphasis on patient endurance and waiting, usually translates into quietism, individualism, and the postponement of justice. At the same time, neoliberal secularisms have rebranded hope as a matter of personal growth, entrepreneurial optimism, and resilience—turning it into a depoliticized affect, equally stripped of collective or structural transformation. Between the theological promise of divine intervention and actualized heaven on earth, and the neoliberal dream of self-mastery and self-actualization from which disenfranchised communities remain gated out, hope seems either too divine or too privatized to hold radically transformative and emancipatory potential.

Indeed, affect theory conveniently warns about the double valence of hope as a positive affect, which is nonetheless subject to manipulation under certain dominant discourses (Berlant, 2011). The presumed universality of Western epistemology—its perception of agency and progress in relation to hopeful futures—has informed colonial ideology and imperial worldviews (Quijano, 2010) and continues to undergird global politics (Hanchey, 2023). Nevertheless, the crumbling effects of neoliberal, capitalist, and globalizing politics, paired with the rise of postcolonial studies, have resulted in new reconfigurations of hope and affirmative utopianism. A particular revision of note is Karmakar's notion of "decolonial hope" (2025), which decentres hegemonic epistemologies to acknowledge and consider traditionally discredited systems of knowledge. Decolonial hope, understood as a praxis rather than an emotion, translates into forms of collective action in alignment with anti-capitalist and ecological ethics. It seeks alternative ways of being and relating that hinge upon the overthrow of the current economic model, in favour of more equitable and sustainable futures. As such, decolonial hope envisions a form of radical eschatology, that is, a definitive rupture with the present order.

From the perspective of literary criticism, this decolonial framework proves particularly productive when delving into Africanfuturism, a speculative literary genre that "posits differential trajectories of futures against coloniality by imagining decolonial forms of development and demonstrating the dystopian effects if Western developmental trajectories continue to dominate imaginations" (Hanchey, 2023, p. 578). At this point, it is crucial to make a distinction between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, terms often discussed interchangeably, but referring to conceptually and geographically different speculative frameworks that imagine alternative Black futures. Afrofuturism, coined by Mark Dery (1994), designates a subgenre of "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture" (p. 180). Deeming this notion reductive and constrained by geographical barriers, numerous authors have engaged with Africanfuturism, a term championed and defined by African American author Nnedi Okorafor. The latter is "specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view" (Okorafor, 2019). Interestingly, the staple features of Africanfuturism, including the reconfiguration of Western linear time, the revindication of indigenous perspectives, and the centrality of spirituality and ecology (Hanchey, 2023), closely aligns with reconceptualizations of decolonial hope.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines Africanfuturist novel *Lagoon* (2014) by Nnedi Okorafor. The novel follows the landing of aliens in Lagos (Nigeria), which is regarded by citizens as the apocalypse, the end of times. Yet, their arrival unveils the present disastrous conditions of post-independent Nigeria, including the environmental ruin brought about by petroculture and other neocolonial forms of mastery. This apocalyptic revelation mediated by other-worldly beings parallelly discloses the utopian potential for change towards salvation in a renewed and sustainable world, built upon the co-existence between humans, nature, and absolute alterity (Kotecki, 2020). Although the novel stands out for its polyphonic nature, the plot revolves around four main characters: Ayodele, the alien ambassador, bringing a message of peace, who seeks the help of three "human" protagonists—Adaora, a marine biologist; Agu, a Nigerian soldier; and Anthony, a Ghanaian hip-hop singer—who are endowed with supernatural gifts. Together, they try to foster change and cooperation between the human and the non-human realm to save their beloved country from itself.

While there is a considerable deal of research exploring Okorafor's works in general and *Lagoon* in particular, these studies have been mainly carried out in the fields of postcolonial studies (Burnett, 2015), feminist and queer theory (Banks *et al.*, 2023), and posthuman studies (Collins, 2023). Nonetheless, few studies have focused on the biblical and apocalyptic references scattered throughout the text. Accordingly, this paper aims to offer new insights into the novel's resignification of Christian eschatological hope and apocalyptic

rhetoric. Thus, the aim is twofold: first, to explore how the subversion of a biblical text—Revelation—challenges classical notions of hope by decentring and problematizing hegemonic discourses; second, to demonstrate the creative potential of Africanfuturism to reimagine alternative decolonial futurities of environmental solidarity and sustainability, grounded in both Western and non-Western epistemologies. To do so, the textual analysis is framed through the lenses of hope studies, relying on both theological (Bowes, 2022; Skrimshire, 2008) and decolonial thinking (Karmakar, 2025), while incorporating insights from ecocriticism, posthumanism, and speculative fiction.

2. Reconfiguring Hope: From Christian Eschatology to Decolonial Utopianism

William B. Bowes contends that hope “is perhaps more easily felt emotionally or recognised intuitively than it is defined conceptually” (2022, p. 51). It hinges upon a constellation of varied uses and definitions, mainly rooted in philosophy, theology, psychology, and affect theory. However, hope, at its core, is simple: “[it] denotes a desire (we hope for something) and it involves a probability (the chances of attainment of the desire have to be something between zero and one)” (van den Heuvel, 2020, p. v). Hope feeds on purposes and motivations upon the prospect of change in the future, no matter how precarious or deplorable the present circumstances. As a result, the majority of contemporary philosophical approaches to hope, like Ernst Bloch’s (1986), have constructed hope as a future-oriented and forward-looking impulse that proves fundamental to achieve social transformation.

Nevertheless, contemporary societies are numbed under a paralysing “politics of fear” and a “normalized state of anxiety” (Skrimshire, 2008, p. 2) that thwart our ability to be forward-thinking and to project and articulate hope in future possibilities; hence, the generalized attitude of indifference, disbelief, and even suspicion towards hope and traditional narratives of faith. As Skrimshire argues (2008), this is particularly conspicuous in the face of unprecedented threats to survival and upon the alleged lack of alternatives to neoliberal capitalism. Going even further, Zournazi (2003, p. 14) contends that society’s disillusionment and pessimism stem from the failure of traditional conceptualisations of hope, which have, “at least since the Enlightenment, defined modernity’s relationship with these crises of the future” (Skrimshire, 2008, p. 4). Consequently, Skrimshire aims to “restore hope as a serious philosophical concept” and as an alternative to neoliberal scripts of life (2008, p. 11). In pursuit of his ambitious objective, he explores the theoretical underpinnings of hope by revisiting Christian theology and future-oriented narratives that have historically influenced political action. Underscoring the political potential of ancient traditions to confront the current politics of fear, he focuses on the Judeo-Christian tradition of eschatological and apocalyptic discourses, as well as on the role of utopian imagination through a contemporary lens.

Following this line of thought, it is worth rediscovering the roots of Christian hope, whose rhetoric is fundamental to the Christian message. Indebted to the Hebrew Scriptures, and informed by eschatology (Sauter, 1999), Christian hope entails trusting in God’s faithfulness, ability, and universal sovereignty, and demands patience and endurance under the present circumstances. Ultimately, eschatological hope seeks national restoration through the coming of the Messiah, which represents God’s divine intervention to save the world (Silva, 2014, p. 185). Thus, it endorses a linear sense of time and history towards the fulfilment of God’s promise in the future. This ultimate hope in God’s glorious kingdom sustains the strength to endure the present (Bowes, 2022, p. 59). Even though this understanding of hope can be traced back to multiple biblical references within the Christian canon, the rhetoric of hope finds its epitome in the book of Revelation (Bowes, 2022), the last book of the New Testament and the Christian Bible.

Scholars generally date Revelation back to the last decades of the 1st century CE, a time of uncertainty and anxiety marked by the persecution of the Christian community by the Roman Empire (Bowes, 2022, p. 63). Accordingly, apostle John of Patmos received a message from God through a vision “mediated by an otherworldly being” (2022, p. 61), which would be later transmitted to the Christian communities and churches through Revelation. John’s purpose was to instil hope in minority and oppressed communities in the face of the increasingly powerful and prosperous Roman Empire (2022, pp. 63–64). Divided into four narrative sections, Revelation offers an evaluation of the churches’ spiritual state and the sins besetting the Christian community. Admonitions are followed by exhortations to repent and save one’s soul, highlighting the need for faithfulness, obedience, and endurance. These requirements underscore that salvation is contingent on one’s present behaviour. Eventually, the promise of God’s coming kingdom is advanced by the final battle between evil and goodness, between Satan and his adepts, and Jesus Christ, embodying God’s power. Not surprisingly, Revelation became “a breviary of hope” (2022, p. 69) that offered consolation, while appealing to Christians’ worship, endurance, and resilience. The victory of goodness would bring the ultimate vision of hope: the complete incapacitation and destruction of evil, and the actualisation of heaven on earth. The ensuing collapse of cosmic order was already common in early eschatology. Yet, this renewal has been rather interpreted as the transformation of what already exists (Ellul 1977; Adam 2013).

To this day, Revelation, along with the sacred scriptures, remains a foundational text, considering its significance and reverberating influence across cultures, despite the passage of time (Puchner, 2018). The Manichean struggle between good and evil, its eschatological worldview, and its linear conception of time as evolving according to a greater design that we cannot fully comprehend have deeply influenced both religious and secular visions of hope throughout history. What is more, the end of times, the fascination with eschatology, and the varied reimagining of the Antichrist and the coming kingdom have been placed at the heart of empires, kingdoms, and nations. Apocalyptic discourses have thus been utilized to provide cultural cohesion while legitimating military campaigns and religious wars against the “evil” other (2018, p. 28). As Burnett

rightly cautions, “[w]hen wedded to fundamentalist nationalisms or imperialisms, the written word is dangerous as it reifies and systematizes hierarchal thinking and helps to translate that thinking into mass violence” (2015, p. 146). Indeed, Christian and Western theology and philosophy, especially since the Enlightenment, have heavily shaped aspirations of colonial modernity in the hope for a “sophisticated” civilisation, built upon an allegedly universal set of values.

Beyond the hazardous hermeneutic practices and the political instrumentalization of apocalyptic rhetoric—particularly evident in what Skrimshire identifies as the “visionary aspect of the neo-conservative agenda” (2008, p. 121)—scholars have problematized intrinsic features of Christian eschatological hope as articulated in Revelation. Thomas Aquinas already hinted at one of the foundational tensions within eschatological hope by characterizing it as inherently individualistic, i.e. a passionate and virtuous impulse that drives the individual towards a desirable and optimistic, albeit challenging future (Schumacher, 2003). This emphasis on personal salvation and self-development resonates with neoliberal and capitalist secularisms that have rebranded hope as a matter of personal growth, individualistic optimism, and resilience (Snyder, 1994). Thus, hope is increasingly rendered a depoliticized affect, divested of its potential for collective agency and structural transformation.

Ongoing debates also concern the content of the promised “new” cosmic order, which is essentially understood as a “projected continuation of our ‘now’” (Skrimshire, 2008, p. 94). In opposition to historical eschatology undergirding ideological closure, Skrimshire advocates for a form of radical eschatology, drawing on theologians Barth and Rahner, which envisions a decisive rupture, a radical transformation that entails destroying the existing order. Nevertheless, radical eschatology can still be problematic, considering its advocacy for human quietism and passivity in the form of patient endurance and resilience. If the future is “given” by God, it follows that humans must relinquish any ideas of self-mastery, agency, or control over the content of hope (Skrimshire, 2008, pp. 93-4). Consequently, there is no attempt to repoliticize human imagination and its utopian potential to anticipate alternative futures. Furthermore, “the tragic view of apocalypse as a materialization of catastrophe has tacitly justified and legitimized the unfolding of catastrophe, aligning with the violent dénouement of global events” (Skrimshire, 2008, p. 115). Likewise, secularized apocalyptic rhetoric has been associated with a received vision of the future that, for authors like Giorgio Agamben (2005), activate dangerous political blueprints of totalitarian connotations that justify states of exception, emergency measures, and authoritarian control.

All things considered, Marxist philosopher Antonio Negri (2003) still acknowledges both the destructive and creative potential of apocalyptic discourse and apocalyptic time as conceptual and political tools for the articulation of hope, justice, and resistance. Negri sees time as an ongoing opportunity for creation and transformation, brought about by human action. Accordingly, the “new” is not a continuous reproduction—with certain variations—of the present, but is “yet to arrive” (Negri, 2003, pp. 162-163). By the same token, Jacques Derrida (1978, p. 95) revindicates the power of the imagination within a politics of the impossible—one that offers alternative practices that, albeit incongruous with the present, challenge, upset, and deconstruct conventional understandings of political possibility and ideological closure. Derrida’s theory of the ever-present possibility of rupture concurs with the notion that acts of resistance are endowed with a visionary sense of what is “to come”, “an apocalyptic impulse” (Skrimshire, 2008, p. 137) that is not anchored in predetermined blueprints of the future or in traditional theological frameworks. In broad terms, Derrida’s radical eschatological conception of hope (1982) resists the teleological assumption of an inevitable end; instead, it frames the future as an open-ended, indeterminate possibility—always deferred, unfinished, and out of reach. Furthermore, Derrida (1982, p. 89) urges us to expand our political and ethical imagination by including a plurality of voices and discourses in the envisioning of a different global order.

Despite Skrimshire’s valuable interdisciplinary focus on the ecology of hope, his work remains deeply grounded on Western philosophical, political, and theological discourses, thereby ruling out non-hegemonic epistemological narratives. In this regard, adopting a decolonial framework becomes particularly insightful to counteract anthropocentric and Eurocentric biases that have long shaped academic discourses on hope. This approach enables the acknowledgment and inclusion of marginalized and discredited non-Western knowledges to envision and develop alternative futures (Rodríguez, 2020), an approach that is clearly in alignment with Derrida’s ethics of alterity. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni contends in the case of African populations:

[T]he problem of coloniality of being has a negative and disempowering bearing on the possibilities of African people creating their African futures. They cannot effectively create African futures if they have not regained their denied ontological density, which enables an escape route from imposed inferiority complexes. (2018, p. 253)

Consistent with this approach, Karmakar (2025) elaborates on the concept of “decolonial hope,”² applied to formulate anti-capitalist ecological ethics. This conceptual framework demands a form of critical hope, i.e. a critical engagement with the present and the presumed universality of Western epistemology (2025, p. 2), which continues to inform global policies compounding rampant social inequality and environmental degradation. Decolonial hope also requires a future-oriented inquiry and collective action to restore “a diminished sense of interconnectedness, relationality, and solidarity with others” (Zembylas, 2014, p. 14). Ultimately, Karmakar (2025, p. 2) contends that the object/content of hope is advancing socially equitable and

² Mónica Fernández Jiménez (2022) already employed a poetics of decolonial hope to explore Edwidge Danticat’s novel *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013).

ecologically sustainable societies whose emergence is necessarily contingent on the radical transformation of the current economic model—relentlessly seeking industrial and capitalist expansion.

This decolonial project and its exploration of new avenues for the future acknowledge the potentiality of both hegemonized and oppressed epistemologies to elucidate alternative forms of existence (Quijano, 2010). For instance, decolonial hope hinges upon palimpsestic temporalities, that is, non-linear temporal paradigms where past, present, and future coexist and overlap, in opposition to capitalist epistemologies of linear progress (Schwab, 2018). Indeed, Karmakar argues that this “emphasis on the stories of the past [...] constitute an integral aspect of a decolonial praxis” (2025, p. 2). Along these lines, Ashcroft already pointed out the importance of the past as “the constant sign of the future” (2017, p. 53). Likewise, this hopeful vision of the future draws from decolonial poetics of ecology, which recognise the relative autonomy and consciousness of natural elements and non-human entities (Ferdinand, 2022), and the interconnectedness of the human and non-human, both constituting the “Web of Life” (Moore, 2015, p. 3).

3. Reworking the Canon: Apocalyptic Rhetoric in *Lagoon*

Nnedi Okorafor (Cincinnati, 1974) was born and raised in the United States by Nigerian Igbo parents. Consequently, her writing is influenced by her dual Nigerian and American heritage. Okorafor's works and, particularly *Lagoon*, have been widely studied from varied critical perspectives. The majority of contributions adopt a postcolonial approach, focusing on “a postcolonial revision of speculative fiction and a speculative revision of postcolonialism” (Burnett, 2015, p. 133). Accordingly, scholars have explored the subversion of classic tropes and conventions informing Western science fiction, including the alien invasion (O'Connell, 2016), through “an African diasporic gaze” (Cobo-Piñero, 2020, p. 108). All in all, critics agree on the potentiality of Okorafor's literary production to fuse temporalities—precolonial past, colonial legacy and neocolonial influence in the present—to materialize a truly postcolonial future (Kotecki, 2020). Building on this context, Hanchey (2023) emphasises the potential of Africanfuturism to envision alternative decolonial paths towards planetary salvation. Furthermore, the environmental and socio-political activism orchestrated in *Lagoon* has been explored within posthuman and ecocritical frameworks. These textual analyses draw from queer and feminist theories, new materialisms, cyborgian morphologies, and theories on relationality and assemblages (Moonsamy, 2020; Banks *et al.*, 2023; Collins, 2023) to contest Cartesian dualisms that have historically shaped discourses on (human) nature, identity, gender, and the body, while advocating for new ontological frames that challenge anthropocentric hierarchies.

For my research purposes, however, Burnett's exploration of Okorafor's work proves particularly insightful, for the scholar already underscored the influence of Christianity, “as a colonizing force in Africa,” while hinting at its resignification as “an inspiration for anticolonial resistance by Christian Africans” (2015, p. 143). Interestingly, in his analysis of Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* and *The Shadow Speaker*, Burnett demonstrates how the selective and biased interpretations of canonical texts have justified enslavement and colonization. Yet, he also demonstrates how texts' intrinsically open-ended nature can become a potential site of resistance and, ultimately, a source of liberation.

As an “Africanfuturist,” Okorafor's literary production is “directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view,” while still drawing from other worldviews that have equally impacted African cultural beliefs (Okorafor, 2019). Not surprisingly, a significant part of the Nigerian cultural imaginary is deeply indebted to the colonial legacy of Christianity: its fascination with eschatology, the end of times, and church millennialism. Indeed, the Bible remains an essential educational tool in West Africa (Ouedraogo, 2010). The combination of Nigeria's precolonial culture, its (post)colonial legacy, and neocolonial influence—the three axes that articulate the linguistic and cultural fabric of Nigerian society (Kotecki, 2020)—is perfectly represented in *Lagoon* (2014).

In this regard, I contend that Africanfuturist novel *Lagoon* offers a dialogic encounter between Christian apocalyptic and eschatological rhetoric—particularly that of the book of Revelation—and decolonial critique that unsettles and reworks dominant narratives of hope. As a result, Okorafor's work can be situated within a postcolonial tradition of authors that “[have] rewritten particular works from the English ‘canon’ with a view to restructuring European ‘realities’ in post-colonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which the order was based” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2002, p. 32). This is particularly conspicuous in the way apocalyptic tropes, grounded in Revelation, are staged in *Lagoon*, thereby inaugurating a “dissident textual system” (Mukherjee, 2013, p. 114).

The reworking of canonical texts is enabled by their potential for the emergence of new interpretations as generations bring their own ideas, values, and beliefs onto the hermeneutic process. According to Kovacs and Rowland (2004), one of the possible interpretations of Revelation is based on actualisation, that is, a partial oblique interpretation whereby Revelation is placed as a starting point or creative frame of reference for the understanding of readers' contemporary sociopolitical reality. This visionary exegesis reads out of the text, focusing on the etymology of “apocalypse” and its revelatory meaning. In *Lagoon*, the arrival of the aliens, conceived by characters like Fisayo as the end of times, is subordinated to revelations concerning the present disastrous conditions and forms of neocolonial mastery in post-independence Nigeria.

As in Revelation's first narrative section—the letter to the churches (ch. 1-3)—there is an evaluation and diagnosis of the spiritual, social, and political state of the country in the present, which is fraught with internal conflicts, threats, and ambiguity. The text depicts a “kinetic multicultural and global city, crosshatched by the intertwining legacies of colonialism” (O'Connell, 2016, p. 296), and assailed by the systemic violence and the structural failures of the Nigerian nation-state, which continues to be under the yoke of neoliberal

developmentalism. It also criticises religious fundamentalism and patriarchal discourses that endorse misogynistic and homophobic attitudes, without overlooking localized issues, including the unsafety of Nigeria's roads, and the poverty of the country leading to desperate and criminal solutions: prostitution, theft, and scams. Furthermore, Okorafor addresses the ecological wreckage brought about by harmful petroculture (Jue, 2017). Not coincidentally, the prologue is narrated by a female swordfish that glides through the ocean, now polluted by the "black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water," in her successful attempt to destroy "a submerged oil pipeline" (Okorafor, 2014, pp. 3-4).

Nevertheless, the alien landing parallelly activates the possibility of radical change in Nigeria's sociopolitical, economic, religious, and ecological landscape, through visions of transformation towards a new era of justice. More precisely, Okorafor embraces a secular teleological utopianism (Kotecki, 2020) and, quite apropos, structures the novel into three acts, recalling the biblical trinitarian division of history—the age of the Father, the age of the Son, and the age of the Holy Spirit, the latter advancing a new imminent age of renewal after persecution and exile. The apocalyptic revelation of the sociopolitical and environmental situation of Lagos mediated by the aliens initiates "Act 1: Welcome," disclosing the utopian potential for change through the alien landing on Lagos Bar Beach. Indeed, the aliens cleanse the water, making it "the sweetest water [the swordfish]'s even breathed" (Okorafor, 2014, p. 4). "Act 2: Awakening" depicts the violence sweeping across the city in the aftermath of their arrival. As Jue contends, "[d]espite the aliens success at remediating the ocean ecology and cleansing it of oil, violence seems to be the one illness, so to speak, that will not go away" (2017, p. 183). "Act 3: Symbiosis" opens up the potentiality for salvation and transformation towards a new cosmic order built upon the co-existence between humans, nature and absolute alterity (Kotecki, 2020), thereby imagining a truly post-colonial and post-capitalist Nigeria. Interestingly, Burnett (2015, p. 139) argues that "[f]or Africa to become genuinely postcolonial, [...] some sort of apocalypse is necessary, destroying the institutional power structures that presently make neocolonialism so persistent and difficult to undermine."

Having explored the intertextual reworkings of Revelation at a macrostructural level, I now turn to specific textual instances in which apocalyptic topoi are reappropriated. First, the narrative is teeming with names—Chris, Jacob, Rome, Seven, Moziz—that evoke deep-rooted biblical and religious connotations. However, these associations are subverted and resignified through the characters' ironic and often contradictory narrative arcs. Such a claim finds evident support in the telling names of Rome, Jacob, and Seven, as representatives of the LGBTQ+ community. *Lagoon* is set in times of uncertainty and anxiety, the country bearing witness to how certain communities are, if not directly persecuted, at least marginalized and harassed, compelled to hide under the weight of Christian fundamentalist ideologies. Interestingly, Revelation was originally written to offer hope and consolation to an oppressed Christian community facing persecution by the Roman Empire for its perceived "difference." As such, Rome stands as a symbol of oppression, violence, and abuse. *Lagoon*, however, stages a role reversal, for the formerly persecuted have now become the persecutors by the same logic: intolerance to those who fail to conform to a particular ideology—a Christian fundamentalist doctrine—embodied in the figure of Father Oke, who gives sermons about "the evils and filth of homosexuality" (2014, p. 72).

Ironically, the members of the Black Nexus are among the few people who, despite being othered as "abnormal" and consequently oppressed, do not seek revenge, but truly embrace the utopian potential of the alien's arrival: "Seven saw infinite possibilities and a people from outer space that could make the world embrace and love everyone" (2014, p. 75). Indeed, unlike religious fundamentalists, Seven's—and the aliens'—advocacy for an ethics of alterity closely aligns with Revelation's prophetic vision of universal salvation for everyone, regardless of difference: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude [...] from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation, 7:9).

The text is likewise fraught with apocalyptic imagery—including descriptions of the city wallowing in chaos and flames, the earth shaking, animals dying, or people rioting—which resonates with the violent and cataclysmic scenes of Revelation. The disclosed visions representing God's wrath and judgement of evil forces in relation to the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls (Revelation, 4-16) also stand out for their strong and vivid language (Bowes, 2022, p. 66). Furthermore, recurrent symbols, such as fire, hail, water, blood, smoke, or chaos, are present in *Lagoon*, either endorsing or shifting their original valence. For instance, Revelation depicts the sea as a place of judgement and death: "A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died of the water, because it was made bitter" (8:11); "[t]he second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died that was in the sea" (16:3). Evil figures related to the Antichrist are also associated with water, including the beast rising from the sea, the whore of Babylon sitting over water, and unfaithful followers. The arrival of the aliens, which are widely regarded as "nonbelievers in Christ" (2014, p. 61) and Satan's followers, is decoded by citizens as the end of times. Hence, the prevailing symbolic valence of water, as "they announced that the ocean would soon swallow [the aliens] up for the sins of these marine witches and warlocks, nonbelievers in Christ who'd taken over the country" (2014, p. 61). Nevertheless, the aliens, not coincidentally arriving by sea, celebrate and protect water, and "the people of the waters," as a source of life. They settle down in the ocean, cleansing the waters, previously "dirty and dead because of the oil companies," and making them sweet (c.f. the waters made "bitter" and "wormwood" in Revelation). Their actions refuel a sense of hope in potential futures rooted in a symbiotic relationship between the human and the non-human realms. As a result, the sea is ultimately reconfigured as a site full of creative possibilities, a fluid border that rejects closure and favours an opening towards the rest of the world.

As stated above, however, numerous Nigerians adopt (pre)millennial attitudes, as they fall prey to pre-apocalyptic anxiety, as if they believed they were actually witnessing the end of times and the imminent collapse

of the world. This eschatological sentiment is powerfully embodied in Fisayo, “[a] secretary by day and a prostitute by night” (2014, p. 14), who bears witness to the alien landing, arriving in their “devil’s *danfo*” on Bar Beach (p. 130). Decoding their arrival as the cataclysmic event heralding “the rapture, the apocalypse, the end” (p. 17), Fisayo envisions the alien’s evil presence as the catalyst for the long-awaited messianic kingdom. Painfully aware of her “sinful” life, she turns to religious devotion: “[s]he prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive her for all her sins and take her to heaven” (p. 14). After being swallowed by the sea and washed back onto the sand, Fisayo interprets this revelatory experience as a sign of God’s absolution, but also of her divinely appointed role as “one of the loudest prophets of doom” (p. 131). Believing herself tasked with the redemptive mission of saving Lagos from evil and impending destruction, she becomes a vocal advocate for repentance and personal salvation, thereby echoing the admonitions in Revelation: “The world was ripe, on the brink of rotting, of apocalypse. She had to save it. Save it from them” (p. 131).

Thus, Fisayo’s narrative arc exemplifies the long-standing Christian preference for redemption over creation, for individual introspection over cosmic awareness and apprehension, for resilience over resistance, a moral stance that has framed Christian hope as an essentially passive and highly individualistic affect. What is more, her attitude serves as a warning against the danger of (pre)millennial movements, whose tendency towards extremism and radicalization often results in violence and the legitimization of “pre-emptive cleansing and ‘quickenings’ action against what they perceive as evil” (Skrimshire, 2008, p. 116). As a matter of fact, Fisayo mistakes the eight-year-old mute boy, another witness of the alien landing, for “the child-witch of Satan” (2014, p. 191), and thinks herself entitled to shoot him to death.

Notwithstanding, not all characters adopt such an overtly hostile attitude towards difference. A great majority approaches the aliens—their cyborgian nature and technology—as an exploitable resource (Moonsamy, 2020), a new flock that can be indoctrinated. This is illustrated in Father Oke, a corrupt and smooth-talking priest. Ironically, he also regards himself as a prophet, contending that “God speaks through [him]” (2014, p. 44), whose role is to “bring this creature [Ayodele] and all of her kind into the light” (p. 47). As such, Father Oke profits from the swirling chaos and paralysing fear to coerce compliance from Christian adherents, to enforce his religious doctrine, and to suppress any dissent threatening his authority. Thus, the novel criticises the indoctrinatory moral frameworks that attest to “the enduring impact of Christian missionaries” (Cobo-Piñero, 2020, p. 105). Religious fundamentalism and the ensuing persecution of opponents are hypocritically marked by a stark departure from foundational Christian virtues—forgiveness, compassion, and universal love—which are replaced instead with intolerance, hatred, and violence. These attributes only contribute to sustain a politics of fear that undermines, rather than nurtures, the possibility of hope.

Finally, another character worth considering under the apocalyptic prism is that of Ayodele, the alien ambassador. Despite her genuinely altruistic intentions, Lagosians reject her as the devil, the Antichrist. Quite apropos, she adopts the appearance of a powerful African woman, resembling deity Mami Wata, who walks out of the water, thereby evoking the “beast rising out of the sea” (Revelation, 13:1). When Chris, Adaora’s husband, confronts Ayodele for the first time, she reminds him of a “marine witch,” a devilish creature that would be sent back to hell by Jesus Christ (2014, p. 31). On the contrary, Ayodele is sent to earth as the Elders’ diplomat to transmit a message of peace—“Nobody is attacking you. [...] We are change. [...] We come to bring you together and refuel your future” (p. 112). She also mediates negotiations between humans and aliens for a new posthuman and truly postcolonial era. As a harbinger of change, she brings about positive transformations, such as the physical and spiritual healing of the president, which enables his dialogic encounter with the Elders. Regardless, after their return from such unprecedented meeting, Ayodele is shot to death by soldiers fixated on her otherness, incapable of seeing beyond her difference and “abnormality.” Despite such display of hatred and inhumanity, Ayodele sacrifices her bodily form, disintegrating into a breathable mist that penetrates into Lagosian’s minds, cleansing them, rendering them “a bit alien” (2014, p. 268), and ultimately bringing all of them together.

Thus, Ayodele becomes the messianic saviour of Lagos, almost like a secular equivalent to Jesus Christ: misunderstood, othered, and persecuted for representing a new worldview, she eventually accepted her fate as the lamb that had to be sacrificed so that the world could peacefully come to terms with alterity. Her spiritual “resurrection” at the ethereal level of people’s intersubjective consciousness heralds a radically new era stripped of the real Antichrist: human selfishness and intolerance, mainly reflected upon post- and neo-colonial forms of mastery, anthropogenic pollution and religious fundamentalism. Thus, Ayodele’s performance of “shamanic healing” (Moonsamy, 2020, p. 178) brings forth a form of “collective othering” (Marquis, 2020, p. 411), a hybrid community based on the symbiosis between the human, the non-human, and the natural realm, rooted in an ethics of alterity. All in all, *Lagoon* does stage the end of the old order, while ultimately envisioning the genesis of a new cosmic order in alignment with that of a decolonial pluriverse. This eschatological utopia epitomizes “a world where many worlds fit” (Escobar, 2011), devoid of exclusionary and destructive forces like categoric dichotomies that have long shaped the history of humanity.

4. Decolonial Hope: West African Cosmologies and Temporalities

The appropriation and resignification of apocalyptic tropes proves a powerful aesthetic pattern to problematize aspects of Christian eschatology that have traditionally informed (Western) narratives of hope: its highly individualistic and anthropocentric approach, its emphasis on passivity, endurance and resilience, its linear conception of time undergirding notions of evolutionary progress, and its non-radical promise of renewal. Likewise, it invites to critically examine specific readings of biblical texts that have been appropriated to advance the (neo)conservative agendas of kingdoms, empires, and nation-states,

often at the expense of foundational Christian values, such as unconditional universal love, kindness and forgiveness. Revelation, once written to instil hope in the oppressed, has been employed to endorse colonial systems of conquest and oppression. As stated above, through the reworking of the Christian eschatological tradition, *Lagoon* offers a new secularized narrative of hope rooted in radical eschatology and its forward-looking promise, which, nevertheless, does not insist on divine intervention. In opposition to the passivity of Revelation, the text appeals to humans' resolution and agency—mainly embodied in Adaora, Agu, and Anthony—to advance change and radically transform things. Ultimately, it highlights the communal dimension of hope, necessarily founded upon an ethics of alterity, which, remarkably, was already hinted at in Revelation (7:9).

Yet, *Lagoon* is profoundly realistic about human potential: a new cosmic era cannot be forged by humans alone. Kotecki rightfully argues that “[o]nly through symbiosis with the powers of the Earth's more threatening landscapes, the desert and the ocean, and with the total alterity of the alien can human society persist” (2020, p. 165). Recognising the interconnectedness of all living entities and the intrinsic value of the nonhuman, *Lagoon* thus heralds the arrival of a more-than-human era that recalls Haraway's “Chthulucene” (2016), where hope and therefore life thrive upon multispecies entanglement and symbiosis. Likewise, hope for a better future necessarily involves confronting the palimpsestic textuality of time, that is, acknowledging how overlapping temporalities—past and present, Nigeria's precolonial culture, (post)colonial legacy, and neocolonial influence—shape the future. To do so, *Lagoon* does not exclusively draw from Western philosophical and theological discourses, but it also recentres indigenous epistemologies. The outcome is a cultural mix of Christian biblical tradition with West African cosmologies, mythology, and folklore—ancestor worship, self's continued spiritual existence after death, African deities, plural temporalities, ecological entanglement. The imbrication of Western and non-Western systems of knowledge is enabled within the framework of Africanfuturism, which, in turn, mobilizes a decolonial approach to hope: one that challenges Eurocentric hierarchies of knowledge, dislodges Western temporalities of progress, and reclaims the imaginative space for futures rooted in relationality, multiplicity, and planetary care.

How is this decolonial frame advanced and materialized in the text? First, the aliens become the embodiment of critical hope as they offer a critical evaluation of Nigeria's present, “unravelling the ingrained asymmetries and injustices” (Karmakar, 2025, p. 4) assailing Lagos, but also a future-oriented proposal to restore “a diminished sense of interconnectedness, relationality, and solidarity with others” (Zembylas, 2014, p. 14). Hanchey conveniently wonders, “[W]hat if aliens came not to colonize, but to create anti-colonial possibilities of relational coexistence?” (2023, pp. 581–582). Indeed, the aliens seek a home in exchange for their “technology,” based on telepathy, telekinesis, and shape shifting, which is endowed with an organic quality that is in sharp contrast to the purely material and mechanical quality of capitalist machinery (Moonsamy, 2020, p. 179). As such, the aliens activate “nonnormative and anti-colonial desires” (Hanchey, 2023, p. 582). Furthermore, Ayodele's discourse decentres the human by giving voice to the non-human, i.e., the animals living in the ocean, presented as agentive entities that nonetheless suffer the consequences of human selfishness: “It's the people of the waters,” Ayodele said. “They are tired of boats and human beings” (2014, p. 240).

Likewise, indigenous cosmologies are foregrounded through direct references to Nigerian mythology and folklore, and the appearance of African deities and ancestors. They play a crucial role in this eschatological utopia, as they respond to the aliens' call, thereby forging an alliance with natural and ancient local powers. Papa Legba, the “Yoruba trickster god of language, communication and the crossroads” (2014, p. 195) appears as a spirit, while being ironically employed as a code name by a savvy 419 scammer. Lagosians also come face-to-face with Ijele, “the Chief of all Masquerades” (p. 199), a transformative experience that compels the 419 scammer to abandon Nigerian internet fraud for good. Likewise, the story is framed within the omniscient narration of Uhide Okwanka, the Igbo story-weaver spider that resides beneath the city. The aliens, the “sweet taste” they brought with them, and the possibility of a new era drive Uhide to pause his storytelling: “I will leave my web. I become part of the story. I will join my people” (p. 291). According to Cobo-Piñero (2020, p. 107), there are also new allegorical figures, like “African Chaos” or “the Bone Collector”, the latter being a sentient highway that “collects human bones, and the bones of human vehicles,” and which has awakened and answered the aliens' call for change (p. 119).

Last but not least, Ayodele is described as resembling Mami Wata, a West African water deity—half human, half marine creature—that can shift its shape. Mami Wata is believed to bring good fortune in terms of material wealth, fertility, and procreation. Yet, she is perceived as an ambivalent figure capable of both fulfilment and disaster. Likewise, “according to the myth, when she is not sea bound, she walks the streets of modern African cities” (Womack, 2013, p. 86). Indeed, not only is Mami Wata evoked in passing, but she appears in human form in front of Father Oke. Realising who the woman truly is and regretting his past behaviour, Father Oke “felt his heart break.” The two of them then head towards the beach, and “no one ever saw Father Oke again” (2014, p. 235). As a result, “the supernatural and the fantastic are [...] enmeshed with the ordinary and the scientific” (Cobo-Piñero, 2020, p. 107). Resorting to magic realism, Okorafor overcomes the irreconcilable opposition between religion and science, between empirical evidence and the mysterious.

This entanglement of West African folklore with other cultural practices—including Christian eschatology—and modernity complicates postmodern and anthropocentric identities, while disrupting Western notions of evolutionary progress and linear time. As Uhide argues:

[T]he story goes deeper. It is in the dirt, the mud, the earth, in the fond memory of the soily cosmos. It is in the always-mingling past, present, and future. It is in the water. It is in the powerful spirits and ancestors who dwelled in Lagos. It is in the heads and hearts of the people of Lagos. Change begets change. Ayodele knew it. All her people know it. (2014, p. 194)

The passage highlights overlapping temporalities that endow time with its palimpsestic textuality, particularly when viewed through the lens of indigenous epistemologies. Accordingly, the past is not a distant, concluded and forgotten era, but a lingering presence, embodied in the pervasive influence of ancestors and the spirit of all earthly entities, which actively shapes the present and informs trajectories of the future. This perspective is in stark contrast to the capitalist conception of time, which defines progress and growth in terms of material accumulation and is predominantly future-oriented, while often disavowing historical accountability. By contrast, non-Western systems of knowledge recognise the ethical and spiritual necessity of engaging with the past as a *sine qua non* to meaningfully move towards the future.

5. Conclusion

Taking all of these observations into consideration, this study has demonstrated that *Lagoon* can be read as a secular eschatological utopia from a postcolonial, decolonial, and posthuman approach. The narrative revisits and challenges Christian apocalyptic discourses and rhetoric of hope, imbricated with West African systems of knowledge, to envision alternative philosophies of decolonial hope for the future. These visions are freed from the constraints of received messages about the destiny of the world to liberate the radical potential of utopian imagination in new practices of decolonial hope.

Through the actualising reworking of biblical tropes, the prophetic is rendered secular. The apocalypse—mediated by other-worldly beings—entails the revelation of uncomfortable truths about the present, but also the disclosure of a transcendent utopian imagination that still envisages eschatological salvation through the collapse of a neocolonial, capitalist, and anthropocentric order, and the genesis of a radically new order: a posthuman and decolonial society of epistemological and ontological pluriversality where past and present, tradition and modernity, Western and non-Western epistemologies coalesce. This form of radical eschatology is heralded through the reconceptualization of time as overlapping temporalities, the solidarity between the interconnected human and more-than-human realms, and the reclaiming of ancestral ecological wisdom in relation to the sanctity of nature and the generosity of the ecosystem.

Okorafor thus underscores the real dangers threatening our contemporary world and reconfigures Western anthropocentric and humanistic notions of hope. In this regard, the novel's engagement with the creative potential of apocalyptic time does not gesture towards finality, but towards a generative rupture, a radical openness to alternative forms of being, knowing and relating. Thus, it aligns with Derrida's politics of the impossible (1978)—the envisioning of the “unreasonable,” for being incongruous with the present—but also with his ethics of alterity—advocating for the centrality of the other. Accordingly, the survival of humanity and the Earth depends on dismantling the Western colonial mentality underlying religious and political ideologies that have fostered both human hubris and environmental degradation, favouring hatred and intolerance rather than acceptance and love for nature and alterity. In turn, Africanfuturism, bringing science fiction into dialogue with African epistemologies, opens up a powerful discursive space to imagine alternative futures beyond the limits of what is realistically possible and feasible according to Western ideas of hope and progress.

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