

Africanfuturism and Climate Fiction: Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* as Environmental Testament

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ABSTRACT

Climate change poses a profound threat to humanity in the 21st century, with the past two decades witnessing unprecedented environmental and climatic upheaval. From wildfires in Chicago, Australia, major floods in the USA, Amazon forests, rising sea levels in several cities to alarming situations in the major cities all were interrelated with the huge impact of environmental degradation caused by humans over the last 50 years. The Clifi genre got its notice in 2009 and more during 2020. Writers focus more on the long-term sustainability of Earth and possible disasters caused by humans to Mother Earth. A noteworthy fiction that received worldwide attention was Nnedi Okorafor's 2021 Africanfuturistic fiction, *Noor*. The fiction's plot follows AO, a woman in a near-future Nigeria who has augmented her deformed limbs with cybernetics, as she goes on the run after defending herself against an attack. Alongside a Fulani herdsman named DNA, they navigate a harsh landscape ravaged by environmental disasters and corporate exploitation, ultimately exploring themes of identity, resilience, and resistance against oppressive forces. This article explores the urgent need to protect the environment, which is being destroyed and could potentially be saved from catastrophic disasters

Keywords: Africanfuturism, Cli-fi, Climate fiction, Environment, Nigeria

Introduction

In 2020, Australian bushfires damaged thousands of homes, scorched about 46 million acres, and claimed at least 33 lives., Hurricane Katrina (2005) led to over 1,800 deaths in New Orleans, European Heatwave (2003) resulted in 70,000 deaths, California Wildfires (2020) burned over 4 million acres, global sea level rise has been greatly exacerbated by the loss of more than 28 trillion tonnes of ice since 1994, mostly from mountain glaciers and ice sheets, as well as from icebergs in the North Pole and South Pole (Ankel). All the aforementioned phenomena occurred were solely the consequence of climate change. An important worldwide issue, increasing average temperatures are largely caused by human activities, such as burning fuel such as oil and petroleum, industrial processes, and forests being cut down. Temperature increases have far-reaching consequences, including extreme weather conditions, increasing sea levels, shortages of food and water, and serious health risks, particularly for people living in countries that are developing. As a result, there is an urgent need to increase resilience strategies and limit temperature increases globally. This research article emphasizes the need to view both literary climate stories and the natural world as active forces, not just as a background for human-made fiction. (Kaushik and Trivedi)

Environmental Warning in Climate Narrative:

Climate fiction acts as a warning message of what the earth can be in the future if the state of the earth keeps on deteriorating. As the borderline between humans, the environment and wildlife was being diminished, humans acted as the centre of the ecological order and extended their comfort zone beyond the needed limit potentially causing permanent damage to the earth. Humans built houses for their safety and now the size and comfort zone long range of the environment are being destroyed. Between 2000 and 2024, global deforestation has resulted in the loss of approximately 192 million acres of forest. (Ritchie). The future of historical novels will increasingly be shaped by climate fiction (cli-fi), engaging with the climate crisis through literature. Expanding

on Fredric Jameson's idea that future historical novels must incorporate science-fictional elements, Forter contends they must also address the environmental devastation of our era. Drawing on theorists like Jonathan Crary and Andreas Malm, Forter explores how late capitalism's obsession with the present suppresses time-consciousness linked to nature, preventing meaningful engagement with environmental realities (Forter).

Cli-fi in Africa: Recent Developments and Analysis

Contemporary African climate fiction, or "cli-fi," has its foundations in earlier literary works that explore ecological and environmental themes. Significant predecessors include Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), which intertwines nature, spirituality, and the human experience, reflecting on the connection between people and their environments. *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila explores the social and environmental effects of the petroleum industry in Nigeria, while *Naturalising Africa* by Cajetan Iheka addresses postcolonial resistance and ecological brutality. African ethics, including those studied by Fainos Mangena and Munyaradzi Murove, highlight Ubuntu's shared principles and encourage ecological sustainability. In more recent works, like Masande Ntshanga's *Triangulum* (2019) and Tochi Onyebuchi's *Goliath* (2022), African authors address climate change and environmental collapse. Nnedi Okorafor, particularly with her novel *Noor*, stands out as a key figure in African cli-fi, integrating African culture with environmental concerns. Research on African Diaspora ecologies by Brittany Mechée and Global South theories on (de)coloniality also contribute to understanding the intersection of identity, environmental degradation, and resistance in African literature. Together, these works have paved the way for cli-fi as a prominent genre in contemporary African prose (Ossana).

Weathering Okorafor's dystopian Cli-fi: *Noor*

The dystopian fiction, *Noor*'s was written by Nigerian American author Nnedi Okorafor in 2022. The protagonist is AO, a heavily augmented woman, who is forced to flee after killing attackers in self-defence in a market in Nigeria. She meets DNA, a Fulani herdsman, and together they embark on a dangerous journey through Northern Nigeria. They are hunted by Ultimate Corp, a powerful corporation that controls clean energy in the region. Along the way, AO discovers her ability to control technology, which helps them evade capture. The pair finds refuge in a hidden community, the Hour Glass, where they learn about the corporation's dark secrets. In a final act of defiance, AO shuts down the massive Noor wind turbines, revealing that they were the source of a deadly sandstorm, the Red Eye. The novel ends with AO and DNA escaping as the sandstorm finally subsides, hinting at new possibilities for the future.

Climate Fiction and the Politics of Energy:

From a climate change perspective, *Noor* presents a powerful narrative about the exploitation of natural resources under the guise of clean energy. AO and DNA navigate a world where a global corporation, Ultimate Corp, has monopolized wind energy in the Northern Nigerian desert, using massive Noor wind turbines to harness and control natural forces. However, instead of benefiting people or the environment, this clean energy is weaponized, contributing to ecological disaster by creating a deadly sandstorm, known as the Red Eye. The novel critiques how capitalist systems, even when appearing eco-friendly, can harm the environment and communities. It highlights the misuse of technology and clean energy for oppressive purposes, raising questions about who truly benefits from such innovations. By shutting down the Noor turbines, AO not only ends the Red Eye but also symbolically challenges the narrative that large corporations should control the future of clean energy. The book calls for rethinking human relationships with the environment, and advocating for more sustainable and just technological advancements in the face of climate change.

Corporate Exploitation and Environmental Collapse & Agency of Nature:

In *Noor*, Okorafor critiques corporate exploitation and its ties to environmental collapse by illustrating how technological advancements, often marketed as solutions, are co-opted for profit and control. Ultimate Corp, the corporation monopolizing wind energy in Nigeria, symbolizes how capitalist systems can manipulate clean energy technologies under the guise of eco-friendliness, only to worsen environmental crises. The Noor wind turbines, which should provide renewable energy, instead cause catastrophic ecological harm, generating a deadly sandstorm known as the Red Eye. This mirrors contemporary issues like corporate greenwashing, where companies present themselves as environmentally conscious while continuing destructive practices. Okorafor goes further by giving nature an active role in the narrative. The desert, long viewed as barren and hostile, becomes both a victim of corporate misuse and a space for renewal. AO's rebellion against the turbines signals nature's potential for regeneration when freed from exploitation. In *Noor*, nature is not passive—it reacts and resists, embodying resilience and the possibility for recovery if liberated from oppressive human systems. The book demonstrates how Africanfuturist literature questions how the desert is perceived in the West. Despite using the desert to produce renewable energy, a multinational corporation utilises it as an instrument for capitalist tyranny and human life control. However, deserts have historically been viewed as empty and unworthy, and Noor seeks to decolonise them. The desert is portrayed in the book as a site for social rebirth and community living by groups like the Fulani herders. By offering a firmly ideological perspective on a globalised society that denounces the capitalist abuse of renewable energy, Noor makes a contribution. In addition to this sociopolitical statements Okorafor returns to the desert environment. The way deserts are portrayed changes from being a place of destruction and control to one where social rebirth can flourish (Ossana).

Fulani Culture and Adaptation & Africanfuturism and Technology:

In *Noor*, the tension between the Fulani herders and farm owners highlights the broader clash between traditional ways of life and the pressures of modern technology and environmental changes. With their pastoral, nomadic way of life, the Fulani symbolise a strong bond with the land and a way of life that is becoming more and more threatened by environmental deterioration and corporate intrusion. Their struggle to maintain their cultural identity contrasts sharply with AO's technologically augmented existence. AO, reliant on cybernetic enhancements to survive in a world dominated by corporate interests, embodies the tension between the need for adaptation and the loss of autonomy that comes with technological dependency. Questions concerning the price of technology advancement and whether it actually benefits mankind or further distances it from nature remain in debate. Okorafor's work, through the lens of Africanfuturism, offers a unique narrative that blends futuristic technology with African cultural resilience. Unlike Western speculative fiction, which often focuses on dystopian or alienating aspects of technology, Africanfuturism imagines a future where indigenous knowledge and technological innovation coexist. In *Noor*, Okorafor doesn't just portray technology as a tool of oppression but as something that, when grounded in African culture and ethics, holds the potential for empowerment and transformation. This perspective situates Africa as a future center of technological innovation, not through the erasure of its traditions, but through their integration with new advancements, presenting a hopeful vision of cultural survival amid rapid change.

Broaden the Environmental Impact Discussion & Environmental Justice:

In *Noor*, the environmental impacts of climate change are vividly portrayed through the symbolic 'Red Eye' sandstorm, a destructive force that parallels real-world climate-induced disasters such as droughts, floods, and extreme weather events. The Red Eye serves as a manifestation of humanity's reckless exploitation of natural resources, particularly under the guise of renewable energy production by Ultimate Corp. This destructive storm not only devastates the landscape but also disrupts the lives of vulnerable populations, mirroring the intensifying severity of climate change across the globe. Okorafor uses this apocalyptic sandstorm to reflect the broader consequences of environmental degradation, where nature when pushed beyond its limits, retaliates against human interference. The book also discusses environmental justice, emphasising how marginalised populations, especially those in Africa, are disproportionately affected by climate change. Fulani herders, already living in precarious conditions, face the brunt of environmental disasters caused by corporate exploitation. This mirrors real-world scenarios where poorer, rural populations in developing countries bear the greatest costs of climate change, despite contributing the least to the crisis. Through *Noor*, Okorafor critiques global inequalities in how environmental degradation is managed, emphasizing the need for equitable solutions that prioritize the well-being of communities most affected by climate injustice.

Comparative Cli-Fi Context Comparison with Other Works:

Noor by Nnedi Okorafor stands out within the broader Cli-Fi genre by offering a distinctly Africanfuturist perspective on environmental collapse, setting it apart from works like Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* and Matt Bell's *Appleseed*. While *Gun Island* explores the global impacts of climate change through myth and migration, and *Appleseed* blends ecological devastation with a post-apocalyptic narrative rooted in Western concerns about capitalism and resource depletion, *Noor* offers a fresh take grounded in African landscapes, cultures, and struggles. Okorafor's narrative intertwines the exploitation of Africa's natural resources with the resilience of its people, presenting an alternative vision of the future that centres on African voices and experiences. Unlike many Western Cli-Fi narratives, which often emphasize dystopia or apocalyptic futures, *Noor* integrates hope and resilience through its focus on indigenous knowledge systems and cultural adaptation. African writers like Okorafor are carving out unique narratives that challenge Western-centric approaches by reimagining climate change through a lens of decolonization and technological empowerment. This reimagining highlights the intersections of environmental justice, corporate exploitation, and community resilience, offering stories that are not merely about survival but also about reclaiming agency and rethinking the relationship between humanity and nature in a globalized world. Through this Africanfuturist approach, *Noor* expands the boundaries of Cli-Fi, enriching the genre with diverse perspectives on environmental crises. In response to the critique of clean energy misuse in *Noor*, real-world solutions emphasize the need for transparent, community-driven, and equitable renewable energy projects. Large-scale renewable projects can be viable and advantageous to local communities, as shown by Kenya's Lake Turkana Hydro-wind Power project, in contrast to the dystopian depiction of Ultimate Corp's monopolisation of wind energy. This project, Africa's largest wind farm, generates clean energy and incorporates social impact programs, providing economic opportunities and infrastructure improvements for nearby communities. Such initiatives stand in stark contrast to the exploitative methods portrayed in *Noor* because they prioritise local involvement and make sure that the advantages of renewable energy are distributed to those most impacted by environmental degradation.

Potential Solutions/Call to Action Rethinking Clean Energy & Government and Policy Measures:

On the policy front, some African governments are taking active steps toward climate resilience through various initiatives. Countries like Rwanda and South Africa have implemented national strategies aimed at

fostering green growth and sustainable development. Rwanda's government policy to promote greenery and fight against climate emphasizes reforestation, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy development. However, challenges remain, particularly around the enforcement of environmental policies and the protection of marginalized communities from corporate exploitation. Governments must continue to strengthen these frameworks by ensuring that policies promote environmental justice, protect indigenous lands, and offer real, long-term benefits to local populations. Through these initiatives, Africa has the potential to become a leader in climate resilience, countering the destructive corporate models highlighted in *Noor* and providing a roadmap for equitable and sustainable development.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, *Noor* invites readers to critically reconsider the complex relationship between technology, nature, and humanity. Okorafor's narrative highlights the dangers of allowing technological advancements, particularly in the realm of clean energy, to be dominated by corporate greed and exploitation. As the world faces unprecedented environmental challenges, *Noor* serves as a powerful reminder that technology, while essential in addressing climate change, must be developed and implemented in ways that are equitable, sustainable, and centred on the well-being of both people and the planet. The novel calls for a future where technological innovation is not used to dominate or exploit, but rather to foster harmony between humanity and the environment. Drawing lessons from *Noor*, we must advocate for responsible technological solutions that uplift marginalized communities, protect natural ecosystems, and contribute to a more just, resilient world. Only by reshaping our relationship with technology and nature can we ensure a sustainable future for future generations.

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