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Global Futures: Articulating the Struggle for (Other) worldly Justice

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Abstract: This essay lays out the concept of global futurities, which I define as the discursive scales and plural epistemologies by which marginalized identities and groups articulate, construct, imagine, or locate their futures. While global future is usually based on what could happen to all people and the planet, my framework of global futurities maps the differential horizon of being and co-becoming for those who have been historically denied a future due to discriminatory processes such as Black communities, Indigenous peoples, formerly colonized populations, migrants, etc. Such futurities are not simply pluralistic in terms of cultural diversity, but they serve as counter-hegemonic forms of futuring and worlding, shaped by dissident interests and political actors dedicated to promoting (Other)worldly justice. These subaltern viewpoints challenge a singular framing of humanity, as they involve multiple nodes and networks of power/knowledge/desire. These ontological and temporal geographies are centered in queer, feminist, intersectional, anti-racist, multi-species forms of collective agency amid existential threats from colonialism, globalization, the Anthropocene, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: coloniality; global South; decolonization; worlding; futurities

This essay introduces a critical framework and vocabulary for global studies through my formulation of the term global futurities. While the singular global future is based on scenarios of what has yet to happen to the world and its people as a whole, *global futurities* denotes the affective horizon of imagining resistance and co-becoming for marginalized groups across variegated zones of life and death.¹ These differently scaled discursive moments and ontological terrains link up with world-building subcultures and postcolonial literature, which aim to creatively reveal “worlds within worlds.”²

1 Futurism originally refers to an Italian arts movement that denoted a humanistic culture that foresees the future from the perspective of youth, technology, and speed.

2 Worlding/building is found within fantasy and science fiction. Insofar as “worlding” is closely related to futurity, the former considers the phenomenology of being-in-the-world and how humans move through the/ir world.

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My thematization of global futurities finds concrete grounding in the political epistemologies, cultural ideologies, and critical perspectives on alterity. These things emanate from the lives of people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, the poor working class, women and feminists, queers and sexual minorities, Indigenous groups, and subaltern people from the “Global South.” Surveying contemporary works to articulate global futurities, I ask how historical struggles to salvage the past can protect the future for those lumped together as the Other.

These distinct yet interrelated factions make up the world’s majority in terms of sheer population, but they are obfuscated within the architecture of global governance. A global future in the singular then cannot hold space for non-elites forcibly assimilated into a massified humanity but made to suffer the greatest burdens of what feminist theorist bell hooks terms imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Hooks 1984). How does futurist globalist politics work for the superexploited without being bound to subjugating forces or the “whiteness of futurity and globalization” (Shahjahan and Edwards 2021)? How are global futurities situated within diverse zones of power, knowledge, and desire? How do we conceive access to the future for disavowed subjects across the local-global continuum? How do we find indications of global futurities in differently articulated futurities like Black futurities and Indigenous futurities? While scholars from a range of disciplines talk about futurities with relation to minoritarian populations, I demarcate global futurities to outline the differential means through which this process happens, traversing across disparate cognitive, geographic, and disciplinary terrains. Global futurities is a creative site for imagining (Other)worldly justice.

As I conceive it, global futurities are discursive formations, heterogeneous forms of place-thought or imaginative worldings (or futurings) that hold competing interests and self-other dialectical relations. They are characterized by a wish for the betterment of humanity’s most vulnerable. The fragmentary patchwork of futurities that constitute global futurities diverge from single-minded futuristic pictures of the world as it necessitates freedom dreams and projects on a global scale. Whereas non-majority peoples inhabit so many spheres of precarious life and forms of “social death,” their modes of existence require a fractal notion of the global. Given the breadth of this project, it is vital then to articulate the collective struggle of Others as a matter of disarticulation, re-construction and deconstruction, play and politics.

In the first section, I put forth global futurities as a framework anchored in various struggles with identity, history, time, and place. Here, I lay out my analytic via major historical moments such as globalization, the Anthropocene, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This critical account first involves pondering global futurities in tandem with global/colonial histories. Next, I tackle multi-faceted ideas of the Anthropocene to consider the environmental aspects of global futurities. Using Afrofuturism as a lens, it also poses the wonders and problems of teaching about

global environmental crisis. The last part of the essay considers the social movements around de/dis/re-globalization as part of “unforeseen” major events like the COVID-19 pandemic.

1 Coloniality and Global Futurities

Globality and futurity are always already bound up with race and colonialism. Philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) imagines race as a moral-scientific descriptor of how the “others of Europe” have been effaced and engulfed within a global space where they do not fully inhabit the privileged position of the human. This transcendental move toward a globalized future follows Hegel’s envisioning of world history as the accomplishment of (European) Man with the dark races subordinated to that history. Post-Enlightenment strategies of power aim to seize the history of nonwhites by force and “hijack their futures (ibid., 250). These strategies put Indigenous nations and people of color within a (white) space of universality and progress, but they always remain racially differentiated, perpetual threats to civilization, modernity, and humanity proper.

Colonial violence and scientific racism are not fully accounted for within the production of *Homo Modernus*. Within mainstream globalization discourse, subaltern futures are foreclosed or disappeared into an immanent horizon of death. Put another way, the subaltern is endangered in a future in which they are fully in power. For example, what do we mean and assume when we discuss the futures of Africa, Oceania, Asia, and Latin America as troubled? The racialized geographies hold built-in assumptions about people, places, and potentialities. As a “people without a future,” Da Silva infers, Black and Brown people are relegated to “(im) possible mode of representation” that always seek *racial emancipation* in an anterior future (ibid., xii).³ In light of Da Silva’s critiques, I observe global futurities not as a neutral “postracial” descriptor of the future but one informed by the racial significations of globality and futurity.

This triangulated relationship between race, the global, and futurity becomes apparent in whitewashed notions of future that deny people of color a viable future or criminalize their futures vis-à-vis white Europeans (Schultz 2019; Shahjahan and Edwards 2021). There is something problematic in “white apocalyptic futures” that conjecture survival or death for “all” in ways that overlook the subordinate or subtended status of nonwhites (Mitchell and Chaudhury 2020). In mainstream end-of-the-world scenarios, BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) are put in the

³ She calls the forces that bring exteriority and interiority together productive *nomos* and interiorized *poesis*.

position of collateral damage or sacrificial lambs in a collapsing economic world-system, one still hell-bent on protecting the properties of whiteness. Critical scholars are attuned to the (im)possibility of embracing “lively practices of mobility and hybridity” for the most marginalized (ibid., 321).

Building solidarities across future orientations and practices of relationality fleshes out fugitive “undercommons” (Harney and Moten 2013) and “otherwise worlds” (Crawley 2017). Afrofuturism is a cultural movement that promotes themes of science, technology, and astronomy. It posits Black people in-between the spaces of marginalization and “hegemonic” globalization (Mazrui 1999). The concept draws on Africans notions of *harambee* (Swahili for “all pull together”) or *sankofa* (Twi for “go back and get it”), remixing the future/past by infusing Black storytelling and memory to resist symbolic annihilation as well as collect lost narratives. Examples of *sankofa* include comic book superheroes who want to protect and save humanity even when they are dealt so much racism and dehumanization (as seen in the revival of the first Black superhero, Lion Man, to the Marvel’s Ghost Light). *Tales of the Orishas* is a graphic novel that gives a modern take on Afro-Brazilian legends with Yoruba origins. Drawn from the diasporic religion of Candomblé, mythic stories from the Bahia people are transformed into tales of powerful deities able to unite all Black people on Earth.

The stories of Black superheroes deploy liberation technology, offering possibilities for the future for Black people (and readers) as active participants in shaping human possibility, beyond past circumstances and present realities (Jennings and Fluker 2019). Carving a space for Black humanity to be free, Afrofuturism as emancipatory practice and unapologetic self-expression can be found in hip-hop and funk music from artists like Parliament to Outkast (Bradley 2021). The work of these artists resonates with global strands of Afrofuturism, and portrays global futurities from a Black lens.

Global futurities become most apparent when distinct worldviews meet one another within a multiverse of struggle. The impulses of these political struggles reorder the way we think, act, and feel about the global order. Their goal is dis/re-orientation to counterpoise the “timeframes of modern colonizing states as well as the self-historicizing, self-perpetuating futurities of their nations” (Tuck and Yang 2016, 6). To break away from nationally determined futures hinges upon the notion of justice as always deferred and desired. What demands for redress are forgotten or lost in the path toward the future?

My oscillating sense of global futurities unites divergent bodies of knowledge to find their application in the field of global studies (Zaragocin 2023). This critical intervention documents the messiness and difficulty of approaching the topic as an “object of study” from a transdisciplinary or even anti-disciplinary perspective. The following examples of (global) futurities provide merely a guiding reference

point in a fluid site of exploration defined by flux, care, fragility, solidarity, and openness to change. They dismiss the overall perception of the future as bound up with quantifiable socioeconomic indices like poverty, mortality, and wealth that global studies scholar Eve Darian-Smith (2016) indicates “mismeasure” humanity based on a developmentalist paradigm that privileges European progress and security. We do not all share one universalized global future, but we (and I use the word “we” judiciously) are part of a plethora of futurities that overlap.

The coloniality of power makes it hard to view a sustainable future for Latin America or the Americas (Quijano 2000). Civilization “transitions” are never mindful of the ecologies of emergence and quotidian concerns of those people excluded from power. Global futurities then signal a “future with dignity” and creative autonomy for the persecuted and pauperized, instead of catering to the needs of the affluent. The concept attends to feminist critiques that spotlight the colonial/modern gender system that utilizes the reproductive material labor of women and feminized others (Lugones 2007).

Yoked to developmentalism and the primitive accumulation of capital, Latin American global futurities are upset by the unsustainability of global modernity. The positive act of futuring contrasts with de-futuring or the negation of world futures in the design of futures (Fry 2020). This dialectical tension says we must negotiate struggles for the future without a clear winner but fight for goals that benefit the impoverished (Escobar 2018). Cultural autonomy and radical interdependence are primal to the making of future just worlds. In Latin America, there exists an “extractive futurism” based on state agrobusiness and Chinese investment. Here, China as future superpower holds an outsized role in shaping what international relations scholars deem a multi-polar world. Moving beyond dichotomized views of Latin America versus China, we can track the movement of ideas and languages of what geographer Sofia Zaragocin calls Latinx feminist futurities. These futurities traffic across national borders, traversing South-South dialogues and North-South trade. Uncomfortable truths about who belongs or not are found in transnational encounters, which reveal embodied presences and rub up against (post)colonial commonsense of people and places.

One clear example of denied futurity comes from the American myth that Indigenous people are extinct if not frozen in time, stuck in the ancient past and not the technocultural future. In 2021, Mexico asked Spain and the Vatican to apologize for the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs in 1521 on its 500th anniversary. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN) put out a communiqué, noting that Indigenous people were never truly conquered or vanquished. A women-led Zapatista caravan from Chiapas went to Europe in a reverse journey of European conquistadors coming to the Americas (Schools for Chiapas 2020). It was as much a performative moment as a political one. The travelers

came bearing this message: “There is no conquest, we don’t want an apology, we continue in rebellion” (ibid.). Against the colonizing mindset of domination over all else, the Zapatistas epitomize a symbolic form of global futurities with defiant speech acts and gestures of solidarities, which pose another mode of inhabiting the world/future otherwise.

The insurgent global manifestations of these Mayan dreamscapes rise to the fore when glimpsed under world-defining contexts like free trade, which catalyzed and inspired the Zapatista uprising. For this militant autonomous group opposed to neoliberal globalization, the imaginings of the future of resistance are anchored in and animated by grassroots struggles. This edict is something the colonizers could not observe in their attempts of genocide and mass destruction of Native lifeways. In 2021, at the same time as the caravan, the Zapatistas and their leader Subcomandante Marcos in Chiapas, Mexico authored the book *Zapatista Stories for Dreaming An-Other World*. There, they reiterate the indeterminacy of Zapatista-inspired futures as providing an open horizon of justice for Indigenous communities and for all people. With Zapatismo, there is reason to believe that everything can be achieved “for many around the world oppressed by the neoliberal war against humanity” (Marcos 2022, xxxv).

This fight for (other)worldly human justice is thus both specific and general. The futurities of one group can inspire others to free their worlds, as seen in the case of the Zapatista movement. Global futurities are not isomorphic. A comparative relational approach remains paramount in the war of position against neoliberal globalization. In the next section, I engage closely with the theme of globalization and how history informs and bears upon the development of global futurities.

2 Globalization and the Futurities of History

Globalization is a term that emerged in the mid-twentieth century but came into prominence in the 1980s through Harvard business economist Theodore Levitt who analyzed the globalization of markets. Since then, the word has undergone several mutations – both positive and negative – to suggest a global culture that is unified and universal, but also mosaic-like and de-territorialized. But this homogenizing global picture glosses over the multidimensional experiences of othered groups who experience world-historical processes differently. Where does identity and group agency fit into this larger picture of world transformation?

Global studies expert Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2012) contributes much to critiques of globalization by calling out the international standardization of time, lobbying critiques against Eurocentric histories of globalization and the periodizing of globalization. Pieterse stresses that the presentism of global rationales papers over

human connectivity over millennia, and the osmosis between East and West. His analysis highlights how different civilizations played a major part in the macro-level processes of globalization. Futurities in the global sense are moments for introspection to address the omission, trivialization, condemnation, and “symbolic annihilation” of the global periphery.

Besides globality, my framing of global futurities draws from the term futurity. African American literary expert Rebecca Wanzo (2020) defines it this way: “Futurity is consistently associated with *identity*, linking ideas of what the future will look like with the belief that various groups can build *a new space* or, in our worst imaginings, *be injured by an impending world that disavows or has no place for them* (119). This definition impresses a group-oriented “right to the future.” Basing futurity on identity carves out a future world or worlds for identity-based constituencies. I zoom in on the social feelings around the futurities in North American with a global felt sense of things.

Theorists of “futurity” (as opposed to regular futurists obsessed with space travel or technological invention) attend to the nexus of identity, nation, and speculative world-building. They are sensitive to group attachments to geographies. Turtle Island is an Indigenous name for Earth/North America, which draws on the creation myths of the Lenape, Iroquois/Haudenosaunee, and Native activists. The heuristic term finds its critical purchase in the “entangled futures” of settler colonialism, U.S. militarism, and industrial pollution by big oil companies (Darian-Smith 2023). These never-ending structures of violence are erected and built atop sacred grounds of First Nations who maintain their worlds against all odds (Kim 2022).

In the conventional historiography of U.S. empire, historical events are recorded in terms of encounter, conquest, colonialism, industrialization, nation-building, imperialism, the Cold War, and globalization. Liberal humanism and the doctrine of Man as the agent of history lies at the heart of these world-changing, future-defining processes. First Peoples are left out of view, even if they are constitutive to the U.S. imperial project of perpetuating settler colonial futures. By centering Native agency and the local voices of Hawai‘i and Guåhan, the emphasis on Indigenous epistemologies and ancestral knowledge simultaneously destabilizes and navigates colonial forms of representation. As Indigenous studies scholars Tiara Na’puti and Judy Rohrer write:

These knowledges offer ways of negotiating and blurring Western notions of time, reminding us to actively resituate and reorient ourselves toward native ways of knowing that the future lies in the ways of ancestors. In the Chamorro language, *mo’na* means “front, be first, forward.”

This understanding of *mo’na* also links with other Oceanic notions of a fluid and nonlinear history, such as in the Kanaka Maoli proverb of “*I ka wā ma mua, ka wā ma hope*” (literally, in the time in front, the time in back), which roughly translates as, “The future is found in the past.” (Na’puti and Rohrer 2017, 546)

Weaving together connections in Kanaka Maoli and Chamorro knowledge structures resist heteropatriarchal colonial structures and genealogies of erasure. It reasserts the intellectual labor of Global Indigeneity and Indigenous Feminisms, delineating historical continuities across spatiotemporal planes that enable people-to-people solidarity. This Indigenous “tending” and caretaking activate possibilities for “braiding time” and keeps intertwined Indigenous histories/futures. One example of this gendered labor of temporal looping is the Pulan Collective, composed of Chamoru women living in California who produce multimedia cookbooks as cultural memory projects. Members of the collective meet around the full moon of every month to combine intergenerational storytelling, photography, poetry, and culinary talent. The project explores how women can both decolonize and heal minds by harnessing matrilineal power and creative collaboration.

Amid the tensions between a global future made for *or* against global Others, my notion of global futurities loops back to a stratified elliptical future tense of globality, one attenuated and circumscribed by colonial history. As scholars who examine history and memory note, conceptualizations of the present future (of globalization) rely on built-in assumptions about the past, which then inform beliefs or myths about future victors or victims. History somehow always repeats itself, but the promise of global futurities waits as a potent force, presenting itself as a phantom specter reminding what horrific things humanity has done and what actions need to be taken. Globalization is a pile-up of disasters and catastrophes. Our global futurities do not have to be.

Imperial debris piles into a storm of progress that opens toward global class struggle (Lowry 2005). Following critical environmentalist Rob Wilson (2007), we can ask what “future tactics” and worlding projects are conspicuous when we historicize globalization as a lineage of local, transnational, and diasporic freedom struggles rather than an omnipotent story of powerful empires and capital flight? What global futurities are made feasible when otherized populations are allowed to partake in a futural commons and global democracy? We must forever exercise caution against “big futures” or even “big histories” that are all-encompassing, based on evolutionary myths about the human species (Graeber and Wengrow 2021). We must dispel the totalizing liberal idea of humanity as on one track. Feminist scholar Karen Barad challenges the tenets of liberal humanism finding that the “future is radically open at every turn, and this open sense of futurity does not depend on the clash or collision of cultural demands. Rather, it is inherent in the nature of “intra-activity... [where] agency is not foreclosed” (Barad 2003, 826).

Various approaches for devising global futurities are possible from an intersectional feminist lens that queers the future and queering is what enables futures to become futurities. In colonized places like Puerto Rico, Singapore, South India, and Zimbabwe, the “impossible” futures of gender/sexual minorities, Third World

women, prostitutes, and low-caste people are affixed to state agendas that disavow their personhood and “alienate” them from humanity (Oswin 2014; Ramberg 2016; Rodríguez 2014). As scholars of gender and sexuality attest, there can exist no decolonized futures for the Africa continent without freeing women and queers from sexual control. These feminist queer futurities are part of African futurities (Bhavnani and Foran 2008; Kafer 2013; Mudiwa 2020; Siebers 2006). Such futurities cannot exist without the inclusion of people with disabilities, normatively denied as part of the reproduction of the human race (Siebers 2006).

For Indigenous children kidnapped or displaced from their homes in settler nations like Canada, the United States, and Australia, the “lost generation” are construed as differently abled or disabled (with no future). Having been denied the ability speak in their language or practice customs, their futures are tied to the maintenance of the colonial past as it rubs up against stolen traditions and intergenerational trauma (Nicolas 2021; Whitt 2021). The U.S. government for example extinguished and deprived a future for the unmarried, elderly, sexually active single women, and indigent men in Tribal Communities. There is an inherent irreconcilability between what the paternalistic settler state pretends to care about (guardianship over Native bodies and land) and the heinous acts that it actively commits to sustain itself. To counteract settler temporality, Indigenous communities drive up their commitments to temporal sovereignty and historical self-determination (Rifkin 2017). To locate viable futures for all Indigenous groups is to think about futurities broadly and particularly within translocal horizons of struggles and efforts of repatriation.

The cross-over effects of globally interdependent colonial formations and interconnected struggles are found in the Levant. Here, the conflict over Palestine and Israel remains ever present as a localized flashpoint of global concern. Literary scholar Amir Eshel uses the term *futurity* in relation to historical traumas for the Jewish people like the Holocaust and the contested birth of Israel (Eshel 2013). A futurist gaze, he contends, must grapple with the retrospective traumas regarding catastrophes of the past two centuries and the madness of today’s geopolitical troubles. Eshel turns to analyzing postwar writers as they revisit Israel’s political birth; their intellectual stories consider Israel’s identity within a Jewish diasporic public sphere.

Thinking beyond the Jewish predicament of posttraumatic diasporic time, I muse on the “fugitive futurities” for internally displaced Palestinians (Ritskes 2017). The protracted struggles of Palestine and possibilities for its liberation can be found in the Palestinian youth movement, whose transnational organizing draws on the language of hip-hop and anti-Apartheid resistance. Says ethnic studies scholars Loubna Qutami and Omar Zahzah, “To fight for the future *and* the history of Palestine means to refuse consent” to being incorporated into the territoriality and discourse

of colonizers (Qutami and Zahzah 2020, 77). Decolonial futurities in Palestine today are derived from theorizations from Indigenous/Black people solidarities around the world and global progressive politics. They strive to resist colonial nation-state formations and focus on specific epistemologies of land. To further situate global futurities within the nexus of earthly resources and colonialism, I now turn to the issue of the Anthropocene.

3 Global Consciousness and the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is a term that describes the world-changing geological impact of human activity upon Earth since the Industrial Revolution. But according to critics, the very dating of the Anthropocene in the mid-twentieth century discounts the colonial era as the formative moment. Genocide provided the “seismic shift” to set off the unequal power relations now enacted on an unprecedented global scale. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people do not simply happen to stumble upon the future, insist cultural critics Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, and rationally move towards it through the traditional phases of industrial scientific management. They remain entrenched in an “amalgamation of conditions that ask us to consider what we are writing into the body of the earth” (Davis and Todd 2017, 770).

First Nations are violently pulled into planetary force fields of power, where they are forced to confront a “global burning” and effacement of Indigenous place-thought or ways of knowing (Darian-Smith 2022). Thus, the Anthropocene, as it is conventionally thought, is concerned primarily with *environmental* destruction, and to a secondary degree with *technological* change. Indigenous environmental know-how counteract typical technoscientific solutions to the Anthropocene by offering archives of the future based on Native knowledge and past-ness (Montenegro 2019).

Before the Anthropocene entered popular parlance, it was the Cold War and the threat of radioactive exposure from nuclear warfare or industry that appeared to seal the (doomed) fate of the human planet. But the theme of global-scale ecological destruction gets usurped stories from Native People. One comes from Russell Jim from the Yakama Nation, an Indigenous thinker well-known for pressuring the U.S. federal government to clean up nuclear waste. When Jim was attending a meeting where policymakers discussed how they would inform humans in the distant future about the danger of high-level radioactive waste buried underground, Jim told meeting participants not to worry, because “We’ll tell them” (Ishiyama and Tallbear 2022, 194–95).

The quotation is suggestive of the far future (or ongoing present) in which Indigenous people will still be around to warn everyone of danger, because they

were the first exposed to it. Later generations will know out radioactive waste but those great minds and spirits “will still be there to fulfill their responsibilities to care for the land in 100,000 years” (ibid.). At present, in a time when battles over oil drilling and pipes on Native lands are reaching a peak, Indigenous communities are regrouping as they have always done, fostering justice narratives to “guide social planning and policy making after settler hierarchies of life fail us” (ibid.). Conversations about future scenarios and existential threats toward the human race under the U.S. imperial state passes over a longer view of Native presence and *survivance* as well as Indigenous-settler relations over time (Vizenor 2008).

One problem with thinking of global futurity in the singular is assuming pre-existing futures in progress and likely outcomes based on human action. Future theorist and practitioner Barbara Adam (2010) questions the future as a matter of scientific social inquiry and individualism. Adam acknowledges the presumption of the future as free resource for endless open use, one feeding into Westernized affluence. She indicates this lifestyle and economic system becomes difficult to uphold today as “past empty futures begin to impose themselves on the present, restricting choices and options... [and as] foundations for responsibility have shifted: from an exclusively individual to a collective base, from a predominantly local to a global scale.” To this point by Adam, I ask, what are our future-oriented collective responsibilities? What praxis can tend to future matters in particularized group-level modalities in the so-called Anthropocene?

With the widespread use of the term Anthropocene reaching global consciousness, the term has been thoroughly humanized and anthropomorphized to the point that it becomes almost meaningless – a buzzword of convenience. Where is the holistic intersubjective awareness of humans, non-human animals, inanimate objects, and the environment? The double bind of protecting the planet and protecting humanity puts human subjects at the center of a human-centric civilizing discourse of planetary rescue and waste-reduction, which falls in the camp of “Anthropocentric futurism” (Wong 2017). Theorizing the relationship between China and the Anthropocene, and the ways that China has been vilified as the biggest polluter in the world, Alvin Wong (2017) advocates for a study of the Anthropocene that combine geopolitics, affect theory, animal studies, and posthumanism. Global futurities are posthuman futurities.

Tackling anthropocentrism requires wrestling with how the raced, classed, and gendered body has been instrumental in the making of the Anthropocene. Black women’s wombs and enslaved reproductive labor secured white planters’ dreams of prosperity, propping up the modern world and financial systems that proved destructive to the biosphere and to Black female bodies. At the neoliberal “end of history,” Africans and women of color must learn to shape-shift in a harsh context that wants to disappear them. Black feminist futurities enact and repose the limits

of the human. Excavating “archives of the future” by mining the past, contemporary artists like Kara Walker play with the human form through drawn shadow figures. Through these illustrations, she helps us meditate on the end of patriarchy and post-slavery, the liberation of Black female reproduction, multi-species solidarity with non-human animals and other organisms, and the cessation of capitalist consumption as well as environmental degradation (Carby 2020, 25). The global figure of the future is a gendered racialized “she” who must stay afloat in times of global crisis, grasping for a future that she can call her own. Global futurities hinge upon healing the histories of trauma in which people were treated as less-than-human (Khan and Schwebach 2023).

By using the term global futurities, I enact a thought experiment to ponder timescapes and historical trajectories anew. It prioritizes life-affirming projects for the world’s most vulnerable in the context of human-induced climate change (Amoureux and Reddy 2021). Geographer Kathryn Yusoff reminds us that entire *worlds* have ended before for many groups. In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, she brings forth another perspective to the apocalyptic picture of the Anthropocene. Through what she calls geologic subjectivity and architectures at an inhuman impasse, Yusoff embraces “intimacies with the human” (and posthuman) instead of catering to a white liberal geology that formed through an “indifferent structure of extraction, indifferent to the specifics of people and places” (Yusoff 2018, n.p.). This critical take on the Anthropocene puts Black geophysics and affective structures of exploitation at the center of conversation about the long-term material effects of extractive fossil capitalism and ecocide. Convenings like Eco Afro Futures gather writers and environmental scientists to address the intersections of ecology, Afrotuturism, and sustainability. Hosted by the Critical Ecology Lab, these meetings suggest that greener futures are Black ones too.

The Anthropocene’s future lies across the racialized bodies, which bore the heaviest brunt of chemical dumping and material violence enacted against the earth. What can repair or represent those bodies? Black feminist poetics promises liberation, freeing us from limited disembodied concepts of futurity and the politics of separability/difference (Da Silva 2016). Their symbolic registers engage the uneven sovereignties and distribution of harm. In an anti-Black world, the refrain of the Black Lives Matter movement offers a reminder of the *matter*ing of Blackness and Black well-being (Zakiyyah 2020), an abolitionist future where Black joy, pain, and care are focalized (Harris 2022).

By heeding the call to picture more than one Anthropocene, I can parse out more than one global future through multiple states of emergencies. These emergencies appeared when antidemocratic, racist, sexist, xenophobic, and nationalist forces exploded during COVID-19 pandemic. The future yet-to-come demands a radical

politics of co-becoming rather than mere co-existence, futural relations based on transparency, love, and openness. These are qualities that are much needed when dealing with a global health crisis.

4 COVID-19 and Pandemic Futurities

In this section, I reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on my concept of global futurities. In early 2020, I was preparing to teach my “Global Futures” undergraduate college course when the global pandemic erupted. I thought that it was ironic that the “future” of education, which included online Zoom and remote learning, brought an immediate change to my syllabus and curriculum planning. The global future was upon us, but built-in social inequalities led to discrepancies in academic achievement and student learning. It equally exposed gaps in health care and mortalities for various racialized and minoritized groups.

Black, Brown, and Indigenous people died in larger numbers than whites from the novel coronavirus. After the brutal murder of George Floyd and other African Americans by police, global calls for social justice, prison abolition, and economic liberation gained popularity. Online pundits commented that the world was experiencing multiple pandemics, as hate crimes against Asians spiked in various countries due to a “racial pandemic.” Medical and educational futures, post/racial futures, the future of work, democratic futures, authoritarian fascist futures, and neoliberal capitalist futures all came crashing down together. How do these global futures shape the idea of global futurities?

The unfolding of a pandemic meant the “uneven distribution of futurity,” as difficult-to-solve emergencies stacked on top of one another (Grove et al. 2022). Global futurities qua pandemic futurities point to competing projections of what could happen to various constituents. These futurities are always contained within other futures projects related to nation or identity. The fate of countries in the Global South without vaccination seem to be laid in the hands of wealthy whiter nations. When a global pandemic required all to be vaccinated, some countries hoarded their medicines refusing to share. The “post-COVID future” made it clear that we are an interlinked global community, but whose futures are (dis)enabled?

One fulcrum of concern that holds competing futurities together involves the wonderment about what makes us human and how we reach for a post-human (Other)world, one full of infinite possibility and justice for all creatures like bats, civets, and other animals blamed for introducing coronaviruses to humans. The intimate biological connections between the spread of SARS-CoV-2 among Homo sapiens and non-human creatures breached the potential for not only zoonotic spillover of diseases, but also for multispecies solidarity and “posthuman futures” (Goldstein 2022). As the pandemic made clear, we are all entering new cognitive

territory, where humans are now made fully aware of their impact on the lives of animals.

The pandemic stoppages of work and travel and trade made it also seem like globalization had reached a stand-still or a reconfiguration. According to social theorist Manfred Steger (2022), the pandemic did not augur the end of globalization or even the Anthropocene. He posits that it presents a form of re-globalization, a reorganization of global power. But how do the phenomena of de-globalization and re-globalization as they were articulated during the pandemic relate to global futurities? How do “unforeseen” events such as pandemics employ uneven global narratives about the future?

The redistribution of power raises questions about a multipolar world. Many political commentators believe that the United States, a driving force of contemporary capitalist globalization, will no longer be the dominant superpower. Rather, it will be an empire in decline, bogged down by competition from China and other emerging powers. However, this geopolitical rendering of the future world order does not account for the centuries of colonial violent destruction and Indigenous displacement that supposedly the U.S. a superpower in the first place. With the political fallout from the pandemic under President Donald Trump, the United States failed miserably, strengthening accusations that it was an empire in decline. With ongoing (de)formations of U.S. settler colonialism, there is no simple wishing away of what feminist theorists like Katherine McKittrick and Sylvia Wynter call “plantation futures” for “livable futurities” (King 2019). The ghosts of the colonial past are inextricably linked to sustainable global futurities in the current day.

In the denotation of global futurities, the “global” might become another shorthand for the “world as a whole” but my coupling of this word with futurities recognizes an intermingled configuration of a pandemic “viral world,” one in which global relations are simultaneous and asynchronous, where the problems of the past are accelerated by present future crises (Bui 2024). Posing the COVID-19 discourse about a “virus that does not discriminate” and “we are all in the same boat” perpetuates a singular story of resolution that entraps social collectives into a totalizing mindset and action agenda. This is a monolithic pandemic world picture that neglects diverse futurities. But as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, “anti-globalist” and “ahistorical” agents of nationalism and fascism have resurged to end viable life for the less privileged and exacerbate “impoverished” futures (Goldstein 2012). Therefore, global futurities and its various strands of thought bridge disparate ideas of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia (Miller 2015).⁴ Their gathering is an invitation for future political education.

⁴ The term heterotopia comes from Michel Foucault. For more on how it is globalized see Miller (2015).

Narratives of global futurities are produced from vectors and streams of populist knowledge. They draw on necro/biopolitical concerns around who is allowed to live or die, who is killed and injured. Positive examples of communalism and mutual aid throughout the pandemic offered a form of epistemic decolonization, allowing room for surviving (and thriving) via processes of interdependence. These domains operate at radically contingent scales of co-relating. They undermine colonial-capitalist hierarchal relations built on protective egoism and distanced rationalism. When we bring these terms together, the global and futurities, we expand our given worldly sense of space-time to mark specificity not universality. Recognizing global futurities – as an assemblage of sub- and micro-futures – underscores radical conditions for freedom that are not narrow in scope.

Refugees and forced migrants experienced the worst time in the pandemic as countries shut their borders to outsider. The impossibility of finding asylum or applying for citizenship presents a bleak future under COVID-19. Amid the worst health crisis in a century, these displaced people faced a hopeless demoralized prospect for life (Poole and Riggan 2020). To reach beyond the totality of pessimism, I take a kaleidoscopic viewpoint toward refugee life that surpasses conventional scholarly frameworks by identifying ways that refugees “jump borders” and global scales (Bui 2021). In this regard, refugees are not global victims, they are global agents of change. This change does not follow a traditional path. Refugee futurities should not be invested in recycling the nation and family, but rather partakes in queer dis/inheritance and aesthetic critiques that upend the heteronormative ways we inhabit the world (Nguyen 2020).

To discuss aesthetic frames further, I return to the theme of Afrofuturism. Coined in the early 1990s, Afrofuturism has undergone a rapid expansion, especially with the literary renaissance of science-fiction writer Octavia Butler and the enormous popularity of the Hollywood blockbuster movie *Black Panther*, which repositions Black-majority sites in Haiti and Africa as high-tech and powerful, instead of always in-crisis and ungovernable. Afrofuturism builds a framework for recovering Afro-diasporic histories and mounts “counter-futures” through comics, fashion, film, digital productions, music, and religion.⁵ It reflects a pan-African creative ethos and dark philosophies on Black people’s future vis-à-vis “their own agency or significance in relation to humanity or other life forms” (Brooks, Taylor, and Baham 2019, 3). Literary expert Hugh Charles O’Connell (2020) observes that

5 A related term to Afrofuturism is Afropessimism, which accounts for civil society’s dependence on anti-Black systemic violence and the impossibility of total Black freedom under those conditions. Bridging the utopian impulses of Afrofuturism and the anti-positivist goals of Afropessimism requires little feats of the imagination when one recalls the science fiction work of Critical Race Theory founder Derrick Bell.

Afrofuturism thinks deeply through the limits of utopianism for the Black people within the abyss of time. Afrofuturism therefore transcends idealist futures to “tarry with the event of futurity after the single, instrumental centered Future has been lost.” What O’Connell and others are saying is that an atomized global future is not possible for Black people when their futures have been attenuated and abridged for so long.

The COVID-19 pandemic inferred a bleak future for Black people, but according to Afrofuturists, Blackness can never be fully captured by given categories of essence/value or by signifiers of difference/otherness. The radical force and properties of Blackness chart a spiritual quest to grapple with Black life at the end of the world as we know it and how to remake the world (Da Silva 2014). At the end of this world exists an unbounded affirmative space for “a person’s black state of consciousness, released from the confining and crippling slave or colonial mentality, becomes aware of the multitude and varied possibilities and probabilities within the universe” (Rollins 2015). The universe as a social construct bears import for plotting global futurities in ways that do not replicate space colonialism and the dream of capitalists to conquer the cosmos (amid an abiding fear aliens will conquer us).

Ethnic studies scholar Fantasia Painter maintains that if Earth is to be incorporated into an interstellar jurisdiction, then the moral anxieties related to Indigenous nationhood and resistance might help to devise plans to address interplanetary colonization. If humans must fight aliens, how does this bear similarity to or draw inspiration from Native nations facing off against world-destroying colonial powers? How does the narrative about engineering the world’s future towards new colonial ends relate to Global Indigeneity?

It is imperative to consider the metaphors and allegories through which space aliens and fictions overlay real colonial histories: “European Americans become Indigenous (to Earth)... where Indigenous peoples are disappeared and settlers are Indigenous” (Painter 2021, 132). In these speculative futures that double as illusory chimeras, scenarios of alien invasions are based on existing settler colonial imaginaries and racial logics. Painter speaks to the logistical nature of colonization centuries and how references to Christopher Columbus utilize the realities and mechanics of the colonization of Native American land. She says “The first moments of arrival and contact may define an epoch. There may even be dramatic music, big explosions, or alien germs, but if alien arrival is anything like the colonization of the Americas, that will only be the beginning... What happens the day after the apocalypse?” (ibid.). Euro-American speculative thinkers and futurists exploit (and ignore) Native American political legal history to envisage ecological and economic futures based on conquest. Settler speculation about “our” world ending by foreign invaders reproduce settler colonial violence. Says Painter, this conjecture of future time must be decolonized to protect Indigenous futurities as well as global futurities.

To relate this to migrant and Black futurities, I draw on the artistic work of Alan Pelaez Lopez and their book *Intergalactic Travels: Poems from a Fugitive Alien*. In this collection of poetry, the former undocumented migrant from Oaxaca attends to the futures of queer trans Black Indigenous (Zapotec and Mixtec) people and seeks to interrupt settler-futures. With prose that operates on an intimate personal level but reads like a manifesto or call to arms, the artist asks about migrant futures as a matter of loving and mourning in the age of displacement through the prose poem, “An Artist Manifesto for Black &/or Indigenous Folk Surviving Empire”:

I believe in the Ghanaian concept of *Sankofa*: we must always go back and get that which we have lost. What we have lost as African-diasporic people, as Indigenous people, as queer people, as trans people, and as undocumented people is memory.

We have lost our memory.

Resistance must no longer look like survival. We must live in order to resist. Dancers, DJ's and singers will be critical for the revolution. The beat of the drum, as our Indigenous Ancestors have taught us, is the beat of our heart. (Lopez 2020, 99)

In this passage, Lopez calls on artists to protect both the memory and the future of the people. Embedded in this elegy are urgent requests that stir the heart to action. It asks so much and so little of us at the same. It requests that the world loves all the aliens back, those who have survived a changing world that has ignored them for so long. Futurities in this regard is not an intellectual abstraction but a form of loving documentation and ethical storytelling with fierce commitment to truth-telling and honesty about how we all live and must live.

5 Conclusions

The world's planners and thinkers worry about our global future and the fate of humanity writ large. As they should be, given the horrible state of things, but these expressions of dread and fears about the future orbit around particular nodes of power, knowledge, and desire that often do not account for many other perspectives or modalities of thinking/existence/becoming/relating. I am a global studies scholar who writes about refugees and displacement and international affairs, but I live on and write from a university that sits on un-ceded lands of the Acjachemen and Tongvar. Tongvar means “our world,” while Acjachemen is understood to be many things like the people of a village. Its meaning denotes the relationship to a heap of animated things. What does it mean to think of global futures through another group's sense of “our world” and the relationship to the world's living things from Indigenous framings?

There stands the prevailing assumption all human beings are getting closer, knitted into one world society through the cascading crises of globalization, the Anthropocene, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, global crises bring us together. While this presumption is not false in some sense, rather than take global space-time and consciousness as a given, I adopt the term global futurities to mark the ways that marginalized othered communities are rendered as abject objects as well as agential subjects in the making of the future. My framing provides semantic grounds for discussing a range of issues related to identity formation and intersubjectivity across scales of globality. Within the broad outlook of the future, the term global futurities recognizes the divergences, nuances, unknowns, contradictions, and fissures of our world(s). These futurities are worldings that project sustainable and emancipatory futures for minoritized groups with visions that look to the past to build up recurring movements for liberation.

With the feared ending of all life due to pandemics or other threats, global futurities as a framework invites different modes and genres of inquiry within global studies and other fields by redefining history/development/progress and revising concepts of time; developing rhetorical communicative frames of resistance and conceiving discursive technologies to counter colonial epistemes; imagining alternative designs for the world and acknowledging a pluriverse of political struggle. Emphasizing future-making as world-making means the future and temporal space of the globe are not evenly distributed. Global futurities qua global historicities upset the amnesias of colonial empires and scientific predictions of mass death for all living beings.

At this juncture in global-historical time, mainstream international appeals to the future have worked to expand the program of colonial modernity and perform the act of further negating with disastrous results for the Other (refugees, sexual minorities, Black communities, Indigenous Tribes etc.). Topics to address include historical futurist projects from Indigenous Nations, the global peripheries and Global South, the critical aesthetics of Afrofuturists, and many others. The “future” holds different value for the world’s subalterns, and so global futurities indicates a direction for “new global studies” that can encompass a range of topics like (post) humanism, Indigenous autonomy, Afrofuturism, and settler temporality. Global futurities mark the beginning and end of efforts to heal the planet, reshaping it in favor of (other)worldly justice.

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