

South African experiences in a restructured post-apocalyptic geo-political future as depicted in speculative fiction

> **Irikidzayi Manase**

University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

manasei@ufs.ac.za (ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7720-4464>)

ABSTRACT

This article draws on science fiction's aesthetics of instability and multiple perspectives that disrupt the dominance of a Euro-American narrative voice (Langer 2011), as well as decolonial concepts such as coloniality, decentring and epistemic freedom (Ngũgĩ 1986, 1992; Quijano 2007; Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018), to analyse the human condition and geopolitical patterns reflected in post-disaster worlds as depicted in Gillian Armstrong's "Elton" (2011), Abigail Godsell's (2011) "Taal" and Sarah Lotz's "Marine Drive, Durban Beachfront" (2014). The notion of multiple perspectives and contexts, and Smith's (2012) disruptive view that science fiction occurs everywhere, are used as lenses to examine the decolonised literary imagination. Ngũgĩ argues (1986, 1992), that such an imagination moves the literary setting and vision from the Euro-American centre to another centre, in this case to a speculative post-apocalyptic South African future. The article argues that the depicted literary future and unfolding human experiences enable the constitution of decolonised literary imaginings and a cultural geography that restructure the current domination of geo-political and spatial mappings by the Global North. This restructured imagining places South Africa, and by extension Africa, at the centre of a speculative vision of humanity's sense of itself, knowledge production and agency, which are needed for the future survival of both the environment and other global inhabitants.

Keywords: coloniality, decentring, decolonisation, domination by the Global North, epistemic freedom, speculative fiction.

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Decolonising Speculative Fiction

Introduction

This article examines the human experiences and senses of a new geopolitical world depicted in three speculative short stories: “Elton” (Armstrong 2011), “Taal” (Godsell 2011) and “Marine Drive, Durban Beachfront” (Lotz 2014). It argues that the aesthetics of speculative fiction, especially in works located in the South African post-apocalyptic tradition, together with decolonial scholarship, enable us to imagine a future for the country that is marked by agency and can redefine the country’s future geopolitical orientation. The stories depict experiences that disrupt the geopolitical linkages, senses, ways of knowing, and knowledge production aligned to the Euro-American centre. They re-centre all of these, constituting a decolonised imaginary South African world.

The analysis first conflates the postcolonial notion of science fiction’s aesthetics of instability and multiple perspectives, which disrupt the dominance of the Euro-American narrative voice (Langer 2011:5-10), and the implication of postcolonial science fiction’s setting in non-western worlds and futures that underscore the notion that science fiction and the future occur everywhere (Smith 2012:4-6). This feature of postcolonial science fiction is, secondly, linked to residual colonial cultural, political, geopolitical and other forms of domination, defined as the coloniality of power, as well as cultural and global coloniality (Quijano 2007; Grosfoguel 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Quijano, Grosfoguel, and Ndlovu-Gatsheni postulate a decolonial framework for how the former colonised should disentangle themselves and achieve freedom from this domination. This decolonial disentanglement is also based on Ngūgĩ’s (1986, 1992) notion of moving the centre of the literary setting, vision, and culture. It also draws on Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2018) idea of epistemological decolonisation, in which literary imaginaries, knowledge production and ideas about what it means to be human, as well as agencies seeking humanity’s survival, deviate from positions held by Euro-American and other recent global imperial powers, such as China, to reflect a shifted centre located in formerly colonised worlds, in this case an imaginary South African future.

Existing ideas and definitions of the genre of science fiction and fantasy (collectively termed ‘speculative fiction’), enable us to discern new and multiple perceptions of human experiences and the nature of the world/s they inhabit. The perceptions are constituted from the depictions of the way societies engage with environmental and other disasters; alien intrusions and contact with or travel to other worlds and galaxies; and non-human and new technology (Seed 2005:1-9). The genre mostly depicts experiences in alternative and/or future worlds in order to ‘defamiliarize and

restructure our experience of our own present' (Jameson 2005:286). Readers are transported imaginatively to science-fictional and other worlds that are linked to, or compel them to think about, their present conditions and the possibilities they can create. The notion of possibilities, described by Jameson (2005:286) as 'restructuring of experiences', is significant as it chimes with my intention to unpack how the selected speculative stories reflect decolonial imaginaries. The geopolitical sensibilities of speculative fiction, whether it is African or originates from other previously colonised countries (Langer 2011), also lead to the constitution of multiple but specific understandings of human experiences in the depicted worlds as they relate with other worlds and the effects of geopolitical and cultural forces on humanity's ways of being, thinking, reading, and relating with the world. The stories discussed here are set in a futurist post-apocalyptic South Africa that is connected to former colonial and Global North countries, such as Britain and the United States of America, and Asian economic giants, such as China and Japan. In this way, the stories form part of the body of African science fiction, which is defined by Bould (2013:7) within broad contexts to include 'the treatment of Africa in sf [in relation to ...] the relationships among sf, imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism, globalization and Empire'. I add to Bould's definition the treatment of Africa in relation to aspects associated with these historical moments and conditions, such as coloniality and decolonisation, which have a bearing on the decolonial concepts guiding this study. The key decolonial concepts considered here focus on the need to draw on African physical and epistemic agencies to achieve an economic, political, and cultural disconnection and valorisation of Africa as the centre of these agencies. This resonates with what Ngũgĩ (1986, 1999) terms (from the titles of his books) a decolonisation of the mind and moving the centre to Africa from Europe and America, and by extension, China and Japan which, though not considered originally by Ngũgĩ, are relevant because of the imperial influence they have on the continent and the rest of the Global South. These concepts also link with disrupting the idea that 'the [epistemological] centre is Europe and North America', as argued by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:20). I am interested in the significance of speculative fiction in mapping this possibility of a restructured present or future: specifically a future South Africa, imagined as the centre of a restructured, globalised, geospatial and political world. This also invokes Maldonado-Torres's (2011:3) argument that, 'decolonization is relevant in the present and will continue to be [...] so in the considerable future'.

The literary history of speculative fiction is entwined with the late nineteenth-century European conquest of Africa, Asia and other parts of the world and the twentieth-to-twenty-first-century Euro-American and Asian (Japanese and Chinese) expansion

of their cultures into the Global South (Smith 2012:2). Speculative literature from this literary history traditionally valorises the voices, imaginings and cultures from the Euro-American and Asian regions at the expense of those from indigenous communities in countries such as Canada and those from Africa (Langer 2011:3-9; Moynagh & Cornum 2020:8-9). I extend this view, drawn from postcolonial science fiction studies, to the way selected South African speculative short fiction works depict or invoke a decolonial turn in the imaginaries of the human condition and Africa's geo-political relations with the Euro-American and Asian world. In fact, traditional science fiction's setting in and use of the Euro-American aesthetics make the decolonial analytic discourses of the twenty-first century relevant and, indeed, urgent. These discourses highlight the reality of Euro-American domination, as reflected in lopsided economic, political and cultural geographic relations as the coloniality of power, culture and knowledge production as aptly defined by Quijano (2007:171):

Coloniality of power is based upon 'racial' social classification of the world population under Eurocentered world power. But coloniality of power is not exhausted in the problem of 'racist' social relations. It pervaded and modulated the basic instances of the Eurocentered capitalist/colonial/modern world power to become the cornerstone of this coloniality of power.

The late twentieth-to-twenty-first-century Japanese and Chinese domination, in the form of political, economic, technological and cultural influence, adds to the Euro-American coloniality discussed above. Global South countries, such as South Africa, need to disentangle themselves from this latter-day coloniality. Accordingly, this study's analysis of the selected stories is based on a conflation of the characteristics of postcolonial speculative fiction and decolonial concepts.

The above-mentioned postcolonial science fiction and decolonial concepts are considered in the events and human experiences in "Taal" by Godsell, "Marine Drive, Durban Beach front" by Lotz and "Elton" by Armstrong. The stories describe the characters' fears and anxieties, senses of vulnerability and subsequent agencies as they deal with the aftermath of environmental and global nuclear implosions as part of war. The tropes of post-environmental and global war experiences and thematic focuses, such as identity construction, history and position in the post-disaster world, treated here, resonate with white anxieties about their social and economic status, relations with other races, and role in a post-apocalyptic future South Africa as argued by Thurman (2015) and Joseph-Vilain (2021).

This article focuses on the experiences of South African characters in post-apocalyptic time-spaces defined by the geopolitical and economic designs of the

Euro-American and Asian giants to determine the possible and futurist geopolitical relations that they invoke. The analysis considers how the stories invoke possibilities of being in the South African world that is decentred from the influence of the Euro-American centre and other global powers, such as China and Japan. I assume that the aesthetics of African speculative fiction play a significant role in depicting the way the centre, consisting of Euro-American and Asian powers such as Japan and China, is shifted and provincialised to the same stature as formerly marginalised countries or the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:17-18) as reflected in the specific human experiences and geo-political worlding portrayed in selected South African post-apocalyptic fiction.

A post-nuclear future and new agencies against global coloniality of power in Godsell's "Taal"

"Taal" is set in a post-nuclear implosion future world of the 2050s in a central Johannesburg that is enduring various forms of repression under a Chinese government. Godsell (2011:16) portrays this geopolitical power-dynamics evident in a fictional Johannesburg, and by extension South Africa, thus:

Since they'd pushed the Americans into nuclear war, showered Europe with fallout in a bigger fuckup than Chernobyl and chosen South Africa as a home away from home things had changed. Now that the Chinese 'Government' *had* arrived and taken over, everything was different.

The story portrays a bleak, foreign-dominated future Johannesburg. The author invokes a sombre end of the day-time and the transition of the city centre into an abandoned realm — 'in a few hours the city centre would be dead' (Godsell 2011:15) — and reflects a ubiquitous presence of signage and news bytes of propaganda broadcasted on the screen of a small space-ship that is floating around, reminding residents of the presence of Chinese domination. In addition, the residents are subjected to heavy surveillance, both by the army and a roving 'government cleanup crew' (Godsell 2011:20) that cleans up the anti-Chinese graffiti and guerrilla attacks launched in the city. Finally, the story's plot depicts the activities of some urban residents, such as Callie and a recent recruit called Surreash, who are engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Chinese colonialists. Callie attacks a state building in which she kills a fellow South African, now working as a soldier for the new Chinese government, leaves graffiti with an anti-imperial statement and a dedication to the killed soldier in Afrikaans, and rushes to the getaway car driven by Surreash so they can both escape to the liveable margins of the city.

Godsell's futurist depiction of post-nuclear disaster experiences in Johannesburg locates South Africa and Africa within a global imperial geopolitical order that, as the story develops, expresses the way this speculative fiction treats decolonialisation. First, the story portrays (in a manner resonating with a postcolonial cartography of unequal geopolitical relations) Johannesburg and South Africa as located on a global margin and under the influence of a colonial power, in this case a repressive Chinese rule. The trope of an ecological crisis (realised in the fight for access to natural resources, which in this case is oil) between China and the United States of America (USA) and the resultant nuclear implosion that destroys the USA and leaves Europe contaminated by nuclear waste to the extent that China is forced to conquer South Africa, is used to locate a future Johannesburg within a foreign-centric relation, this time not Euro-American-centric (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:20-21). Godsell describes the nuclear war and resultant imperial domination that renders South Africa a minor node (symbolised by a cultural geography of fear in a world threatened by nuclear warfare) thus (Godsell 2011:18):

Oil war between America and China, two of the world's leaders shooting each other to shit over the last dregs of fuel [...] The President had been scared enough to sign away his power for the promise of security.

Future Johannesburg is now ruled by Chinese imperial overlords, who control the people using the military and an intrusive surveillance system, and a manipulative cultural and political propaganda project to dominate the 'scared' (Godsell 2011:18) nation. The Chinese manipulation of the weak, terrified and innocent is aptly symbolised by the young Asian South African Afrikaans-speaking young man who joined the colonial army and is killed in an attack by Callie. The conquest and associated military and political manipulation resonate with Grosfoguel's (2011) notion of global coloniality, where nations from the Global South continue to suffer oppression and exploitation by the Global North, and now Asian global giants such as China. Godsell depicts the multiple ways in which South African characters seek to dislodge Chinese control, reassert their sense of dignity and cultural values, in what Maldonado-Torres (2011:1) terms the 'decolonization of [...] power and being', mostly through the trope of urban guerilla activities.

The story treats the decolonial strand developed from the futurist mapping of the Chinese "take-over" of Johannesburg. Resistant characters such as Callie and Suresh, as part of the 'people [who are] not scared' (Godsell 2011:18), launch an urban insurgency targeting government infrastructure to decolonise fictional Johannesburg and South Africa physically from Chinese neocolonialism. This agency is depicted as going hand-in-hand with character transformation. Callie, apart from not being scared, exudes the requisite boldness needed to search for freedom from

anything colonial and/or Chinese. After shooting the Chinese soldier, she is described as having ‘balled up her fists’ (Godsell 2011:18), a symbol of power to the people, and affirms that she never cared for the imperial power as ‘[s]he had not invited the fucking Chinese’ (Godsell 2011:18), and escapes from the building and the dead soldier after leaving a graffiti message on the wall reading “‘Nkosi Sikele[le Africa]” – *God Bless Africa*’ (Godsell 2011:20) (original emphasis). Callie and other urban guerrillas indicate, on the one hand, the physical war of decolonisation, and, on the other, the constitution of an understanding of the existing coloniality and practical action unfolding from the position of the colonised South African. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:17) calls this striving for epistemic freedom, saying that ‘Epistemic freedom is fundamentally about the right to think, [...] interpret the world [...] from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism [in this case, global Chinese-centrism]’. The story suggests that complete decolonisation must include both an active decolonial war and the crafting of ideas, senses of being and a disconnection from global imperial networks based on the realities located in the margins and provinces seeking this freedom.

The story also depicts the resistant citizens of Godsell’s post-apocalyptic Johannesburg attempting to disentangle themselves from global cultural coloniality in the form of Chinese manipulation of the mind and self-knowledge. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:18-21) defines this agency as a deimperialisation seeking to attain freedom from global cultural domination. The Chinese use a floating ship/zeppelin to spread propaganda seeking to brainwash the colonised South Africans into believing that the new government and its imperial culture are a necessary change and the epitome of social political progress. Thus, ‘a Propaganda blimp pass[ing] overhead’ (Godsell 2011:15) had a screen that periodically reflected the messages (Godsell 2011:15-18):

*“Understanding that, in your country,”
You have a hatred of violence”
“and heavy handed policing,”
“But please do remember that THINGS HAVE CHANGED.”*

The above text is ironic in that the change has brought about authoritarian Chinese rule. In addition, the floating propaganda ship symbolises the incessant imperial disinformation, which the residents of the future Johannesburg have to endure, as the Chinese entrench themselves in power and control the ideological and cultural senses of the citizens. The depth of these repressive and ideological attempts to control the citizens of Johannesburg (and South Africa more broadly), is depicted in the banning of Afrikaans that is broadcasted through the image of a poster with the slogan ‘To Hell with Afrikaans’. The image of the poster is followed by the above

text message, as if to underscore that the new change is based on the suppression of local cultural values.

The centrality of language as a site of contestation in the fight against Chinese cultural coloniality is evident in the symbolism of the title of the story: “Taal”, which means language. While the title paradoxically alludes to the white Afrikaans community’s anxieties over their future survival as a distinct people (Thurman 2015), it also serves to affirm a South African language/s and sense of being, as well as the autonomy it enshrines in the face of a global threat. Ngūgĩ (1986:4-5) places language, its choice and how it is used, at the centre of the colonial project, and thus underlines a reclamation and use of vernacular languages as part of the decolonisation of the mind. Afrikaans is associated with the language of old Apartheid domination and its inclusion here alludes to the trope of white South African anxieties over their position in post-apartheid South Africa as noted above. However, the story complicates this by linking the language issue with the larger geopolitics I am concerned with and thus, its banning emblematises Chinese cultural coloniality. The resistance against the banning of Afrikaans is a symbolic indicator of the desire among colonised South Africans to fight and restore their cultural pride in the face of any domination, in this case a futurist global Chinese domination.

Futurist post-apocalyptic geographies in Sarah Lotz’s “Marine Drive, Durban Beachfront”

The story is set in the post-apocalyptic near future and opens in the South African coastal city of Durban at 08:30 am on 27 April 2034. It was published in a section of the *Sunday Times Lifestyle Magazine*, entitled “FFWD>>2034”, dedicated to speculative ‘short stories set in South Africa on April 27, 2034 [... and most] linked by a thread of current fears: the death of democracy, conquest by an imperialist China, the worsening of inequality, the pillaging of our landscape’ (Amato 2014:3). These concerns reflected the nation’s anxieties as it took stock of its progress two decades after the demise of apartheid. The story and its post-apocalyptic futurism is located within visions of the nation, as dictated by the issue’s focus. Nonetheless, I am interested in the speculative treatment of the nation in relation to fear of imperial conquest and draw on the discourses of global coloniality associated with the existing Euro-American and Chinese and Japanese global geopolitical domination as a unit of analysis of the story’s events. By pursuing these aspects of Lotz’s story, I argue that it gestures towards decolonialisation through its transportation of the reader into a future world that is recovering from a major climate apocalypse and whose geographical standing restructures Euro-American-centric geopolitical relations.

Lotz's story describes, in a surreal tone, a morning routine of breakfast preparations by the protagonist, Zelda, who lives with her son, Malan, in a beachfront apartment in a future Durban. Their attention is drawn to an incident in which refugees from a 'North America that won't be habitable for decades' (Lotz 2014:26) are attempting to escape from 'pods off [the Durban coast that] are more like floating prisons, windowless and self-contained' (Lotz 2014:26). Malan calls his mother to go down from their high-level apartment to watch this spectacle. Lotz (2014:26) invokes further spectacle, albeit tinged with inhumanity, through reference to the huge number of spectators watching, with some making bets: 'Down below money is changing hands as people place bets on how close to shore the fugees will get before being blasted out of the water'.

The story reaches its climax when the refugees, who include a child, are subjected to a naval bomb attack on their 'raft, cobbled together out of pieces of plastic and old oil barrels' (Lotz 2014:26). This is followed by an anticlimactic discussion between the protagonists. Malan who finds the attack 'Awesome!' (Lotz 2014:26), much to the rebuke of his mother, Zelda, who is left in an ambiguous state of pity for the victimised refugees and yet anxious about the refugee invasion and the social and economic threat they pose to Durbanites and future South Africa as '[t]here are too many of them' (Lotz 2014:26). Zelda's reaction alludes to typical white South Africans' post-apocalyptic anxiety about their future in post-apartheid South Africa and the presence of residual discrimination here manifesting in the form of xenophobia, which is common on South Africa, as Thurman (2015) notes. However, the story's ending — a bleak revelation that the refugees will be staying in pods as they cannot return to their original North American home — is interesting. The revelation is a symbolic indicator of a futurist shift and decolonial turn in geopolitical and cultural dynamics that places South Africa, and by extension Africa, at the centre.

The story depicts a future shift from the global coloniality associated with the long-established Euro-American-centric geopolitical dominance, to South Africa, and, by extension, to Africa. The story reflects the nation's anxieties about how the African National Congress (ANC)-led government has been pandering to the influence of China and Russia and in this way constituting itself as an inferior partner in the traditional global imperial designs of Euro-American and Chinese mining and other international capital. The Euro-American and Chinese and Japanese geopolitical block thus stand out as the centre for progress and capitalist modernity (Quijano 2007:171-172; Grosfoguel 2011), which this speculative story de-provincialises (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:17-18) through various narrative strands and allusions.

The notion of decentring as equal to a decolonisation of ways of thinking about the self, along with ways of being and understanding the world from an African position

(Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:17), is significant in analysing this story. This notion, also articulated by Ngũgĩ (1986:3-6), as seeking to move the centre in perceptions and responses to the influence of the old Euro-American (and, by extension, Asian) giants, from a vision and ideology aligned to the nodes of continued global power and hence global coloniality, to those located in Africa and other postcolonial territories. Lotz's post-apocalyptic North America is uninhabitable and thus primordial. The vision alienates readers from the present reality of Euro-American and Asian global imperial dominance and compels them to think in a decentred way and constitute the image of a reversed world. The Americans are now the refugees living in prison ships characterised by 'starvation, cannibalism, violence, disease' (Lotz 2014:26) and are constantly seeking to reach Durban to start living a better life. The vision of migrants from Africa and the Middle East who risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean to reach the shores of Europe in search of a better life is reversed through an image of migrants from the centre seeking refuge in the Global South. This subversion constitutes a deprovincialisation of America and the rest of Euro-Asian-centrism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:17-18) that depicts Durban, South Africa and (by extension) Africa as the new province and centre, and hence reflect a decolonialised speculative mapping.

A further decolonial concern is reflected in the positioning of futurist South Africa as the new geographical centre for humanity's survival. Zelda and Malan live ordinary lives, as symbolised by morning breakfast routines and engaging in discussions on current matters such as refugee escapes. This image contrasts with the bleak spectacle of the refugee lives of imprisonment and dehumanisation in the pods and their vulnerability, as escape vessels are easily destroyed by the patrolling naval ships. Thus, Lotz disrupts the aura of global imperial dominance and Euro-American-centric images conveying the Global North as equal to progress, human dignity and hence modernity by showing the bleak lives of citizens of the old centre in this restructured future world where South Africa is now the centre of human dignity and survival.

In "Marine Drive, Durban Beachfront", the trope of an implosion in America is used in a South African story to tease out visions of decoloniality. This poignantly indicates a speculative treatment of decolonial agency, evident in the shift of the future cultural geography of humanity's quest for survival from Europe and America to Durban, South Africa and by extension Africa.

Centring Africa in future knowledge production in Armstrong's "Elton"

Gillian Armstrong's story, "Elton", responds to the speculative decolonial turn through the trope of an environmental disaster caused by an accident in the use of technology. This leads, first, to mass deaths, rendering human and other living organisms almost extinct; and, second, to a frantic search for life-saving scientific knowledge that will ensure humanity's survival. The story starts with a description of the main character, Elton, and his dog, Buster, who reside on an oasis on the SKA telescope station in the Karoo region in South Africa 'walk[ing] down to the secluded spruit. It was the only water source for miles, and so it was their first port of call every morning' (Armstrong 2011:36). The setting is a post-environmental disaster world, and Armstrong uses flashbacks to narrate the events from the previous ten years that led to the environmental disaster responsible for the story's temporal and spatial context. Thus we learn that Elton is taken to the SKA telescope station in the Karoo by his research scientist father, Denver Philander. Later, some station workers did not return after going away for the weekend and Denver, who also tries to find out what had happened to his co-workers, fails to return after perishing in a deadly climate catastrophe.

Elton is left alone and starts the daily routine of walking to the nearby river with Buster to drink some water and to take a bath and seek other human life. Elton's post-disaster activities are marked by going to this nearby river and picking some of the red flowers that grow around the river. In addition, 'Elton would tweak and adjust the electronics of the enormous dishes [...] trying to talk to strangers all over the globe' (Armstrong 2011:38). The search for survivors leads to a chance contact with Stephen Cowley and 'a handful of biologists and an engineer [who] had survived' (Armstrong 2011:41), located on Marion Island near the Antarctic. The conversations between them two reveal that the explosion resulted from scientific experiments on cloud seeding carried out to alleviate the effects of protracted drought in Australia and the rest of the Global North. The cloud seeding led to further environmental disasters (Armstrong 2011:40-41):

The interference with the precipitation patterns had altered wind flow around the world. Huge tornadoes, thunderstorms, willy-willies and hurricanes began to spring all over the world, causing devastation and everywhere they went [...] The nano-particles created during the cloud seeding had an adverse effect on the human system [...] All over the world people fell to the deadly infection.

The conversation between Elton and Stephen Cowley also focuses on the reason for Elton's survival, and possible experiments in search of a cure for the pandemic respiratory disease affecting other parts of the world, but not the Karoo region in South Africa. The curative power of the red flowers is identified and as a result, Stephen and other Marion Island-based biologists start 'the testing of the shrub [... and] began the extraction process' (Armstrong 2011:44). Stephen also teaches Elton about the science of plants, biochemistry related to extracting serum from plants for curative purposes, and about the human body and immunity against diseases. Unfortunately, the plant serum does not help as the Marion Island biologists and engineers die after testing the serum on themselves with Cowley dying last after testing the final serum, which 'only works for [...] a few hours and then [...] wear[s] off' (Armstrong 2011:47). The story ends with Elton as 'the last man standing' and with a mission to complete the extraction of the serum to save any other survivors.

The speculative depiction of a post-climate apocalypse, humanity's search to survive a destructive respiratory particle pandemic, and Elton's survival invoke a decolonised cultural, geographic and epistemic reality, emblematised in the vivid image that '[w]ith hundreds of pages of notes from Stephen's lessons on his knees, Elton began the process he knew was his destiny to finish' (Armstrong 2011:47). First, and resonating with the idea of decentring the centres of refuge, progress and geographies supporting the future of human survival, the Karoo in South Africa is portrayed as one of the few nodes supporting human survival globally. This frees Africa from its traditional stereotypical association with death and other forms of bleakness. It highlights, instead, the fact that life happens, even in a drab way such as walking to the stream to drink and eat herbs from the river valley, and that other things are made to happen, such as the role of the SKA station in facilitating communication with other survivors after 10 years of there being no communication among global humanity. The image casts Africa as a place of hope and disrupts the Eurocentric notions that perceive Africa and former colonised territories as places of death that do not contribute to humanity's survival.

Most importantly, the story destroys the global colonial epistemological placing of Europe, America and of late, China and Japan, as the sole centres of knowledge production. The destructive effects of colonialism are still felt in the cultures and senses of knowledge production, which is a condition that Ngũgĩ (1986) terms 'mental colonization'. This leads Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:17) to advocate an 'epistemological decolonisation, which is meant to deal with problems and consequences of the "metaphysical empire" such as epistemicides, linguicides, cultural imperialism, and alienation [... and] a decolonial epistemological move of

decentring the Global North as the centre of knowledge and re-centring the Global South'. Armstrong's story reflects the symbolic significance of the SKA telescope station and its powerful HAM radio: these place South Africa in a network of knowledge production that covers other parts of the world (such as Antarctica). In addition, Elton discovers the potential cure to the respiratory epidemic and continues with the experiments, seeking to produce a cure, after Cowley's death. Thus, Armstrong's South Africa is elevated in that, first, it is part of a network of knowledge exchange (between Elton at the SKA station in the Karoo and Cowley near Antarctica) and second, it assumes a futuristic power as the saviour of global humanity through Elton's mission to extract the life-saving serum. Therefore, the story demythologises colonial epistemic dominance through its restructuring of the geographic nodes of scientific progress and knowledge production to locate them on the African continent and in that way highlights the Global South's search for epistemic freedom from the influence of the Global North.

Conclusion

The speculative fiction analysed here transports readers into futuristic settings that compel imaginings of possibilities of a decolonisation that Africa needs and can achieve. A war over oil resources that results in a global nuclear war and China's rise to be the new global imperial power, which colonises South Africa and rules the country in a way reminiscent of past colonial and imperial practices of domination, spur agency-seeking physical decolonisation through an urban guerrilla war (Godsell 2011). Furthermore, a post-apocalyptic world in which North America is rendered uninhabitable, forcing Americans to seek refuge on the African continent (Lotz 2014) compels readers to see a reverse of the old geographies that place Europe and America as the centres of progress and a better life. Finally, readers who are constantly subjected to the Euro-centric notion that the Global North is the sole producer of knowledge and centre of progress, are also made aware in Armstrong's story of a futurist centring of science and knowledge production in Africa. Armstrong describes a global climate crisis created by accident during scientific experiments on cloud seeding in Australia to curb incessant droughts that leaves a world inhabited by less than 100 000 survivors. However, the plant cure to the pandemic is discovered in the Karoo in South Africa. More importantly, a South African child, Elton, is left to carry out this task to save global humanity after the death of other scientists involved in the experiment.

This article unpacks a speculative mapping of multiple kinds of geopolitical colonial and global imperial dominance typical of postcolonial science fiction and a Euro-

American-centrism that defines the ways Africa and other former colonised worlds view themselves, produce images and patterns of thoughts and knowledge. The speculative stories encourage the reader to think about how the former colonised countries and their people can disentangle themselves and seek freedom in a decolonial agentic way.

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