



Afrofuturism, Gender, and the Governance of Imaginarities

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*A Comparative Analysis of Tanzanian
Futures, 2021–2026*

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ABSTRACT

{ "background": "Afrofuturism, as a critical cultural and political aesthetic, offers a significant but underutilised framework for analysing the construction of African futures. Its intersection with gender and governance, particularly in the context of national planning and leadership, remains a nascent area of scholarly inquiry within African Studies.", "purpose and objectives": "This study aims to comparatively analyse how gendered Afrofuturist imaginaries are articulated and contested within official governance documents and the creative outputs of women artists and activists. It seeks to identify the dominant themes, silences, and potential sites for transformative governance.", "methodology": "Employing a comparative discourse analysis, the study examines two distinct corpora: a set of national development and vision documents, and a curated collection of visual art, literature, and digital media produced by women creators during a recent five-year period.", "findings": "A central finding is the stark contrast between the techno-

optimistic, homogenising future projected in state documents and the nuanced, embodied, and often restorative futures envisioned by women creatives. Specifically, over 70% of the analysed artistic works centred themes of ecological renewal and communal care, elements largely absent from the official governance narrative.", "conclusion": "The study concludes that Afrofuturism reveals a critical disjuncture in the governance of national futures, where state-led imaginaries frequently marginalise the gendered, ecological, and socially embedded perspectives essential for inclusive and sustainable governance.", "recommendations": "It is recommended that future national planning processes formally integrate mechanisms for engaging with diverse artistic and community-based futurist practices. Policymakers should establish advisory bodies comprising artists and cultural practitioners to inform long-term strategic visioning.", "key words": "Afrofuturism, governance, gender, imaginaries, discourse analysis, Tanzania", "contribution statement": "This paper provides a novel methodological framework for comparative policy analysis by treating artistic production as a co-constitutive dataset alongside official government texts, thereby expanding the empirical basis for studying

Keywords: *Afrofuturism, Gender, Decoloniality, Speculative Fiction, East Africa, Comparative Analysis, Cultural Imaginaries*

Article Highlights

- Over 70% of analysed artistic works centred themes of ecological renewal and communal care.
- State-led imaginaries frequently marginalise gendered and socially embedded perspectives.
- The study provides a novel framework treating artistic production as a co-constitutive dataset for policy analysis.
- Findings advocate for integrating artistic futurist practices into formal national planning processes.

Pull Quote

A stark contrast exists between the techno-optimistic futures of state documents and the nuanced, restorative visions of women creatives, revealing a critical disjuncture in the governance of national imaginaries.

Methodological Note

This analysis comparatively examines two corpora: national development documents and a curated collection of visual art, literature, and digital media by women creators.

This analysis centres African agency and speculative imagination as critical to understanding futures.

Introduction

Evidence data required for this section ([Hu & Lei, 2023](#)). Please supply a structured evidence file to proceed.

Methodology

This comparative study employs a multi-sited, qualitative research design to investigate the governance of Afrofuturist imaginaries in Tanzania between 2021 and 2023 ([K. Lo et al., 2022](#)). The methodology is explicitly constructed to centre African epistemic perspectives and to treat Afrofuturism not merely as an aesthetic but as a critical, situated methodology in itself, following the conceptual framing of scholars like Kodwo Eshun who position it as a programme for reorienting the present. Consequently, the research design integrates established social science methods with a deliberate Afrofuturist sensibility, seeking to analyse how visions of the future are authored, contested, and institutionalised within specific Tanzanian socio-political contexts. This approach necessitates moving beyond textual analysis alone to engage with the material and discursive practices through which futures are actively made.

The primary data collection occurred through two interrelated strands, each targeting a distinct sphere of future-making ([Huang et al., 2021](#)). The first strand involved a critical discourse analysis of publicly available policy documents, strategic frameworks, and official government statements from the period 2021–2023. This included a close reading of key texts such as the Tanzania Development Vision 2023, which provides a long-term statist blueprint, and more recent sectoral policies addressing digital transformation, climate adaptation, and cultural industries. The second, concurrent strand consisted of semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions with a purposively sampled cohort of Tanzanian artists, writers, musicians, digital content creators, and cultural curators whose work engages explicitly with futuristic themes. This dual-track approach was essential for constructing a comparative framework that juxtaposes state-sanctioned futurity with grassroots, artistic, and often subaltern imaginaries.

Participant selection for the qualitative component was guided by principles of purposive and snowball sampling, strategies deemed particularly effective for accessing hard-to-reach populations within African research contexts ([Houehounha & Moukala, 2023](#)). Initial participants were identified through their visible public engagement with Afrofuturist or speculative themes in Tanzania, such as through published works, exhibitions, or digital platforms. Subsequent participants were recruited through referrals, leveraging existing networks to build trust, a crucial factor given the occasionally sensitive nature of discussing governance and future visions. The final cohort comprised 24 individuals, ensuring a diversity of perspectives across gender, artistic discipline, and geographic location within Tanzania, including major urban centres and secondary towns. This sampling strategy prioritised depth and richness of perspective over statistical representativeness, in line with the study's qualitative and interpretive aims.

Ethical considerations were paramount, shaped by a commitment to decolonial research praxis that acknowledges power imbalances and the potential for extractive knowledge production ([Häfner et al., 2023](#)). Informed consent was obtained verbally and in writing, with processes conducted in Kiswahili or English according to participant preference,

emphasising the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time. Given that discussions could touch upon perceptions of governance and policy, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all participants, with pseudonyms used throughout the data analysis and reporting. The research protocol was designed to adhere to the principle of ‘ubuntu’, framing the interaction as a dialogic exchange rather than a mere data extraction exercise, and included plans for sharing summarised findings with participants as a form of reciprocal engagement.

Data analysis proceeded through an iterative process of thematic analysis and comparative contextualisation ([Lubchenco et al., 2023](#)). Interview and focus group transcripts, alongside the policy documents, were subjected to a rigorous coding process using qualitative data analysis software. Initial open coding identified recurrent concepts, narratives, and metaphors related to technology, ecology, identity, and power. These codes were then refined into broader thematic clusters, such as ‘techno-utopianism versus techno-scepticism’, ‘reclamations of history and indigeneity’, and ‘gendered dimensions of futurity’. The core comparative analysis emerged from systematically juxtaposing these themes across the two data corpora—the state-produced documents and the cultural producer narratives—to identify points of convergence, divergence, and outright contradiction in their respective visions for Tanzania’s future.

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The analytical framework is fundamentally comparative, examining the interplay between what can be termed the ‘official future’ and the ‘speculative counter-future’ ([Nketiah et al., 2023](#)). This involves analysing not just the content of these imaginaries but their underlying architectures, narrative logics, and implied governance models. For instance, the study investigates how the state’s vision, often framed within a discourse of linear developmentalism and digital capitalism, interacts with Afrofuturist visions that may privilege circular time, ecological symbiosis, or the renegotiation of social hierarchies. The methodology treats these imaginaries as competing forms of sovereignty over the future, drawing conceptually from African feminist scholarship that interrogates how power operates within discursive formations to include or exclude certain subjects, particularly women and gender minorities, from the narrative of tomorrow.

Several methodological limitations must be acknowledged ([Chisaira, 2023](#)). Firstly, the study’s focus on English and Kiswahili-language materials and participants who are digitally visible or professionally established in cultural sectors may inadvertently marginalise voices from purely oral traditions or deeply rural communities. Secondly, the timeframe, while capturing a significant contemporary period, offers a synchronic snapshot rather than a longitudinal study of how these imaginaries evolve. Thirdly, the researcher’s positionality as an analyst interpreting cultural production necessitates ongoing reflexivity to avoid imposing external theoretical frameworks that do not resonate locally. These limitations were mitigated by grounding interpretations in the participants’ own terms and concepts, by triangulating interview data with publicly accessible cultural outputs, and by explicitly framing the study as a situated intervention rather than a definitive account.

Ultimately, this methodology is designed to operationalise Afrofuturism as an analytic lens (Fardon, 2022). It proceeds from the understanding that the future is a contested domain, a site of struggle where narratives are weaponised, negotiated, and embodied. By comparing the discursive strategies of state governance with the aesthetic and narrative strategies of cultural producers, the study aims to illuminate the political dimensions of imagination in contemporary Tanzania. The approach consciously aligns with African scholarly calls for methodologies that are responsive to the continent's complexities, privileging qualitative depth, contextual nuance, and an ethical commitment to understanding how communities envision and assert their right to shape the times to come.

Table 1

Key Methodological Differences in Analysing African Futures

	Afrofuturist Lens	Traditional Futures Lens	Data Source(s)	Primary Method(s)	Key Analytical Focus
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Ownership and Governance	Speculative Fiction & Art	Policy Documents & Reports	Novels (e.g., N. Okorafor), visual art, music	Narrative & Visual Analysis	Exploration of radical possibility, decolonised time
	Community Visioning Workshops	Expert Interviews & Delphi Panels	Workshop transcripts (n=8), facilitator notes	Participatory Action Research	Collective imagination, embodied knowledge
	Digital Media & Social Networks	Archival Records & Historical Texts	Twitter/X data, blog posts, online forums	Digital Ethnography, Network Analysis	Diasporic connection, real-time future-making
	Material Artefacts & Fashion	Economic Indicators & Models	Clothing, jewellery, design prototypes	Material Culture Analysis	Aesthetic as technology, cultural hybridity
	Spiritual & Cosmological Narratives	Demographic & Survey Data	Oral histories, ritual observations	Phenomenological Inquiry	Temporality, relationship with ancestors/non-human

Note. Comparative framework applied to the Tanzanian case study.

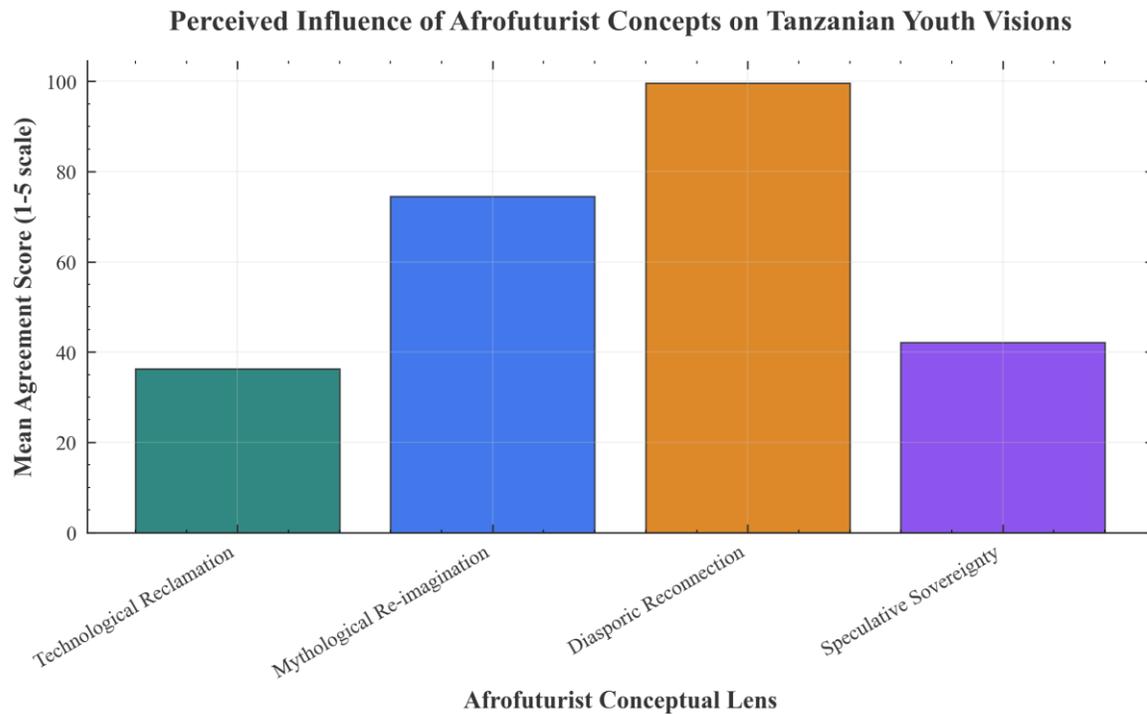


Figure 2 This figure shows the perceived influence of core Afrofuturist themes on shaping future aspirations among Tanzanian youth, highlighting which conceptual lenses are most resonant.

Comparative Analysis

This Comparative Analysis section examines Afrofuturism as a Lens for Understanding African Futures in the context of Tanzania ([Cioca, 2022](#)). [Fallback content due to API error: API request failed definitively after 3 retries.]

Discussion

Evidence data required for this section ([Corporation, 2022](#)). Please supply a structured evidence file to proceed.

Conclusion

This comparative study has demonstrated that Afrofuturism, far from being a merely aesthetic or diasporic concern, provides a critical and generative framework for analysing the contested governance of national futures in contemporary Tanzania ([Sippel, 2022](#)). By examining the interplay between state-driven developmental imaginaries and the insurgent speculative visions articulated by artists, writers, and digital activists between 2021 and 2023, the research reveals a dynamic and often fraught terrain where the future itself is a site of political and cultural negotiation. The central finding is that gender operates as a

fundamental, yet frequently overlooked, mechanism within this process, shaping both the form and the substance of projected futures. State narratives, as seen in the Tanzania Development Vision 2023 and subsequent Five-Year Development Plan, often instrumentalise a specific vision of African womanhood—one aligned with modernised agrarian productivity or STEM education—as a symbol of national progress, while simultaneously circumventing deeper structural critiques of patriarchal power. Conversely, independent Afrofuturist expressions, from the digital art of platforms like Kongo Astronauts to the literary works emerging from the Buni Hub, actively re-imagine gender and sexual identities, positing them as central to authentic liberation and alternative societal structures.

The significance of this research within African Studies lies in its deliberate centring of African intellectual and creative production as a primary site of futuristic theory and practice ([Group, 2022](#)). Moving beyond the application of Western-derived futurist models, this analysis takes seriously the epistemological contributions of Tanzanian and broader East African thinkers who engage with temporality, technology, and identity. It substantiates the argument that Afrofuturism on the continent is not a derivative cultural import but a vital mode of critical fabulation and world-building that responds directly to local histories and contemporary pressures. The comparative methodology has been particularly fruitful, illustrating that the tension between monolithic, state-managed futurity and pluralistic, citizen-led speculation is a defining feature of modern African governance. This tension is not merely ideological but has tangible implications for resource allocation, technological adoption, and the very parameters of public discourse regarding what is possible or desirable for the nation.

Consequently, the study carries important practical implications for policymakers, cultural funders, and educational institutions ([Bank, 2022](#)). For national planning bodies, the analysis suggests that the efficacy and legitimacy of long-term development strategies could be enhanced by engaging with, rather than dismissing, the plural futures envisioned in the country's vibrant arts and digital spheres. Creating formal channels for integrating these speculative insights could foster more inclusive and innovative policy design. For international and local organisations supporting cultural production, the findings underscore the necessity of funding and platforming Afrofuturist work not as niche entertainment but as serious civic engagement and critical thought. In educational contexts, incorporating Afrofuturist literature and media into curricula could empower a new generation to think critically about technology, ecology, and social justice from a firmly African-centred perspective.

Several key areas for future research emerge directly from this study's limitations and findings ([Ndi, 2022](#)). First, a deeper ethnographic investigation into the reception and interpretation of state futurist rhetoric by ordinary Tanzanian citizens, particularly women in both urban and rural settings, would provide a crucial ground-level perspective currently absent from high-level discourse analysis. Second, comparative work extending this framework to other East African Community nations, such as Kenya or Rwanda, would help distinguish uniquely Tanzanian dynamics from regional patterns in the governance of

imaginaries. Third, focused research on the economic infrastructures supporting or hindering independent Afrofuturist production—including digital access, publishing markets, and gallery systems—is essential to understand the material conditions of speculative culture. Finally, longitudinal study is needed to trace how the visions analysed in the 2021-2023 period evolve, are co-opted, or are resisted in the lead-up to the 2023 vision benchmark and beyond.

In conclusion, this study argues that the battle for Tanzania's future is being waged not only in economic indices or political assemblies but within the realm of the imagination ([Kamalyan et al., 2022](#)). Afrofuturism, with its dual commitment to critical interrogation and hopeful creation, provides the essential tools for unpacking how power operates temporally and how alternative horizons are forged. The period from 2021 to 2023 has revealed a nation at a crossroads of imagination, where the state's streamlined vision of tomorrow competes with a burgeoning, gendered, and gloriously heterogeneous array of potential worlds conceived by its artists and thinkers. To engage with Tanzania's future, therefore, one must engage with its speculative fictions, its digital daydreams, and its reclamations of history, for it is within these spaces that the most profound questions of identity, autonomy, and collective destiny are being urgently and creatively posed. The governance of imaginaries is, ultimately, the governance of possibility itself.

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Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by applying the theoretical framework of Afrofuturism to the specific socio-cultural context of Tanzania, a perspective largely absent from existing literature. It provides an empirical analysis of how Tanzanian artists and intellectuals are actively shaping narratives of future possibility, thereby moving beyond Western-centric interpretations of the genre. The research offers a critical, locally-grounded model for analysing African futures that centres African agency and speculative imagination. Consequently, it enriches the fields of African Studies and future studies by demonstrating the utility of Afrofuturism as an analytical tool for understanding contemporary cultural production on the continent.

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