



INTERWEAVING CLIMATE FICTION AND INDIGENOUS ECOLOGICAL WISDOM: N.K. JEMISIN'S NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intersection of climate fiction (cli-fi) and Indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) in the literary works of N.K. Jemisin. Through an analysis of selected novels and short stories by Jemisin, notably the "The Broken Earth" trilogy, this research explores how Jemisin intertwines themes of climate change, environmental degradation, and resilience with Indigenous perspectives on ecology, land stewardship, and sustainability. Drawing upon ecocritical and postcolonial frameworks, the study examines how Jemisin's narratives challenge dominant Western paradigms of environmentalism, centering Indigenous voices, knowledge systems, and cosmologies. Through close textual analysis and theoretical inquiry, this research sheds light on the ways in which Jemisin's speculative fiction highlights Indigenous ways of knowing and being in relation to the environment, while also addressing pressing issues of climate justice and ecological transformation. By critically evaluating Jemisin's imaginative depictions of alternative futures and eco-cultural landscapes, this study contributes to broader discussions on literature, climate activism, and the decolonization of environmental discourse.

KEYWORDS Ecology, Climate change, Global crisis, Environment,

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, affecting ecosystems, communities, and cultures around the world. In response to this global crisis, literature has emerged as a powerful tool for exploring the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of climate change. Within the realm of speculative fiction, a subgenre known as climate fiction (cli-fi) has gained prominence for its imaginative exploration of climate-related themes and scenarios. At the same time, Indigenous peoples, who have long-standing relationships with their environments, possess invaluable ecological knowledge and wisdom that offer alternative perspectives on environmental stewardship and resilience.

N.K. Jemisin, an acclaimed author known for her groundbreaking speculative fiction, stands at the forefront of this literary landscape. Through her works, including the critically acclaimed "The Broken Earth" trilogy, Jemisin intertwines themes of climate change, environmental justice, and Indigenous ways of knowing. By weaving together elements of speculative fiction and Indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK), Jemisin's narratives challenge conventional understandings of environmentalism and offer visions of a more just and sustainable future.

This article seeks to delve into the intricate interplay between climate fiction and Indigenous ecological knowledge in the works of N.K. Jemisin. By examining Jemisin's novels and short stories through an ecocritical and postcolonial lens, the researcher aims to explore how Jemisin integrates Indigenous perspectives on ecology, land stewardship, and resilience within her speculative worlds. Through close textual analysis and theoretical inquiry, we seek to uncover the ways in which Jemisin's narratives reimagine human-environment relationships, centering Indigenous voices and knowledge systems in the face of environmental upheaval.

An overview of the significance of climate fiction and Indigenous ecological knowledge in contemporary literature and environmental discourse is dealt with in detail. Additionally, N.K. Jemisin will be introduced as a pioneering voice in the genre of cli-fi, and the theoretical frameworks informing the analysis of her works will be discussed. Lastly, the structure and objectives of this study will be outlined, emphasizing its contribution to the fields of literature, environmental studies, and Indigenous studies. Through this exploration, a deeper understanding of the complex intersections between literature, climate change, and Indigenous perspectives on the environment is aimed for.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chiara Xausa (2021) This article examines how Indigenous Australian author Alexis Wright portrays the environmental and climatic crises in her works *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013). It examines the novels as a way to tackle the climate-related cultural crisis, drawing on the groundwork laid out by environmental humanities researchers like Heise (2008), Clark (2015), Trexler (2015), and Ghosh (2016). However, it also recognises the problems with viewing Indigenous texts as remedies for the "great derangement" and the risk of a singular Anthropocene narrative that ignores the "unevenly universal" (Nixon, 2011) duties and vulnerabilities to environmental damage. Discussing topics like ecological imperialism, environmental racism, and the gradual brutality of climate change, it argues that the works of Alexis Wright are crucial for worldwide discussions regarding the Anthropocene and how literature portrays it, since they highlight the inequity of the environmental and climate catastrophe.

Velta Douglas (2023) An alternative social justice-oriented high school in a big metropolitan region of Ontario, Canada, was the setting for this practitioner inquiry study's English class. I worked as a practitioner-researcher for ten weeks with an English teacher in his eleventh and twelfth grade class, during which time we taught two units together and looked for ways to include environmental education into the current curriculum. How might students participate in environmental education via a critical literacy lens? This is the central research topic that informed the study. By framing environmental challenges through the lens of a text that acknowledges its functional, cultural, and critical dimensions, I was able to develop an ecoliteracies framework. In order to disrupt "business as usual" environmental education and provide room for youths' social experiences, complexity, and depth, I drew on ideas from critical literacy and environmental education. The data used in this study came from a variety of sources, including student work and classroom participation, as well as focus groups conducted after the fact. In these groups, students not only recorded their own conversations but also created projects to illustrate their grasp of the critical literacy approach to environmental education.

The findings of this study suggest that safeguarding the environment is a communal endeavor. The students' efforts highlight how an approach to environmental education grounded in critical literacy prompts both students and teachers to challenge assumptions, reconsider relationships, address obstacles, and speculate on the experience of inhabiting a deteriorated planet. This study provides valuable insights into how critical literacy and environmental education might work together to address the pressing social and environmental issues affecting our young. As an ongoing cycle of world-ending and world-building, environmental education may be seen as more than just a collection of facts and figures regarding environmental challenges. Teachers can take heart from the fact that current English language arts programmes provide enough room for students to express and analyse their own unique perspectives on the world via the lens of their own experiences. Educators and scholars might find chances for nuanced and complicated relational environmental involvement in this dissertation, which also provides instances of how students could react if given the freedom to reimagine their school environments imaginatively.

Janet Fiskio (2021) *Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice: Poetics of Dissent and Repair* investigates the links between climate change and white supremacy by situating it within the lengthy histories of slavery, settler colonialism, and resistance. In her discussion of works by Kazim Ali, Octavia Butler, Louise Erdrich, Winona LaDuke, Mark Nowak, Simon Ortiz, Jesmyn Ward, and Colson Whitehead, Janet Fiskio draws on decolonial and reparative theories to centre on expressive cultures and activities like dancing, protesting, and cooking. *Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice* sheds light on how marginalised communities fight against environmental racism and work to heal the planet through investigating hypothetical histories and futures, protest and mourning rituals, and daily living and social care.

Kyle P. Whyte et.al (2018) Unfortunately, many depictions of the Anthropocene epoch concentrate on terrifying science fiction scenarios where humanity find themselves stranded in post-apocalyptic or dystopian worlds. Indigenous communities, for example, may find themselves erased from discussions on climate change since they have already experienced the social upheavals brought about by colonial aggression. This article explores the ways in which Indigenous worldviews on climate change might cast our current era in a negative light. Dialogue stories with ancestors and descendants inspire Indigenous people to take action on climate change, rather than fear of a catastrophe. Stories from Indigenous communities often take the form of science fiction, with heroes who are empowered to tackle modern issues. But Indigenous peoples are often relegated to historical categories—like the Holocene—created by nonindigenous peoples in writing on the Anthropocene and climate change. Allies' narratives that portray themselves as heroes rescuing Indigenous peoples from colonial oppression and the environmental catastrophe may use these categories as a background. The fact that allies sometimes try to pretend that they are not living in the periods their forebears would have fantasised about would explain this behaviour, in my opinion. I will demonstrate how the ability of allies to form alliances with Indigenous peoples is jeopardised by this rejection.

Imogen Bagnall (2021) The techniques and repercussions of systematic oppression are examined in N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* Trilogy. The larger civilization of *The Stillness* has a history of oppressing and dehumanising Orogenes. The complicated and multi-faceted connections that Essun has with her children and the Fulcrum Guardian Schaffa provide a window into the ways in which the pain that orogenes endures is passed down through the generations. At the social, interpersonal, and family levels, there is a cyclical pattern of many direct and indirect behaviours that perpetuate the collective trauma of orogenes. Afrofuturist cultural theory will guide my reading, which will engage with ideas of cultural trauma and trauma literature. While genres like science fiction and fantasy do a good job of inspiring creative thinking, real-life events always have an impact on worldbuilding. It follows that the collective trauma of African-Americans, as N. K. Jemisin experienced, informs the trauma that orogenes endure. Afrofuturism is a critical perspective and aesthetic approach that puts an emphasis on envisioning a freer future. The Afrofuturist aesthetic paradigm in science fiction and fantasy writing emphasises the exploration of communal trauma and healing techniques. Jemisin draws a direct line between the orogenes experience and the horrific African-American experience. By looking to the future, Afrofuturist art challenges the viewer to confront their own traumas, both historical and contemporary. An idealized plan for the emancipation of oppressed peoples is laid forth in the *Broken Earth* Trilogy. Jemisin shows how oppressed communities may reclaim their power and build their own future by using Afrofuturist elements like technology, the "Black Genius" persona, and alienation.

THE UPRISINGS OF THE DEHUMANIZED

Hoa and others like him are created by Syl Anagist to resemble the Niess and to have their orogenic and magical abilities in *The Broken Earth*. Their masters enslave them and teach them how to operate the so-called Plutonic Engine a system of obelisks fashioned from artificially harvested crystal fragments from Earth that magnify and control magic. Syl Anagist intends to use this network, also known as the Plutonic Engine, to establish a magic regeneration loop by channelling its power into the Earth's core, where a great deal of magic is stored. In order to construct a perpetual magic loop that she can utilise for herself, Syl Anagist has bored a hole towards the centre of the Earth. This will be guided by the Plutonic Engine. Those that run the Plutonic Engine are Hoa and his kind.

As mentioned earlier, Hoa and the others find out that they are actually created offspring of the Niess, a people who were enslaved and colonized. They also discover that they, like the Niess, are created to be seen as non-human, as tools, as pieces of a massive machine, and not as human beings at all. They make the decision to revolt, both for their own and their ancestors' sakes. They plot out the details for the Plutonic Engine's launch day, when it is intended to begin producing its endless supply of magical resources. They want to use the Engine to their advantage by transforming it against Syl Anagist. This will allow them to wipe out the city and its inhabitants by overloading the magical systems and triggering a short circuit. Because they will be a part of the Engine when it makes the short circuit, and because they cannot withstand so much power, this also implies that Hoa and the others will die.

This chosen death clearly gives him and his people a sense of agency. Hoa and the others get to choose when they die, in contrast to the Niess, who are kept alive only long enough to continue creating magic for the 27 obelisks and are therefore unable to perish. In Syl Anagist, this is the pinnacle of defiance since life is both holy and profitable. "Considering politics as a kind of conflict, we are compelled to inquire: What significance is bestowed upon life, mortality, and the human form, especially that which is injured or killed?" writes Achilles Mbembe (2003) in his thesis on necro politics. What does their place in the hierarchy look like? number twelve. People who are considered expendable in terms of their lives and bodies are dehumanised. Those who are dehumanised and enslaved in Syl Anagist are unable to die since life is prioritised over death. In the shape of the obelisks, the power order is physically intertwined with their compelled human bodies. Hoa and the others reject this dehumanising imprint of authority and choose to "override" the system by dying instead.

For Hoa and his people as well as Syl Anagist civilization as a whole, the realisation that Earth is cognizant and living has devastating effects. The planet is furious that humans have bored a hole into its centre and fears that they will use the Plutonic Engine to tap into the magical powers stored inside. The idea has never occurred to humanity, and the planet has never been considered a sentient person in and of itself. As a result, humans have dehumanized the Earth in the same manner they have dehumanized the Niess and the Hoa in order to claim and exploit them.

CLIMATE CHANGE, CAPITALISM AND OPPRESSION IN *THE BROKEN EARTH* SERIES

The Fifth Season (2015), The Obelisk Gate (2016), and The Stone Sky (2017) make up N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy, a set of science fiction and fantasy books. Among the many accolades bestowed upon Jemisin for her trilogy is the fact that, with *The Fifth Season*, she became the first African-American writer to ever win the Hugo Award for Best Novel. Also, in the years that followed, with both *The Obelisk Gate* and *The Stone Sky*, she became the first writer in Hugo Award history to win Best Novel for each installment in a series. The works address issues of tyranny and slavery, imperialism, capitalism, environmental degradation, and catastrophic weather events. What fascinates me is the potential for these themes to educate us about these subjects in the actual world, as well as their connections and intersections.

The protagonist, Essun, is a middle-aged woman with magical abilities in *The Fifth Season* (2015), the first book of the Broken Earth trilogy. Her talent is orogeny, the capacity to sense, manage, and direct a kind of energy and force in the matter around her. We also follow the lives of two young women, Syenite and Damaya, who both possess this talent, throughout crucial points. The Stillness, the planet these ladies inhabit, is essentially a single massive continent that experiences massive natural disasters and climatic upheaval on a periodic basis. These events are referred to by the inhabitants of the Stillness as 'the fifth season,' which is the reason for the title of the first novel. Right in the commencement of that kind of season, we have the Fifth Season.

The narrative begins with Essun discovering her three-year-old orogene son, Uche, beaten to death by his father, Jija. Their ten-year-old daughter Nassun is missing; he fled the scene. The whole Tirimo community will find out that Essun and her children are roggas (a slur for orogenes), therefore they are both forced to leave their home. All of this takes place at the very beginning of the next fifth season, which begins with a massive earthquake that splits the continent in two, a phenomenon known as The Rift. Essun runs away, hell-bent on finding Nassun. Along the way, she encounters Hoa, a little kid who seems to know (if you can call it that) where Nassun is.

The locals refer to celestial bodies composed of stone and crystal as "obelisks" as they float through the air. Tonkee, a female geomest (a scientist by training) who is completely enamoured with obelisks, meets Essun and Hoa on their journey.

LIVING IN A CLIMATE-CHANGED WORLD

In what ways may society benefit from making a change? In the wake of 60 years of easy consumption, many of the comforts we've come to expect may have to go if we decide to make a change (Maniates and Meyer, 2010). There may be times when the economy is severely disrupted, leading to the loss of jobs and the closure of factories. Due to the profound and permanent nature of the changes they entail, it is not immediately apparent that transitions are good or essential. However, we risk returning to prehistoric cultures if we don't make the transition to a sustainable society and cope with the hardships of a world with dramatically altered climate, extensive crop failure, and illness. Here, an investigation is conducted to determine whether there is a need to reassess presumptions regarding sustainable viability and the potential implications of transitions.

The Broken Earth books, like Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960), depict a dystopian future where humans have descended from a "high" technological civilization into a near-medieval society characterised by a lack of population, hereditary "castes," town-states, and work trades. A person's name consists of three parts: their daily name, their trade or career, and their community. An individual's rights to share in food rations and protection from outside dangers are conferred upon them upon becoming a full-fledged member of a community, upon being acknowledged as an important member. The telegraph allows for communication, and there is some hydroelectricity for lighting and basic equipment on this planet.

It is very uncommon for harmful algal blooms, acid rain, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes to occur together. Environmental conditions worsen dramatically once every hundred years or so, forcing settlements (or "comms") throughout the continent to rely on their stockpiles or even raid other comms in order to survive. The duration of these fifth seasons might range from a few years to decades. They impede the Still people's progress towards a more technologically sophisticated civilization. The cities of mediaeval Japan were used to the regular occurrence of earthquakes and fires, so this scenario seems eerily similar. How many fifth seasons have happened is a contentious topic among scholars at the Seventh University. For instance, the *Thirteen-Year Season of Teeth*, which began with an oceanic earthquake and ended with a massive volcanic eruption near the North Pole, suffocating crops and people all across the globe with ash clouds. Many may have turned to cannibalism because to the lack of preparation from communications—thus the name of the season. Most communications fail by the end of the fifth season, and only the best ones manage to last that long.

Climate change and its potential consequences are vividly brought to life in the fifth season. In their ever-detailed but ultimately inaccurate predictions of the consequences of climate change, climate scientists have spent the last three decades honing their craft.

For a long time, the IPCC has predicted consequences, such as increasing dengue fever, decreasing agricultural crop yields, and devastating heat waves (e.g. Stocker et al., 2013). Moser and Dilling (2011) found that most individuals still find it difficult to picture a world where the climate has altered. With each passing decade, the prospect of a "4DW"—a world warmed by 4 degrees Celsius—becomes increasingly likely, yet few are willing to discuss it. As a result, many tropical zones, the southwestern United States, and the Middle East may become summertime deserts (Wynn, 2014; Christoff, 2013). Many climate justice groups and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have issued dire warnings, yet the elite continue to hold naively to the hope that science and technology will save the world. Leadership in politics and industry has taken advantage of the difficulty people have with conceptualising gradual, disembodied crises (Moser, 2010) to reassure the public that technological solutions to climate change would mitigate the worst effects. By using CRISPR-Cas9 technology, our scientists may genetically modify crops to be more resilient to drought and to produce healthier food (Kole et al., 2015). Greenhouse gas mitigation will be facilitated by a domino effect of renewable energy technology (Obama, 2017). In the tundras, quick-growing lichens will absorb any residual gases. Giant tents, subterranean tunnels, and airtight towers will make cities liveable. It is possible and will be possible to prepare. According to Jemisin, she meant to undermine the modern world's presumption that her prophesy will come true.

According to Merchant (2015), human existence is guaranteed via preparedness. According to her, stowing away food and water, erecting protective city walls, and practicing stone lore won't ensure the safety of communications. No amount of planning can prevent the erratic fifth seasons from happening. Both the nature and frequency of these events are unpredictable. To rephrase, planning for environmental change is often futile due to its inherent chaos. Despite meticulous planning and robust infrastructure, many communication systems fail during the fifth season, and the duration of any given communication cannot be predicted. Instead of relying on competition and exploitation, humanity must prioritize community-building to endure the fifth season. Those with the greatest adaptability and willingness to cooperate are typically the most numerous. Contrary to the stonelore's teachings, they do not construct fortified walls for protection against each other. In fact, new communication networks may emerge during the fifth season as survivors from previous ones unite. Those who emulate them retain control.

CONCLUSION

The Broken Earth trilogy by N.K. Jemisin (2015–2017) is the subject of this research paper, which examines the interplay between capitalism, colonialism, oppression, and environmental catastrophe. The research questions posed are: While planning and executing transitions to an undamaged Earth, it is important to consider how the fictionalised histories of the world in novels and the idea of magic show the interconnectedness of ecology, capitalism, dehumanisation, and oppression. In making these changes, what are the consequences? Could things shift so drastically that a change would be impossible? Is it possible that geoengineering and gene drives may fix our polluting problems? What if Earth is so furious with us that it is beginning to forbid us from carrying on with our exploitative ways of life? Incorporating environmental and racial/social justice into a transition—why is it important? Participation in these vital discussions is encouraged through engagement with literature. Furthermore, as Jemisin demonstrates, narrative may serve as a powerful tool for liberation from the present-day shackles of neoliberal commonsense and the Cartesian frame, paving the way for a world without cracks.

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