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Tropical Futurisms: Thinking Futures

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Abstract

Tropical Futurisms situates the reading of futures in the shared yet multiple modalities of this geo-climatic zone, acknowledging the social and political complexities, technological engagements, multispecies vitalities, and cosmological plurality within tropical regions. This first part of the double Special Issue emphasizes the diversity that comes from thinking about futures by positioning them back in material ecological experiences in this time of escalating climate crisis. This issue seeks solidarity in the tropics via imagining the future together in plural forms. This praxis of tropical futurisms encompasses envisioning decolonial tropics not only by archiving the past-future but also by rebuilding worlds, including Indigenous and multispecies knowledge and experience that is conventionally not seen as belonging to the future. Considering the vibrancy of Indigenous, Caribbean and Latin American, Afro and African, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Pacific and Tropical Australian futures, we are also interested in the ways they intersect in the tropics creating new rich and complex forms of theorizing and storytelling.

Keywords: Tropical Futurisms, Futures Thinking, tropical futurity, climate futures, ecological futurity, tropical materialisms, past-future, multispecies

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Futures Thinking: Theories, Histories, Practices

The future is here. 2030, the decade when countries across the globe aimed to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is fast approaching. Although considerable progress has been made overall, the global efforts seem far from meeting what was first drafted in the 1987 ambitious document provocatively called *Our Common Future* (Leal Filho et al., 2023). In times of AI, climate catastrophe, political instability, and the rapid rise of nationalism, the future feels strangely close and dystopic. Literary scholarship has long been interested in future speculations, bewildered by the endless capacity to imagine future scenarios that renegotiate present and past conditions. Nevertheless, futuring, which comprises future-thinking and future-making practices, is not exclusive to literary studies. As the premise of the SDGs reminds us, almost every discipline engages with these questions in one way or another. Consider, for example, astrophysics' interests in where the universe is going, environmental studies creating climate models and scenarios, and urban planners anticipating needs and ideals of futurity, among countless other examples. Politics, economy, science, and technology all relate to futures and speculations.

This first issue of a two-part publication dedicated to futures and futurisms in the tropics revolves around the concept of "Thinking Futures" to highlight how scholars from the tropics engage with theories about the future by approaching diverse creative practices, and how they contribute to thinking about their region's futures. Hence, in this Introduction, it is important to acknowledge concepts, genealogies, histories, origins, and evolutions of future-thinking practices attending to common and traditional modes of engaging with this concept, as well as recognizing the academic field about the future known as *futures studies* or *strategic foresight*. This is both a field of study and a practice that involves researching and anticipating possible, probable, and preferable futures. It focuses on understanding trends, emerging patterns, and challenges to help guide decision-making and planning for the future. Futures Thinking is therefore a strategic approach aimed at examining and critically assessing possible future scenarios to determine the most preferable (for people, organizations, societies, communities, countries), as well as those that are undesirable and thus should be avoided. In this regard, futures thinking aims to help policymakers and decision-makers proactively anticipate changes, recognize opportunities, and ease the transition toward desirable futures (Canina et al., 2022). In our current century of "polycrisis" (Lawrence et al., 2024), disruptions, and uncertainties, Futures Thinking is gaining more prominence, especially as evidenced by the recently adopted United Nations' *Pact for the Future* (2024). Notably, its second annex, titled "Declaration on Future Generations," encourages the world to embrace foresight and long-term thinking in dealing with global complex challenges.

In the field of foresight and futures studies the terms futures thinking, futures making, futures literacy, and foresight are often used interchangeably. This notwithstanding, we have subtitled the first part of this two-part Special Issue "Thinking Futures" due to its focus on theoretical contributions—bringing together articles engaging with concepts, cosmologies, epistemologies, theories, and wisdoms as we seek throughout this issue to identify what it means to think about futures from and for the Tropics. Part two, subtitled "Making Futures," presents articles that portray the work of the authors in their own voices, using directly artistic, literary, architectural and other creative dimensions as methods to practically deal with the plurality of futures in tropical contexts. Nevertheless, these terms "thinking" and "making" futures do not exclude each other. To the contrary, we acknowledge and embrace the frequent overlap in uses and meanings of the terms in both parts of this Special Issue on Tropical Futurisms.

Even though Futures Thinking has a long history, and many scholars suggest that all human societies have attempted to know and deal with the future in different ways throughout history (Gidley, 2017; Son, 2015); yet, it is to modern history and the temperate Western hemisphere that Futures Thinking is attributed. Strategic foresight as a structured approach to studying and preparing for the future in the Western world originated at the end of the Second World War (WWII). Specifically, strategic foresight (later known as futurology in Europe), emerged in the United States military as generals began to forecast and anticipate potential scenarios of enemy attack, particularly with the availability of atomic bombs and aviation in warfare. Foresight scenarios would eventually become an important part of the mission of Research and Development corporations in the 1950s (ie., the RAND corporation) and into the present (Dartiguepeyrou & Saloff-Coste, 2023; Kristóf & Nováky, 2023; Gidley, 2017; Son, 2015; Schultz, 2015).

However, as much of the contemporary scholarship about futurity points out, the future is not the same for everyone. People and cultures from different regions relate to it by attending to their unique histories. Hence, in recent decades, there has been a rise in the number of anthologies and future-oriented projects, following various aesthetics and social projects that question whose futures the dominating Western narratives refer to. The field of futures studies has now evolved to include a very wide range of multiple approaches and methodologies, including Decolonial Futures, narrative foresight, and multiple forms of futurisms (Indigenous, Afro, African, Chicanx, Asian, etc.). Examples of these practices and theories have been compiled in the recent volume *The Routledge Handbook of Cofuturisms*, a term that describes "movements that offer us paths to internal and external colonization, modes that remind us that we belong in the future" (Taylor et al., 2024, p. 1). These and similar works demonstrate that colonial Western origins of the field of strategic foresight and futures thinking have

been rightly contested and deconstructed. For instance, decolonial approaches to Futures Thinking emphasize different histories and trajectories of evolution in the present and into the future, not always within disciplinary confines: "Our approach to decolonizing futures practice seeks to facilitate plurality and heterogenous thinking with a non-disciplinary spirit" (Jae, 2023). In this regard, plurality and heterogeneity speak to the different intellectual, socio-cultural, political, economic, technological, and environmental contexts and perspectives that shape the evolution of thinking futures.

Accordingly, Futures Thinking is currently marked by a variety of theories, methods, and tools. Some key approaches include exploring multiple futures or scenarios, statistical forecasting and modelling, storytelling, and so forth, using methods such as scenario planning, Delphi method, futures labs, gaming, backcasting, computer and social simulations, systems thinking, horizon scanning, etc. Among endless possibilities, some relevant foresight tools are futures wheel, futures triangles, futures cone, entangled time tree, three horizons, and causal layered analysis (Terry et al., 2024; Hichert & Schultz, 2024; Kohler, 2021). Meanwhile, narrative foresight, especially as formulated by Ivana Milojevica and Sohail Inayatullah (2015), is one of the most aligned approaches to this Special Issue, which deals significantly with storytelling and other creative expressions—philosophical, ethnographic, translatological, reflective, cinematic—about future possibilities for the tropics. As Milojevica and Inayatullah observe,

> In a similar way that narrative has been used in history—to investigate patterns of change—narrative has also been used in futures studies since the development of the field. Thick descriptions of potential events and conditions through the use of scenarios, for example, have heavily relied on the use of narrative. Trend analysis, as well, outlines a particular sequence of events wrapped as a meaningful story, even as it claims to be narrative-free, that is, it is quantitative and thus story is controlled for. Visioning and backcasting provide detailed and robust narratives presented as a sequential movement through time—from preferable to plausible futures towards the present moment. Utopian and science fiction literature is as well based on the power of story. (2015, p. 152)

Thus, Futures Thinking is fundamentally a narrative and creative practice, hinging on the kinds of imaginaries and stories people tell as they think about and/or plan for the future(s). It is about the worlds humans creatively and systematically build for their futures, drawing on the plural experiences of pasts and presents. In the case of the tropics, this practice is of the utmost importance, as environmental and social catastrophes—both by-products of ongoing colonial logics and impositions—loom in the present, aiming to thwart tropical futures. From the tropics, new imaginaries of

futurity—Indigenous, Caribbean, Latin American, African, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Pacific and Tropical Australian—emerge to retell the stories of this rich and creative zone. This issue seeks to learn from these different perspectives offered by scholars concerned with thinking futures of the tropics. Following these thinkers, a new concept of Tropical Futurisms can begin to take shape.

Thinking Tropical Temporalities with Ecologies

As perused in several essays on this special issue, environmental concerns in the geographies of the tropics are especially relevant when considering global futures on a warming planet. If melting glaciers and dying polar bears inform the images of ecological decline in the temperate areas (Garrard & Carey, 2020; O'Neill, 2022), a stark image of hurricanes, fires, floods, and dying coral reefs informs such imageries from the tropics. Yet, these images are not separate; rather, they are in relation, for melting ice sheets in the frigid zone create a dynamic whereby relative sea level rise is higher in the tropical equatorial regions (Lundberg 2021; Lundberg et al., 2021, p. 2).

In this distribution, "the tropics are more vulnerable to the direct and immediate impacts of climate change and its associated variability" (Roy, 2018, p. 5), with tropical liveability more at risk, and causing movements of people to temperate areas as climate refugees. Relatedly, as Piguet and others discuss, the way climate migration research is conducted shows a bias as "the result of a framing of 'environmental refugees' (and refugees in general) as an intrinsically 'southern problem' and as a security risk for the North" (2018, p. 358). 'The south,' in this case, is a category that encompasses mainly the realities of the tropical regions (Roy, 2018, p. 3), and the fears of a dystopic future in the global north are often images of already existing conditions in the south (Armiero, 2021). Such dystopian futures are the basis of two papers in this special issue set in Indian speculative future cityscapes. The papers, one by Chakshu Gupta and Isha Malhotra and the other by Neeharika Haloi, discuss neo-colonial wasting and the need for decolonial multi-futures. However, such interventions in the Western rhetoric of dystopian scenarios are rare, and the tropics continue to be portrayed as doomed to succumb to climate catastrophe and environmental degradation before anywhere else, as is imagined in the trope of the "disappearing islands" that Fiona Cameron (2011) critiques in her study on imaginaries in the Pacific, and which is further discussed in this issue through Gemma Blackwood's paper set on the tiny atoll of Pukapuka. Whereas climate change strongly impacts these regions, there is a risk of imposing temporal determinism on the tropics with such "disappearing" narratives. Consider the outdated and essentialist discussion of the tropics as spaces of "backwardness" compared to the temperate zones' supposed progress (Clayton, 2021, pp. 75-76; Clayton & Bowd, 2006, p. 213) as the extreme

example of assuming certain stereotypical tropical temporalities. In his future-historic re-surveying of discourses on colonial Malaya and postcolonial Malaysia/Singapore, Wai Liang Tham critiques examples of tropical essentializing and a need for decolonial ecology towards Malaysian futurity (this issue).

The tropics undoubtedly "fight back" in these time-related rhetorics, reminding us that, paradoxically, their materialities are essential to any possible realization of futurity imposed by the West, even though Western imaginaries of such futurity often exclude them. This is taken up in this issue in Prabhudutta Samal and Swati Samantaray's paper on Zambian futurism, where the authors discuss speculative inventions such as microdrones, bioengineering, and the race for space. Filmmaker Ester Figeroa's documentary *Fly Me to the Moon* (2019) exemplifies this, showcasing how the United States space race in the 1950s heavily depended on Jamaica's bauxite mining and smelting for aluminium production. The same applies today to many mining operations for rare materials for cutting-edge technologies that ignite conflicts, like we are witnessing in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zane, 2025). Valuing one region over the other as futuristic relies on "developmental paradigms" (Chattopadhyay 2021, p. 10) that co-opt futurity and wilfully neglect the different futures envisioned outside the global north's well-guarded borders. Far from new, this is symptomatic of old discourses and systems of knowledge, long invested in "proving" and perpetuating the idea of inferiority of nonwestern contexts compared to Western technoscapes; projects mainly fueled by the contacts of the West with the Americas in the C15 and the subsequent exploitation of lands and bodies. The ensuing narrow narratives of futurity are thus deeply imbricated in colonial logics of forced access to Indigenous land and violent extractivism (Liboiron, 2021). In this sense, it is pertinent to follow Boddhisatva Chattopadhyay's (2021, p. 11) call to stop trying to decolonize genres of the future like science fiction—whose core is essentially a colonialist one—and focus instead on decolonizing the singularity of the future, calling for more bio-imaginative-diverse forms of understanding futurity coming from places often reduced to margins and peripheries. In the case of the tropics, these geographies remind us that, far from marginal, the tropics are central, especially concerning ideas of the future. This is the core of Abhisek Ghosal's philosophical paper when he argues that futurizing 'geo-tropicality' offers a way to understand how the crisis in the Indian Ocean warns of future worldly ecoprecarity (this issue). Tropical spaces also illuminate multiple futures that are diverse yet united in their engagement with tropicality, not only concerned with climatic-ecological categories but also with entangled aspects such as sexuality, as examined by Guhan Priyadharshan P. in his paper on Sri Lanka in this issue, and disability, which is the focus of Jasmin Peer's analysis of Tropical Australia (this issue). There is an urgency for envisioning futures that correspond to the reality, desires, and potentialities of the tropics' inhabitants. This area is home to diverse groups that coincide in imagining futures differently, outside the temperate Western discourses,

and attending to their similar tropical geophysical materialities and complex eco-social histories. This Special Issue seeks to contribute to enriching these perspectives, acknowledging the ways many of these considerations overlap in the tropics, a space of Indigenous and settler cultures, a place of transculturation (to think with Fernando Ortiz, 1995). Such a consideration of a tropical futurism at the intersection of Indigenous, settler, and diasporic cultures is the focus of the article by Florence Boulard, Marine Lechene, and Lola Kamblock, as they discuss their island home of Kanaky-New Caledonia in the Franco-Melanesian Pacific (this issue). Together with broad cultural projects in the tropics that have sought to confront imposed ideas of what tropical ontologies are, more and more initiatives are interested in reclaiming their futures outside colonial impositions. As Digital Humanities scholar Schuyler Esprit puts it when referring to the looming discourses of disappearing low-lying Caribbean islands: "The decolonial project of home is to assert that the Caribbean is in the future, that we *resist* and *persist*" (our emphasis). The same applies to the broader tropics, from which people imagine futures beyond solely crises and disasters, focusing instead on multispecies relationality, collaboration, and justice. This is the case for Nikodemus Niko's ethnographic paper on Indigenous futurity of his Dayak Benawan community in the tropical rainforests of Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo. It is likewise the theme of the paper by Niyi Akingbe which elucidates forest and ocean activisms through the girl-child heroes of two Afrofuturist children's stories (this issue). Resistance and persistence are key terms to navigate such proposals. As we foreground in this first part dedicated to future thinking, the epistemic *resistance* of scholars who continue to assert the tropics as spaces full of imagination and endless potentialities in the future is crucial. Future thinking practices from the tropics enable conversations about the possibilities of expanding visions and sharing strategies among communities facing similar challenges—like looming environmental alterations and remnants of colonial pasts. This is particularly poignant in the paper by Thanh Tran and Giang Hoang in which they analyze five eco-cinematic films from neighbouring countries of the Mekong River in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, tropical future thinking practices offer formidable confrontation to chronologies that attempt to define tropical futures without considering their rich and creative contributions to pasts, presents, and futures.

In this sense, many of the papers in this special issue engage in temporal politics. As discussed by Ysabel Muñoz-Martínez in this issue, the term "chronotropics," coined by Odile Ferly, Tegan Zimmerman, and Joshua R. Deckman (2003), has emerged as a way of encapsulating Indigenous and other times that break with the Western imaginary of linearity and its associated anthropocentrism. Although based on examples from the Caribbean, this notion has resonances across the tropics. Also in this issue, Laura de la Fuente López articulates the pan-Amerindian concept of time as a spiral in which past and future are in the present and coexist with human and

more-than-human cosmovisions. This resonates with Indigenous Australian cosmovisions, called "Dreamings" in several Aboriginal languages. Barbara Glowczewski (2022) discusses how this space-time is articulated in mythical itineraries of ancestral travellers through material actualizations in landscape and with the pluriversal agency of more-than-human worlds, including the Indigenous astronomical cosmos.

Towards an Elucidation of Tropical Futurisms

These elucidations on Future Thinking in the tropics contribute to contouring (rather than defining) what we editors of this Special Issue call “Tropical Futurisms,” a framework for imagining the future transcending nation-state borders and pivoting instead around a shared geo-climatic-atmospheric-ecological zone known as the tropics in order to reconceptualize challenges, communities, and solidarities (see Tham, this issue). As Speculative Futures thinker Alex Quicho states in her article entitled “Tropical Futurism Envisions the Climate of Our Fate” (2022): “Moving ‘the future’ away from ideologies of dominance and control has become imperative.” She contends that “tropical futurism reimagines a different relationship to the earth.”

Tropical Futurisms, born in increasing concerns for climate-centred futures, capture the shifting environmental uncertainties surfacing in speculative fiction, philosophical discourses, ethnographic studies, and ecocinematic presentations of the tropics (to name but a few). In this regard, Tropical Futurisms is also concerned with inquiring into social structures causing climate crises. As anthropologist Sophie Chao writes regarding the current worldly “great unmaking” (Rose, 2013, p.9), extractive capitalism, ecological breakdown, and climate change are desecrating “lives, relations, and futures” (2022, p. 166). There have been a bevy of neologisms “to grasp the spatiotemporal scope and significance of this great unmaking” (2022, p.166), including the Plantationocene coined by Donna Haraway (2015) to analyze the devastation of plantations that relied on slavery and other exploited labour based on extractivism of humans and nonhumans, and the Patchy Anthropocene, conceived by Anna Tsing et al. (2021), which subsumes the hegemonic abstraction of the Anthropocene to its various material, spaciotemporal, and multispecies contexts. Chao integrates these notions into a “patchy plantationocene.” As she summarizes, “patchiness” pays attention to:

> feral proliferations at play within capitalist landscapes, the importance of noticing and attuning to more-than-human sites and stories, the need to think with different scales and structures in theorizing material formations, the challenge and necessity of reckoning with crisis while also attending to emergence and possibility, and the imperative to

> rethink intersectional injustices within and beyond the human realm. (2022, p. 168)

Given the tropical specificities of the colonial history of plantations, this patchiness, is also an invitation for thinking tropical futures. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has famously argued, "Anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (2009, p. 201). Our task, by doing tropical futurisms, lies in rejecting old binaries—culture versus nature, human versus nonhuman—and embracing their interwoven realities (Haraway, 1988). In this regard, we must consider the specific materiality of the tropics (humidity, rainforests, volcanos, rivers, seas, corals) and their lively entanglements with each other, with humans, and with the cosmo-spiritual. Here it is pertinent to remember the work on "Tropical Materialisms," which sets forth a decolonial engagement with New Materialism and Posthumanism, demonstrating how these new philosophies that trace the entanglements of natureculture manifest in particular ways in the tropics, and given the multitude of Indigenous cultures of the tropics, how Indigenous peoples have always celebrated the aliveness of more-than-human worlds (Benitez & Lundberg, 2022).

Thus, in any vision of Tropical Futurisms, "tropicality" must play a crucial role. More than just a geographic belt around the planet, or a scientific category, the tropics carry history and power, ideal and material. Colonialism once cast the tropics as lush yet chaotic, fertile yet ungovernable, paradisiacal yet pestilential—reflecting how the concept of tropicality, was first conceived under a colonial-orientalist gaze (Arnold, 2014). However, differing from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), tropicality has always had a strong climatic-ecological focus. Thus, writing through the specificities of the tropical materiality of his native Martinique, Aimé Césaire conceived of *tropicalité* as an anti-colonial term to celebrate tropicality and divert its colonial imaginary through a rhizomatics in which the tropics speaks back to the temperate (Césaire & Roussi, 1978) (also see the important discussion by de la Fuente López on Suzanne Roussi-Césaire's contribution to decolonial politics, this issue).

Today, Tropical Futurisms takes up this decolonial tropicality to demonstrate the multiple and competing power dynamics that co-shape tropical landscapes. From the ways that ongoing global-local relations shape techno-ecological couplings in Singapore (Chang, 2016; Wong, 2022), local forms of resistance against electronic waste happening in Africa (Iheka, 2021), to the haunted spaces produced under colonial and state repression (Comaroff 2007; Harvey 2008), we urge our readers to genuinely feel the tropics. Joanne Leow, for instance, critiques Singapore's "manufactured tropicality," exposing its dual legacy—not just as a colonial holdover but as the very foundation of the country's authoritarian spatial politics (2020, p. 871).

Meanwhile, Ann Ang examines Filipino literature's portrayal of bodies under heatwaves, where the relentless tropical climate serves as both a sensory register of place and a gothic inversion of historical progress (2023) (see also Tham, this issue, on the politics of heat in Malaysia and Singapore). These perspectives make one thing clear: the tropics' past does not lead neatly into a singular future. There is no straight line—only ruptures, hauntings, competing claims, which offer openings and flowerings towards multiple future imaginings emerging from tropical communities.

Thus, multiplicity is another key concept of Tropical Futurisms. This multiplicity is not only temporal, referring to the plural relationships between pasts and futures, but also actor-driven, encompassing diverse agents engaged in shaping future possibilities. We advocate for an 'art of attentiveness' or 'noticing' (van Dooren et al., 2016), extending attention not only to human actors but also to the entanglement between colonialism, capitalism, their unequal relations, and the broader web of life (Moore, 2015). Colonialism and capitalism have never operated in isolation; their logics have entangled themselves with broader ecosystems, structuring human hierarchies and relationships with animals, plants, microbes, rains, and winds.

These non-human actors, often dismissed as background noise, in fact, shape the very terrain of what we call the future. A multispecies approach means approaching difference itself to include more-than-human agents and engaging with "the powerful work that various modes of differentiating and distinguishing do in shaping worlds" (van Dooren et al. 2016, p. 12). This relational focus further challenges the ownership of the future. It calls for a multispecies justice that acknowledges, recalibrates, and embraces interspecies relations. This is an approach long embedded in the ancestral knowledge of the Bewaka community of Australia, which recognizes the co-becoming of humans with land (Country et al., 2016). This deep understanding is also expressed in African philosophy. Archaeologist Ashton Sinamai, speaking from Australia of his native home in Zimbabwe, explains that the land is alive, "experienced sensorially, imagined in various forms of consciousness and lived through collective memory of those experiences" (2022, p. 55). These, and many other Indigenous cultures from the Americas to Asia, have long recognized that life is built not on domination but on negotiated coexistence (see Niko, this issue). In this light, world-making becomes an act of intervention for the future. Hence, we find resonance with Arturo Escobar's concept of pluriversal politics (2020), with its call to continually reimagine (or, in his words, sentipensar) the world, offering a way forward—one that resists the colonial, patriarchal impulse towards a singular and universal order.

Building upon multiplicity, transgression is also a keyword of Tropical Futurisms. Tropical futurisms do not seek to merely catalogue different possibilities for the tropical world and its futures; instead, they emphasize the moment of creating new

relationships and worlds, where we may capture the movement of transgression—the forces that drive it and the boundaries it disrupts. The editors of this special issue argue that the potential of the future exists in motion, and the politics of Tropical Futurist practice lies in detecting and generating these fluctuations from within and across tropical communities.

A Tropical Cartography of Thinking Futures

The papers collected together here in part one of this double special issue on "Tropical Futurisms" demonstrate how Thinking Futures in the tropics decolonizes the dominant notion of the future as singular, Western-centric, and universal. The papers offer various insights into thinking through tropicality, multiplicity, intervention, and transgression as they offer rich examples from the Caribbean and Tropical Africa, across to India and Sri Lanka, through the Southeast Asia countries of Malaysia, Indonesian Borneo, and the countries of the Mekong River—Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand—across to island groups of Pukapuka and Kanaky-New Caledonia in the Pacific, and finally to the Tropical Far North of Australia.

The Caribbean and Tropical Africa

First, we encounter cartographies of Abya Yala (Latin America) and the Caribbean. The article "Translation, Decolonial Futures, and More-than-Human" offers another compelling dimension of understanding futurity in the tropics through language as relationality. If the Caribbean has had to translate itself often to a West that has othered it, in this work, the author Laura de la Fuente López demonstrates through an analysis of Yanick Lahens's *Bain de Lune* that tropical futures reclaim their own language and codes as a process intrinsic to its formation—as demonstrated by creole cultures. Delving into decolonial concepts of utopia through a plurality of visions, the paper strongly challenges the West's claim of a singular future. Both utopia and translation, as the author reflects, possess a "shared capacity to detect fissures, unravel power dynamics, and outline possible reparations" (p.32). The author enables access to these ideas with her own translation practices from French, Franco-Creole, and Spanish to English and, importantly, evokes terms from Indigenous cultures that in many ways prefigure contemporary buzzwords in Environmental Humanities. In this context, the author uses the concept of "creole futurism" as a powerful tool to understand the multiple linguistic and cultural backdrops against which tropical futurisms in these regions are cultivated, recognizing "the rhizomatic diversity resulting from their multiple [African], Amerindian, European, and Asian heritages" (p. 34). The analysis reveals complex linguistic negotiations that mirror the novel's eco-social context, and the author's own practice highlights eco-translation as one form of contribution to both futures thinking and futures making.

Crossing to Puerto Rico, Ysabel Muñoz-Martínez's article, “Archipelagic Futures: The Speculative and Decolonial Transecopoetics,” explores Roque Raquel Salas Rivera's poetry, focusing on his 2022 collection, *antes que isla es volcán/before island is volcano*. The article examines the poet's resistance to colonial temporality, reimagining of sovereignty, and commitment to ecological and social justice. It develops an interdisciplinary approach to decolonial futurity by analyzing three key operations: "affective eco-literacies," "the breakage of normative time," and "geological trans-speciation" (p.55). Salas Rivera's work centres on counteracting singular narratives of the Caribbean as endless plantation. He seeks to break with “’plantation futures,’ a concept that describes its haunting aftermath in contemporary urban infrastructures and carceral systems” (p. 57), through expanding “transecology and chronotropics by rearticulating the relations between transgender bodies, islands, and temporalities” (p.60). Through "affective eco-literacies," the poet reconfigures connections between the body and ecological materials, reactivating the potential for a sovereign nation that is neither patriarchal nor Anglo-America-centric. Salas Rivera resists colonial temporality through his form, writing in non-linear, fragmented, and recursive timelines, disrupting hegemonic modes of historical narration, and redistributing the right to the future to marginalized subjects.

Taking us to Tropical Africa, Niyi Akingbe examines two African children’s books in connection with ecological issues. Specifically, he engages with Ben Okri’s *every leaf a hallelujah* (illustrated by Diana Ejaita) (2021) and Zandile Ndhlovu and Katlego Keokgale’s *Zandi’s Song* (2023), suggesting how the books (both texts and illustrations) and their girl-child protagonists “blaze new trails in environmental humanities and blue humanities” (p.77). In Ben Okri’s *every leaf a hallelujah,* Mangoshi embarks on a journey into the forest in search of a leaf that could heal her sick mother and ends up fighting to protect trees from ecological harm. Meanwhile, in *Zandi’s Song*, Zandi responds to the invitation of the water goddess Maya by undertaking a “bold oceanic adventure to a special place called KwaUmkhomazi in order to witness how the ocean has survived decades of environmental pollution from the over-profusion of plastics and other human wastes carried by rivers downstream to the sea” (pp. 79-80). Akingbe situates these books within Afrofuturism, Blue and Environmental Humanities, and travel writing; and ultimately demonstrates how Okri and Ndhlovu intentionally weave aspects of oral literature traditions (myths and fables), magical realism, and ecological concerns to advocate for ecological futures based on justice. In this regard, Akingbe asserts, “The narratives in both *every leaf a hallelujah* and *Zandi’s Song* revolve around ecological [dis]entanglement, and this is tenaciously pursued to reflect both Okri and Ndhlovu’s environmental convictions” (p. 80).

Concentrating on Zambia in particular, and Africa by extension, Prabhudutta Samal and Swati Samantaray read Namwali Serpell’s novel *The Old Drift* (2019) in light of

how it engages with the entanglements of history, colonization and decolonization, ecology, and technology. The novel, as the authors suggest, draws on magical realism, historical fiction, and science fiction to shine a spotlight on "Zambia's colonial history, postcolonial [and ecological] struggles, and speculative futures" (p. 99). In this regard, the story incorporates and celebrates complexity, interdependence, and resilience among human and nonhuman entities, including technological inventions. Historically, the novel confronts distorted and dominant accounts of Zambia's colonial past, highlights local agency and resistance, unveils unending decolonial struggles, and how history has influenced the construction of a Zambian national identity, while envisioning alternative futures for the country. On the ecological front, the authors argue that the novel foregrounds multispecies ecologies. "The relationship between humans and mosquitoes, traditionally seen as pestilential, is reimagined in the novel as a symbol of both resistance and technological innovation" (p. 100), they contend. Technologically, the article shows how Serpell imagines the futures of technology, notably how innovations such as gene editing and nanotechnology may shape the future of Zambia (and Africa). For these authors, Serpell's vision of the future is one where boundaries between humans, nonhumans and technology are blurred.

South Asia: India and Sri Lanka

In the context of South Asia, the article by Chakshu Gupta and Isha Malhotra, "Waste Ecologies and Decoloniality in Tropical Futurisms," discusses Shiv Ramdas's novel *Domechild*. The authors draw our attention to the materiality of waste to think futures of the tropics: from wasted landscapes and people to AI infrastructure and post-work imaginaries. The analysis situates tropical India and its speculative fiction as spaces where it is possible to rework and challenge the existing conditions that foreground whiteness, high technologies, and the singularity of the future as the only possible ways to imagine futurity. Through a close reading of the novel, the article brings political ecology, discard studies, material ecocriticism, and futures thinking frameworks to engage with "epistemic responsibility." Importantly, it poignantly discusses that waste can be an "ecosophical matter against colonialism, its legacies, and imposed futures" (p.125). As the authors announce, the novel portrays the multifold perils haunting tropical ecologies, and in analyzing the parallel urban spatial structures of the novel, namely 'the City' and 'the Sanctuary,' they critique the dualities inherent in the Wasteocene. If the Sanctuary in the novel becomes a space where "futurisms in/voluntarily abstract the entanglements of various displacements in the web of tropical life that convene colonial violence through matter-meaning relations" (p.136), this article likewise contributes to this Special Issue by precisely bringing the materiality of matter to tropical practices of thinking futures.

Also set in a tropical Indian cityscape is Neeharika Haloi's paper, "Dystopian Mumbai: Futurism in Varun Thomas Mathew's *The Black Dwarves of the Good Little Bay."*

Dystopian science fiction is a powerful medium for imagining post-apocalyptic scenarios, and this novel, set in 2041 Mumbai, follows the tropical city as it is recovering from a massive flood, which has led to the migration of its residents into the towering structure called Bombadrome. The tropical island city of Mumbai has been unmade by the dual threats of climate change and corrupt politics: "the novel highlights the mythologies constructed by a corrupt government as it deftly exploits modern technologies, media, and state-sanctioned violence, leading to climate disasters that displace millions of its people" (p. 141). Through the framework of South Asian Futurisms, the article focuses on how colonial histories and environmental precarity shape dystopian imaginaries through representations of environmental change and techno-capitalist ideologies. The description of the shores of Mumbai where Bombadrome now stands is the novel's approach to (tropical) wastelanding, which renders spaces and peoples as polluted/pollutants. Haloi extends this notion to colonial tropicality, where the neo-colonial imagination of the tropics works to create visions of utopias and dystopias in the forms of paradise and hell. However, while reflecting on the socio-political and ecological challenges of the novel's present-time, the study also envisions the possibilities for ruptures that offer glimpses of alternative non-dystopic Mumbai futures.

In "Towards a Sri Lankan Future," Guhan Priyadharshan delivers an important contestation to regimes of "colonial tropicality, which is intertwined with colonial legacies that presuppose tropical states as incapable of stable governance" (p. 159). This paper addresses Sri Lankan futures through an examination of issues of governability, inter-ethnicity, and heteronormativity as depicted in the novel *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai. In a historiographic account of Sri Lanka's past and present, the analysis proposes scrutinizing the "continuum" imposed by colonial logics, confronting its apparent inescapability for the future. By examining the concepts of "ethnosexual frontiers" and "heterotopias" in the novel—in a move similar to Jose Esteban Munoz's in *Cruising Utopia*—the author encounters the possibilities of "imagin[ing] a future where ethnic differences are overcome, and sexuality is no longer policed" (p. 172). Utilizing frameworks from political philosophy, the text emphasizes the multilayered approaches needed to understand tropical futurisms. To do this, it brings narratives that disrupt the exclusionary premises of a nation-state that reproduces colonial tenets, embodied in the examined story by same-sex and inter-ethnic relationships. Moreover, Priyadharshan engages in speculation, grounded in past and present realities, as a key practice through which tropical futurisms can be further theorized.

Also set in Sri Lanka, Abhisek Ghosal brings the concept of geo-tropicality as an important method to detangle the tropics from its ontological colonial impositions and refocus on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of territory. Then, by proposing "futurizing"

as an operation to think with the Indian Ocean and Sri Lanka's coast, these spaces become the place where new knowledges emerge together with endless possibilities to rethink futurity. Specifically, he argues that "Futurizing geo-tropicality in terms of enfolding the Indian Ocean is a modest decolonial attempt at problematizing the limited understandings of tropicality in terms of exoticism and to underscore the archival potentials of the Indian Ocean in calling structured and stratified neoliberal politics into question" (p. 191). This reading of the ocean as archive of past, present, and futures contributes to thinking futuring practices from a more-than-human perspective, foregrounding epistemologies coming from the unruly materialities of the nonhuman. Yet, anthropogenic factors such as coastal development and infrastructure complicate these interactions, as the analysis of Romesh Gunesekera's 1994 novel *Reef* demonstrates towards the end of the article. Oceanic flows are—as Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite reminds us with the term "tidalectics"—harbingers of temporalities different from Western colonial ones, and Ghosal's contribution is another example of how this proves true across the geo-tropics and its "interconnected marine ecologies" (p. 194).

Southeast Asia: Malaysia, Indonesian Borneo, and the Mekong River

Wai Liang Tham's "'Malaysia' Resurveyed: From Representation and Separation to Alternative Tropical Futurities" examines how colonial and postcolonial discourses have shaped the idea of "Malaysia" through the intertwined processes of representation and separation. The essay examines how British colonial narratives framed Malaya as both a site of immense natural abundance and inevitable environmental degradation—tropes that persist in shaping environmental governance in postcolonial peninsular Malaysia and Singapore. Tham argues that these inherited frameworks have fragmented ecological and political imaginaries, limiting cross-border mobilization on environmental issues and effacing shared tropical ecological realities. The first section revisits historical representations of Malaysia, from colonial botanical classifications to the nationalist projects. Post-independence Malaysia and Singapore treated nature as an economic resource rather than living systems, as is evident in developmental policies, urban modernization, and technocratic control. The second section interrogates contemporary ecological politics, raising alternative futures via the lens of civil society activism and advocates for a 'decolonial ecology' that moves beyond state-centric frameworks. Drawing on speculative fiction, Indigenous mapping, and counter-cartographic practices to "explore how the debilitating effects of…alienation from…regional climates and ecologies can be re-politicised to imagine new tropical futures" (p. 201).

From the island of Borneo, Nikodemus Niko's article, "Dayak Benawan Indigenous Futures: Tropical Rainforest Knowledge in Kalimantan, Indonesia," is an ethnographic study of the cosmological basis of the sustainable practices of the author's own

Indigenous rainforest community. As he states, "[a]mid the growing complexity of tropical rainforest degradation—leading to climate change, biodiversity loss, and socio-economic inequalities—the Indigenous knowledge of the Dayak Benawan emerges as an increasingly relevant alternative solution" (p. 232). Indigenous futurity is an important component of decolonizing future studies, for in colonial and neocolonial discourses, Indigenous knowledges are imagined as ancient, not modern, creating a binary between past and future, tradition and development, backward and forward. Niko's article demonstrates this "false dichotomy, for Indigenous notions of sustainability, as part of sustainable development goals SDGs (United Nations, 2015), can create a new shared understanding of a better planetary future, with Indigenous futurism emphasizing ecological flourishing for generations to come." (p. 219-220). The article shows how cosmological knowledge and its spiritual connection with the rainforest is a viable system for navigating ecological changes. The spiritual-material knowledge of the Dayak Benawan people involves religious rituals, agricultural practices, and healthcare traditions. These are future-thinking practices that demonstrate harmony between ancestral spirits, nature, and humans, while maintaining ecological sustainability and engendering futurity.

The mighty Mekong River traverses the Southeast Asian countries of Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. In their article "Sustainable Nostalgia to Dystopian Future: Toward a Tropical Transnational Ecocinema," Thanh Tran & Giang Hoang examine the film anthology *Mekong 2030* (2020) as an environmental intervention in contemporary Southeast Asian filmmaking. Bringing together five directors from each of the five tropical countries through which the river flows, the anthology challenges dominant cinematic representations of the Mekong River as a static, nostalgic, and romanticized landscape. Instead, it speculates on dystopian futures to highlight ongoing environmental crises such as flooding, drought, biodiversity loss, and deforestation, which link to the loss of faith, reverence for the sacred, and Indigenous spiritualty, which also coincides with the industrialization of landscapes—factories, electric grids, and cargo ports. The temporal entanglement between past, present, and future, according to the authors, plays a critical role in future thinking. The film's visual storytelling replaces romanticized nostalgia with a melancholic sensibility, transforming memory into a mode of accountability in the present. The authors argue that *Mekong 2030* employs what they term "sustainable nostalgia" or "ecological nostalgia" to evoke ecological memory through film, thus mourning the past is not a passive act but a way of imagining and shaping alternative environmental futures "to envision a post-apocalyptic future" (p.243). By stirring public emotions and responsibility, these art-house representations encourage environmental awareness and action to shape alternative futures.

The Pacific and Tropical Australia

Films of Pacific Island atolls, Gemma Blackwood argues in "Ecocinema in Pukapuka: Climate Change and Pacific Island Future," are deeply entangled with imaginaries of possible tropical futures. Through an analysis of two documentaries by filmmaker Gemma Cubero del Barrio—*Our Atoll Speaks* (2019) and *The Island in Me* (2021)—Blackwood explores cinematic representations of the Pacific Island atoll Pukapuka, examining how these environmental justice-informed films contribute to alternative understandings of the existential threat posed by climate change—particularly rising sea levels—on the island's future. By centring individual experiences, ancestral knowledge, and the agency of nonhuman actors in Pukapuka, these films offer a counternarrative to dominant climate change discourses that depict the Pacific as having no future, a frequent trope in "the popular international documentary subgenre of 'sinking islands'" (p.264). She critiques this subgenre arguing that it falls into salvage environmentalist narratives that isolate the islands from their histories and inhabitants. In contrast, Cubero del Barrio's films foreground ancestral knowledge and the interconnectedness between humans and nonhumans**,** offering a vision of the Pacific's future that is neither static nor predetermined. By emphasizing local knowledge, traditions, and communal efforts in maintaining their island, these narratives intertwine the viewpoints of travellers, local islanders, and nonhumans, including the movement of seawater and boats captured by underwater cinematography. This approach prompts a reimagining of environmental responsibility within trans-Pacific relationships**.** She argues that these relationships foster "nuanced interactions with place…both local and distant" (p. 277), allowing for interconnected understandings of climate crisis, agency, and responsibility.

The notion of a local and distant Pacific is reiterated (differently) in the paper "Across the Tropical Pacific Ocean: Reflections on the Future of Kanaky-New Caledonia," by Florence Boulard, Marine Lechene, and Lola Kamblock. This reflexive piece articulates the uncertain future of the often-overlooked Franco-Melanesian island group of Kanaky or New Caledonia. This uncertainty was dramatically showcased in the May 2024 riots, an event instigated by the French government amendment to the constitution allowing recent immigrants to the island to participate in local elections, a move that would further dilute the political influence of the Indigenous Kanak population, reducing them to a minority power and curtailing their future. The three authors write as non-Indigenous women from Kanaky-New Caledonia. Although each has migrated to Australia, the island remains their source of identity and connection, even though it is not their ancestral home. Calling on Epeli Hau'ofa's famous work, *Our Sea of Islands* (1993), the authors recognize the Pacific as essential to the future. This future, they believe, lies in "its ongoing, multifaceted identity, shaped by its dynamic, multicultural, and multilingual nature" (p. 283). Their short reflexive pieces,

interwoven in their paper, are thus not only personal reflections but are also political practices fostering connections among themselves, their island home, and the wider Pacific region. Using *métissage* as both a method and reflection on challenges and possibilities, they state, "our future depends on acting in solidarity and cultivating radical hope. This means creating conditions for meaningful coexistence with courage, humility, and sustained engagement, even when the future is uncertain or difficult to imagine (p. 283).

Lying on the edge of the Pacific Ocean is Far North Queensland (FNQ) in Australia. This is the setting of Jasmin Peer's article that undertakes an ethnographic analysis of disability futures. The article concentrates on National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and, as the title "The Undesirable Present and Future of Disability Support" indicates, present disability support in the tropical north of Australia is fraught with problems which require fundamental changes in order to offer a more promising future. Problems include: bureaucratic complexity and neoliberal systemic exploitation, both fomented by tropical rural inequality. Peer notes that "FNQ is the tropical heart of Australia" (p.3) noted for its rurality and regionality which add to critical shortages of medical and disability services. The "cultural fabric of the tropical north has a unique fingerprint" (p. 4) with a high population of Indigenous Australians and significant population of South Sea Islanders who were historically brought to the area as indentured labourers. The region experiences many complications due to natural disasters, and with "climate change expected to disproportionately impact rural tropical regions, addressing the current challenges faced by disabled people in FNQ becomes more pertinent" (p. 307). Peer concludes that "while ideological shifts are required to truly herald a new future, with the undesirable future quickly approaching, the current state of tropical disability imaginaries in FNQ remains pragmatic and crisis-driven" (p. 321). It is imperative to address this immediate future. She argues that to imagine "the blossoming of tropical disability visions and hope, we must first deal with a practical envisioning of a future. Only then can we begin to adequately discuss disability futurisms in FNQ and how a society that embodies and values disability justice in the tropical North of Australia will uniquely function" (p.322).

Conclusion: from Thinking Futures towards Making Futures

The plurality of futures in the tropics cannot be bound to a single definition. In this issue, we have offered an elucidation and a significant array of theories that will help to further conceptualize the tropics and their vital stakes in global futurity. The authors encourage us to rethink temporality in and of itself, while underscoring the locality of specific communities where the questions of the future have been engaged. Their analyses employ theories and methods from multiple disciplines, encompassing various creative and political practices—from novels, poetry, and cinema, to

cosmologies, social movements, and policy documents—to examine the plural ways in which tropical futures are imagined and enacted.

By proposing reflective and non-normative frameworks the contributions open avenues for academic dialogues on Tropical Futurisms in a more expansive and capacious way. We hope that they will continue to evolve, especially since they offer a language with which the tropics can communicate ideas of futurity between its various regions. Moreover, Tropical Futurisms enter the conversation with multiple emergent movements aiming to reclaim the future not as a Western commodity but as a common cause for survival and flourishing, thus inviting us to build other possible worlds. They invite us to envision alternative worlds that transcend dominant paradigms of futurity.

These papers furthermore provide crucial guidance to approach the work of so many practitioners interested in Futures Making. Whereas we present here a selection of the tools available to understand these practices, the second part of the double issue shifts focus to contemporary creators who actively reimagine the tropics through creative methodologies. These two parts complement each other, as we see the analytic and creative coming together to showcase distinct visions of how tropical futurity can be understood and, importantly, *felt*. The second part emphasises that creative and embodied interventions are other epistemological venues through which we can practice futures in the now. The examples presented there draw diverse scenarios that aim to inspire, encourage, and lead to action. Moreover, we witness in the second part of the double Special Issue a provocative push of the boundaries of any preconceived ideas of Tropical Futurisms. Amid these distinctions, we reiterate that Futures Thinking necessarily entails and contributes to Futures Making, and vice versa, as one cannot happen without the other. We return to a central provocation: how do we, as citizens and scholars of the tropics, engage in the work of thinking, making, and enacting futures of environmental and social justice in our own communities? We hope that this issue sparks a sustained reflection on the possibilities that lie ahead, inviting scholars, artists, and activists alike to take part in shaping the tropical futures.

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