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*Womanism and Identity Reconstruction of the Black Female Explored in the  
Afrofuturistic Trilogy of Binti by Nnedi Okorafor (2015)*

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctorate in  
English Literature

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## *Statement of Originality*

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the doctoral thesis entitled “Womanism and Identity Reconstruction of the Black Female Explored in the Afrofuturistic Trilogy of Binti by Nnedi Okorafor (2015)”, supervised by Dr. Aissa Hanifi and Co-supervised by Dr. Ibtissam Touhami is the product of my own research and composition. This latter abides by the fundamental rules and standards of responsible referencing.

Name: Zahra Ines Gafour

Date: 23/06/2024

Signature:

## DEDICATIONS

This work is an earnest tribute to my cherished parents, whose unwavering presence and limitless love have illuminated my path through every challenge and triumph. Their boundless emotional, moral, and financial support and their sage guidance have crafted the woman I have become today—a resilient daughter who cherishes and embraces her womanhood.

In profound gratitude, I extend a special dedication to the most essential contributor to this journey—myself. The dedication, determination, and unwavering commitment I poured into this research reflect the essence of my spirit, and it is with immense pride that I celebrate this achievement.

To all the dreamers and believers, may your passion lead you to great heights.

For the late nights, early mornings, and countless cups of coffee that fueled this endeavor.

And

In honour of those who came before me, paving the way for future generations.

Our collective efforts have breathed life into this work, a testament to the enduring power of love, self-belief, and the indomitable human spirit.

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## Abstract

Afrofuturism, rooted in the 19th century, critically examines and reshapes African and African American identities through futuristic narratives, emphasizing Afrocentric perspectives. It challenges stereotypes, celebrates diversity, and imagines empowered futures where Black women actively redefine their identities. This research explores the multifaceted nature of identity and its deconstruction process with a major focus on Black females. The study further centers on Womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker that emphasizes Black women's unique experiences, struggles, and resilience. The combined examination of Afrofuturism and Womanism is significant, given that previous studies have focused on each movement individually, leaving their intersection largely unexplored. At the core of this research is the proposal of an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, which stands out as a significant finding due to its innovative approach to addressing the current scholarly gap. This framework catalyzes self-discovery and empowerment within Afrofuturism and Womanism, facilitating transformative growth. The essence of this Manifesto finds transcendence and celebration in the compelling narrative of Nnedi Okorafor's acclaimed *Binti Trilogy* (2015-2018). The tale unfurls not merely as a splendid fusion of science fiction and African cultural richness but also as a profound odyssey into the realms of Black female identity. Within the Afrofuturistic tapestry meticulously woven by Okorafor and viewed through a multidisciplinary lens, this study employs a multifaceted methodology, integrating descriptive, analytical, and quantitative approaches with discourse analysis to delve into the intricate ballet of identity reconstruction, tracing the protagonist's journey through the cosmic interplay of tradition, modernity, and self-discovery. This thesis embarks on the journey of Binti, a youthful Himba spirit resonating with womanist echoes, navigating a transformative expedition that entwines the paradox of ancestral sagacity and futuristic enlightenment, exemplifying the principles articulated in the proposed Manifesto.

*Keywords:* Black Female Identity, Intersectionality, Womanism, Afrofuturism, Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

**AAUP:** American Association of University Professor

**AF:** Africanfuturism

**AfriCOBRA:** African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists

**AWSA:** American Woman Suffrage Association

**BSAM:** Black Speculative Art Movement

**FX:** Fox Extended

**NAACP:** National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People

**NAWSA:** National American Woman Suffrage Association

**NBFO:** National Black Feminist Organization

**NOW:** National Organization for Women

**NWP:** National Woman's Party

**NWSA:** National Woman's Suffrage Association

**STEAM:** Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics

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# **General Introduction**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

At its essence, identity is a complex narrative where history, culture, and individuality converge. It serves as a canvas upon which ancestral heritage informs the present and shapes future dreams. Within the rich tapestry of African American literature, this identity narrative unfolds, transcending the boundaries of time and place to explore the depths of the human experience. The concept of identity is a patchwork intricately woven with threads of history, each strand bearing the weight of collective memory and cultural heritage. It reflects the intricate interplay between the past and the present, where the stories of ancestors echo the aspirations of descendants. This narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a dynamic and ever-changing world, where identities are not fixed but evolve, adapt, and transform.

The framework of this thesis centers on identity and requires a reevaluation of conventional notions of the self within a setting characterized by its complex layers. Within the scope of this study, individuals under examination struggle with the difficulties brought on by their cultural and diasporic identities, trying to find a careful balance between the traditions that are ingrained in their background and the limitless opportunities provided by contemporary life. Thus, the notion of identity (social, racial, sexual, or cultural) as an evolving and dynamic narrative continues to be a central theme, prompting a reevaluation of perspectives and an immersion in narratives that reverberate the enduring resilience of a community.

The African diaspora has given rise to a complex array of identities, stemming from diverse cultures, histories, and experiences. These identities collectively form a rich and intricate tapestry, with each element contributing to one shared heritage. Among the voices that emerged from this diaspora, the experiences and perspectives of Black women have been historically marginalized and relegated to the periphery of mainstream narratives. However, the emergence of Womanism, a concept introduced by Alice Walker in the 1980s provided a framework through which the unique experiences and struggles of Black women can be acknowledged and celebrated. Womanism, as an ideological standpoint, offers a lens through which the multifaceted dimensions of Black female identity can be examined, championed, and understood. It emphasizes not only the intersectionality of race, gender, and class but also the strength, resilience, and agency of Black women as they navigate a world that often seeks to constrain and define them.

Womanism emerged as a potent ideological movement within the broader scope of Feminism and social justice, challenging entrenched stereotypes and addressing the

shortcomings of previous movements. Originating from the experiences of Black women, Womanism charted a distinct course that celebrated the diverse identities and challenges faced by Black females. It arose as a response to the limitations of mainstream Feminism, which often overlooked the intersectional obstacles encountered by women of colour. While Feminism achieved notable progress in advocating for women's rights, it did not consistently recognize the unique struggles and perspectives of Black females. Womanism aimed to correct this omission by placing the experiences of Black women at the forefront and providing a platform for their voices to be acknowledged.

Additionally, in the intricate world of literature, some stories go beyond the bounds of conventional storytelling, transcending both time and space to create a universe in which the imagination has no bounds. Afrofuturistic literature stands as a testament to the boundless creativity and resilience of Black authors, offering a portal to worlds where technology and tradition, the past and the future, and reality and myth converge. Afrofuturism stands as a dynamic and visionary cultural movement that has provided a profound platform for the exploration and celebration of multifaceted identity, cultural diversity, and the principles of Womanism. At its core, the movement reimagines the past, present, and future of the African diaspora through a lens that blends science fiction, fantasy, spirituality, and cultural heritage. This genre has become an arena where the complexities of identity converge to create narratives that are not only forward-looking but deeply rooted in the diverse experiences of Black individuals, particularly those of Black women.

Afrofuturism therefore according to Womack (2013) utilizes Black characters and aesthetics to deconstruct images of the past to re-visualize the future. Black authors use this genre as a platform to address various human issues like segregation, apartheid, and racism, while also exploring subjects such as class, spirituality, tradition, and history. Additionally, they reassess the role of technology in society and its influence on artistic expression. For some, Afrofuturism is a tool to free Black individuals from mental constraints and societal limitations, all with the shared objective of imagining a future where people of colour are at the forefront, free from the power dynamics associated with race. In essence, Afrofuturism seeks to create a future where people of colour, especially women of colour, hold central roles.

The intersection of imagination, technology, culture, and innovation is pivotal in Afrofuturism. The four work together to produce an informed prism that has the power to change ways of living, worldviews, and beliefs. Afrofuturism frequently serves as an umbrella term for a variety of narratives, but at its core, it champions the ability of imagination and



creativity to revitalize culture and break through societal barriers. The capacity for imagination, which serves as a weapon for resistance, is what gives the human soul its resiliency. It goes against convention to write future-set fiction that features minorities who were marginalized and neglected. Black artists have greater authority over how they are perceived than ever due to technology and new freedoms.

Afrofuturism intersects with yet another movement that decolonized and deconstructed Black womanhood. The genre intersects seamlessly with the principles of Womanism, providing a platform where the voices and experiences of Black women can thrive. Womanism, with its emphasis on inclusivity and the celebration of Black female agency, finds a natural home within Afrofuturism. This synergy has given rise to narratives that challenge stereotypes, amplify the diverse stories of Black women, and envision futures where their roles are not confined by traditional limitations. The fusion of Afrofuturism and Womanism transcends their contributions, presenting a comprehensive approach to identity reconstruction for Black females. Moreover, Afrofuturism, in particular, has the potential to liberate readers from an oppressive present by reimagining the future for those oppressed because of race and gender, in this case, by reading them through a womanist lens.

In this framework, Black women do not passively receive narratives but actively craft their own stories. They challenge historical stereotypes that restrict them to narrow roles and envision a reality where they embody power, complexity, and authenticity without reservation. An essential element of this intersection is the celebration of the diverse facets of Black womanhood. It recognizes that the experiences and identities of Black women are multifaceted. Afrofuturism and Womanism offer space for various voices, including womanist scholars, Afrofuturist artists, and everyday Black women, to engage in a discourse that broadens the horizons of identity. This dialogue encompasses topics like sexuality, spirituality, technology, mental health, and more, ensuring that no aspect of Black women's lives remains unheard or marginalized.

The comprehensive exploration of Afrofuturism and Womanism carries substantial weight, primarily because prior scholarly inquiries have tended to isolate each movement, resulting in a conspicuous gap concerning their intersectionality. Previous studies often undertook an analysis of Afrofuturism or Womanism individually, overlooking the dynamic interplay and synergies that emerge when these two movements converge. This research aims to rectify this scholarly oversight by offering an in-depth examination of Afrofuturism and Womanism in tandem. By exploring the intersection of these movements, the study seeks to

unveil the intricate ways in which they mutually inform and influence each other, contributing to a more holistic comprehension of their combined impact on the narratives surrounding identity, empowerment, and the experiences of Black women. Through this comprehensive lens, the research endeavors to illuminate the synergistic potential inherent in the intersection of Afrofuturism and Womanism, enriching our understanding of their collective role in shaping cultural, social, and literary landscapes.

The intersection of Afrofuturism and Womanism thus presents an inspiring path for Black women as they strive to reclaim, resist, and redefine their identities. It provides them with the tools to envision realities where they are not limited by historical burdens or societal norms. While navigating the intricate landscape of identity, Afrofuturism and Womanism serve as guiding lights, reminding us that Black women are not constrained by the narratives of the past; instead, they are the architects of their destinies. Through movements like Afrofuturism and Womanism, Black women are crafting a fresh narrative – one that honours their strength, acknowledges their challenges, and envisages a world where their voices are not only heard but cherished and placed at the forefront. Through an Afrofuturistic womanist lens, young Black women readers are now able to imagine heroes who look like them as liberators.

By emphasizing how Afrofuturism and Womanism overlap, Black women not only find a space for resistance but also a canvas for profound transformation. It represents a journey into uncharted territories where the imagination knows no bounds, and the future holds the promise of liberation and self-discovery. Moreover, within this convergence, there emerges a critical need for an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto—a proposed guide that articulates the core principles, aspirations, and visions of this intersectional movement. Such a Manifesto would serve as a roadmap for Black women and their allies, providing a structured framework to navigate the intricate terrain of identity reconstruction, resistance, and empowerment.

The proposal for an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto holds immense significance as it marks a pivotal step in formalizing the intersection of these two influential movements. Such a Manifesto would lay a robust foundation empowering Black women to assert their identities, challenge oppression, and actively mold the narratives of their impending futures. It stands as a testament to the immense power vested in imagination, resilience, and collective action, underscoring the truth that Black women are not mere spectators of the future; they are active architects. This proposal's distinctiveness lies in its pioneering approach. It aims to formally merge Afrofuturism and Womanism, two influential movements that have separately reshaped

discussions about identity, race, gender, and the future. This undertaking represents a groundbreaking effort with revolutionary potential.

Before the conception of this proposed Manifesto, Afrofuturism and Womanism existed as separate entities, each addressing crucial issues within Black communities but from slightly different angles. The absence of a document explicitly unifying these ideologies meant that their combined potential remained untapped. Through the creation of this Manifesto, Black women would be pioneering uncharted territory, carving a path for future generations, and making a resounding statement about the recognition their voices and visions deserve.

Among the luminaries of the Afrofuturistic realm, Nnedi Okorafor (1974-present) has carved a niche for herself with her thought-provoking and transformative Afrofuturistic trilogy, *Binti* (2015-2018). Within the pages of this trilogy, Okorafor not only redefines the contours of science fiction but also embarks on a profound exploration of Black female identity, weaving the concept of Womanism into the very fabric of her narrative. In the realm of Afrofuturism, a genre that melds the futuristic with the ancestral, the technological with the traditional, and the scientific with the mythic, Okorafor's *Binti trilogy* stands as an exemplar of literary innovation.

Through her narrative, Okorafor invites readers to traverse the cosmos alongside the eponymous heroine, Binti, a young Himba woman from Earth. Okorafor thus utilizes Black characters, protagonists, and aesthetics to deconstruct images of the past to revisit the future. Binti's journey, which begins as a simple quest for knowledge, rapidly evolves into a transformative odyssey that transcends the boundaries of time and space. Her tale is one of profound self-discovery, challenging the norms and constructs that seek to define her identity. It is a journey that resonates deeply with the principles of Womanism, as it encapsulates the agency, strength, and resilience of Black women in the face of a changing and sometimes hostile world.

In Okorafor's *Binti trilogy*, we are presented with a vivid exemplification of the principles advocated in the proposed Manifesto. The trilogy's central character, Binti, stands as a bold embodiment of these ideals, as she fearlessly challenges societal norms to pursue her dreams of interstellar education. Through Binti's remarkable journey, Okorafor skillfully explores profound themes of identity, agency, and resilience. The narrative underscores the transformative potential of imagination and unwavering determination when confronted with adversity. This narrative resonance aligns seamlessly with the Manifesto's core message, urging Black women to proactively shape their destinies, embrace their uniqueness, excel in unfamiliar

realms, and confront and dismantle preconceived notions and stereotypes that have historically marginalized them.

Moreover, the central aim of this thesis is to shed light on the intricate process of reconstructing the identity of Black women, a journey profoundly shaped by Afrocentric movements. Additionally, this research places a significant focus on the use of an Afrofuturistic womanist lens to analyze the deconstruction process of the Black female's identity and Black womanhood. Furthermore, this study explores the vital role of certain ideological movements, including Feminism, Black Feminism, and Africana Womanism, with particular attention given to Womanism, in the reshaping and redefinition of the identity of Black women, while examining how this transformative process aligns with the influential Afrofuturism movement functioning both as a genre and an analytical framework.

An essential aspect of this thesis involves analyzing how Okorafor's *Binti trilogy* explores and adds to the conversation surrounding Black female identity, especially within the context of Womanism. It explores the complex intersections of cultural and diasporic identity, navigating the tensions between tradition and modernity and embracing the concept of hybridity within Okorafor's Afrofuturistic narrative. Additionally, this research scrutinizes how the trilogy disrupts traditional stereotypes and depictions of Black women, providing a nuanced portrayal of their agency and ability to mold their destinies, featuring a Black female protagonist reminiscent of a womanist. As we embark on this literary odyssey through Binti's Afrofuturistic universe, we encourage readers to delve into the realms of reconstructing identity, traverse the cosmic journey of self-discovery, and witness literature's transformative influence in reshaping our perception of Black female identity. In light of the preceding discussions, the following inquiries are presented and investigated:

1. Can a community envisage conceivable futures and form or accept a certain identity if its past has been purposefully erased and its energies have been absorbed by the quest for readable remnants of its past?
2. How can Afrofuturism be characterized, and how has it served as a platform for African Americans, particularly Black women, to confront and deconstruct prevailing stereotypes and ideologies rooted in a white-centric perspective?
3. How did Womanism distinguish itself from Feminism and Black Feminism, and what enabled it to emerge as the movement most adept at representing the aspirations and needs of Black females?

4. What are the key principles and objectives that should be addressed in the development of an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, and how might such a Manifesto contribute to the empowerment and identity reconstruction of Black women?
5. In what way does Nnedi Okorafor's trilogy, through the perspectives of Afrofuturism and Womanism, disrupt conventional gender roles and societal expectations, especially those impacting Black women?

The hypotheses can be set as follows:

1. This thesis explores potential futures where Black individuals, particularly Black women, can thrive and hold influence. It explores how community agency and empowerment can shape these futures, aiming to uncover readable remnants that can serve as a catalyst for collective identity reconstruction.
2. Afrofuturism serves as a powerful tool for reshaping narratives and empowering marginalized communities. It is characterized by its ability to envision alternative futures that challenge prevailing stereotypes while providing a platform to confront and deconstruct ideologies rooted in a white-centric perspective, fostering empowerment and redefinition of identity.
3. Womanism stands apart from Feminism and Black Feminism by centering on the distinctive experiences of Black women, highlighting the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class. It is theorized to have emerged as the most effective movement in addressing the aspirations and needs of Black females, offering a more encompassing framework.
4. An Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto should emphasize celebrating diversity, empowerment, and challenging systemic inequalities. Its development and adoption could greatly empower and reconstruct the identity of Black women by offering a guiding framework for collective action.
5. Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti trilogy* disrupts traditional gender roles and societal expectations, especially for Black women, through Afrofuturist and Womanist narratives that challenge stereotypes. The trilogy empowers readers to rethink and redefine the roles and expectations placed on Black women.

Consequently, the essence of an inclusively Black future beckons all Black perspectives to converge, engage in rich and purposeful dialogue, and collectively envision a future that is a testament to the multifaceted richness and complexity of their identities. It strives for a future where no voice is muted, where every unique perspective is cherished, and where society boldly

navigates the uncharted territories that lie ahead. Essentially, within the domains of Afrofuturism and Womanism, an inclusively Black future transcends the confines of singular narratives, inviting a symphony of diverse Black voices to harmonize. It is a future that not only acknowledges but also celebrates the multifarious experiences, histories, and identities of Black individuals, fostering a sense of unity amidst diversity. This inclusive vision encourages Black voices from various walks of life—Black men, Black women, womanists, Afrofuturists, and myriad others—to unite in a harmonious discourse that shapes the contours of what is to come.

Additionally, following analytical, qualitative, and descriptive research methods, this thesis is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter deals with the intricate and multifaceted theme of identity. It investigates how identity is seen through the prism of African Americans and how there will be a balance between an indigenous or traditional identity related to the culture and ancestry of these people and an artificial identity that was imposed and forced on them. This part of the research dives deep into the roots of identity by examining its etymology and linguistic evolution, highlighting the importance of understanding where the concept of identity originated and how it has transformed over time. This chapter furthermore embarks on a captivating journey through African American history, focusing on the reconstruction of African American identity. Themes of hybridity, belonging, double consciousness, racial and cultural passing, along with identity Dialectics are all explored in this chapter.

The second chapter lays the foundation for an exploration of Afrofuturism, a genre that blends futurism with African and African American culture, exploring themes of identity, technology, and social change. It invites readers to delve into the intriguing world of speculative fiction that reimagines the Black experience. It beckons readers into a world where imagination knows no bounds, where questions of identity, technology, and social transformation are reimagined through the lens of speculative fiction. This chapter therefore sets the stage for a profound journey into Afrofuturism's intriguing landscapes.

Furthermore, the second chapter embarks on a thought-provoking examination of how Black communities envision their futures while navigating the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. It delves into the tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing innovation, a theme that lies at the heart of Afrofuturism. This, this chapter delves deeply into the conceptual framework of Afrofuturism, seeking to unravel its manifold meanings and interpretations. The intellectual groundwork for a nuanced understanding of the movement is thus laid, appreciating its capacity for profound social critique and imaginative expression. The evolution of Afrofuturism through different phases, from its early

manifestations to its contemporary forms is further traced within this chapter. Moreover, it offers readers a comprehensive and reflective overview of this visionary movement, underlining its profound significance in redefining narratives of Black identity and reshaping visions of the future.

Chapter three explores women's writings as the foundation for the evolution of feminist consciousness, reflecting diverse experiences that shape feminist thought and female identity. The historical waves of Feminism are explored; however, it becomes evident that such movement particularly in its earlier waves, did not fully address the unique needs and experiences of Black women. This oversight led to the emergence of Womanism, a movement that aimed to rectify the gaps in traditional Feminism and provide a more inclusive and nuanced perspective on gender, race, and identity. Womanism arose as a response to the limitations of Feminism in adequately addressing the concerns of Black women. It highlights the necessity of Womanism for the reconstruction of the Black female identity, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the intersectionality of race and gender in feminist discourse. Through the lens of Womanism, a deeper insight into the multifaceted experiences of Black women and their pivotal role in shaping and reconstructing the Black female's identity is gained.

Chapter four aims at bridging the realms of Afrofuturism and Womanism by exploring the rich intersections between these movements. It delves into the conceptual framework of Afrofuturism and its potential meanings within the context of Black female identity. It examines how Afrofuturism serves as a liberating platform, embracing the multifaceted dimensions of Black womanhood and challenging established stereotypes and white-centric ideologies. It further embarks on a journey toward crafting what can be termed as an "Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto," a visionary blueprint that seeks to reconstruct and empower the Black female's identity through the fusion of Afrofuturist and womanist ideologies.

Moreover, the core of this chapter is the proposed Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto which represents a radical departure from conventional narratives and ideologies that have historically constrained the identity of Black women. It proclaims the right of Black females to occupy the forefront of speculative narratives and futurist visions and it challenges established stereotypes, restrictive norms, and white-centric perspectives that have often silenced their voices and marginalized their experiences. Central to this proposed Manifesto is the affirmation of the holistic identity of Black women. It celebrates the intricate tapestry of their existence, acknowledging their cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions. It recognizes the significance of

embracing one's roots, history, and traditions as essential components of identity, even in the context of futuristic imaginings.

Chapter five deals with a profound exploration and analysis of the *Binti trilogy* (2015-2018) by Nnedi Okorafor through an Afrofuturist womanist lens, illuminating the transformative journey of the titular character, Binti. At its core, the fifth chapter delves into the theme of self-discovery—a theme that resonates deeply with the Afrofuturist womanist perspective. It examines how Binti, a young Black female from the Himba tribe, navigates the complex terrain of identity, belonging, and self-realization against the backdrop of a richly crafted Afrofuturistic universe. Binti's journey serves as a symbolic microcosm of the larger Black female experience. Through the Afrofuturist womanist lens, this journey becomes a powerful metaphor for the broader quest of Black women to break free from societal constraints and explore the boundless possibilities of their identities.

Additionally, the fifth chapter delves into the unique aspects of Afrofuturism and Womanism that intersect within the *Binti trilogy*. It examines how Afrofuturism provides a visionary space where Black women can imagine and construct futures free from the confines of historical oppressions. This speculative genre empowers them to envision themselves as creators of their destinies, forging paths that challenge existing power structures and hierarchies. As the chapter unfolds, it explores the intricate interplay of identity, heritage, and belonging in Binti's narrative. It examines how she negotiates her cultural traditions with the knowledge she gains at Oomza University, revealing the tensions and harmonies that arise when old and new worlds collide. This exploration mirrors the multifaceted nature of Black female identity, often shaped by a dynamic interplay of heritage, contemporary influences, and future aspirations.

The motivation for this research lies in the intersection of science fiction and African American literature, a compelling area that promises to enrich scholarly discourse. Science fiction offers a unique platform for exploring speculative realms and pushing the boundaries of imagination. Concurrently, African American literature provides profound insights into the nuanced experiences, triumphs, and challenges of a resilient community navigating historical complexities. This convergence presents an opportunity to examine how these two realms intersect, contributing to a deeper understanding of cultural narratives and speculative genres. By exploring this intersection, the research aims to illuminate how science fiction narratives within African American literature reflect broader societal themes and contribute to contemporary discourse on identity, representation, and cultural resilience.



Furthermore, this thesis delves into the rich complexities of the *Binti trilogy*, celebrating the transformative power of self-discovery within an Afrofuturist womanist framework. It invites readers to accompany Binti on her odyssey of identity, highlighting the universal themes of resilience, empowerment, and the enduring quest to find one's true self. This study therefore not only illuminates the transformative power of literature but also underscores the potency of storytelling in encapsulating the multifaceted nature of identity. Through Binti's narrative, readers find a reflection of their journeys, their complexities, and their quest for self-discovery within an ever-evolving world.

# **Chapter One**

Reconstructing African American Identity in Diaspora: Cultural Evolution and  
Complex Realities

## **Chapter One**

### **Reconstructing African American Identity in Diaspora: Cultural Evolution and Complex Realities**

#### **I.1 Introduction**

The concept of identity is a global topic of debate and exploration, intriguing individuals as they navigate their place in society. Within African American literature and cultural studies, this chapter plays a significant role in unraveling the complex dimensions of African American identity, delving into cultural, diasporic, and hybrid aspects. Like a mosaic composed of diverse elements tightly interwoven, identity shapes an individual's distinctiveness, serving as the conduit linking their past, present, and future. Any disruption within this mosaic can evoke profound reactions and impact various aspects of an individual's existence across different phases of time. This chapter delves into the theme of African American identity reconstruction, tracing the evolution of self-perception, resilience, and empowerment. It explores the intricate process undertaken by the Black community, especially within the diaspora, to rebuild their identities rooted in their cultural heritage and history. Moreover, this exploration examines challenges such as recovering from a fractured past and envisioning a future amidst the systematic erasure of their history. Shedding light on the African American experience, it emphasizes the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, heritage, and innovation in shaping African American identity.

#### **I.2 Exploring Identity: Historical Roots and Contemporary Significance**

Identity is a term that finds frequent usage in both everyday conversations and a multitude of academic disciplines. However, despite its ubiquitous presence, the concept remains a subject of continuous and often contentious debate. A precise and comprehensive definition of identity remains elusive. To grasp its essence, one might delve into the reflections and musings of daily life. Questions like "Who am I?" and "Who do I aspire to become?" are existential inquiries that regularly occupy the thoughts of individuals. Attempting to unravel these questions can lead to intricate and multifaceted responses. Identity encompasses the array of roles that individuals inhabit, such as those of a child, friend, partner, or parent. It encompasses external elements over which one may have limited control, including gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Moreover, identity extends to encompass political affiliations,

ethical principles, and religious beliefs, all of which exert a profound influence on the choices individuals make in their daily lives.

An argument can be made that individuals who place a high degree of importance on their physical appearance or who feel that fundamental aspects of their identity, such as their social class, gender, or sexual orientation, are not adequately represented, may grapple with the process of reconstructing their identity. Contemplating the divide between one's current self and the desired self can act as a potent catalyst for personal transformation. This concept has garnered significant attention from scholars across various academic disciplines, leading one to expect a plethora of precise and straightforward definitions that capture the essence of the term. However, surprisingly, this is not the case. While various definitions can be found from different sources, scholars have demonstrated that these definitions often fall short of encompassing the multifaceted meanings associated with the term. This inadequacy can be misleading and hinder a comprehensive understanding of the concept.

A basic definition of the term can be found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2022) which defines identity as “The distinguishing character or personality of an individual: Individuality; it is also the sameness of essential or generic character in different instances; and the sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing: oneness”. Identity can therefore be seen as a distinguishing trait that each individual has as part of the process of developing his or her personality. It is characterized in a variety of ways, such as I, me, personality, individuality, and essence. These characteristics enable anybody to comprehend who they are inwardly within the exterior environment.

Fearon (1999) in his article *What is Identity: As we Now Use the Word*, delves into the concept of identity and highlights that a significant portion of academic scholars employing this term often take for granted that their readers already grasp its meaning. Even when identity plays a central role as a dependent or independent variable in research, there is often an unspoken assumption regarding the readers' understanding of the concept. Fearon characterizes identity as something that is difficult to put into words and is regarded by many as sacred or ineffable. This perception, he suggests, is a primary reason why comprehensive definitions are frequently absent, as people are hesitant to define that which is considered sacred, ineffable, or intricate.

Fearon (1999) gave a few examples of how identity is defined in various sources, for example, he mentions the definition of Hogg and Abrams (1988) who stated that Identity is

“people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (p.2). He also mentions the definition by Deng (1995) who stated: “Identity is used to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (p.1). He highlights that the variety, intricacy, and distinctions between these many formulations are astounding and each academic defines it while influenced by various events, theories, and psychologies that may have given birth to these definitions. Furthermore, he emphasizes the fact that some of these writers may just want to specify a meaning of identity that is acceptable or beneficial for their objectives, thus some variance is to be expected given varied intents. Therefore, one can assume that the meaning of the term is still lacking and cannot be placed and articulated in different contexts.

Nonetheless, Fearon (1999) mentions that it is notable that the definitions appear to be referring to a shared underlying notion. Despite the variation, almost everyone elicits a sense of identification; therefore, none appear incorrect. This is also to be expected, as identity has long been a part of everyday discourse. Regardless of research traditions or goals, it would be bizarre to define an identity that had nothing to do with what we already instinctively understood by the term. Therefore, when a word has deep roots in a common language, it can be exceedingly misleading to specify a definition without paying particular regard to the term's preceding ordinary language meaning. However, upon a closer examination of these definitions, one may encounter challenges in applying them universally across all fields of study and contexts. The meaning of identity, for instance, can vary significantly between an individual's understanding and its interpretation within an ethnic community or among a group of professionals, such as scientists and legislators.

Gleason (1983) states that “identity has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign” (p. 914). According to the author, the notion of identity has been identified by so many definitions that it has lost its significance and has no meaning at all. The scholar explains that most of us try to define the concept in a void context, which is the reason why most of us find it difficult to understand the term in its fullest meaning. The scholar further clarifies that adding modifiers to the term is what makes it even more complicated than what it already is, and he gives the example of “ethnic identity” The scholar states the matter that no writer has even been able to give a satisfactory answer to such concept.

Fearon (1999) attempted to define identity in the context of the “now” stating that a present definition is needed to understand how the word is being used and interpreted

nowadays. He emphasizes the fact that identity is often related to certain terms such as sameness, wholeness, and togetherness. Moreover, the concept usually focuses on similarities between individuals, groups of people, states, and even races and ethnicities. However, Fearon states that it should rather focus on and celebrate the differences between individuals, races, ethnicities, and genders. He also mentions the definition of identity that was recently used in South Africa. He stated: “The word was used as a label for a policy that refused to acknowledge any difference between Africans and Europeans – the policy of identity” (p.9). This only highlights the fact that the definitions of the word given in the past, mostly by the patriarchy, are no longer relevant nor reliable to this new evolving world.

One cannot mention the concept of identity without also mentioning the concept of “identity crisis”. Erikson is known to be the first who used the term and gave it significance. His definition made it to several dictionaries and is defined in one as follows: “the condition of being uncertain of one’s feelings about oneself, especially about character, goals, and origins, occurring especially in adolescence as a result of growing up under disruptive, fast-changing conditions.” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 2014). Identity is more than just something we inherit; it is a multifaceted concept that may shift as the circumstances surrounding a person or group of people change. Those conditions can either be beneficial and uplift the individual, or they might be disrupted by tragic occurrences that will eventually ruin the person or even a community.

Fearon (1999) states that there is no brief description or meaning that can be provided to such a notion since it encompasses so many definitions that it is difficult to offer it a single definition. However, the scholar argues that the term as we use it today has two separate but connected meanings, and much of the power and fascination of the notion is predicated on the underlying issue of how these meanings intersect. He mentions that identity can be either “social” or “personal”. According to him, social identity is when an individual or a group of people are related to social categories and labels (Americans, Arabs, Black community, homosexuals...etc.). On the other hand, personal identity is different in a way that it is related to how a person chooses to identify. It is a personal decision of how we want others to see us and identify us.

Moreover, A person's “personal identity” is a combination of characteristics, beliefs, goals, or behavioral principles that they believe distinguishes them in socially significant ways. Fearon (1999) states:

Personal identity is a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks to distinguish her in socially relevant ways and that (a) the person takes special pride in; (b) the person takes no special pride in, but which so orient her behavior that she would be at a loss about how to act and what to do without them; or (c) the person feels she could not change even if she wanted to. Most often, I will argue, the (a) meaning applies so that for usage in ordinary language personal identity can typically be glossed as the aspects or attributes of a person that form the basis for his or her dignity or self-respect. Used in this sense, “identity” has become a partial and indirect substitute for “dignity,” “honor,” and “pride.” (p.11).

In the contemporary context, the term "identity" has evolved into a highly diverse and intricate concept. It is no longer possible to use this term without recognizing its close association with celebrating the differences and unique characteristics of individuals worldwide. In today's world, identity is deeply intertwined with aspects like ethnicity, cultural heritage, gender, and sexuality. It is about how individuals perceive themselves, embracing their distinctiveness and every facet of their self-identification, while also honouring the people and traditions they identify with. This notion of identity is no longer confined to those who hold power and privilege; rather, it is now embraced by those who were once denied the very right to assert their own identity.

Hall (2019) in his book *Essential Essays: Identity and Diaspora* discussed the concept of identity under the context of what he named “old and new identities, old and new ethnicities.” (p.63). The author stated: “Can identity itself be rethought and relived, in and through difference?” (p.63). Such thought reflects his profound exploration of the complex nature of identity and how it can evolve through interactions with difference. Hall's question challenges the traditional, fixed notion of identity. He suggests that identity is not a static, unchanging concept but rather a dynamic and evolving one. In essence, he questions whether our understanding of who we are can be transformed or redefined when we encounter and engage with different cultures, perspectives, and experiences.

Hall (2019) emphasizes that this rethinking and reliving of identity occur in and through difference. This means that when individuals encounter others who are different from them in terms of culture, background, beliefs, or experiences, it can lead to a reevaluation of their own identity. Exposure to diversity prompts individuals to consider how their identity is shaped, challenged, or expanded by these encounters. The author's question underscores that identity is

a process rather than a finished product. It evolves and is influenced by our interactions with others and the changing world around us. It invites individuals to reflect on how they define themselves and how their sense of self may shift as they engage with diverse perspectives.

In essence, Hall's (2019) ideology challenges one to consider identity as a fluid and evolving concept that can be reshaped and deepened through one's encounters with difference. It invites one to be open to the idea that our understanding of who we are is not fixed but can be enriched and redefined as we engage with the diverse mosaic of humanity as the author states: "What is this never-ending theoretical work which is constantly losing and regaining concepts? I talk about identity here as a point at which, on the one hand, a whole set of new theoretical discourses intersect and where, on the other, a whole new set of cultural practices emerge" (p.64). The critic delves into the traditional or "old" ways of conceptualizing identity, examining them from both philosophical and psychological perspectives. These conventional views have deep historical roots and have significantly influenced how we understand the nature of identity. He contrasts these conventional views with newer, more complex understandings of identity.

From a philosophical standpoint, Hall (2019) alludes to the "old Cartesian subject," a reference to the philosophical framework introduced by René Descartes. In this traditional perspective, the self, or subject, is portrayed as an unchanging and foundational entity. Identity is perceived as the immutable core upon which all actions and thoughts are built. It is the grounding principle of human existence. Similarly, from a psychological perspective, Hall draws parallels to the traditional understanding of the self. Here, identity is often depicted as a continuous, self-sufficient entity that undergoes a developmental and unfolding process over time. This viewpoint portrays identity as an inner dialectic of selfhood, where individuals are seen as constantly on a journey towards complete self-understanding. The ultimate goal is to reach a state of certainty about who one truly is.

However, it can be contended that these traditional conceptions of identity have not gone unchallenged. Over time, many scholars and thinkers have critiqued these notions, questioning the idea of a fixed, unchanging self and the feasibility of achieving complete self-understanding. Hall (2019) is one of the scholars who has paved the way for more nuanced and complex understandings of identity. These newer perspectives recognize that identity is not a static or singular entity but is instead shaped by an array of factors, including cultural influences, societal contexts, and personal experiences. Identity is seen as a fluid and dynamic concept that can change and evolve. In essence, the critic's analysis highlights a shift away from rigid, fixed



notions of identity and toward a more context-dependent understanding that embraces the multifaceted nature of human identity.

Drawing from another perspective, Goffman's concept of the "presentation of self" is a central idea within his symbolic interactionist framework, as outlined in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). In this work, Goffman explores how individuals engage in impression management during social interactions, actively shaping the way they present themselves to others. Goffman (1959) argues that individuals play roles in social situations, much like actors on a stage. He introduces the metaphor of the "front stage" and "backstage" to describe different aspects of social life. The front stage is where individuals perform and present themselves to others, adhering to social norms and expectations. This is the realm of public interaction. In contrast, the backstage is where individuals can relax and be themselves, away from the public gaze.

Within this framework, Goffman (1959) introduces the concept of "impression management." This involves the conscious or unconscious efforts individuals make to control the impressions others form of them. People strategically choose how they present themselves, using various cues such as clothing, language, and body language to influence the perception of their identity. "Impression management" becomes a key concept, illustrating how individuals strategically navigate their interactions to influence the perceptions of those around them. This strategic presentation is not deceitful but rather a fundamental aspect of social life, allowing for the smooth functioning of interpersonal relationships.

Goffman's (1959) framework highlights that identity is not a monolithic entity but a complex, situational performance. People continuously adjust their expressions, gestures, and verbal cues to fit the expectations of specific social settings. This adaptability underscores the socially constructed and fluid nature of identity, challenging the notion of a fixed, essential self. In other words, the ability to adjust expressions and behaviours based on the social context reflects the socially constructed nature of identity, illustrating its fluidity and responsiveness to the demands of diverse social settings.

The concept of identity holds significant importance across various domains, including political, theoretical, and conceptual discourses. Beyond its academic relevance, Hall (2019) sees identity as an existential reality that profoundly affects our self-conceptions. The critic underscores the pivotal role of the language of identity in shaping how we perceive ourselves. It carries with it the idea of an authentic self, a genuine core hidden within us beneath the layers

of false personas we present to the world. This notion of a "true self" serves as a guarantee of our authenticity. According to this perspective, we believe that we only truly understand ourselves when we delve deep inside to listen to what our innermost, authentic self has to express.

In essence, the author's reflection on the language of identity underscores its influence on one's self-perception. It suggests that we often view our identities through the lens of an inner, genuine self and that seeking this authenticity is a fundamental aspect of our self-discovery. Thus, the language and concept of identity are not only intellectual constructs but also integral to our journeys of self-exploration and understanding as the critic states: "There is something guaranteed about that logic or discourse of identity. It gives us a sense of depth, out there and in here." (Hall, 2019, p.64).

Hall (2019) delves into the role of concepts in providing a sense of stability and reassurance in the face of the tumultuous nature of history. He suggests that concepts serve as a form of intellectual comfort, akin to a good night's rest, by implying that within the chaotic and unpredictable developments of history, there exists a relatively stable and slowly evolving foundation. He further argues that this conventional "logic of identity" has become obsolete or finished for a variety of reasons. One of the key factors contributing to its demise, as he mentions, is the "great decentering of modern thought." This phrase alludes to significant shifts in intellectual and philosophical paradigms that have challenged and transformed our traditional understanding of identity.

This "decentering" refers to various groundbreaking ideas and movements in modern thought that have eroded the once-dominant belief in a fixed and unchanging identity. For instance, advances in fields like psychology, sociology, and cultural studies have highlighted the dynamic and context-dependent nature of identity. Postmodernism, for instance, has questioned grand narratives and emphasized the multiplicity and fragmentation of identities. Additionally, the influence of feminism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory has spotlighted how power structures and social contexts shape identity (Hall, 2019). Furthermore, the critic underscores that concepts have historically provided a sense of stability in the face of historical upheaval, but this traditional logic of identity has been challenged and transformed by the great shifts in modern thought. These shifts have led to a more nuanced and fluid understanding of identity, emphasizing its adaptability and susceptibility to change in response to evolving societal and cultural dynamics.

Within the sphere of identity and modernity, Bauman (2000) in his influential work, *Liquid Modernity* argues that societal structures and institutions have transitioned from a solid form to a liquid one. Unlike the stable and enduring nature of "solid" modernity, characterized by fixed social roles and institutions, "liquid" modernity is marked by constant change, uncertainty, and the dissolution of traditional structures. The author applies this notion to the realm of identity, contending that identities in the liquid modernity era are no longer fixed or predetermined. Instead, individuals navigate a dynamic and unpredictable landscape where social, economic, and technological forces continuously reshape their sense of self.

Moreover, Bauman (2000) introduces the concept of "individualization," emphasizing the increasing responsibility placed on individuals to construct and manage their identities in a world that lacks fixed structures. The freedom to choose one's identity is accompanied by the burden of constant decision-making and adaptation. Bauman's concept of liquid modernity offers a valuable perspective on the fluid nature of contemporary identity. By examining the impact of globalization, technological change, and individualization on societal structures, the author provides insights into how identities have become more contingent, adaptable, and subject to ongoing negotiation in the liquid modernity era.

Hall (2019), however, draws upon the contributions of influential figures who have transformed the outlook on identity over time. He discusses how the traditional logic of identity, particularly in the context of individuals or groups being the sole authors of historical practices, becomes untenable when viewed through the lens of Marxist thought. The author begins by acknowledging that although Marx primarily addresses the concept of "man" (a common historical practice that often excluded women from explicit discussions of historical agency), he does recognize the role of both men and women in making history. However, Marx emphasizes that this historical agency occurs under conditions that are not of the individual or group's choosing.

Hall (2019) explains that the traditional logic of identity, where individuals or groups are seen as the sole authors of historical practices, is no longer tenable in light of Marx's perspective. Marx's view emphasizes that historical agency occurs within conditions not of one's choosing, decentering the traditional notion of autonomous, self-determined agents of history. Instead, individuals and groups are situated within broader historical practices and socio-economic structures that profoundly shape their actions and choices, challenging the idea of absolute individual agency and highlighting the impact of societal structures and historical context on identity and actions. In other words, this historical decentering, as Hall terms it,

underscores the idea that our actions and identities are not formed in isolation but are deeply intertwined with the social and historical circumstances in which we find ourselves. It challenges the notion of absolute individual agency and emphasizes the importance of recognizing how societal structures and historical conditions constrain and shape our actions and identities.

Hall (2019) tackles further the Freudian perspective on identity invoking Sigmund Freud's ideas to illustrate the fragility of the self and the limitations of our understanding of identity. He metaphorically portrays Freud as coming "from underneath, like Hamlet's ghost," (p.65) suggesting that Freud's insights emerge unexpectedly, much like a haunting presence, challenging conventional notions of identity. The critic discusses how we are constantly being "decentered" from various angles, meaning that our understanding of ourselves and our identity is continually evolving and being disrupted. However, Freud's contribution goes deeper. He reminds us that the stable language of identity, which we often take for granted, is also influenced by the complexities of our psychic life—the realm of the unconscious mind.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory emphasized the importance of the unconscious in shaping human behavior and identity. According to Freud, the unconscious is a vast and enigmatic territory where our desires, fears, and hidden motivations reside. It operates beneath the surface, often eluding our conscious awareness. Freud believed that the unconscious communicates not in straightforward language but through symbolic and sometimes cryptic messages, particularly in our dreams and slips of the tongue. As a result, the author suggests that our self-concept and understanding of identity are not as stable or transparent as we might assume. The unconscious, which we cannot fully access or comprehend, plays a significant role in shaping who we are. This realization challenges the notion of a fixed and easily knowable self, making it appear much more delicate and elusive. In essence, Freud's ideas serve to remind us that the self is a complex and multifaceted construct, deeply influenced by the hidden currents of our unconscious mind and that understanding it requires a nuanced and introspective approach (Hall, 2019).

Hall (2019) describes how the traditional notion of a stable and self-determined identity faces challenges from various intellectual perspectives. Marx's influence highlights that individuals and groups are shaped by external socio-economic forces, disrupting the idea of autonomous agents of history. Freud's insights emphasize the significance of the unconscious mind in constructing identity, revealing its complexity and hidden motivations. Finally, the author also mentions Saussure's linguistic theories that underscore the idea that language

precedes individual expression and that our identity is constructed within discourse. This philosophical upheaval challenges the belief in a seamless connection between our language and an objective reality, ultimately eroding the concept of a perfect, transparent continuity between our expressions and an external truth. It suggests that our identities are intricately tied to the discourses and systems of meaning that surround us, and there is no direct, unmediated access to an ultimate "truth" outside of quotation marks.

The writer describes modernity as a period of significant disruption and transformation. It differs from earlier notions of progress and enlightenment, representing a time of challenges to established ideas about identity and the self. Hall points to several key factors contributing to this modernity of upheaval, including the rise of diverse cultures that relativize Western narratives, as well as shifting gender dynamics marked by the displacement of the traditional masculine gaze. Together, these disruptions redefine modernity as a complex and contested era, far from a straightforward narrative of progress and enlightenment (Hall, 2019).

It can be argued that while significant collective social identities still hold influence in our world, their nature and role have fundamentally transformed. In the past, these identities were often perceived as homogeneous and unified, possessing unquestioned authority. However, contemporary perspectives challenge this notion, emphasizing the inner differences, contradictions, segmentations, and fragmentations within these identities. This shift reflects a more nuanced understanding of social identities, recognizing their complexity and the existence of diverse and sometimes conflicting subgroups and experiences. It encourages a more inclusive and critical engagement with these identities, acknowledging their evolving nature and the rich diversity they encompass.

In the evolving landscape of modernity and postmodernity, one can argue that it is increasingly evident that identity is no longer the static and stable concept it once was, governed by traditional variables like class, gender, or race or as Hall (2019) calls them "Master Concepts" (p.68). This transformation reflects a profound shift in the way we understand ourselves and others and such variables lose their master status. In this new era, identity is better characterized as fluid and malleable, capable of undergoing significant changes under the influence of diverse cultural and social circumstances. One can claim that the traditional markers of identity, such as socioeconomic class or gender, still play a role in shaping who we are, but they are no longer the sole determinants of our identities. Today, individuals are influenced by a multitude of factors, including globalization, technology, multiculturalism, and

the breakdown of traditional social hierarchies. These dynamics allow for the interplay of various cultural and social elements in shaping how people perceive themselves and others.

Moreover, the concept of identity is no longer confined to predefined categories; it has become a dynamic and intersectional construct. People increasingly embrace complex and multifaceted identities that transcend traditional boundaries. This transformation signals a departure from old notions of identity regulation and opens the door to a more inclusive and diverse understanding of human identity. In essence, in this era of modernity and postmodernity, identity is in a state of flux, influenced by a wide array of cultural and social forces. It reflects the ongoing evolution of society, challenging established norms and paving the way for a more dynamic and inclusive understanding of who we are as individuals and as a global community. Hall (2019) states:

It makes us aware that identities are never completed, never finished, and that they are always, as subjectivity itself is, in process. That itself is a pretty difficult task. Though we have always known it a little bit, we have always thought about ourselves as getting more like ourselves every day. But that is a sort of Hegelian notion, of going forward to meet that which we always were. I want to open that process up considerably. Identity is always in the process of formation (p.68).

Hall (2019) further asserts that the concept of identity is intricately linked with the process of identification, where individuals or groups assert that they share common traits or characteristics. It signifies a sense of sameness, a recognition that "this here is the same as that" or "we are the same together" in certain respects. However, an important lesson drawn from discussions in Feminism and psychoanalysis is that this structure of identification is far from straightforward. It is invariably constructed through layers of ambivalence and splitting. In other words, the process of identifying with a particular identity or group is rarely a smooth, unambiguous process. It often involves conflicting feelings, inner contradictions, and a simultaneous recognition of both similarities and differences. This complexity highlights that identity is not a monolithic or fixed construct but rather a nuanced and multifaceted one, shaped by the intricate interplay of various factors and emotions.

Hall (2019) claims that the conventional notion that identity is solely about individuals or groups who share similar appearances, emotions, or self-identifications is, in reality, a simplistic perspective. Instead, identity should be understood as a dynamic process, a narrative, and a discourse that is fundamentally intertwined with the concept of the "Other." In essence,

our understanding of who we are and how we define our identity is profoundly influenced by our perception of those who are different from us. It is about the "Other" that we construct our sense of self, often by highlighting what distinguishes us from them. This process of identity formation is not isolated but occurs within a broader context of interaction and negotiation with those we perceive as different. In this way, identity is not an insular concept; it is a dialogical and relational one, shaped by our engagement with others who provide a crucial backdrop against which we define and understand ourselves.

The notion of identity, as understood in contemporary discourse, is inherently contradictory and multifaceted. It is not a singular or sealed totality but rather a complex and dynamic concept. Identity is seen as comprising multiple discourses, often conflicting and intersecting, and it emerges within the interplay of these diverse narratives. Moreover, identity is not solely self-defined but is also shaped by the presence and silence of others. It is in the gaps, ambivalence, and desires that emerge in these interactions that our identities are woven. This perspective acknowledges that identity is not a fixed or closed entity but a fluid and evolving construct, influenced by the rich tapestry of human experiences, relationships, and the ongoing negotiation of meanings within a broader social and cultural context. Hall (2019) states: "What is more is that identity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation. Identity is not something that is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one's self" (p.70).

To conclude, it can be contended that identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that transcends mere labels and categories. It encompasses the essence of who we are as individuals and as members of various communities and societies. Our identities are shaped by a myriad of factors, including our cultural heritage, experiences, beliefs, and interactions with others. What makes the concept of identity particularly intriguing is its dynamism—it evolves, adapting to new experiences and circumstances. It forms the core of our self-awareness and the lens through which we perceive ourselves and engage with the world around us. Understanding and embracing the complexities of identity can lead to greater empathy, acceptance, and a deeper appreciation of the rich diversity that defines our global community.

### **I.3. Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Navigating the Intersection**

In today's era of globalization and transnational migrations, the intertwined concepts of cultural identity and diaspora have emerged as compelling subjects for exploration and

discussion. The intricate interplay between these two dynamic and interrelated phenomena encapsulates the multifaceted experiences of individuals and communities as they grapple with the complexities of displacement, hybridity, adaptation, and multiculturalism. This part of the thesis embarks on an exploration of this profound intersection, delving into the intricate relationship between cultural identity and diaspora. By scrutinizing the various dimensions of this complex interplay, how individuals and communities uphold, adapt, and negotiate their cultural identities when confronted with the challenges and opportunities inherent in diasporic experiences are unraveled.

As globalization and migration continue to reshape the contemporary landscape, it becomes increasingly evident that cultural identity, far from being a static or monolithic construct, is a dynamic and evolving facet of an individual's self-concept. It encompasses an array of elements, including language, religion, traditions, customs, and shared historical narratives, which collectively contribute to an individual's sense of belonging and self-identification. Conversely, diaspora is known to refer to the dispersion of a particular group, often due to historical events, forced migrations, or economic factors, resulting in communities residing outside their homeland. The consequences of diaspora extend beyond geographic displacement, permeating the realms of cultural, social, and psychological experiences, engendering unique challenges and opportunities in the preservation and adaptation of cultural identity.

Within this complex milieu, the central premise of this section rests upon the recognition that cultural identity and diaspora are mutually influential, shaping and reshaping one another in a dynamic interplay. As individuals and communities grapple with the realities of diaspora, they encounter a spectrum of experiences, from the preservation of their cultural heritage to the formation of hybrid identities that incorporate elements from both the homeland and the host culture. This exploration acknowledges the diversity of diaspora experiences while seeking to unearth common threads that bind individuals and communities in their quest for self-definition and cultural continuity.

Throughout the annals of history, humanity has been marked by the ceaseless movement of people—sometimes propelled by necessity, driven by ambition, or forged by circumstances beyond their control. The diasporic narratives of communities and individuals, shaped by the relentless currents of migration, reveal a tapestry of experiences that transcend borders and epochs. This study undertakes a historical investigation into a crucial junction—the intersection of cultural identity and diaspora. Throughout history, this interconnection has etched a lasting



impression on the human narrative, encompassing intricate dynamics related to the preservation, adaptation, and resilience of these phenomena.

These themes have been recurrently explored, documented, and celebrated by authors, poets, and storytellers from diverse backgrounds. From the pages of the Harlem Renaissance to the verses of contemporary poets, the diasporic experiences of communities, mainly African Americans, have been a wellspring of inspiration. The African diaspora, a monumental chapter in the human story, traces its origins to the forced displacement of millions of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. This historic upheaval, characterized by the brutal rupture of families and the wrenching of individuals from their homelands, is a profound testament to the enduring spirit of resilience. Within the folds of this diaspora, cultural identity became a beacon of hope, a repository of traditions, and a source of unwavering strength.

One can argue that cultural identity, as rendered through the prism of literature, is an intricate mosaic of memory, language, music, and ancestral knowledge. It is a testament to how communities have clung to their roots amidst the tumultuous currents of diaspora, nurturing the flame of their cultural heritage. From the oral traditions of storytelling that carried the wisdom of generations to the novels and poems that articulate the multifaceted dimensions of identity, literature has been both a reflection and a conduit of this enduring legacy.

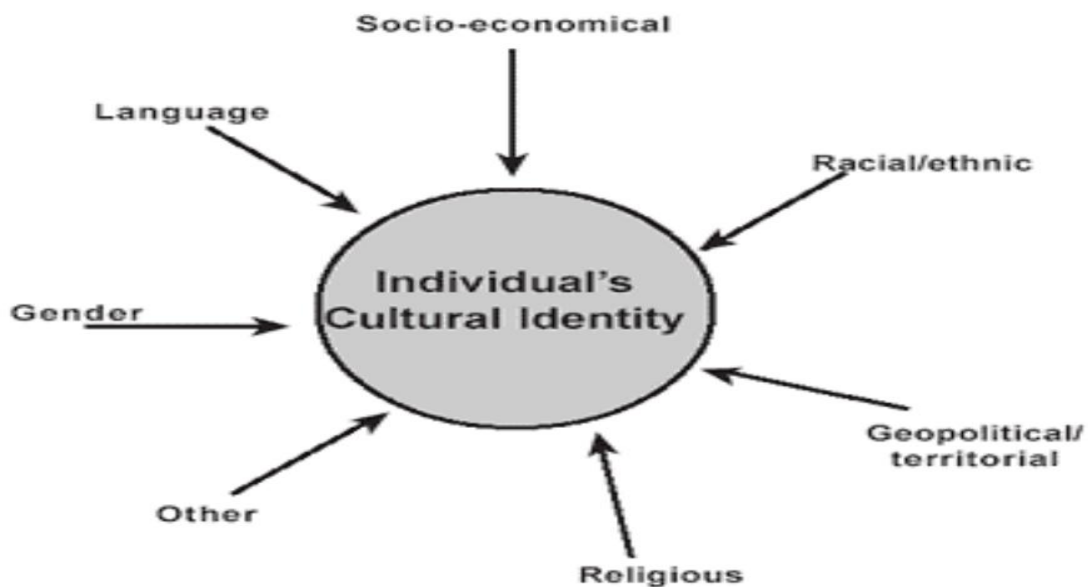
### **I.3.1. Cultural Identity: Nurturing the Tapestry of Self**

Cultural identity is known to represent a multidimensional concept that revolves around an individual's or a group's profound sense of belonging, identification, and connection to a specific culture or cultural community. It encompasses a rich array of shared customs, traditions, values, beliefs, language, rituals, and social practices that collectively define the unique character and way of life of a particular cultural group. This sense of cultural identity is deeply ingrained within an individual's self-perception and plays a pivotal role in shaping how they understand themselves within the broader societal context. Cultural identity can be influenced by various factors, including ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, gender, and socioeconomic background. It provides individuals with a foundation for continuity, a link to their cultural heritage, and a framework for comprehending their place in the world. Moreover, cultural identity significantly shapes one's values, behaviours, and worldviews, influencing their interactions with others and their understanding of the diverse human experience.

Voicu (2013) delves into the multifaceted nature of cultural identity, emphasizing its dynamic and responsive qualities. The author specifically explores how an individual's cultural identity is intricately intertwined with the ongoing dialogue between diverse cultures. This suggests that one's identity, mainly cultural identity, is not static but is continuously shaped and influenced by interactions with different cultural contexts:

**Figure 1**

*Individual's Cultural Identity*



*Note.* Adapted from *Exploring Cultural Identities in Jean Rhys' Fiction* by Voicu (2013).

Expanding upon Hall's perspectives on culture and identity, one delves into the intricate interplay between these two dynamic concepts. Hall's seminal work, particularly his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1996), has provided invaluable insights into how cultural identities are constructed and negotiated within diaspora contexts. Hall delves into the complex concept of identity by stating:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity', lays claim... We all write and

speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a specific culture. What we say is always 'in context', positioned (p.222).

In Hall's framework, cultural identity is not a fixed or essential attribute; rather, it is a process that unfolds over time and is shaped by a multitude of factors. These factors encompass historical, social, and cultural contexts, and they contribute to the formation of one's sense of self. Hall argues that cultural identity is neither a singular nor a homogeneous entity but a complex web of affiliations, experiences, and affiliations.

In his essay, Hall (1996) undertakes a profound examination of the multifaceted concept of cultural identity. Within this exploration, Hall unveils two distinct and compelling definitions, each laden with profound implications, particularly when applied to the context of comprehending the enduring trauma inflicted by colonialism. The first definition he dissects is what he terms an "essentialist identity." This perspective accentuates the commonalities shared among members of a cultural group, casting a spotlight on the shared customs, traditions, and values that bind them together:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes that provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (p.223).

Hall (1996) thus argues that while this notion of identity can undoubtedly serve as a wellspring of inspiration for feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist art and activism, it harbors inherent limitations. The essentialist identity, in its emphasis on uniformity, often risks oversimplifying the intricate and multifaceted nature of cultural identities, potentially sidelining the diverse experiences, histories, and perspectives that exist within a cultural collective. It is in this oversimplification that the critical understanding of the traumatic legacy of colonialism, with its intricate layers of power dynamics and cultural erasure, can become elusive.

Contrastingly, the second definition offered by Hall (1996) embraces a more dynamic and inclusive perspective. Within this framework, cultural identity is recognized as comprising

not only shared commonalities but also acknowledging and valuing the differences that coexist within an imagined cultural group. This viewpoint acknowledges the inherent complexity of identity, emphasizing that it is not a static, monolithic entity but a continually evolving, historically contingent construct. This recognition that cultural identity is profoundly shaped by the historical and social contexts within which it emerges becomes particularly pertinent in the context of understanding the trauma of colonialism:

This second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's 'uniqueness'. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. (p.225).

Colonialism, as a deeply impactful historical and social force, often involved the imposition of one culture's norms, values, and systems upon indigenous populations, leading to dislocation, the loss of cultural autonomy, and the fragmentation of identity. Hall's second definition, with its emphasis on the historical and social contingencies that influence identity, provides a valuable framework for unraveling the intricate and multifaceted ways in which colonialism disrupted and transformed cultural identities. It underscores that identities are not stagnant but rather fluid, adapting in response to historical forces and power dynamics. In this nuanced exploration, Hall encourages a deeper, more empathetic comprehension of the complexities of cultural identity in the shadow of colonial trauma (Hall, 1996).

Hall (1996) thus argues that it is only from this second standpoint that the traumatic nature of 'the colonial experience' can be properly comprehended. The positioning and subjugation of black people and their experiences within the prevailing systems of representation were the outcomes of a deliberate exercise of cultural power and normalization. In line with Said's concept of 'Orientalism,' individuals from black backgrounds were not solely depicted as different and alien within Western knowledge paradigms by these systems; they also possessed the capability to shape how Black individuals viewed and experienced themselves, pushing them into the realm of the 'Other.' Nonetheless, this concept of 'Otherness' as an inner compulsion alters the conception of 'cultural identity'.

Voicu (2013) posits that cultural identities, viewed through the lens of David Winterstein's four primary axes, manifest in distinct patterns. These include nested or embedded identities, resembling concentric circles; 'marble-cake' or mixed identities, where components are inseparable at different levels; cross-cutting or overlapping identities; and separate or exclusive identities. The axes, encompassing inclusion, exclusion, identification within a culture's value system, and spatial association, contribute to the formation of cultural norms and meanings, collectively shaping the phenomenon of cultural identity. In essence, these axes serve as dynamic frameworks that delineate the intricate interplay of attributes, differentiation, value systems, and spatial context within the cultural identity construct. Thus, cultural identities vary as culture in itself is not static, but fluid and it evolves, adapts, and adopts.

It can be contended that cultural identities are not static entities with fixed origins; instead, they are shaped by their historical context and undergo constant evolution. They are not forever anchored in an unchanging past but are continually influenced and transformed by the interplay of history, culture, and power dynamics. These identities are not mere artifacts waiting to be rediscovered, nor do they offer an eternal sense of self. Instead, they represent the labels we use to describe how we are situated within and contribute to the narratives of the past. In essence, cultural identities are fluid, dynamic constructs that reflect our ongoing relationship with history and the diverse ways we position ourselves in it.

Thus, building upon Hall's viewpoint, one can argue that cultural identity is not a static essence untouched by the currents of history and culture nor is it a universal, transcendent essence unaffected by historical forces. It is not an unchanging source to which one can definitively return. However, it is also not a mere illusion; it possesses its substance. Cultural identity carries its intricate histories, and these histories have tangible, material, and symbolic consequences. The past continues to exert its influence, but it no longer approaches one as a straightforward, factual 'past' because one's connection to it, much like a child's connection to its mother, is always shaped by intervening experiences. It is continually constructed through memory, imagination, storytelling, and myth. Cultural identities function as points of identification, albeit inherently unstable ones, within the narratives of history and culture. They do not represent inherent essences but rather positions occupied by individuals and groups.

Consequently, Hall (1996) argues that there is always a political dimension to identity, a politics of positioning, without any absolute assurance rooted in a straightforward, transcendent 'law of origin'. One can further state that the role of cultural identity in shaping an individual's sense of self is profound and multifaceted. Cultural identity encompasses the set of

beliefs, values, traditions, language, customs, and affiliations that define a person's connection to a particular cultural group or community. It forms the foundational basis of an individual's self-concept, providing a framework through which they understand who they are and where they belong in the world. Cultural identity fosters a sense of belonging and affiliation, offering individuals a community to relate to, where they can share experiences, values, and traditions with like-minded people. This sense of belonging contributes to one's emotional well-being and social integration.

Voicu (2013) also explores the notion of “The narrative identity model”, a conceptual framework that delves into the intricate relationship between individual life stories and the formation of collective identity. At its core, this approach emphasizes the idea that the way individuals construct and tell their life narratives holds significant implications for how they perceive and contribute to the collective identity of a larger group or community. In this context, "biographical structure" refers to the organizational framework individuals use when recounting their life experiences. It encompasses the roles they have played, the pivotal events they have encountered, and the overall trajectory of their journey. By examining these elements, the narrative identity model contends that individuals actively contribute to the ongoing narrative of the larger collective identity.

Voicu (2013) contends that the process involves weaving together personal experiences into a cohesive narrative that not only reflects an individual's unique journey but also contributes to the broader story of the community or social group to which they belong. This shared narrative becomes a crucial part of the collective identity, shaping how the group perceives itself and how its members connect. Importantly, the narrative identity model acknowledges the dynamic nature of identity. It recognizes that identity is not a static or fixed concept but an evolving narrative that individuals actively engage with and contribute to over time. The stories individuals choose to tell, the emphasis they place on certain aspects of their experiences, and the connections they draw between their personal narratives and the collective story all play a role in shaping the ongoing narrative of identity within a community or social group.

It can be asserted that cultural identity exerts a profound influence on an individual's values, beliefs, and perspective, shaping their ethical and moral framework and impacting decisions, behaviours, and interpersonal dynamics. Moreover, it fosters a connection to one's cultural pride and heritage, linking individuals to ancestral traditions and historical narratives. This connection serves as a means to celebrate and safeguard cultural heritage, fostering a

positive self-image and a sense of continuity with the past. Additionally, cultural identity plays a pivotal role in an individual's language and communication. Language, as a fundamental aspect of cultural identity, serves as a means of communication and expression, enabling individuals to connect with their cultural community. Proficiency in one's native language fosters a strong sense of identity and belonging. Additionally, cultural identity involves navigating the complexities of living in multicultural societies. Individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds often negotiate multiple identities, adapting to different cultural contexts while preserving their cultural roots.

One might posit that cultural identity is also a dynamic aspect of one's self-concept, subject to personal growth and experiences. Individuals may explore, question, or reaffirm their cultural identity as they journey through life, contributing to ongoing identity development. Finally, cultural identity can provide individuals with resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges and discrimination. It becomes a source of strength, enabling them to confront adversity while maintaining a sense of self-worth. In essence, understanding the role of cultural identity is essential for appreciating the richness and diversity of human experiences and the intricate ways in which it shapes an individual's sense of self.

One can claim that the profound investigation into these two distinct definitions of cultural identity serves as a poignant reminder of the imperative need for a nuanced and adaptable comprehension of identity, particularly when confronting the enduring and harrowing aftermath of colonialism. The second definition, which meticulously accounts for both the commonalities and distinctions existing within an envisaged cultural collective, emerges as a pivotal framework for not only understanding but also dissecting the intricate web of historical and social contingencies that profoundly shape cultural identity. This more comprehensive perspective illuminates the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the constitution of cultural identity, elucidating how it responds to traumatic episodes such as colonialism.

### **I.3.2. Cultural Identity Through the Diasporic Prism**

Diaspora, a term both ancient and contemporary, is known to encapsulate the profound human experience of migration, dispersion, and cultural continuity. It tells the stories of communities whose roots are firmly planted in one corner of the world but whose branches have spread far and wide, creating intricate and enduring connections across borders and oceans. The concept of diaspora transcends mere geography; it encompasses the resilience,

adaptability, and unwavering cultural identity of people who find themselves navigating the complexities of living away from their ancestral homelands. Diaspora communities therefore emerge for a multitude of reasons: historical events, political upheaval, economic opportunities, or simply the pursuit of new horizons. Despite the often challenging circumstances that lead to their dispersal, these communities remain bound together by shared heritage, culture, and a sense of belonging. They are, in essence, living bridges between worlds, serving as a testament to the human spirit's ability to adapt, thrive, and preserve its identity in the face of change.

Safran's (1991) conceptualization of diaspora, articulated in his article *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return*, encompasses a multifaceted understanding of minority groups with migrant origins. According to the author, diasporas represent communities residing in host countries while retaining robust emotional and material connections with their countries of origin and their cultural roots. Beyond mere physical relocation, these communities actively engage in a complex negotiation of identity, navigating the delicate balance between their present circumstances and the persistent ties to their homelands. Safran's definition emphasizes the dual nature of diasporas, capturing not only the geographical dispersion of communities but also the enduring emotional and cultural bonds that shape their collective identity. In essence, the diasporic experience, as conceptualized by Safran, involves a dynamic interplay between the adopted host country and the cherished homeland, with the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness playing a central role in shaping the identity of these migrant communities.

Cohen's (1997) definition of diaspora on the other hand builds upon the idea that diasporas constitute communities living outside their country of origin. Unlike a purely geographic understanding, the author introduces a nuanced perspective that extends beyond physical location. Diasporas, in Cohen's framework, are characterized by their continuous links to both their original homeland and their fellow diasporic members, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and shared identity. This definition emphasizes the ongoing nature of diasporic ties, suggesting that these communities actively sustain relationships with their places of origin while simultaneously forging connections among themselves. Cohen's conceptualization underscores the complexity of diasporic identities, which involve not only the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness but also a dynamic interplay of relationships within the diaspora itself. The notion of diaspora, according to Cohen, transcends mere physical displacement; it is a rich and evolving tapestry of connections, cultural affiliations, and collective identity that unfolds across geographical boundaries.



It can be asserted that throughout history, diaspora communities have played pivotal roles in shaping the societies and cultures of both their host countries and their places of origin. They bring with them unique traditions, languages, and perspectives, enriching the tapestry of diversity in their new homes while also maintaining strong connections to their roots. These communities are living repositories of history, carrying the collective memory of their origins, and often advocating for justice, equality, and recognition for their homelands. Hall (1996) employs the concept of diaspora as a powerful analytical framework to explore the intricacies of cultural identity. Diaspora, in this context, serves as a lens that enables scholars and readers to view identity from a unique perspective. Rather than treating identity as a static and essentialist concept, the critic suggests that viewing it through the lens of diaspora offers a more dynamic and context-sensitive understanding.

Hall (1996) defines diaspora as a condition of dispersion or dislocation. It typically arises from historical events or processes such as colonization, forced migration, economic migration, or exile. These historical circumstances lead to the scattering of a particular cultural or ethnic group across different geographic locations. What distinguishes diaspora from other forms of migration is the notion of a shared, often ancestral, homeland that retains a symbolic and emotional significance for the dispersed community. Through the lens of diaspora, the author underscores that the diasporic experience is multilayered and complex. It encompasses not only the physical movement of people but also the emotional and cultural ties that connect individuals to their homeland and each other. Diaspora communities are often characterized by a sense of shared history, memory, language, and cultural practices that persist across generations.

In the initial phases of diaspora studies, Voicu (2013) argues that the predominant focus was on anthropological perspectives that concentrated on the examination of the 'survival' of cultural traits originating from Africa within the context of the New World. These early studies were driven by a keen interest in understanding how elements of African culture persisted and adapted amidst the challenges and transformations associated with the diasporic experience. Scholars sought to trace the transmission and preservation of cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs from their African origins to the diverse and often challenging environments of the New World. The emphasis was on unraveling the intricate dynamics of cultural continuity and change as African communities navigated the complexities of diaspora, offering foundational insights into the enduring resilience and transformations of cultural identities across geographical and historical distances.

Voicu (2013) further states that according to Gilroy, the concept of diaspora in opposition to what he terms "camp-thinking," is characterized by oppositional and exclusive modes of thought rooted in notions of purity and cultural identities. In contrast, diasporic identities, in Gilroy's perspective, are envisioned as dynamic, creolized, syncretized, hybridized, and inherently impure cultural forms. Unlike the restrictive nature of camp thinking, the diaspora concept explicitly challenges nationalistic perspectives and can exert destabilizing and subversive influences. Gilroy's framework proposes an alternative to the metaphysics associated with race, nation, and culturally bounded identities encoded into the body. By problematizing the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging, the concept of diaspora disrupts conventional notions and opens up avenues for a more fluid, interconnected understanding of identity.

Hall (1996) further emphasizes that historical events play a pivotal role in shaping diaspora communities. Events such as colonization, slavery, political conflicts, or economic upheaval forced people to leave their homelands. These historical circumstances profoundly affect the identities of diaspora communities and become central elements in the construction of their cultural identities. The scholar's observation underscores the vital role that immigrants from Third World countries have played in shaping and enriching the cultural landscape of the United States. He emphasizes that the contemporary image of American society and culture cannot ignore the presence and contributions of these immigrants: "...But the slaves were also from different countries, tribal communities, villages, languages, and gods." (p.227).

Immigrants from Third World countries bring with them a rich tapestry of cultural traditions, languages, cuisines, art forms, and worldviews. This infusion of diverse cultural elements serves to enrich American culture beyond the confines of Western cultural ethos. It expands the horizons of American cultural expression, making it more inclusive, vibrant, and dynamic. Hall's point here thus challenges the notion of a monolithic or homogenous "Western" cultural ethos. He contends that American culture is not confined solely to Western influences but is a complex mosaic shaped by a multitude of cultural influences. Immigrants from Third World countries contribute to this complexity by introducing new perspectives and cultural practices that extend far beyond the traditional Western narrative (Hall, 1996).

Hall's (1996) work is particularly significant in understanding how the African diaspora has shaped cultural identities and contributed to the broader discussions on diasporic experiences. The author recognizes the African diaspora as a product of historical events such as the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and forced migrations. These historical

circumstances led to the dispersal of African populations across the Americas, Europe, and other regions. The author's essay moreover emphasizes the complexity of identity formation within the African diaspora. He argues that individuals of African descent living in various parts of the world have developed multifaceted identities that are shaped by their African heritage, but also by their experiences within diverse cultural contexts.

Within the context of the African diaspora, one can argue that Hall recognizes the history of resistance and resilience. He acknowledges how African diasporic communities have fought against oppression, racism, and inequality. This resistance has contributed to the development of distinct cultural identities and expressions. Hall's use of the concept of diaspora as a lens is particularly relevant when examining the African diaspora. It allows scholars and readers to explore how African cultural elements intersect with host cultures, creating new and evolving identities that reflect the complexities of the diasporic experience.

Hall (1996) states: "The paradox is that it was the uprooting of slavery and transportation and the insertion into the plantation economy (as well as the symbolic economy) of the Western world that 'unified' these peoples across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past." (p.227). Such a statement underscores the traumatic and involuntary nature of the African diaspora. Millions of Africans were forcibly uprooted from their homelands, families, and communities, enduring the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade. This displacement severed their direct ties to their places of origin and disrupted their lives in profound ways.

One can argue that the paradox emerges when considering that, despite the diverse origins of the enslaved Africans, their experiences of enslavement and exploitation in the Western world served to "unify" them in certain ways. They shared the experience of being subjected to dehumanizing conditions, forced labor, and a common history of oppression. This unity was not based on cultural or ethnic similarities but on their shared experience of suffering and resistance. In essence, the paradox highlighted in the statement encapsulates the complexity of the African diaspora experience. It underscores how the traumatic uprooting and exploitation of enslaved Africans simultaneously created a sense of shared experience and unity among them while cutting them off from their direct access to their ancestral pasts. This paradox is a testament to the resilience and creativity of the African diaspora in forging new identities and cultural expressions in the face of adversity. Hall (1996) states:

At the same time, we do not stand in the same relation of the 'Otherness' to the metropolitan centers. Each has negotiated its economic, political, and cultural dependency differently. And this 'difference', whether we like it or not, is already inscribed in our cultural identities... The common history — transportation, slavery, colonization - has been profoundly formative, for all these societies, unifying us across our differences (p.228).

Hall's (1996) depiction of how immigrant cultures exist in a state of "in-betweenness" within the diaspora offers a fresh and transformative understanding of the boundaries of identity. It liberates individuals from the pressures to assimilate or conform strictly to Western expectations. By examining the intersections of identity and culture, immigrants shift away from adhering to a single model of cultural identity. Instead, they embrace alternative expectations that align with discussions about cultural identity being transnational and influenced by borders. The immigrants' sense of instability can be attributed to their rejection of essentialist views that seek a universal commonality grounded in shared experiences.

The exploration of cultural identity through a diasporic prism reveals a dynamic and multifaceted landscape where communities navigate the intricate intersections of their adopted homes and ancestral roots. The concept of diaspora provides a framework for understanding the complexities of identity formation in transnational contexts. It underscores the enduring ties that diasporic communities maintain with their homelands while actively participating in the cultural fabric of their host countries. This exploration goes beyond a mere geographical lens, delving into the intricate web of relationships, shared experiences, and cultural negotiations that define diasporic identities. The objective understanding of cultural identity through a diasporic prism acknowledges the fluid and evolving nature of these identities, shaped by ongoing connections, cultural exchanges, and the collective resilience of diasporic communities.

In this framework, the diasporic prism becomes a crucial tool for understanding the multifaceted dimensions of African American identity. It goes beyond geographical boundaries to encompass the shared histories, cultural practices, and resilient spirit that define the African diaspora. The diasporic lens allows for a nuanced exploration of how African Americans negotiate their identity within the broader diasporic context, drawing on both the struggles and triumphs of their shared history. Moreover, The objective understanding of cultural identity through this diasporic prism recognizes that the reconstruction of the African American identity is an ongoing process shaped by the complexities of diasporic existence. It acknowledges the continuous negotiation between ancestral heritage and contemporary influences, offering a

dynamic perspective on how African Americans contribute to and shape the broader narrative of the global diaspora.

### **I.3.3. Cultural Hybridity: The Culminating Point of the Diasporic Journey**

The concept of diaspora, rooted in historical events such as forced migrations, enslavement, and displacement, has given rise to complex and multifaceted cultural identities across the globe. At the heart of this intricate web of identities lies the phenomenon of cultural hybridity. Cultural hybridity thus represents the dynamic and transformative process through which individuals and communities, particularly those in the diaspora, engage with and blend diverse cultural influences. It emerges as a response to the challenge of navigating between their ancestral heritage and the cultural contexts of their host or adopted homelands. This interplay between diaspora and cultural hybridity forms the basis for a fascinating exploration into how identities are shaped, negotiated, and continuously redefined.

*On Hybridity*, an article written by Camilleri and Kapsali (2020) discussed such a concept. They state: "In its most fundamental sense, hybridity refers to mixture and fusion, of species, races, plants, or cultures. The contemporary application of the word can be traced across various disciplines, from biology and chemistry to linguistics, politics, racial theory, and popular culture." (p.1). The authors further explain that due to the poststructuralist opposition to ideas of fixity and purity of origin, as well as the development of liberation and emancipation politics in industrialized societies, hybridity began to be more widely associated with issues of "subjectivity" and "identity" in the second half of the 20th century. This eventually gave rise to ideas of cultural hybridity.

Camilleri and Kapsali (2020) further assert that hybridity, therefore, became closely associated with notions and practices of cultural as well as individual performance due to Homi Bhabha's influential reading of the term in the context of colonialism (1994). In a paper entitled *Hybridity in the Third Space: Rethinking Bi-cultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (1998) by Paul Meredith, the notion of hybridity is investigated. The author explained that Bhabha used the term hybridity to explain how cultures and identities are created under the oppressive and unfair conditions of colonialism. He borrowed this term from literary and cultural theory. According to Bhabha, hybridity is the process by which the colonial controlling power attempts to interpret the identity of the colonized (the Other) under a single universal framework but fails to do so and instead creates something that is both familiar and novel.

Meredith (1998) argues that according to Bhabha, every essentialist cultural identity is challenged by the emergence of a new hybrid identity or subject-position from the blending of aspects from the colonizer and colonized. Hybridity is positioned as a challenge to essentialism or the conviction that a particular entity's characteristics are unchanging and unchangeable and hence characterize its "whatness." The idea that any culture or identity is pure or fundamental is debatable in postcolonial discourse. Bhabha contends that all forms of culture are always undergoing a process of hybridity and is conscious of the hazards of fixity and fetishism of identities within binary colonial thinking.

Meredith (1998) asserts that according to Bhabha, hybridity is a type of liminal or in-between space, or what he refers to as the third space, where the cutting edge of translation and negotiation takes place. He states: "For me, the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather a hybridity to me is the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge." (p.03). As a result, the Third Space is a form of expression, a means to describe a creative place that creates new possibilities rather than just one that is introspective. It is a realm of fresh cultural meaning and creation that interrupts, interrogates, and enunciates, blurring preexisting boundaries and challenging accepted definitions of culture and identity. According to Bhabha, this hybrid Third Space is an equivocal location devoid of any innate unity or fixity in terms of cultural meaning and representation.

Moreover, hybridity can foster understanding, dialogue, and empathy by emphasizing connections and shared experiences across seemingly distinct categories. It invites individuals and communities to explore and embrace the complexities of their identities, bridging divides and breaking down barriers that stem from rigid categorizations. At the same time, one can argue that hybridity can be a source of resistance and subversion, challenging dominant narratives and power structures. It allows marginalized voices and experiences to reclaim agency, as hybrid identities often emerge from the intersections of multiple marginalized or minoritized identities. Through the celebration of hybridity, individuals and communities can challenge stereotypes, question hierarchies, and assert their unique perspectives and contributions.

The multifaceted nature of identity within the African diaspora can also be a source of challenge. Individuals may experience identity confusion, particularly if they straddle multiple cultural worlds or have a complex heritage that includes Africa, the host country, and possibly other cultural influences. This complexity can lead to questions of belonging and self-identification. Moreover, one can argue that overcoming these obstacles requires a concerted

effort to maintain and celebrate cultural traditions while adapting to the ever-evolving dynamics of diaspora life.

However, according to Hall (1996), overcoming challenges within the diaspora involves embracing the concept of Bhabha's Third Space, an intermediary zone where cultural identities are negotiated and redefined. Hall argues that the concept of the Third Space is the locus of cultural identity within the diaspora. This concept serves as a pivotal locus for the intricate dynamics of cultural identity within diaspora communities. The Third Space represents neither the homeland nor the host culture but, rather, an intermediary and transformative zone characterized by hybridity. It is within this elusive Third Space that individuals within diaspora communities navigate the complexities of their identities. Here, they engage in a profound process of blending and adaptation, incorporating elements from both their original cultural roots and the cultural milieu of the diaspora.

This space as Hall (1996) argues, embodies the essence of diaspora identity, as individuals negotiate the duality of their affiliations, embracing the richness of their heritage while simultaneously embracing the nuances of their current cultural surroundings. The Third Space serves as a crucible where diverse cultural influences converge, where languages, traditions, and customs intermingle, ultimately giving rise to the vibrant and ever-evolving diaspora identities that defy simplistic categorization. In this context, building upon the perspective of Bhabha, Hall's concept of the Third Space underscores the fluidity, adaptability, and resilience of cultural identities within diaspora communities, offering a profound lens through which to understand the intricate dance of belonging and unbelonging that characterizes their experiences.

Diaspora communities are often characterized by cultural hybridity, where elements of their ancestral heritage intersect with the cultural context of their host or adopted homelands. This blending results in the creation of new, hybrid cultural expressions that reflect both continuity and change. For example, languages may evolve into Creole languages, blending aspects of the mother tongue with the language of the host country. One can argue that Hall's concept of cultural hybridity is particularly relevant to the African diaspora. Hall (1996) suggests that individuals and communities in the diaspora engage in a dynamic process of blending their African cultural roots with elements from their host cultures. This cultural hybridity results in unique forms of expression, including music, art, literature, and religion.

One may claim that the critic's concept of cultural hybridity is indeed highly relevant when examining the experiences of the African diaspora. This concept delves into the dynamic and transformative processes through which individuals and communities in the diaspora navigate the complexities of their identity by blending elements of their African cultural heritage with those of their host cultures. Cultural hybridity within the African diaspora involves a deliberate and organic blending of cultural elements from diverse sources. Individuals and communities draw upon their African cultural roots, which may include languages, traditions, beliefs, and practices, as a foundational aspect of their identity.

It can be further argued that in diaspora settings, individuals and communities inevitably interact with and are influenced by the cultural context of their host or adopted homelands. This interaction may result from various factors, including historical processes, social integration, and exposure to new ideas and practices. The process of cultural hybridity often leads to syncretism, where elements from different cultures merge and coexist. For example, in religious practices, diaspora communities may fuse African spiritual beliefs with the religious traditions of their host country, giving rise to unique syncretic belief systems.

Cultural hybridity according to Hall (1996) is not a static process but a continuous adaptation to changing circumstances. It reflects the agency of individuals and communities in shaping their identities within the diaspora, embracing both their heritage and their current context. It exemplifies the resilience and creativity of diaspora communities. It allows them to forge unique cultural expressions that not only preserve their heritage but also contribute to the diversity and richness of the global cultural landscape. In essence, cultural hybridity within the African diaspora embodies the ongoing dialogue between tradition and adaptation. It showcases the capacity of individuals and communities to create vibrant, multifaceted identities that reflect the complexities of their diasporic experiences while celebrating the enduring influence of their African roots.

Hall (1996) further argues that the presence of Africa within the diaspora is intimately intertwined with the profound concept of cultural hybridity, a phenomenon that illuminates the dynamic and transformative nature of cultures when they converge and intermingle. Cultural hybridity encapsulates the intricate processes through which diverse cultural elements fuse, adapt, and ultimately evolve when brought into contact with one another. Within the context of the African diaspora, where individuals and communities grapple with displacement, forced migrations, and the complexities of adapting to new environments, the enduring presence of Africa emerges as a catalyst for the flourishing of cultural hybridity.



One can further argue that this fusion of cultures, propelled by Africa's indomitable influence, manifests across various dimensions of diaspora life. Linguistic evolution exemplifies this phenomenon as creole languages and dialects emerge, reflecting the blending of African linguistic roots with the lexicons and idioms of the host societies. Moreover, cultural hybridity challenges the rigidity of essentialist notions of identity. It acknowledges the multifaceted nature of identity construction within diaspora communities, where individuals and groups negotiate complex and evolving identities that reflect both their African heritage and the cultural influences of their new homes. This fluid and adaptable approach to identity aligns harmoniously with the dynamic nature of cultural hybridity.

The presence of Africa acts as a profound interpretive framework for diaspora communities. It offers a unique perspective through which individuals reinterpret and navigate the complexities of their identities, simultaneously celebrating their African roots while embracing the cultural affiliations forged in their diasporic experiences. In essence, the presence of Africa within the diaspora is an indelible force that fuels the engine of cultural hybridity, fostering a rich tapestry of expressions, identities, and narratives that defy simple categorization and instead reflect the ever-evolving nature of human culture and heritage in an interconnected world.

Hall (1996) delves into the intricate web of cultural resilience that characterizes the African diaspora, with a specific focus on the Caribbean. The author builds upon the perspective of D  rri   who argues that Africa's presence or "pr  sence Africaine", though not always overtly acknowledged, remains a fundamental and ever-present force in the lives of diaspora communities. From language and naming conventions to religious practices, music, and artistic expressions, Africa's influence is woven into the very fabric of Caribbean culture. Hall quotes D  rri   who states:

Presence Africaine is the site of the repressed. Silenced beyond memory by the power of the experience of slavery, Africa was, in fact, present everywhere: in the everyday life and customs of the slave quarters, in the languages and patois of the plantations, in names and words, often disconnected from their taxonomies, in the secret syntactical structures through which other languages were spoken, in the stories and tales told to children, in religious practices and beliefs, in the spiritual life, the arts, crafts, music, and rhythms of slave and post-emancipation society. Africa, the signified which could not be represented directly in slavery, remained and remains the unspoken, unspeakable 'presence'

in Caribbean culture. It is 'hiding' behind every verbal inflection, every narrative twist of Caribbean cultural life. It is the secret code with which every Western text was 're-read'. It is the ground-bass of every rhythm and bodily movement. This was -in - the 'Africa' that 'is alive and well in the diaspora'. (p.230).

Hall (1996) posits that the presence or absence of Africa, in its current manifestation, holds a unique and privileged position in shaping the evolving conceptions of Caribbean identity. Within the Caribbean, individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds, whether Black, brown, mulatto, or white, will inevitably confront the undeniable influence of “Présence Africaine”. They must acknowledge it and recognize its significance. However, whether this African presence can be considered the singular origin of Caribbean identities, remaining unchanged despite four centuries of displacement, fragmentation, and forced migrations, is a matter open to debate. The original concept of 'Africa' as it once existed is no longer static; it too has undergone profound transformations.

The critic asserts that history, in this context, is an irreversible force. It is essential not to align with Western narratives that seek to normalize and freeze Africa into a timeless archetype of an unchanging, primitive past. Instead, the Caribbean must engage with Africa in a more nuanced and complex manner. While Africa's influence demands recognition and reckoning, it cannot be simplistically reduced to a mere process of recovery; it is a dynamic force that continues to evolve and shape the Caribbean's multifaceted identities (Hall, 1996).

Moreover, one can claim that the concept of cultural hybridity plays a central role in understanding how diaspora communities, particularly those of African descent, negotiate their identities in the context of displacement and cultural encounters. The concept sheds light on how individuals and communities within the African diaspora engage in dynamic processes of cultural blending, adaptation, and innovation. Hall's works often navigate the complexities of such concepts and underscore the blurring of cultural boundaries that occurs within diaspora communities. He challenges the notion of fixed, essentialist cultural identities and instead emphasizes the fluidity and adaptability of these identities which aligns with the concept of cultural hybridity, where individuals and communities actively engage in the fusion of their African cultural roots with elements from their host cultures including Syncretic Religious Practices, language, and artistic expressions.

Hall (1996) states:

diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured about some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of 'ethnicity'. We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of this backward-looking conception of diaspora - and the complicity of the West with it. The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' that lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (p.235).

It is therefore plausible to state that diasporic identities do not rely on notions of purity or fixed essences but thrive on recognizing and embracing differences and hybridity. They are dynamic and constantly evolving, shaped through ongoing processes of transformation and adaptation, allowing individuals and communities to forge identities that are resilient, fluid, and reflective of the complex realities of their diasporic experiences. This perspective challenges the traditional, static view of diaspora and underscores the importance of embracing diversity and change in understanding identity within diaspora communities.

Furthermore, one can claim that many scholars including Hall (1996) highlight and explore the intricate dynamics of cultural hybridity within diaspora communities. Such perspectives invite one to rethink conventional notions of fixed cultural identities, highlighting instead the ever-evolving, fluid, and adaptive nature of these identities. By delving into the experiences of individuals and communities grappling with displacement, he unveils a complex tapestry of cultural encounters, negotiations, and transformations.

It can be contended that in the context of the African diaspora, the legacy of forced migrations and the intertwining of diverse cultures have given rise to an array of rich and nuanced expressions. It is here that the concept of cultural hybridity finds its fertile ground, where African roots fuse with the customs, languages, and traditions of host countries. This fusion, far from erasing or diluting cultural heritage, breathes new life into it, leading to the emergence of vibrant syncretic belief systems, linguistic evolutions, and innovative artistic expressions. Moreover, the agency of individuals and communities in shaping their identities becomes apparent as they become active participants in the ongoing construction of their cultural selves while navigating the complexities of diasporic life. In doing so, they not only

adapt to new circumstances but also contribute to the broader cultural tapestry of the host societies, enriching them with their multifaceted heritage.

Hall's (1996) insights into hybrid identities offer a valuable perspective on their contributions to multiculturalism. Hall emphasizes that hybrid identities, formed through the blending of multiple cultural influences, are not only a natural outcome of diaspora experiences but also essential to the evolution of multiculturalism. Hybrid identities according to the author enrich the cultural tapestry of multicultural societies by introducing new elements, traditions, and perspectives. They challenge the notion of fixed cultural boundaries and demonstrate that cultural identities are not mutually exclusive. As individuals and communities navigate the complexities of multiple cultural influences, they contribute to the diversification of the cultural landscape.

One can claim that Hall's concept of hybridity challenges hierarchies and power dynamics within multiculturalism. It highlights that no single culture or identity should be privileged over others. Hybrid identities challenge essentialist notions and encourage a more inclusive approach to multiculturalism, where all cultures are valued and respected equally. Hybrid identities thus challenge conventional identity narratives by demonstrating the fluid and adaptable nature of cultural identity. This challenges stereotypes and preconceived notions about cultural purity. In doing so, it encourages a more complex and nuanced understanding of multiculturalism. Hybrid identities thus serve as vibrant agents of change within multicultural societies. They expand the scope of cultural diversity by demonstrating that individuals can draw from multiple cultural sources, enriching the cultural tapestry of their communities. This expansion of diversity is not merely superficial but deeply transformative, as it challenges the monolithic view of culture and encourages a deeper appreciation of the multiplicity of human experiences.

It can be asserted that deconstructing and decolonizing all previously established stereotypes of identity mainly the Black identity entails a critical examination of the conventional understanding of fixed and essentialized identities. It aligns with the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of cultural identities, challenging the notion that identity is predetermined by one's cultural background. This deconstruction unveils the constructed nature of identity, revealing how it is shaped by historical, cultural, and contextual factors. Moreover, it is defensible to claim that it acknowledges the power dynamics and hierarchies that influence identity formation within multicultural societies. Embracing ambiguity, multiplicity, and the

socially constructed nature of identity fosters inclusivity by recognizing and validating the diverse experiences of individuals.

### **I.3.4. Navigating Dualities: The Complex Experience of Belonging and Unbelonging in Diaspora Communities**

In the intricate tapestry of diaspora experiences, a concept of profound significance emerges—the paradoxical sensation of "belonging and unbelonging." This concept encapsulates the intricate and often contradictory nature of identities within diaspora communities. It delves into the emotional and psychological intricacies of individuals who find themselves straddling multiple worlds, grappling with a sense of simultaneous connection and disconnection to their places of origin and the cultures they now inhabit. In this exploration, the complexities of belonging and unbelonging within the context of diaspora identities, shedding light on the dualities that define this deeply resonant phenomenon are explored.

Hall (1996) introduces the concept and argues that diaspora identities are uniquely marked by the tension between the longing for connection to one's ancestral homeland and the recognition of the complex realities of life in a new cultural context. This dichotomy often results in a profound sense of "belonging and unbelonging," where individuals experience a simultaneous pull toward two or more places, cultures, and identities. The sensation of "belonging" manifests in the deep emotional ties that individuals maintain with their ancestral roots. It is the nostalgia for the land, the customs, the language, and the traditions of their forebears. This belonging is a testament to the enduring influence of their heritage and a source of cultural pride. It is a reminder of the rich tapestry of history and traditions that continue to shape their identities.

However, this belonging is frequently accompanied by an equally potent sensation of "unbelonging." The diaspora experience often involves navigating a new cultural landscape, adapting to different norms, and negotiating a sense of identity that straddles multiple worlds. This unbelonging arises from the recognition that, while the ancestral homeland may hold a special place in one's heart, it is not the sole locus of identity. Diaspora communities are shaped by the interplay of diverse cultures, both past and present, and individuals must reconcile their dual or multiple affiliations (Hall, 1996).

Moragia (2019), from an Afro-diasporic perspective, cites Delphine Fongang who contends that even with improved education and elevated socio-economic status, individuals within the diaspora face a perpetual challenge – the inability to fully establish a sense of belonging. The struggle arises from the continuous effort to assert their subjectivities within spaces that tend to marginalize them. The author further argues that in the context of diaspora, the sense of difference becomes a poignant factor that significantly contributes to the pervasive feeling of unbelonging.

Moragia (2019) asserts that the diasporic experience is often marked by a distinct awareness of one's differences, whether they be cultural, linguistic, or even racial. This acute recognition of being different, set apart from the dominant or local culture, creates a psychological and emotional distance that fosters the sentiment of unbelonging. This feeling is not merely a passive state; rather, it is an active engagement with the reality that the diasporic individual carries a unique identity, shaped by their cultural heritage and experiences, which may not align seamlessly with the mainstream narrative of the host society. Consequently, this divergence in identity becomes a constant reminder of the diasporic individual's status as an outsider, reinforcing the overarching sense of unbelonging within the broader societal context.

According to Moragia (2019), the sense of unbelonging within Afro-diasporic communities can often be attributed to the performative nature of racial identity. Drawing on the perspectives of scholars like Harry Elam and Kennel Jackson, Moragia suggests that racial identity is not a static concept but rather a dynamic performance, particularly in the context of the Afro-diaspora. Throughout history, Afro-diasporic communities have engaged in performative acts, using mediums such as dance, music, and other cultural expressions to convey the essence of being Black and to juxtapose their identities against the dominant white culture. Elam and Jackson further elaborate that this performative aspect has been a consistent feature in the history of the African diaspora, where Black individuals have strategically employed cultural expressions to symbolize and assert their Black identity in opposition to the prevailing white communities. This performative dimension, therefore, becomes a significant factor contributing to the nuanced experience of unbelonging within Afro-diasporic contexts.

However, it can be argued that embracing a sense of belonging in Afro-diasporic contexts involves a multifaceted journey, weaving together self-acceptance, community engagement, and the redefinition of identity. One pivotal aspect of this journey is the encouragement for individuals to delve into the exploration and acceptance of various facets of their identity. The concept of "belonging and unbelonging" underscores the complexity of

diaspora identities and challenges essentialist notions of belonging tied solely to a single homeland. Instead, it acknowledges the dynamic and evolving nature of identity formation within diaspora communities. It prompts individuals to embrace the duality of their experiences, recognizing that their identities are not fixed but continuously shaped by the interplay of past and present, roots and branches. Ultimately, it is in this intricate dance of belonging and unbelonging that diaspora identities find their depth and richness, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of those who navigate the complexities of multiple worlds.

Hall (2019) emphasizes the idea of hybridity, where cultural elements blend and adapt when different cultures intersect. The sensation of "belonging and unbelonging" encapsulates this process, as individuals in diaspora navigate their dual or multiple affiliations, resulting in a dynamic and hybrid sense of identity. Hall's perspective underscores the importance of recognizing heterogeneity and diversity within cultural identities. The concept of "belonging and unbelonging" acknowledges the existence of diverse experiences within diaspora communities, where individuals may feel varying degrees of connection to their ancestral roots and their current cultural surroundings.

Furthermore, the idea of "belonging and unbelonging" aligns with Hall's view of identity as fluid and adaptable. Diaspora identities are not static but continuously shaped by the interplay of different cultural influences. This fluidity is a central theme in Hall's exploration of cultural identity. In essence, the concept of "belonging and unbelonging" in diaspora communities resonates with Hall's broader ideas about cultural identity, particularly his emphasis on hybridity, fluidity, and the recognition of diverse experiences within diaspora contexts. It highlights the complex and dynamic nature of identity construction and deconstruction.

It is reasonable to state that the tension between "Home" and "Diaspora" is a central and poignant theme within the African diaspora, representing a complex interplay of longing, identity, and cultural preservation. This dynamic relationship between the ancestral homeland and the new diasporic reality gives rise to multifaceted narratives and experiences. At the heart of the African diaspora lies a deep nostalgia for the ancestral homeland. For many in the diaspora, "home" represents a place of cultural roots, familial connections, and historical significance. This sense of longing for a distant home can be a powerful force that shapes personal and collective identities. It is a yearning to reconnect with the land, culture, and traditions left behind due to historical displacements like the transatlantic slave trade.

One can thus claim that the diaspora is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of African cultures. While living far from their homelands, communities in the African diaspora have worked tirelessly to preserve their cultural heritage. They have done so by maintaining languages, rituals, music, and culinary traditions. Simultaneously, they have adapted to their new environments, blending elements of their African identity with the cultures of their host countries. This fusion of cultures gives rise to unique expressions of identity, often referred to as "Diasporic culture."

Within the African diaspora, there is a persistent search for a place of true belonging. Some individuals may embark on journeys to reconnect with their ancestral homelands, visiting countries in Africa to experience a sense of homecoming. Others find belonging within diaspora communities, where shared experiences and a sense of shared history create a powerful sense of identity and belonging. Hall (2019) talked in an interview with Les Back about this sense of duality and diasporic belonging as he states:

So, I was right not to go back. But it was a loss. One has to say that. Diaspora is a loss. It is not forever; it doesn't mean that you can't do something about it, or that other places can't fill the gap, the void, but the void is always the regretful moment that wasn't realized. History is full of what is not realized, and I feel that about it. Whenever I go back, I think I'm at home, but still, I'm not at home. (p.275).

Hall (1996) acknowledges that being part of the diaspora entails a sense of loss. This loss can encompass various aspects, including physical separation from one's homeland, the absence of a direct connection to one's cultural roots, and the feeling of displacement. Despite the sense of loss, the author emphasizes that diaspora is not a permanent state. It does not mean that one can never return to or reconnect with their homeland. It is a transitional phase in one's life, and there is potential for change and reconnection.

Hall (2019) introduces the idea of a "void," which represents the emotional and cultural gap that exists when one is separated from their homeland. This void can be a source of regret, as it signifies the missed opportunities and unfulfilled moments that come with being part of the diaspora. The critic draws a parallel between the personal experience of diaspora and broader historical events. They suggest that history is replete with missed opportunities and unfulfilled potential, much like the regrets felt by individuals in the diaspora. This highlights



the universal nature of the diaspora experience and its connection to broader historical narratives.

Hall's (2019) statement, "Whenever I go back, I think I'm at home, but still, I'm not at home," (p.275) encapsulates the paradoxical nature of the diaspora experience. Even when returning to one's homeland, there can be a sense of both familiarity and estrangement. It reflects the complex process of negotiating one's identity and sense of belonging in the diaspora context. In essence, this passage underscores the intricate emotions and reflections that individuals in the diaspora often grapple with. It acknowledges the sense of loss and regret associated with being separated from one's homeland which the author refers to as "out-of-place-ness", while also recognizing the potential for reconnection and the complex interplay of emotions when returning. Ultimately, it highlights the universal and deeply human aspects of the diaspora experience, which involves both personal and historical dimensions.

The critic explores the shifting dynamics between multiculturalism and assimilationism in the context of societal approaches to diversity. Multiculturalism advocates for the coexistence of various cultures within a society, allowing individuals to maintain their cultural identities while living alongside others. However, the author suggests that there is a perceived decline or "declared death" of multiculturalism. In its place, there appears to be a resurgence of assimilationism, a contrasting approach. Assimilationism requires individuals from diverse backgrounds to conform to the dominant culture, effectively erasing their differences. This shift raises questions about how societies handle diversity and whether they are moving toward a more assimilative stance (Hall, 2019).

Moragia (2019) draws on the insights of scholars like Kelly Woltman and Bruce Newbold to emphasize a crucial element of assimilationism: the obliteration of distinctions. In this approach, individuals are expected to shed their cultural or ethnic identities and adopt the ways of the dominant group. This process involves giving up elements of one's heritage, language, traditions, and cultural practices that hold personal and communal significance. Moreover, the author introduces the notion of a "new accommodation," which, while not explicitly explained, appears to be a form of assimilationism. Here, even if individuals are allowed to stay in the society, their acceptance is conditional on their willingness to become like the dominant culture. In essence, the message conveyed is that "You can stay, but only if you become like us." Ultimately, the author underscores the complexity of issues related to cultural diversity and the challenges of finding a balance between preserving cultural identities and fostering a sense of belonging in diverse societies.

One can therefore argue that within such a journey, individuals, and communities grapple with the complexities of identity. The dualities encapsulated in such perspectives represent the ongoing negotiation of cultural and social boundaries. The experience of belonging is marked by a profound connection to cultural roots and shared histories. Conversely, unbelonging signifies the challenges, the unmet expectations, and the feeling of being on the periphery. Yet, it is within this very complexity that resilience thrives. Diaspora communities embody the spirit of adaptability, preserving their cultural identities while navigating the unfamiliar.

"Navigating Dualities" is thus a testament to the rich tapestry of human experience. It is a reminder that identity is not static but a dynamic interplay of influences, experiences, and aspirations. It captures the essence of diaspora communities as they construct and reconstruct their identities, embracing the dualities that define their existence. This complex journey transcends boundaries, enriching societies and contributing to the mosaic of cultural diversity that characterizes our interconnected world. It is an exploration of the enduring human spirit, navigating the complexities of belonging and unbelonging with grace and resilience.

#### **I.4. African American Identity Reconstruction: Navigating a Complex Journey**

The quest for identity among African Americans is a dynamic and multifaceted journey that has evolved over centuries. Rooted in the historical legacy of slavery, segregation, and systemic racism, the process of African American identity reconstruction is both deeply personal and collectively significant. This exploration seeks to delve into the intricate layers of this journey, from the historical context that shaped it to the contemporary dynamics that continue to influence it. As African Americans navigate the intersections of race, culture, heritage, and belonging, they engage in a profound quest to reconstruct and redefine their identity.

For centuries, African Americans have grappled with questions of identity and belonging in a context that, at various times, denied their humanity, rights, and contributions. From the forced displacement of African ancestors during the transatlantic slave trade to the enduring struggle for civil rights and racial equality, the narrative of African Americans is one of both profound pain and remarkable resilience. This story, however, is not one-dimensional;

it is a mosaic of voices, histories, and narratives that converge and diverge, creating a diverse and dynamic African American identity landscape.

Consequently, African Americans have confronted profound questions concerning their identity, straddling a complex divide between their African heritage and American reality, often feeling detached from both. This quest for identity reconstruction encompasses a multifaceted exploration of cultural heritage, as many seek to reconnect with their African roots through genealogy, traditional practices, and a reinvigorated engagement with African history and traditions. This effort allows individuals to forge a deeper bond with their ancestral legacy, contributing to a sense of rediscovery and affirmation.

Throughout this intricate journey, African Americans have exhibited remarkable resilience and creativity, using avenues like music, literature, art, and activism to reclaim and assert their identity. Communities play an integral role in this process, offering support, preserving traditions, and fostering a sense of belonging. Solidarity within the African American community is pivotal, as it has underpinned their pursuit of a more empowered and multifaceted identity. This journey, however, is not uniform, as it intersects with other facets of identity such as gender, class, sexuality, and religion, adding layers of complexity to the narrative. In the contemporary context, African Americans continue to grapple with persistent racial discrimination and inequality, which further influence the ongoing identity reconstruction efforts, fueling discussions on what it truly means to be African American in contemporary times. The journey of African American identity reconstruction is a multifaceted and enduring odyssey, reflecting the resilience, creativity, and solidarity of a community steadfast in its quest for a more authentic and empowered sense of self.

Burt and Halpin (1998) in their article *African American Identity Development: A Review of the Literature* mention Erikson's definition of a healthy identity formation process. According to Erikson, Identity refers to a person's integration into a group as well as how he or she learns to interact and connect with other groups. His theory also includes that healthy personalities actively master their surroundings, exhibit a certain unity of personality, and can understand the world and themselves correctly. The critic also emphasizes the fact that for a person to develop a healthy identity, the person must be surrounded by a healthy environment including all the cultural and ethnic aspects that will be engraved in them in the pre-adolescent stage.

In other words, to develop a healthy personality, a child needs to be exposed to a series of positive cognitive experiences as well as significant social interactions. Burt and Halpin (1998) also mention the definition by Winsell (1971) who stated: "Identity is who we are as individuals as well as who we are as members within a group (or groups) and how we equip ourselves (or are equipped) to deal with our past, present, or future environments" (p.2). He clearly states that the past is an essential part of one's identity formation to envision their present and possible future. Furthermore, it is essential to consider how a community, whose history has intentionally been obliterated and whose efforts have primarily been devoted to the pursuit of any tangible remnants of its past, can align itself with the definitions mentioned above. How can they actively embark on the journey of self-identification and identity construction? It is posited that before the 1970s, there were no readily available templates specific to the task of African American identity formation. The concept of reconstructing an African American identity is believed to have emerged in the post-Civil War era, following the abolition of slavery.

Before the 1970s, the Black identity was related to terms and descriptions that were not only considered racist but inhumane in their full sense. Erikson characterized Black identity as vulnerable in 1959, claiming that "any interruption of the 'childlike' aspect of the Negro identity. Such as education or unlimited freedom, would thrust these Negroes into a dangerous and evil identity stage." (Burt & Halpin, p.37). The author also stated that a positive Negro identity was "mild, submissive, dependent, somewhat querulous, but always ready to serve, and with occasional empathy and childlike wisdom" (p.37). However, the critic during that time had little or no interaction with "Negro" citizens, which explains the urge of forming such an opinion.

It can be contended that the experiences of African Americans have traditionally been viewed through the perspective of the dominant culture, resulting in a persistent miscomprehension of their lived experiences. This misinterpretation can be traced back to the arduous history of African Americans, which commenced during the era of slavery. Even after the abolition of slavery, these individuals continued to confront discrimination and were unable to envision a future characterized by genuine equality. Those within the African diaspora, in particular, experienced a sense of powerlessness in a society shaped by white norms and ideals. African Americans realized that their pursuit of identity, dignity, and freedom remained unrealized, given their rejection by the white community and their detachment from their African heritage. This predicament left them in a state of liminality, feeling as though they did not authentically belong to either of the two worlds they were navigating.

Burt and Helpin (1998) contend that throughout history, numerous Black leaders and organizations have sought to establish a distinctive Black identity. Robert Penn Warren (1965) conveyed how the African American felt "alienated from the world to which he is born and the country of which he is a citizen yet surrounded by the successful values of that new world, and country, [therefore] . . . how can the Negro define himself" (p. 17). Warren (1965) explains the struggles of African American individuals in trying to form and mold an identity of their own in a world that does not accept them only because of the colour of their skin.

Warren (1965) noted that African Americans faced a shared experience of alienation and were compelled into a state of estrangement from a society that not only failed to acknowledge their presence but also withheld access to the fundamental elements necessary for shaping a healthy identity and existence. In many respects, African Americans found themselves positioned on the periphery, observing from a distance as another group defined and established the parameters for what constituted a wholesome and conventional identity. It is universally accepted that the grim legacy of slavery, a dark chapter in history that is often ignored or concealed by those who prefer to forget, undeniably left an indelible mark on the development of the Black individual's identity. Even after the abolition of slavery and the conclusion of the Civil War, the enduring impact of these traumatic events continued to resonate with those who shared the same heritage, culture, and historical legacy as their previously enslaved ancestors.

Eyerman (2001) in his book *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* contends that African American identity was primarily shaped by a generation of Black intellectuals who did not directly experience slavery as a contemporary issue but recognized its historical significance. According to Eyerman, these intellectuals were instrumental in defining and expressing the concept of African American identity. While they did not live through slavery, they understood its profound impact on their community.

Eyerman's (2001) perspective emphasized that the enduring legacy of slavery, particularly the traumatic memories associated with it and its portrayal in various forms of communication and art, played a central role in establishing and consolidating African American identity. This identity was further institutionalized through the creation of organizations like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) in 1909, which aimed to advocate for the rights and progress of African Americans. It is essential to acknowledge that certain events and experiences, like slavery, leave an indelible mark on individuals and communities. The memories of such events can create lasting trauma, which, in turn, can significantly influence how identity is shaped and perceived.

Eyerman (2001) further highlights a unique aspect of trauma when discussing diasporic African Americans. Unlike conventional understandings of trauma as a direct experience, the trauma faced by this group is rooted in the enduring consequences of slavery. This trauma is compounded by misrepresentations in the media and the refusal of some to acknowledge the equal identity of Black individuals compared to their white counterparts. The author emphasizes that when the collective experience of a significant upheaval and societal crisis evolves into a crisis of meaning and identity, it becomes a particularly challenging form of trauma.

In his study, Eyerman (2001) claims that in this "traumatic process," certain groups, referred to as "carrier groups," play a pivotal role in articulating the claims and advocating for the interests, desires, and needs of those affected to a broader audience. Within this context, intellectuals, in a broad sense, have a critical role to play. The author clarifies that here, the term "intellectual" does not merely refer to a structurally determined position or a personality type but rather signifies a role that is socially constructed and historically conditioned. These intellectuals serve as important voices in the discourse surrounding the trauma and identity of diasporic African Americans.

The writer argues that intellectuals have immense importance for they are the ones who connect their people and the dominant society. They do not represent their thoughts and ideas but rather give a voice, interpret, and translate the desires and needs of the people they represent. Those are usually "movement intellectuals", the people who carry any movement that contains the values and aims of the minority they stand for (Eyerman, 2001). The main role of these intellectuals is to highlight past issues and reinterpret the past as a means of reconciling present and future needs. The aim has always been related to what Eyerman refers to as "cultural trauma" and identity reconstruction. Taking into consideration the historical context in which Black people tried to build an identity of their own, one can only assume that embracing one identity was no longer an option for the Black community.

Furthermore, it can be posited that along this historical journey, African Americans have encountered the lingering shadow of slavery, an agonizing past that has etched an enduring impression on their shared awareness. Nonetheless, their identity is shaped not solely by the gravity of this traumatic history but also by their resolute commitment to rise above it. The intellectual trailblazers, who, despite not having personally endured the horrors of slavery, assumed a crucial role in elucidating the core of African American identity, serve as a testament to this unyielding determination.

## **I.5. Synergy of Double Consciousness and Identity Reconstruction: Bridging the Past and Present**

The exploration of African American identity is deeply intertwined with two pivotal concepts that have endured the test of time: "Double Consciousness" or "the Veil." These enduring ideas serve as essential touchstones in understanding the intricacies of identity within the African American community. Rooted in a historical backdrop marked by systemic racial disparities, these concepts continue to provide a profound framework for examining the multifaceted processes of identity construction and reconstruction.

By critically examining the intricate contours of Double Consciousness, which highlights the dual awareness of self within a racially stratified society, and the metaphorical construct of the Veil, symbolizing the enduring racial and societal barriers, one delves into the multifaceted layers of African American identity. These concepts, deeply embedded in the discourse, serve as indispensable tools for dissecting the complexities of identity reconstruction, both within the annals of history and the ongoing conversations of today. The historical narrative, marked by the struggles and triumphs of the past, intersects with the contemporary discourse, where new dialogues on race, cultural heritage, and social justice play pivotal roles in shaping the dynamic transformation of African American identity.

These foundational concepts were first introduced and expounded upon by the eminent African American scholar and civil rights activist, W.E.B. Du Bois. While Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver espoused a philosophy of accommodating white supremacy, W.E.B. Du Bois, a historian, and sociologist trained at Harvard, emerged as a significant voice in the burgeoning Black protest movement during the initial half of the twentieth century. Du Bois' scholarship not only shed light on the intricacies of African American identity but also paved the way for future generations of scholars and activists to navigate the ongoing process of identity reconstruction with depth and insight. His enduring influence continues to shape the academic discourse surrounding African American identity and remains a touchstone for understanding the complexities of this vital subject.

According to Harrison and Nonini (1992), William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) stands out as one of the most prolific and influential African American authors of the first half of the 20th century. In an era marred by segregation, Du Bois emerged as a prominent intellectual who aimed to provide an unvarnished portrayal of the reality of America. His multifaceted identity encompassed roles as an American sociologist, socialist, historian, civil

rights activist, Pan-Africanist, author, writer, and editor, and his written works left an indelible mark on the landscape of African American academia across various disciplines. Du Bois not only shaped the trajectory of African American and global history but also left a lasting and significant imprint on the realm of African American literature.

Harrison and Nonini (1992) assert that through numerous publications encompassing books and articles, this trailblazing scholar delved into the realms of African American culture, history, literature, and political economy. In doing so, he skillfully elucidated the intricate connections between race and racism, while also shedding light on the dimensions of class and exploitation within the African American narrative. Moreover, his analytical and artistic contributions became integral components of the collective culture, history, literature, and political economy of this unique experience. What set Du Bois apart was his deliberate rejection of the common trend among North American intellectuals to compartmentalize their roles as activists and scholars. Instead, he seamlessly integrated these responsibilities, avoiding the fragmentation and intellectual dilution often observed when these roles are kept separate.

As the first African American to attain a Ph.D. from Harvard University, Du Bois emerged not only as a passionate activist but also as a profound thinker. His rigorous examination of racism compelled him to contextualize the African American experience within the broader framework of global colonialism and capitalist expansion. Consequently, he earned the moniker "Father of Pan-Africanism" and emerged as a key intellectual figure in the pursuit of African independence, owing to his extensive research and political engagement. The significance of Du Bois's contributions transcends the boundaries of American culture and history, as evidenced by his recognition of racism as a pervasive global issue. The permutations of this twentieth-century problem reverberated not only in Western Europe but also overseas, particularly in South Africa (Harrison & Nonini, 1992).

In 1905, Du Bois formed the Niagara Movement<sup>1</sup> with William Monroe Trotter. Manhood suffrage, equal economic and educational advantages, an end to segregation, and complete civil rights were among the demands made by the organization. The Niagara Movement had little influence on those in power, moreover, Du Bois teamed up with other civil

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<sup>1</sup> The Niagara Movement was a movement of African American intellectuals that was founded in 1905 at Niagara Falls by such prominent men as W. E. B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter. The movement was dedicated to obtaining civil rights for African Americans. In 1909, the Niagara Movement was hampered by a lack of funds, and many members (including DuBois) joined the newly founded National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP was an organization that used legal power to obtain rights for black Americans, and which is still in existence today.



rights activists to launch the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in February 1909 also known as the NAACP. In November of 1910, the NAACP launched *Crisis*, its magazine. Du Bois edited the inaugural issue, which had Oswald Garrison Villard and Charles Edward Russell as contributors. The publication quickly gained a considerable following of Black and white sympathizers. *The crisis* was selling 100,000 copies every month by 1919. In *Crisis*, Du Bois advocated for the abolition of lynching, the repeal of Jim Crow laws, and the elimination of sexual inequality (Gates, 2007)

The Independent, Nation, The Southern Workman, Harper's Weekly, World's Work, The Outlook, The Missionary Review, the Literary Digest, the annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the Dial, featured W.E.B. Du Bois works on race, society, and economics. To develop a "cure" for America's racial issue, Du Bois immersed himself in the anthropological, sociological, historical, economic, and philosophical study of Blacks in America. Through his foundational involvement in the NAACP (1909) and the Pan-African movement, he dramatically affected Black political culture in the United States and globally. (Gates, 2007). The scholar published twenty-two single-author works, twenty-one in his lifetime (his Autobiography, edited by his friend and literary executor, Herbert Aptheker, would not be published until 1968).

Gates (2007) states that a compilation of his most significant literary contributions, titled *An ABC of Colour: Selections from over a Half-Century of the Writings of W. E. B. Du Bois* was published in 1963, coinciding with his Passing. Du Bois' literary portfolio encompasses a diverse array of genres, including three highly acclaimed and authoritative essay collections released in 1903, 1920, and 1940 (*The Souls of Black Folk*, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, and *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*). In addition to these collections, his literary repertoire features one biography, five novels, a groundbreaking sociological study of a Black community, five volumes dedicated to African history, and three historical investigations into the experiences of African Americans, among other works.

Finkelman (2007) in his introduction to *John Brown* (1909) further asserts that Du Bois' sociological and historical studies of African American communities and culture broke new ground in a variety of fields, including post-Civil War reconstruction history. Du Bois was also a prolific writer, penning novels, autobiographies, many editorials, and journalistic articles, as well as various historical works. The revolutionary political biography of W. E. B. Du Bois, *John Brown* (1909), set the stage for his transfer from academics to a lifelong career in social action. This biography differs from Du Bois' previous work in that it is designed to raise

awareness about racial politics. The political disclosures discovered inside the pages of this book are more important than the historical events of John Brown's life. Du Bois had begun his journey as the most prominent civil rights leader of his day when he penned it in 1909.

Du Bois perceived himself as a man of action who reveled in the abundant and fertile forest of words. Nevertheless, his uniqueness within the pantheon of African American leaders does not solely stem from the seamless fusion of action and eloquence, a characteristic shared by many in Black history. Du Bois's distinctive position in the African American heritage is more closely related to the fact that he harnessed the power of the written word to ascend to influence, in contrast to relying primarily on spoken discourse. This distinction becomes apparent when considering his predecessors, such as Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr. Despite their remarkable literary achievements, both Douglass and King are renowned for the forcefulness of their oratory. Du Bois, conversely, did not possess exceptional oratory skills; his writing closely mirrored his spoken language, which was characterized by the erudition typical of late Anglo-American Victorians (Finkelman, 2007).

According to Gates (2007), while other activists like Douglass and King were renowned for their powerful oratory skills, and possessing an innate talent for spoken expression, Du Bois stood out as a writer deeply engaged in political matters. This distinction in Du Bois's place within the tradition was even recognized by his contemporary, William Ferris, despite Du Bois having authored only five volumes at the time. Ferris noted that Du Bois was a rare figure in history who ascended to a position of leadership primarily through the compelling force of the written word. He was among the select few writers who catapulted themselves to the forefront of a movement, assuming the role of a prominent leader and influencing others through the written medium.

Gates (2007) further states that although Du Bois had previously published several significant works, including his Harvard doctoral dissertation in history, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* (1896), his sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), his sole biography, *John Brown* (1909), and his first of five novels, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), Du Bois's rise to leadership is attributed primarily to one book: *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). While Du Bois had penned numerous noteworthy works, it was this particular book that played a pivotal role in solidifying his place within the canon of African American literature. In essence, *The Souls of Black Folk* stands as the single most widely read and recognized work authored by Du Bois.

Gates (2007) mentions Ferris (1913) who argues that most people concentrate on Du Bois's place in the literary canon via *The Souls of Black Folk* and frame the arc of his seven-decade career as a writer through it. Du Bois's theme was, in part, the largely unarticulated beliefs and actions of American Negroes, who were eager to break free from the cotton fields and claim their proper place as citizens. African American culture in 1903, in Ferris' opinion, was both dynamic and fragmentary, steeped in an almost medieval agricultural past while being ferociously restive. The culture had begun to develop a profoundly varied corpus of narratives, tales, songs, and rhythms as a result of the turmoil of slavery.

The quest for identity in African American life and literature during the early twentieth century was hampered by the fact that identity was determined by colour instead of what an individual projected. Du Bois's groundbreaking work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) provided a seminal framework for understanding the psychological and sociological dimensions of African American identity in the face of racial discrimination and systemic inequalities. Du Bois illuminated the inner conflict experienced by African Americans, a duality of self-perception within a racially divided society, encapsulated in the idea of Double Consciousness. Furthermore, his metaphorical construct, "the Veil," vividly portrayed the invisible yet omnipresent racial barriers that separated African Americans from the broader society, deepening their sense of identity complexity. One can contend that it is similar to Ralph Ellison's notion of invisibility in his work *The Invisible Man* (1952), in which oppressors ignore one's identity and actions because they only see African Americans through a distorted lens. African Americans experience a sensation of invisibility both internally and outwardly when they are assessed externally and then develop a new sense of self-consciousness inside.

According to Du Bois (1903), two people were seen "One is always aware of his two-ness—an American, a Negro"(p.2). He also states in the first essay of his book entitled *Of Our Spiritual Strivings*:

The Negro is a sort of the seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled

strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p.2)

It is plausible to state that while this short excerpt may seem limited in scope, the concept of double consciousness is far from insignificant. Its implications extend into various realms, encompassing philosophy, society, and psychology. In fact, within the context of American racism, double consciousness stands as a central issue. It underscores that consciousness, as a universal facet of human understanding, serves as the common ground on which we all share, yet it can also be a source of confinement and division.

*The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) is a foundational book in African American literature and an American classic. In this essay, Du Bois contends that the central issue of the Twentieth Century revolves around the concept of the colour line. His ideas on living behind the veil of race and the ensuing double consciousness, or the feeling of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, have become touchstones for how Americans think about race. In addition to these timeless ideas, the book provides an appraisal of the race's development, the barriers to that growth, and the prospects for future advancement as the United States entered the twentieth century (Gates, 2007). Thus, according to Du Bois (1903), what causes African Americans to experience their "twoness"? What does the African American population have that the white population does not? To begin with, they are born with a veil.

Major in his article *Identity and Invisibility in African American Literature* explores the significance of the veil claiming that it stems from its masking function, which is to cover or obscure the face from view. The significance of the veil is expanded in Du Bois' perspective. African Americans are "born with a veil" rather than being born on one side or the other of the veil. It is not something that exists outside of them, but something that exists within them. The veil's presence obfuscates both Black and white parties. White people do not consider African Americans to be "real" Americans, while African Americans only perceive themselves through the lenses that white America provides. As a result, just as a white person cannot see a Black individual beyond their skin colour, a Black person cannot see a white person beyond the negative prescription they provide (Major, n.d.).

Moreover, Du Bois emphasizes that the presence of the veil is what resulted in the presence of double consciousness and a lack of actual self-awareness. This lack of actual consciousness and mental dualism might be compared to the concept of "unhappy consciousness" proposed by German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *The*

*Phenomenology of Spirit* (1789), a text which heavily inspired Du Bois. Hegel (1789) claims that "unhappy consciousness" is the product of consciousness at odds with itself. In more detail, consciousness is the limited, dependent element of knowledge (also known as desire), but the self-conscious is the limitless, autonomous identity held by the individual (the social human) (Major, n.d.).

The dissatisfied consciousness continually seeks to reconcile the finite and infinite aspects of existence, aiming to alleviate the tension arising from their duality. While this might seem distinct from Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, it serves as a foundational element for understanding the practical circumstances of African Americans, as advocated by Du Bois. In essence, Du Bois's double consciousness is a reinterpretation, albeit with specific contextual adjustments, of the underlying concept of the "unhappy consciousness." It offers a nuanced perspective to address the distinctive challenges faced by African Americans in the twentieth century (Major, n.d.).

Furthermore, how does the concept of the "unhappy consciousness" intersect with "double consciousness" and more specifically with the notion of identity? One can argue that Du Bois's articulation of this dualistic mode of thinking becomes notably evident in an individual's experience when they are entrapped in a society where, due to the color line, everyone else is considered the "Other" in various ways. This situation necessitates an ongoing struggle to reconcile self-awareness with suppressed consciousness. However, for African Americans, achieving reconciliation between consciousness and self-consciousness was an elusive goal because their consciousness was never fully acknowledged, and their identity was solely determined by physical attributes like skin colour. Consequently, their consciousness becomes divided, evolving into a conflicted and dualistic entity, which they yearn to resolve above all else

It can be argued that consciousness naturally yearns for things that bring about pleasant sensations, such as the attainment of a clear and defined identity. However, these desires are often unattainable due to the constraints imposed by racial structures and the belief that self-perception can only be achieved through the acknowledgment of the other world. Self-awareness distinguishes itself as a distinct entity, transcending the boundaries of consciousness. In essence, consciousness takes on a tangible form. Through this external identification, the "Other" is recognized as part of the same sphere as consciousness. This external predicament inevitably deepens the division within the dual souls of African Americans.

Major further argues that Alain Locke's explanation of this notion of a lack of true self-consciousness gave more perspective to the matter when he stated his concept of "The New Negro". The eponymous notion, according to Locke, is a person who emphasizes "self-assertion and self-articulation" and replaces the racist stereotype of the "Old Negro," which "included passivity, accommodation, and lack of knowledge." The "Old Negro" lacks full self-consciousness and suffers from the same sense of alienation from the world as the "double-conscious" individual. According to Locke, the "Old Negro" is more of a formula than a person. They express a mistaken view of themselves as a result of how others see them, and this viewpoint dominates their personality.

In a scenario like this, there is no actual self-awareness. An individual in this situation is unable to form bonds with others, even people who are in the same situation as them: mentally and physically isolated. The main tie among Black people has been of a common situation rather than a common mind, as Locke put it. Without the actual self, no meaningful community or connection can be built, as this self is required for creating a community that is not dominated by another (Major, n.d.). Du Bois (1903) claims that the United States' approach to racial relations is harmful to the race's long-term growth. He criticizes Booker. T. Washington argues that the acceptance of segregation and emphasis on material growth exemplify an old attitude of accommodation and submission on Washington's part. According to Du Bois, this approach has harmed African Americans by contributing to the loss of the right to vote, civil status, and financial support for higher education institutions. The right to vote, civil equality, and education of the young according to ability are all vital for African American advancement.

Du Bois (1903) recounts his experiences as a rural Tennessee schoolteacher before turning his attention to a critique of American materialism in the burgeoning metropolis of Atlanta, where a single-minded focus on accumulating riches threatens to obliterate all other considerations. African Americans should not be taught only how to make money in school. Rather, the critic thinks that there should be a balance between lower training standards and human cultural norms and noble goals of life. In effect, the African American college should educate the Talented Tenth, who may then contribute to lower education and serve as liaisons to improve racial relations.

Du Bois (1903) focuses on how racial prejudice affects individuals in the last chapters of his work. He is heartbroken at the death of his young boy, but he wonders if his son would be better off dead than growing up in a society ruled by race and the colour line. An essay on African American spirituals finishes Du Bois' book. These songs have evolved from their

African origins into powerful reflections of the African American experience's sadness, anguish, and exile. According to the scholar, these songs exist not only as American music but as the most exquisite expression of human existence born on this side of the seas. Du Bois described the experience of being an African American as hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development. The author highlights even more the major theme of this work 'the dual identity of African Americans' which equated African American identity with a split or a contradictory identity:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (p.3)

Therefore, according to Du Bois (1903), having a dual identity was a unique feature that had been a handicap in the past, but could be a strength in the future. Du Bois also writes of his own experiences of reconciling his African heritage with an upbringing in a European-dominated society. He also mentions in his collection of essays his struggle with dual identity, not knowing what to identify as, however, he took pride in the fact that this double consciousness is rather a gift to be celebrated than a cause for concern.

Eyerman (2001) explains that: "developing what the Bois would describe as Double Consciousness both African and American offered another possibility, one that implied loyalty to a nation but not necessarily to its dominant culture or way of life" (p.4). The author mentions Erikson (1968) when interpreting the writings of Du Bois who "lived about as integrated, and in fact, favored a life in his Berkshire town as any American Negro child can claim to have had" (p. 296), saw the strange duality of Black identity. According to Erikson, Du Bois experienced all of what is crucial to mold a healthy identity but, like many of the African American writers of his time, shared in expressing a kindred sense of "invisibility", "imperceptibility", and "disaffection" from the larger American society.

It can be argued that when African Americans find themselves in an unjust society, they experience deep existential and psychological distress due to the racial structures in place. This distress stems from the fear that their unalterable physical characteristics dictate their self-awareness and existence. Humans are inherently social beings, and their understanding of themselves is profoundly influenced by their interactions with others in various forms. When individuals are in a situation where power is stacked against them and they share the experience of oppression with others, asserting oneself becomes a challenging choice, and all who are oppressed face the same suffering of feeling marginalized and powerless.

Eyerman (2001) states that in many instances, this apprehension frequently leads to African Americans experiencing a sensation of invisibility, wherein they are deprived of the acknowledgment and recognition they seek and rightfully deserve. A related issue centers on the difficulty of attaining freedom when one is rendered invisible and disregarded. Freedom and accountability are inherently interlinked, with each relying on the other. The concept of accountability becomes intricate when individuals are denied the freedom to make choices, and conversely, the notion of freedom loses its significance when choices are predetermined. As Jean-Paul Sartre posited in many of his works on Existentialism, humans are inherently destined for freedom.

To further explore the idea of responsibility and freedom, Major argues that one should examine Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), where the main character asserts that the lack of responsibility contributes to his invisibility; from any perspective, it represents a form of denial. *The Invisible Man* is well aware of the consequence of invisibility, but he is also well informed that he cannot claim responsibility due to its presence. To whom could he be held accountable, and for what reason, especially when those individuals consistently avoid acknowledging him? The Invisible Man's sense of responsibility is closely tied to his perception of being observed by others. Invisibility also plays a role in Julius' persona in *Po' Sandy* by Charles W. Chesnutt (1888) but in a more positive way. He deceives the white couple into allowing him to transform the schoolhouse into a place of worship so Julius and his associates may utilize it for their purposes (Major, n.d.).

W. Chesnutt goes on to say that the spirit of Sandy (a slave who wished to escape from the identity of slavery, or the identity of property that he has been tethered to for his whole life, who eventually is turned by his wife with special powers into a tree), would never disturb a religious service and that the worship itself could be able to pacify Sandy's everlasting soul. However, it is vital to realize that, while invisibility has certain advantages, its psychological



impacts are mostly negative. Despite the unsettling nature of invisibility, Ellison (1897) gives an example in literature of what African Americans must do in the face of invisibility: accept responsibility, regardless of the hurdles in place, in *The Invisible Man*. Only by accepting responsibility can one truly grow toward true freedom and self-identity. Ellison (1897) advocates the strength that everyone has inside themselves, and he encourages the reader to never believe external forces that want to restrict that potential. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois emphasizes the need for education for African Americans in claiming responsibility and identity, saying that knowledge allows them to climb above the curtain that limits progressive action (Major, n.d.).

Burt and Halpin (1998) argue that according to Erikson (1968), both history and experience influence the identity formation of minorities and other people of colour. While some may see African American identity development issues as weak or bad, Erikson (1968) identified Negro identity as an adaptive coping method that African Americans have learned to use to shield themselves from potentially dangerous and troublesome situations: "Negro[s] are apt to develop a 'surrendered identity' [which] has reduced many Negro men to the reflection of the 'negative' recognition which surrounds them like an endless recess of distorting mirrors" (p.6). These individuals of colour saw themselves as neither Africans nor African Americans. They couldn't perceive themselves as either as they never really felt a deep connection to their homelands, which they had never seen, or their new nations, where the dominant race refused to recognize them as equals. Du Bois had already posed the question "What, after all, am I? Am I an American or a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be American?" (p. 16-17).

Gates (2007) mentions French psychologist Alfred Binet (1896) explores the concepts of "bipartition," or the doubling of consciousness stating: "Each consciousness occupies a more restricted and limited range than if there were a single consciousness comprising all of the subject's concepts." (p.7). William James, a Harvard professor who was one of Du Bois's teachers, discussed the concept of a "second personality" within the context of a "hypnotic trance." When Du Bois adapted this concept to describe the social condition of African Americans, he modified it significantly. Nevertheless, he concurred with psychologists that double consciousness was essentially a disorder.

Gates (2007) further claims that according to Du Bois, a dual life, including dual language and dual conceptions, as well as dual thinking, dual obligations, and dual social classes, is the outcome that tempts the intellect to deception or rebellion, deceit, or

radicalism. As a result, Du Bois desired to make the American Negro complete, and he thought that only desegregation and full equality could do this. Nonetheless, what DuBois saw as a problem was adopted as the defining characteristic of modernity itself by future generations of authors. One may argue that the diagnosis outlasted the disease.

It can be further argued that the concept of double consciousness, also referred to as "two-ness" and "duality," had a profound impact on 20th-century literature and public opinion. It offered a fresh perspective on the challenges faced by the Black community and inspired numerous intellectuals to advocate for the rights of their people, becoming their voices against what Du Bois termed "the pale society" – a culture that remained unaccepting, regardless of their efforts. The conflict arising from simultaneously being an American and a person of African descent created a tension between two opposing principles, held together only by the resilient determination of both.

While it is commonly asserted that Du Bois provided a precise terminology for the identity crisis of duality, it is worth noting that the term itself had a preexisting history before Du Bois introduced it. The psychological challenge of double consciousness had long been experienced by Black individuals, but Du Bois was the one who brought these issues to the forefront and addressed them in a remarkably thought-provoking and unexpected manner. In both his essay and the subsequent book, he explored the concept of double consciousness, drawing extensively from this historical context to create a relatively consistent framework of meanings.

According to Bruce (1992), Du Bois incorporated two primary sources in his use of the term "double consciousness." One source was largely metaphorical and had roots in European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. The other source, which had a more medical basis and had been evolving in the field of psychology, was not entirely unrelated. Historian Arnold Rampersad briefly acknowledged this second source in his interpretation of Du Bois's work. Du Bois employed the concept of double consciousness to define the African character and spirituality, drawing on a broader Romantic conception of the human soul and connecting it with various references that were readily apparent.

Bruce (1992) gave much greater weight to his notion that an African message to the world might be sent by converting what had frequently been a racist or racialist primitivism into a romantic primitivism. Du Bois' portrayal of African spirituality as an alternative to materialism drew a lot of attention because of this conversion. In this context, the expression

"double consciousness" was implemented in cases of a split personality; by the late nineteenth century, it had been widely used, not just in professional publications but also in popular debates of psychological study. This dichotomy between two identities, one of who these people are and who they were compelled to be in a community that did not give them any chance to reconcile with both those realities.

Bruce (1992) in his article *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness* argues that Du Bois used the term in his essay *Strivings of the Negro People* to represent at least three different issues. first, the real power of white stereotypes in Black life and thought, and second, the double consciousness formed by practical racism that excluded every Black American from society and last the double consciousness of being both an American and not an American. Most notably, Du Bois alluded to an internal battle among African Americans between what was "African" and what was "American." The metaphorical basis for "double consciousness" gave the phrase its most clear support in terms of this third sense, because for Du Bois the essence of a distinctive African consciousness was its spirituality, a spirituality based in Africa but revealed among African Americans in their folklore, their history of patient suffering, and their faith.

In this sense, according to Bruce (1992), Du Bois' efforts to elevate the spiritual over white America's materialistic, commercial realm were exemplified by double consciousness. Negro blood carries a message for the world, he stated, and this message was of a spiritual sense and a softening effect that Black people might provide to a cold and calculating society, as he had been preaching since at least 1888. What Sherman Paul says of Emerson's emphasis on the "feminine eye" can also be said of Du Bois's emphasis on the African soul, namely, that it serves as an alternative to a dominant inability to "see" beyond the possibilities for action and profit, a concept that Du Bois exploited when he characterized African Americans as having a type of "second sight," led by his essential figure of the "veil".

Moreover, Bruce (1992) further argues that African American values, rather than being an odd "message," gave a feasible future for American civilization that Du Bois' audience could embrace and appreciate. Thus, according to scholars including Karl Miller and Jackson Lears, there was a strong desire for a revival of the spiritual in the rapidly industrializing United States of the late nineteenth century, particularly among the middle class. There was also a fresh interest in Romantic ideas of human nature and human possibilities throughout the West, as Miller and Henri Ellenberger claimed, including that positive feeling of alienation that Thomas Holt addressed concerning Du Bois's ideas.

It is plausible to state that the concept of double consciousness, along with the set of Romantic references it was embedded in, played a crucial role in shaping a positive perception of African and African American identity. This concept aimed to create a counter-narrative to American materialism, which resonated with many educated readers. It is not unexpected that Du Bois continued to utilize this pattern of references in his critique of Booker Washington's materialistic views, as seen in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Du Bois (1903) never neglected the psychological background whenever he used the terms “duality” or “double consciousness”. Given this backdrop of thoughts and realities, Du Bois found the concept of double consciousness particularly valuable in developing a positive perspective of racial difference out of his uniquely African history. In the late 1800s, ideas about race and conduct were contentious. At the time, concepts of culture and cultural relativism were elementary and not widely accepted. The term "race" had biological overtones that were troubling because biological concepts of race were primarily used to base whites' opinions about Black inferiority. For good reason, Black authors and thinkers were ambivalent about the concepts regarding racial distinction that Du Bois was attempting to depict, no matter how favorable they appeared on the surface. In other publications from this period, Du Bois himself expressed such ambivalence.

Bruce (1992) emphasizes the fact that because the concept of double consciousness expressly stressed the integrity of different states in the individual subject, it assisted Du Bois in overcoming the issue that his concept of distinctiveness had created for so long. A feeling of distinction that truly entailed equality, a sense of differentiation that did not imply inferiority, was made possible through such a concept. It provided him with the precise terminology he required to make his argument. Because there was no adequate concept of cultural relativism at the time, Du Bois used the concept of double consciousness to talk about an African mode of thought and what we now call a cultural conflict between Africans and Americans in a way that was very similar to what a concept of relativism would allow. As a result, he could build his discussion on a body of psychological knowledge that had become more well-established during his time, one that identified the potential of several, equally useful ways of interacting with the world.

Bruce (1992) asserts that it is essential to understand that none of these observations intended to downplay the severe hardships faced by African Americans, as per Du Bois' perspective. Du Bois used the phrase "double consciousness" to suggest that if what made African Americans unique was not considered abnormal, then the very condition they

experienced, rooted in double consciousness, was abnormal. All discussions of double consciousness underscored the deep suffering endured by those affected, the genuine dissatisfaction felt by African Americans upon realizing their situation, and their longing for a unified and distinct self. Nevertheless, Du Bois did propose a potential resolution, at least concerning the duality of "African" and "American" selves. He wrote that for the African American "to merge his double self into a better and truer self, losing neither of the older selves" (p.306). Du Bois emphasizes that the only way to recover from this dilemma is not by accepting one over another, but by embracing both identities as one, resulting in a third, new self, different from the other two, but knowing their objects together.

Du Bois (1903) argues that he was not entirely convinced that a successful merger of these dual identities was achievable. Notably, his Atlantic essay leaves this issue open-ended, focusing more on presenting the problem than providing concrete solutions. One reason for this ambiguity could be that the scholar grappled with a complex rhetorical challenge—blurring the lines between two distinct aspects of double consciousness. One aspect stemmed from the experience of racism, while the other arose from conflicting life perspectives. Du Bois himself did not always make a clear distinction between these two aspects. The key difference between them lies in the element of will.

Bruce (1992) contends that Du Bois believed that the fusion of African and American selves could be a deliberate choice. However, the merging of selves shaped by American racism was not a matter of choice. Du Bois might have hoped that by loosely addressing this division, he could make the latter seem more manageable as part of a broader duality. Nonetheless, as the Atlantic essay underscores, Du Bois had not entirely formulated a solution, and neither Emersonian philosophy nor the emerging psychological literature, despite its optimism, provided substantial guidance on how to achieve this.

The great authors of the time exhibited a renewed shrewdness in African American writing during the twentieth century. With their notions of ideas like double consciousness and the symptoms and consequences invisibility has on the African American identity, writers like Du Bois, Ellison, and Chesnutt exemplify this new degree of knowledge. They understood how much the effect of the outside world and its inhabitants had on the African American populace. Such writers like Du Bois worked tirelessly to bring such concerns to the notice of a wider audience, to educate people about the injustice that hindered African Americans and other persecuted minorities from forging their own identities without distortion. Many intellectuals attempted to do so, particularly during the Harlem Renaissance, also known by what Locke

named in 1925 “Mecca of the New Negro” when the Black man battled with words and shared the beauty of his heritage and culture with the rest of the world.

## **I.6. Unlocking a Brighter Future: The Harlem Renaissance as a Threshold to a Better Future**

The Harlem Renaissance marked a significant period in the United States where numerous Black poets, writers, and artists united to collectively represent their race. It was a momentous era that facilitated substantial interactions among Black individuals from diverse backgrounds, offering fresh perspectives on Black identity. Additionally, the mass migration of Black populations from the Southern states to major industrial cities in the North, including Harlem, played a pivotal role in shaping this distinctive cultural environment. The African American community was on the verge of entering a new era of cultural and social progress, symbolizing the beginning of positive change and celebration.

In different terms, the Harlem Renaissance can be described as a cultural movement that thrived among African Americans in the late 1920s. It represented a period during that decade when African Americans embraced and celebrated their African heritage through various artistic forms, encompassing music, visual arts, literature, and even engagement in political and social activism. This era served as a manifestation of African Americans' resistance against various forms of oppression. Instead of resorting to armed conflict, they chose to channel their resistance through the power of words, art, and cultural expression. This diasporic movement allowed them to find innovative means of expressing their cultural identity, all in pursuit of claiming their rightful place in society by showcasing their intellectual prowess.

It can be contended that Harlem, New York, held a magnetic allure, serving as a stage and platform that drew African Americans to amplify their voices, representing the "voice of the voiceless." This period witnessed African Americans boldly expressing their pride in their African American identity through their writings. Even white individuals were captivated by the intellectual depth and emotional richness displayed by African American writers. This era coincided with the Great Migration, often referred to as the "Melting Pot Harlem," during which African Americans aspired to assimilate into mainstream American society and break down cultural barriers, which were believed to advance their race by establishing an American Negro

state. However, there were still dissenting voices within the Black community, advocating for either leaving Harlem altogether or fostering a distinct Black melting pot.

This foreign interest in Harlem, though it acted as a creative drive, is only one facet of the time; it is also the age of the "New Negro." The phrase "New Negro," which has been in use since the start of the twentieth century, has come to symbolize the search for self-identity and a desire to move beyond the stereotypes that lingered from the age of slavery. Critics such as Locke and Du Bois challenged artists and writers across the United States to seek beyond caricature and stereotype in their works and to examine subjects of African American life and culture. Traditional subjects—portraiture, landscape, historical, and religious painting—were reinvigorated by artists of the twenties and thirties with a fresh style and vision that mirrored their experiences as African Americans, while also contributing to greater developments in American art. Artists began to look back to the Harlem Renaissance as a source of artistic inspiration as time progressed. The twenties and thirties were painted by artists like Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, and Faith Ringgold, who used Harlem as a subject. The Harlem Renaissance's cultural and artistic climate also paved the way for later developments like AfriCOBRA and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, which prioritized expressions of African American experience, African heritage, racial pride, and the Black image (including slogans like "Black is Beautiful<sup>2</sup>"), as well as racial politics (The Oklahoma City Museum of Art, 2009).

The Harlem Renaissance's abiding impact is the continuous interest in researching, updating, and portraying the present and historically African American experience. Even though the phrase "New Negro" was not coined by Locke, it embodies the search for self-identity and self-visualization that characterized most of the art of the time. By contrasting the "Old Negro" and the "New Negro," Locke pushed artists to go beyond popular culture's unfavorable portrayals of African Americans. "The days of 'aunties,' 'uncles,' and 'mammies' are...gone," he wrote. "Uncle Tom and Sambo are no longer with us..." wrote Du Bois, while urging artists to "find beauty in Black." (The Oklahoma City Museum of Art, 2009, p.4).

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<sup>2</sup> The Black is Beautiful movement was a cultural and political movement that emerged in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. It aimed to challenge and overturn traditional Eurocentric standards of beauty that marginalized and devalued Black features and aesthetics. This movement celebrated Black pride, encouraged self-acceptance, and promoted the beauty of Black features, hair, and skin tones. It played a crucial role in fostering a sense of identity, empowerment, and unity within the Black community, while also advocating for social, political, and economic equality.

In their study, The Oklahoma City Museum of Art (2009) found that during the Harlem Renaissance, many African American painters looked to African art for inspiration. From the portrayal of masks to the use of African-inspired design motifs to abstracted renderings of the human form, artists turned to Africa, and the thought of Africa, in some ways. By the 1920s, European modernists had found African art and were incorporating its style into their work. One well-known example is Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* which has masks (1907). Critics such as Locke and Du Bois encouraged painters to explore and use African art as a source of inspiration, and Africa became a symbol during this time. Even though certain African American writers and painters admired Africa and African art, the continent remained an alien and foreign memory. "What is Africa to me?" Countee Cullen wonders in his poem *Heritage*. In his later poetry, *Afro-American Fragment* Hughes wrote, "So far, so far away Is Africa" (p.13).

Moreover, it is plausible to state that the 1920s were a dynamic era in American society, a time of material luxury as well as increased awareness of racial and cultural diversity. Many artists and thinkers were examining and debating the American heritage's distinctiveness. African American writers, painters, and musicians sparked an unprecedented surge of creative expression and a new "race awakening" in the 20th century, which became known as the Harlem Renaissance. The poetry of Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Claude McKay, among others, the paintings of Aaron Douglas and Archibald J. Motley Jr., and the popularity of musical forms such as the blues and jazz, all reflect this newly discovered racial awareness and appreciation with displaying and documenting the African American experience.

According to The Oklahoma City Museum of Art (2009), the twenties were also the time when the Negro was in vogue, as Langston Hughes subsequently put it. African American painters began to address topics of daily life, religion, and the South. The movement paved the way for all future African American writing and had a significant influence on global Black literature and consciousness. It sparked anti-colonial and anti-assimilationist groups such as Negritude, a literary movement born in Paris in response to French colonial power and assimilation. The Renaissance also allowed Black authors to publish with major American publishing firms, and Black artists acquired more authority over portrayals of Black culture and experience, paving the way for the subsequent civil rights struggle.

However, there was a downside to this increased visibility: Emerging Black authors relied mainly on white-owned newspapers and publishing firms, while the greatest Black performers of the day performed exclusively for white audiences at Harlem's most famous



cabaret, the Cotton Club. Many white metropolitan sophisticates looked to Black culture as a doorway into a more "primitive" and "dynamic" way of life, as represented by a controversial book about Harlem life by white author Carl van Vechten in 1926. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois slammed Van Vechten's novel and condemned works by Black writers, such as McKay's novel *Home to Harlem*, for propagating unfavorable preconceptions of Black people. The Harlem Renaissance came to an end with the start of the Great Depression, when groups like the NAACP and the National Urban League shifted their attention to the economic and political difficulties that Black Americans faced. Its impact has spread over the globe, allowing Black artists and authors access to mainstream society (History.com Editors, 2009).

Despite the increased awareness of the Black community and its cultural heritage, the dominant white culture continued to deny them recognition as full members of society and withheld their rights. Ongoing legislation was enacted to suppress Black culture and erase African history. In response to this oppressive reality and the feeling of not belonging anywhere, some Black individuals sought refuge by assimilating into the white community that had previously rejected them because of their skin colour. This was seen as a way to end their struggle for acceptance and integration.

## **I.7. Belonging, Passing, and Identity Dialectics: The Tug of Contrasting Realities**

The African diasporic identity is a tapestry woven from the threads of history, culture, and resilience. It is a rich and complex identity shaped by centuries of displacement, survival, and the quest for belonging. Within this intricate fabric, a central dialectic emerges, a dialectic that encapsulates the tension between rooting, belonging, and the urge to pass as a member of another group. In the context of African diasporic identity, this dialectic explores the profound questions of where one truly belongs, what it means to be authentic, and how external pressures influence the expression of identity.

The concept of "rooting" or "belonging" speaks to the deep connection that individuals of African diasporic heritage feel to their ancestral roots, histories, and cultural legacies. It signifies a sense of pride, unity, and belonging to a community that shares a history of struggle and resilience. It is the affirmation of one's identity and a celebration of the cultural traditions and narratives that have been passed down through generations. On the other side of this

dialectic lies the notion of “Passing”, which is often driven by external pressures, discrimination, or a desire to access social advantages. Passing involves concealing one's true African diasporic identity to navigate a society that may not fully embrace or understand the complexities of this heritage. It is a strategy to assimilate, access opportunities, or escape prejudice, but it also raises questions about authenticity and the sacrifices individuals make to navigate an often hostile world.

This dialectic is not exclusive to any one era or location but is a recurring theme throughout the African diasporic experience. Whether it was African Americans "Passing" as white in the segregated United States, Afro-Caribbeans navigating identity in colonial settings, or Afro-Europeans negotiating their place in predominantly white societies, the tension between rooting and “Passing” has been a constant companion on the journey of African diasporic identity. In this dichotomy, a dynamic interplay between the desire to root oneself firmly within the African diasporic identity and the allure of Passing to navigate societal challenges unfolds. This tension forces individuals to contemplate where they truly belong in a world marked by diversity and often hostile external pressures. It challenges the idea that identity is a fixed, unchanging concept and instead highlights the malleability of identity within the African diaspora. The dichotomy illuminates the nuances, contradictions, and ambiguities individuals face as they balance the need for authenticity and the practical considerations of their environment.

The path African Americans embarked on to discover their identities and engage in deep introspection was marked by significant difficulties. Throughout history, they endured systematic marginalization based on their skin colour and the racial divide, which cast a shadow of adversity upon this community. The "one-drop law," which categorized anyone with even a trace of Black ancestry as exclusively Black, regardless of their appearance, further exacerbated their predicament. Colourism and invisibility were pervasive issues, compelling individuals to adopt dual identities and lead double lives as they grappled with the conflict between their true selves their sense of rooting, and their aspirations. Passing as white was no longer a matter of choice but to some individuals, a necessity in the face of such dire circumstances. While they yearned for acceptance from the white community, they were often left with no option but to seek opportunities to pass as white to access the privileges and benefits denied to them otherwise.

Many social and racial topics that were ignored by mainstream white America during the pre-civil rights era are addressed in African American literature. Continuous racial violence,

isolation, segregation, and terror are among the social and racial issues. Many renowned African American novelists were inspired by the idea of “Passing” and wrote their works based on such theme notably Harriet Jacobs' (1861) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Nella Larsen's (1929) *Passing*, and *Quicksand* (1928), and Charles Chesnutt's (1900) *The House Behind the Cedars*.

The concept of “Passing” is defined by Volk (2017) as "crossing the socially created 'color line' that divides white and black Americans, however, it can also relate to other ethnic or racial groups, as well as gender, sexuality, or class classifications” (p.1). Early African American writing draws attention to a Passing cliché that is well-known among African Americans but not well-known among the general public. Many light-skinned men and women found an outlet for inclusion through Passing. This theme also allows for a more in-depth examination of the country's racial divide.

The works cited above are just a handful of numerous literary works that depicted the realities of society at the time, a society dominated by laws that discriminated against and degraded African Americans. Volk (2017) explained that the colour line is a method of determining a person's identity and social sense of self solely based on skin colour and racial origin. The term's dual interracial and intra-racial definitions are significant when Blacks engage with whites and members of their race. On a racial level, the colour line denotes institutionalized racism and prejudices that were created to divide, oppress, and instill a sense of inferiority in Blacks in comparison to the dominant race.

Volk (2017) further states that the superior race in American racism is identified as white and right, while the second-class race is identified as dark inferiors who bear the humiliating impacts of Jim Crow and double-conscious identity as a result of their Blackness. Additionally, the colour line's centrality to Passing exemplifies how the passer navigates societal institutions designed to keep him or her out. particularly, the passer must manage numerous social structures meant to keep male and female presences out of certain social places to cross the colour line. Education, housing, work, politics, and law are examples of social institutions and spaces. All of these social institutions deny certain bodies access, effectively marginalizing and undermining attempts at social, economic, and political advancement. These social institutions also symbolize a place that is forbidden to people based on physical characteristics such as race, class, sexuality, or gender.

Volk (2017) additionally argues that the colour line serves a dual purpose for those who pass: they must navigate the social institutions intentionally designed to exclude them, while

also remaining acutely aware of their position and the potentially life-threatening consequences if their true identity is exposed. The possibility of death, as well as the psychological repercussions that Passing has on the passer, ensures that the passer will never return to his or her prior state of being. This identity crisis and the dichotomy between wanting to be recognized as Black and yet longing to pass as white is well illustrated in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). This literary work is a famous statement on the psychological experiences of Black men and women in white-dominated societies. It is based on his own experiences as a man who was born on the Caribbean Island of Martinique before studying psychiatry in France. Simultaneously, it draws on his psychiatric background to offer a provocative therapeutic perspective on how racism causes psychological difficulties in people of colour.

The yearning for Black people to be white is a prominent theme in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon examines this in connection to interracial relationships in chapters two and three when having a white partner appears to grant access to a previously forbidden white world. The ambition to be white, according to Fanon, stems from a society's power imbalance. In other words, people regard white people as having greater possibilities and economic advantages, and they want to be white so they may enter that sphere of possibility. However, a Black person cannot become white. Thus, according to Fanon (1952), they will always remain Black, and the desire to be white leads to a psychological problem of losing one's sense of self.

To argue for how one's concept of self is generated by how one is seen by others; Fanon draws on the philosophical work of Hegel and others. For example, Black people do not consider themselves to be Black until a white person—"a white Other"—identifies them as such and imposes a sense of inferiority on them. This indicates that identity categories are always formed as a result of interactions and connections involving persons from various social positions. Fanon's book also goes into detail on the complicated psychological effects of white ideology on men and women who are forced to pass. Volk (2017) quotes Fanon who states: "We understand now why the black man cannot take pleasure in his insularity. For him, there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world." (p.2).

One can argue that although Fanon concentrates on Martinique's men and women, there are parallels between African Americans in America and Martinique's residents since both societies prioritize pale complexion above dark skin. Furthermore, the question of identity has always been how someone with power in its complete sense, whether it be cultural power, class power, gender power, or even race and skin colour power, views someone who is perceived to be less privileged and powerful. African Americans in this situation, were the less powerful

community with less if no privileges at all. Forced to wear white masks and pass as white, to a culture that does not accept in the slightest their real identities only due to the colour of their skin.

Volk (2017) in her analysis of Fanon's book explains that Fanon's psychological examination of "the Negress and the Mulatto" provides insight not just into Martinique's inhabitants, but also into mixed-race Americans who choose to pass. The Negress and the Mulatto, according to Fanon, are both pursuing the same thing: The first only has one option and one worry which is to turn white. The second wishes to not only turn white but also to prevent reverting. These two categories of women are not only looking for benefits based on their skin colour, but they are also attempting to "become" white permanently to fully integrate into white culture.

Volk (2017) further contends that Passing is a phenomenon that occurs not only in the United States but in every region where whiteness and colonial concepts of civilization are the ideal forms of society. The decision to pass for white has detrimental consequences for the individual's psychological well-being, as well as affecting their interpretations and disrupting the colour line. To pass effectively, the passer must disassociate from his or her history while still aligning with the oppressor's hue. However, many narratives involve problems of class, gender, and sexuality, thus Passing may not always refer to racial Passing.

Much of *Black Skin White Masks* is a discussion of how colonization and enslavement created a perception of inferiority in Black people, which in turn supported white supremacy. However, Fanon warns against dwelling too long on the past as they will continue to produce a racial hierarchy if they continue to be guided by the past. Instead, they must look to the future, and recognize the freedom they have to break free from that past that would only lead to more trauma and psychological problems. Fanon argues that in the case of Black people, this means demanding immediate justice and white recognition of their inherent humanity. Fanon (1952) emphasizes acting solely to reinforce a way that enhances freedom, rather than in a way that perpetuates past wrongs.

Fanon (1952) places higher importance on action than knowledge because his main objective is freedom. It is more necessary for individuals to have agency than to comprehend everything there is to know about racism and racist history. To put it another way, he does not believe that everyone needs to read his book to be free. Knowledge is not a requirement for taking action. The most crucial thing is to increase people's autonomy. Otherness, invisibility,

sexism, and several other themes including the major Passing theme are well visible in Fanon's work. As a result, the author contends that overcoming an inferiority complex in Black individuals is more complicated than simply treating a neurosis. It necessitates the change of an entire civilization that is based on a hierarchy of inferiority and superiority.

Harriet Jacobs and Nella Larson's writings are also considered excellent illustrations and portrayals of the concept of "Passing". Novels such as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), *Passing* (1929), and *Quicksand* (1928) give the readers a wide perspective and insight into Passing in all its forms (racial, class, cultural, and gender Passing). In Harriet Jacobs' early slave narrative, the author loses all regard for a male who passes for white. She even stated in her book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* that "everybody knew he had the blood of a slave father in his veins; but for the sake of Passing himself off for white, he was ready to kiss the slaveholder's feet. How I despised him!" (Volk, 2017, p.3). Jacobs viewed Passing for white as a horrible type of white imitation, and she abhors any affiliation with the men who oppress her; as a result, she has no desire to associate with a man who is Passing for white. The author wrote the novel when she was a slave, and kept a secret, she tried to depict all the horrors of slavery and share her thoughts with a desire to change not only the public opinion but also the history that was once told by the dominant race's point of view. Jacobs used the pseudonym Linda Brent and changed the names of all parties described.

It can be asserted that even though the book discusses the concerns of slavery and segregation, it also explains the wonderful African heritage and traditions, as well as how they were combined with Western society. This shows that having only one identity was no longer a viable choice. African Americans had to combine and embrace both African and Western cultures to develop a single identity, which was born out of double consciousness or dualism. Because they had a Western component to who they were, it was no longer viable to celebrate only one identity. At that point, it was not so much African as it was African American.

Volk (2017) contends that while many people reject the idea of merging their two identities, many others feel that it is an important part of who they are since they are after all both Africans and Americans and that was well illustrated in *Incidents*. The book explores the rich history, tradition, and religion of Africa as it intersects with those of the United States. This is especially visible in the slaves' Christmas celebrations; they enjoy Western Christmas traditions while also incorporating the "Johnkannaus" tradition from West Africa. They also sing spirituals, which, according to historians of the time, incorporate biblical themes and allusions as well as themes from their own lives and sorrows, which are sometimes borrowed

from their African heritage. These people also performed dances based on Western and African rituals and traditions. Their language was, in the end, a mix of English and African dialect. They made meaning for themselves in the context of their terrible life by fusing cultures.

It is reasonable to state that the writer also focuses on the fact that slavery was a horrific experience for both men and women, but the latter had its own set of horrors. Women, including young girls, discovered that their bodies were not their own, but rather were viewed as sexual objects on which their masters may execute their most heinous sexual desires. For women, identity was not just about cultures and the conflict over which of the two they desired to belong to, but it was also about gender, as women not only suffered a cultural divide but also lost all of their womanhood privileges. Furthermore, identity is not solely a matter of culture; it encompasses not only the latter but also gender, sexuality, race, heritage, and other factors that contribute to the formation of one's individuality. While some individuals of African descent easily transcended the colour line, others chose a different path, opting to embrace their roots and celebrate their true selves.

However, it can also be argued that even those who successfully passed as white still grappled with a profound sense of not belonging. They struggled in vain to distance themselves from their heritage because it remained deeply ingrained within them, causing them considerable emotional distress and psychological turmoil. Despite crossing the colour line and assimilating into the white community, their identity remained fragmented and marked by a persistent feeling of emptiness. Additionally, scholars highlight that Passing had a more detrimental impact on the Black community than initially perceived, as it entailed pretending to be someone they were not. According to these scholars, Passing did not provide the escape that some Black individuals had hoped for; instead, it led to a distressing exchange of identities, resulting in increased inner turmoil and a greater loss of identity.

Churchill (2017) argues that *Passing* (1929) by Nella Larsen focuses mainly on this phenomenon. The book features Black characters who pass as white to differing degrees, switching back and forth between various outer identities as they see fit. Some of Larsen's protagonists pass only when it is convenient and advantageous to them, but they live in Black communities and embrace their Black identity, while others live as white people and keep their Black history hidden. Irene, one of the protagonists of the story is an example of a character who disguises herself as white only when it is convenient for her. She passes, for instance, towards the start of the novel so she can have an iced tea at Drayton's, a white hotel. Irene says she only passes when she's alone at Drayton's, connecting Passing with isolation from the Black

community. Irene is proud of her Black society in Harlem, where she resides with her children and Brian, who is unable to pass.

Churchill (2017) argues that "Passing" is a convenience for Irene, allowing her to travel through the white society without being ridiculed or excluded, but it is not a way of life for her. Irene constantly remembers to tell herself that she is Passing through Drayton's for the sake of convenience, not because she denies anything at all about her Black identity. Irene's dedication to her Black identity sets her apart from other characters who move through white neighborhoods, not for the sake of convenience, but because they enjoy it. Consider Irene's childhood friend Gertrude, who married a white man and claims to desire light-skinned children. Gertrude appears to be willing to renounce blackness, or at the very least dark-skinned infants, to join the white group.

Churchill (2017) further contends that some other characters like Clare, have entirely passed, rejecting and concealing their Black origins. Clare has given up her black identity to live among white people. She deceives her husband, John, who believes she is entirely white and is overtly racist in her presence. Clare appears to believe that her way of life, in which her Black identity has been completely obliterated, is superior to Irene's at the start of the novel. Clare expresses her dissatisfaction with the lack of light-skinned Black women crossing over into white society and leaving their Black roots behind during one talk with Irene. She is implying that her way of life is superior by doing so. Clare's benefits as a white woman are undeniable, from her enormous money to her protection from discrimination, exclusion, and racial violence.

However, as the novel progresses, Larsen demonstrates how Passing has a significant psychological impact on Clare and does not protect her from all she expected. During Irene's first encounter with Clare's husband, John exhibits virulent bigotry and refers to his wife as "nig," a racial slur. John has no idea that Clare is Black or originates from a Black neighborhood, thus the slur is a "joke" about her allegedly worsening skin colour. Nonetheless, the scene depicts Clare's daily maltreatment and warns that if she ever renounces her white identity and embraces (or even discloses) her Black one, she will undoubtedly face violence (Churchill, 2017)

Churchill (2017) asserts that Clare articulates a desire to quit John and rejoin the Black community as the story progresses, and she enlists Irene's assistance. Irene, on the other hand, harbors deep anger for Clare for a variety of reasons. Irene is envious of Clare, but her rage



may arise from the fact that Clare has said many horrible things about Black people and has gotten away with it for so long. Irene's animosity casts doubt on her passage, even though she only passes once in a while. It invites the reader to consider the following question: if Irene perceives Clare as an alien in the Black society, at what point does Passing constitute you one? Furthermore, Larsen's portrayal of Passing casts doubts on the idea of race as innate or hereditary. The word Passing has a dual meaning: it can signify to be taken for or, more literally, to cross the barrier from one identity to another. The second definition demonstrates how binary racial identities were in the minds of Americans in the 1920s, as the concept implies that Black and white identities are two separate categories.

However, according to Churchill (2017), the characters in *Passing* constantly trespass, muddle, and challenge the idea of race as binary as they go back and forth between numerous identities, contradicting this viewpoint about race. Irene mocks white people's belief that they can always identify a Black person from a white person in Drayton, yet they are continuously fooled because Black heritage does not necessarily correlate to conventional conceptions. Ultimately, characters like Clare and Irene's racial ambivalence and fluidity put into question concepts of race as inherent and separate hereditary classifications, because they highlight how race is built and played, despite having real ramifications for people's lives. This concept is significant because it poses a threat to racism, which is based on the belief that race is innate. At the same time, it has the potential to endanger Black identity, or at least conceptions of Black individuality based on genetics instead of a common experience.

Larsen (1929) appears ambivalent regarding the concept of Passing and what it means for Black identity and race in the end. One of Irene's casual remarks could be construed as the book's thesis on the matter: "It is funny about 'Passing.' We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with a kind of revulsion, but we protect it." (p.97). The author emphasizes the duality and conflict that exists between adopting one or both identities. Passing was a need for survival in a white environment that refused to accept these people for who they were, as much as these people despised it because it stripped them of their ancestry and culture.

Moriel (2005) in her article *Passing and the Performance of Gender, race, and Class Acts: A Theoretical Framework*, identifies Passing as the movement from one identity group to another, usually from margin to mainstream. It is regarded as treason to one's heritage and identity since one chooses to live away from them. The author claims that embracing, moving into, and being incorporated into a realm outside one's own is a show of shame for one's

community and culture. “Passing”, on the other hand, is neither a simple adventure nor a haphazard excursion. The author claims that it is a purposeful choice, a desire for self-, identity, and potential transformation. While the author claims to grasp the traitorous component of Passing, it does include complicated survival methods that may benefit both the community and the individual. “Passing” as the writer claims is not only a process of concealment but also a process of moving to a place or situation in and from which one can express and more fully fulfill oneself. As a result, “Passing” calls into question judgments constructed on identity stereotypes that people use to simplify their social environment.

In conclusion, in the intricate interplay of belonging, Passing, and identity dialectics, we find the essence of the human experience within the complex tapestry of African diasporic identity. The journey has been one of unceasing tension, where individuals navigate the opposing currents of their cultural heritage and the external pressures of a world that often fails to fully embrace their complexities. Through this exploration, one is reminded that this dichotomy is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is a lived reality for countless individuals who must make daily choices about how they express themselves, where they belong, and how they present their identities to the world. It is a dichotomy that reflects the strength and resilience of those who grapple with it, often in the face of adversity and discrimination.

the act of "Passing" in African American history reflects a complex and challenging response to a society that imposed racial barriers and discrimination. While some individuals sought to escape the confines of racial prejudice by Passing as white, this often came at the cost of their true identity and a sense of disconnection. The phenomenon of “Passing” serves as a poignant reminder of the profound impact of racism on individuals' lives and the lengths to which people went in their quest for freedom, acceptance, and opportunity. It is a testament to the enduring struggle for self-identity within a society marked by racial divisions.

## **I.8. Conclusion**

The journey of reconstructing African American identity in the diaspora is marked by a complex interplay of historical legacies, cultural evolution, and contemporary challenges. Shaped by the enduring impacts of slavery, migration, and resilience, African Americans navigate a process that involves exploring cultural heritage, negotiating identity within diverse contexts, and striving for self-determination and empowerment. Chapter one delves into the

intricate journey of the Black community, particularly within the diaspora, as they grapple with the formidable task of reconstructing both their individual and collective identities. It delves into essential questions surrounding this endeavor, such as the complexities of rebuilding what has been fragmented by a tumultuous past and how a community can envision a viable future while striving to recover pieces of its heritage, systematically erased by historical forces. As these themes are explored, the chapter offers a profound examination of the African American experience, encouraging readers to navigate the intersections where identity and history converge. In doing so, it provides valuable insights into the ever-evolving dynamics between tradition and modernity, heritage and innovation, all within the intricate framework of African American identity.

# **Chapter Two**

Redefining Black Futures: The Rise of an Afrofuturistic Identity

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### **Redefining Black Futures: The Rise of an Afrofuturistic identity**

#### **II.1. Introduction**

Afrofuturism, originating in the 19th century, is a movement that aims to challenge stereotypes, redefine the identities of Africans and African Americans in the diaspora, and create a uniquely Afrocentric platform that prioritizes representation in futuristic contexts. It encompasses a diverse community of Black diasporic individuals, including writers, musicians, artists, and theorists, who collectively contribute to this cultural movement. While Afrofuturism extends beyond literature, it is primarily expressed through novels, serving as a powerful medium to convey its core ideas, values, and objectives. This chapter is dedicated to exploring an inclusive vision of the future, one that celebrates the diverse perspectives within the Black community. It aims to provide a platform where historically marginalized voices can converge to engage in discussions encompassing a broad spectrum of future-oriented subjects. At its core, this chapter focuses on the process of reimagining, deconstructing, and decolonizing Afrocentric viewpoints, with the ultimate goal of envisioning a future where Black excellence and prosperity are integral elements of the narrative, whether in the immediate or distant future. Additionally, it delves into the captivating world of Afrofuturism, exploring its origins, principles, and transformative potential, unraveling the intricate threads of Afrocentric narratives interwoven into futuristic imaginings.

#### **II.2. An Introduction to the Critical Black Futures (The Traditional Vs the Futuristic)**

In the realm of human understanding, the narratives of the past, present, and future play a pivotal role in shaping how one perceives and defines their identities, cultures, and the scope of their possibilities. These narratives serve as essential frameworks that guide one's interpretation of the world. Within this context, the concept of "Critical Black Futures" emerges as an intellectual exploration, traversing the diverse terrain of the African diaspora. It seeks to bridge the traditional elements deeply rooted in this legacy with the ever-evolving and expansive realm of the futuristic.

The dichotomy of the traditional versus the futuristic, presented in this exploration, is not rigid but rather a dynamic relationship. It represents a dialogue that transcends temporal boundaries, encouraging inquiry and contemplation. This dialogue invites one to envision a future that respects the legacy of the past while simultaneously propelling one toward uncharted territories. It is a spectrum of possibilities where the wisdom of tradition intersects with the spirit of innovation, providing opportunities for holistic exploration.

Butler (2021) explores the critical aspect of Black futures in his book *Critical Black Futures: Speculative Theories and Exploration*. The author gives an in-depth analysis of the concepts and argues that without critical reflection, moving from one space to another can be considered random and unintentional. Even though there is no way to account for every scenario, a lack of a critical mindset prevents any progress that can be tracked, measured, or compared. Without imagination, a journey confines the traveler to the basic elements of what has come before. Even though some could argue that "if it ain't broke don't fix it" (p.1), this is not the case and never has been when considering what Black bodies may be doing in the future. Therefore, progressing toward new ways of existence without critical reflection might be likened to floundering aimlessly in a space without a foundation. Moreover, one can argue that the critical aspect is essential and must be taken into account.

Butler (2021) emphasizes the significance of critical reflection and imagination in shaping the trajectory of the future. He suggests that merely moving forward without these essential components might seem like a mere wishful endeavor. Imagination, according to Butler, catalyzes innovation, offering a gateway to the realm of speculation. It involves the reinterpretation of existing knowledge and concepts, often presenting them in more accessible and progressive forms. This process demands a delicate balance between familiar ideas and novel possibilities. The exploration of Black futures follows a similar pattern, requiring a rooted foundation for venturing into uncharted territories. For instance, one must consider the modes of navigation in these new landscapes—whether it involves walking, flying, or accessing encrypted portals. Each step in this journey necessitates a harmonious fusion of critical thinking and imaginative prowess, ultimately shaping the contours of the envisioned reality.

Butler (2021) quotes Brooks (2016) who states: "I [too] share a dream: to ensure that long-oppressed racial minority and diverse voices can articulate themselves in the futures imagined in the practices of long-term thinking and the professional areas of foresight" (p.2). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the pervasive presence of speculative language within Black critical discourse. Some might argue that this discourse emerges from the diverse

subjectivities that harbor Black imagination(s) and subsequently give birth to a plethora of imaginative possibilities.

Black critical discourse is profoundly intertwined with Black speculative imagination(s). This connection is vividly exemplified through the literary awakening crafted by Zora Neale Hurston, the realm of speculative futurist fiction meticulously woven by Octavia Butler, the thought-provoking anti-/decolonial deconstructionism articulated by Aime Cesaire, and the profound investigation into the political dynamics governing death and dying undertaken by Achille Mbembe. In each of these instances, the speculative elements within this discourse serve as potent tools of radical imagination. They allow for the conceptualization and reshaping of new worlds through profound shifts and disruptions in the prevailing epistemological paradigms, as eloquently explored by Butler (2021).

Alex Khasnabish (2019) is quoted by Butler (2021) and defines radical imagination as: “our capacity to conceive of the world as it might be otherwise.” (p.2). One must conceptualize innovative epistemologies, social norms, genders, sexualities, embodiments, etc., to do this. The idea is that to create new realities in which Black futures are whole, accounted for, powerful, and independent, it is necessary to adopt strategies that are not grounded in the current reality (whatever that may be). Therefore, it is crucial to engage in dialogue with Black critical imagination to critically consider what the future may hold for Black people. This endeavor is predicated on the notion that Black futures (desirable to Black people) will emerge from a more expansive discourse that may be attained via the use of Black imaginations. In essence, it is an effort to investigate the imagined potentialities of what might exist in futures where Black people are present, thriving, and powerful.

Butler (2021) further contends that prevalent depictions of the future in mainstream media often feature extravagant technological advancements, vast ecological potentials, and ambitious scientific explorations. However, within these portrayals, Blackness is frequently sidelined, ignored, marginalized, or rendered invisible, as if it were destined for obscurity or extinction. To address this issue, the author argues that it is crucial to subject these conventional representations to critique, both directly and indirectly. This critical examination necessitates a deep-seated curiosity about the possibilities of a broadly conceived, inclusive Black future—one that embraces the diverse array of Black perspectives. This inclusive vision extends to a wide range of future-oriented subjects, including Meta-humanism, transhumanism, posthumanism, Astro-Blackness, and technology.

Hence, it can be contended that there is a pressing need to establish a norm of Black prosperity within Afrocentric futuristic settings, and this imperative must find a prominent place in global discourse. The act of envisioning, conceiving, and positioning African Americans within remote temporal landscapes holds the potential to propel one toward uncharted territories, untouched by the constraints of societal conventions, class distinctions, sexual orientations, gender dynamics, or racial boundaries. Realities remain malleable, and so does the trajectory of history, provided one is receptive to the myriad possibilities and stretches the boundaries of their imagination.

Butler (2021) mentions the author of the Liminal Series Ayize Jama-Everett who spoke about the uniquely Black aspects of science fiction on the Afrofuturist Podcast. He claims that the rough and granular parts of reality that are depicted in Black science fiction are what make it speculative: "It's a much more accurate form, of what is going on." (p.4). The critic further states that according to Enrique Dussel (1985), persons who are on the periphery have a far deeper understanding of what is happening, which accounts for their correctness in criticizing it. Black science fiction's precise accuracy and meticulous focus on the overwhelming complexity of reality are what give the genre its distinctively speculative character. Jama-Everett contends that what distinguishes Black speculative fiction from other types of popular science fiction is the focus on the unsettling and beautiful facets of life's complexity. Because of this, Black science fiction is never simply science fiction.

Furthermore, one may only come to wonder: What is a crucial circumstance or event that will trigger future Black innovation? If Blackness became the primary factor in shaping the world's economic, political, and social structures, how might it differ, if at all? What part does Africa play in this remaking of the world's politics? How may Black women pave the way for a future that is more just and equitable? What might masculinity contribute to the process of decolonization? Can Blackness acquire and exercise power apart from historical colonial methods? Such questions are inevitable when trying to analyze and understand critical Black futures and movements that are purely Afrofuturistic and Afrocentric.

Butler (2021) cites Amber Johnson (2020) who asserts that dismantling oppression and power structures is a pivotal aspect of critical cultural studies. She emphasizes that rhetoric's function in this endeavor goes beyond just assuming responsibility for the body's liberation, and "continuing to critique systemically oppressive structures ... using your work to go far beyond the critique ... to (re)build, strategically, our just future" (p.7). Many scholars also argue that critical work around radical imagination seeks fundamental change rather than reform. This



is essential to critical Black futures because it shows how the speculative interacts with, births, and develops from Blackness.

Moreover, it can be contended that understanding critical Black futures necessitates an understanding of the various discourses that adapt topics of oppression, speculative fiction, Blackness, power, and decolonization. Reconfiguration of power dynamics results in redistribution of value. Moreover, critical Black futures are a combination of imagination along with reframing and critical analyses of the realities that Black folks find themselves immersed in. Therefore, one can claim that critical Black futures are very much linked to the building of new worlds where possibilities are endless and in which Blackness is at the forefront.

One can argue in this context that only through imagining and changing the reality that is presently lived, one can thrive and achieve beyond expectations and socially established norms. Therefore, to overcome the challenges faced today mainly by African Americans in the diaspora, a reconfiguration, reimagination, and even a restatement of certain values, principles, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours is much needed. By imagining or considering counter- or alternative futures that are concerned with challenging the cultural, social, and ethical ramifications of developing technology, critical design explores alternative modes of existence or being. It is crucial to keep in mind that critical Black futures are always designing new realities by altering the very foundations of our present existential incarnations.

### **II.3. Afrofuturism: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis**

Afrofuturism is an evolving field of study in Black cultural studies. Its theories are heavily influenced by particularities in science fiction, speculative fiction, new media, digital technology, the arts, and Black aesthetics all situated and focused on the continent of Africa, the diaspora, and its imaginaries. Over the past three decades, scholars have fervently endeavored to carve out a niche for the burgeoning discipline of Afrofuturism. These conversations have covered a wide range of topics, including the numerous ways that Afrofuturism has already been in motion throughout history and the very important question of how to define this phenomenon. Consequently, Afrofuturism has been articulated through a multitude of interpretations.

Before delving into a formal definition of the term, it is essential to deconstruct the concept itself. Afrofuturism is essentially an amalgamation of two distinct components: "Afro"

and "Futurism." The term "Afro" typically conveys associations with African Americans or Black traditions, encompassing elements of culture, heritage, history, and more. On the other hand, "Futurism" pertains to matters concerning future events and trends, often involving the anticipation and exploration of what lies ahead. Futurism, historically, refers to an Italian art movement that spanned approximately from 1909 to 1914. It was spearheaded by a collective of artists known as Futurists, who aimed to repudiate Italy's historical past in favour of a vision focused on the nation's future. This vision prioritized elements such as motion, technology, violence, and fervent nationalism. Despite its relatively brief existence, the movement left an indelible mark on the artistic landscape, with Futurism manifesting across various mediums, including painting, sculpture, architecture, theater, film, literature, and more (Studio Binder, 2023).

Anderson and Jones (2021) attempted to explain the difference between concepts of Futurism and Afrofuturism by arguing that one key difference between such concepts is that the former originated as an avant-garde movement among European intellectuals and artists, and during and after WWII in the ideas and works of Isaac Asimov, Claude Shannon, Philip K. Dick, Bertrand de Jouvenel, The Rand Corporation, and others; leading to a current situation where the powerful employ futurists and draw power from the futures they endorse. In contrast, Afrofuturism finds its contemporary origins within the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s in North America, where it emerged among a multitude of writers, as well as innovative musicians in contemporary jazz, R&B, and pioneering hip-hop artists.

Anderson and Jones (2021) go on to explain that, unlike Futurism, Afrofuturism places a more central emphasis on African diasporic concerns and is primarily focused on the concept of "Africanity" and everything related to Black African society. Consequently, Afrofuturism is not merely categorized as a genre of literature or a style of music and art; it is viewed as a cultural movement, one that has been created by and for Africans in both Africa and the diaspora. The authors argue that Africa and its diaspora share a connection through cyber-culture and have been exchanging ideas, art, politics, and more, including remittances, since the nineteenth century.

Moreover, in its basic definition, Afrofuturism is known to be a science fiction movement that plays with the past, present, and future, where time is adapted and augmented to reconsider how the realities and diasporic identities are reconstructed. It can be used to relate to images of mysticism, spirituality, and the superhuman to envision futures where all Africans from different cultures thrive. It embodies the alien, the cyborg, the witch, and the beyond and

is where technology meets culture and social and political climates are redefined. one may argue that Afrofuturism is a decolonization of the all-previous ideologies built on the identity and the future of the African, mainly the African American. This movement paved the way for many African Americans to re-introduce what the future could be from an African lens.

One can further assert that Black individuals within the diaspora have the unique opportunity to utilize Afrofuturism as a means to expand their creative horizons and envision a future where their presence is not merely one of survival but of thriving. This creative realm permits the exploration and reinterpretation of representation, allowing for the fusion of traditional myths and narratives into novel and imaginative realities. Afrofuturism, as a comprehensive term, finds its place within the realms of science fiction and fantasy genres, prominently featuring the diverse cultures and people of the African diaspora. It goes beyond mere representation and positions Black experiences and identities at the forefront. In doing so, it serves as a critique of the pervasive anti-Black sentiments ingrained in the global consciousness. Afrofuturism breaks free from this constrained perspective of the future, forging narratives that revolve around freedom and societal transformation while embracing the full spectrum of Black cultures and their collective experiences.

When attempting to determine the exact date of Afrofuturism's emergence, it is vital to take into account several historical moments; nonetheless, Dery (1994) as the first academic to use the term in his essay *Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose* defines Afrofuturism as:

Speculative Fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of the twentieth-century techno-culture and more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future. The notion of Afrofuturism gives rise to troubling antinomy: can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers — white to a man — who have engineered our collective fantasies? (p.180)

According to Dery (1994), the essay delves into the multifaceted dimensions of Afrofuturism, addressing its cultural and societal significance for the Black community. In the

course of the discussion, the author raises a significant question regarding the relatively low production of science fiction literature by African Americans, particularly in conversations with Black authors. During the interview, the critic identified Octavia Butler, Steve Barnes, Charles Saunders, and himself as the sole four Black science fiction novelists who were writing in English at that time. He pointed out that this number had remained stagnant for a decade, highlighting the need for more diverse voices in the genre.

Dery (1994) asserts that African Americans' future is closely tied to their history, heritage, and experiences. This has ultimately resulted in the creation of a particular genre of fiction that can only be understood in the context of ancient African traditions and Black identity. This genre of literature differs significantly from that which is typically controlled by whiteness; its distinctiveness lies in its celebration of the essence of Black culture. The author asserted that many people, however, were unable to emphasize the concept's genuine purpose at the time due to a lack of understanding on their part.

Dery (1994) furthermore argues that African Americans have many stories to tell of their rich culture and experiences, technology, and things to come. The author states in his essay that the movement can be traced in such works as Jean-Michelle Basquiat's paintings and movies such as John Styles's *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984), and even in music such as Sun Ra's *Omniverse Arkestra* and his creation of a whole realm fully Afrocentric and Afrofuturistic. The movement also transcends itself in comics and superhero tales to give a new perspective on the genre (a Black superhero rather than the usual white superheroes).

Moreover, one can argue that with such a genre, past issues of alienation, subjugation, racism, colourism, and sexism are highlighted and put forward in a futuristic context that is purely Afrocentric with the hope of solving and changing the public perspective on such issues. This science fiction genre challenges a certain part of history that neglected the Black community and their contributions to the world in every field. Moreover, it is not only seen and considered as merely a science fiction genre but rather a cultural and social movement that is all about representation, the reimagination, and reconstruction of the notion of Blackness and African diasporic identities.

Therefore, one can claim that the main goal of such a movement is to create this sort of a Utopia<sup>3</sup>, more specifically, a Black Utopia where Black people are the dominant force and

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<sup>3</sup> Utopia means an imaginary place, community, or society that possesses highly desirable or nearly perfect qualities for its members. In common usage, it names anything that seems too idealistic. Utopia is, in other words,

have illimited access to technology which helps them to thrive and prosper in different realms while remaining faithful to their culture, heritage, beliefs, and behaviours. Consequently, one might define the term as a cultural aesthetic, philosophy of science, and history that investigates how African diaspora culture and science and technology connect. It includes a variety of mediums and artists with a shared interest in imagining Black futures that grow out of Afro-diasporic experiences. It explores themes and concerns of the African diaspora through technoculture and speculative fiction. The speculative genres of fantasy, alternate history, and magic realism are all included in Afrofuturism, even though science fiction is the genre with which it is most frequently identified.

Womack (2013) in her book *Afrofuturism: The World of Science Fiction and Fantasy* explores the concept of Afrofuturism and defines it as:

Afrofuturism is an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation...I generally define Afrofuturism as a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens...I see Afrofuturism as a way to encourage experimentation, reimagine identities, and activate liberation. Whether through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing, Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future. Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it's a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques (p.9).

As an Afrofuturist herself, Womack (2013) claims that for those who adopt the Afrofuturist paradigm, the ideas can take you light-years away from the place you call home, only to return knowing you had everything you needed from the start. She further argues that when Black people are not mentioned in global history, that is a serious thing to consider. Thankfully, she argues, teams of committed historians and cultural activists have worked to correct that blatant error in the propaganda that frequently passes for history among students around the globe. However, people cannot imagine someone of non-European descent living a hundred years in the future, even in the imagined future—a space where the mind can extend

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something that is embraced in youth but abandoned at maturity. Black utopians outlined futuristic ways of being (Zamalin, 2019).

beyond the Milky Way to envision routine space travel, cuddly space animals, talking apes, and time machines—a cosmic foot has to be put down.

One can argue that the prevailing stereotype in the world of science fiction, where Black characters often meet grim fates or are the first to be captured, needs to evolve. This stereotype had limited the imagination of the Black community when it came to envisioning themselves thriving in futuristic settings. However, the essence of this concept, albeit unnamed, had always existed. It could be found in the music of artists like Sun Ra, the writings of authors like Octavia Butler, and even in movies and video games featuring Black characters in advanced interstellar scenarios. In contemporary times, due to technological advancements, social media platforms, graphic arts, and other tools, people of colour have found it increasingly accessible to create and share their own stories and experiences.

Womack (2013) further asserts that while technology gives creators more power, the fascination with science fiction and fantasy itself challenges preconceived notions about Black identity and elevates the imagination. Black identity does not have to involve battling negative stereotypes, a pessimistic perspective on race, a pitiful sense of helplessness, or a reckoning with harsh facts. She therefore asserts that Fatalism is not the same as being Black neither is it under the obligation to be associated with it.

Moreover, Afrofuturism, at its core, pushes the boundaries of imagination past modern conventions and preconceived notions of what is normal and what it means to be Black out of the solar system. Afrofuturism flips the script on reality, whether through science fiction plots or extreme eccentricity. Writers of Afrofuturism write their own stories. Womack (2013) quotes Reynaldo Anderson, a writer of Afrofuturist critical theory who stated: “Afrofuturism, like post blackness, destabilizes previous analysis of blackness. What I like about Afrofuturism is it helps create our own space in the future; it allows us to control our imagination. An Afrofuturist is not ignorant of history, but they don’t let history restrain their creative impulses either.” (p.16).

Additionally, Womack (2013) claims that many people considered the similarities between the transatlantic slave trade and science fiction concepts of alien abduction to be both fascinating and eerie. Were alien-related tales merely allegories describing Black life in the Americas? Moreover, the goal of Afrofuturists was and still is to fill in the gaps in the history of individuals of African origin and their contributions to technology, science, and science fiction. Additionally, they intended to bring back discussions of cyberculture, contemporary science, technology, and sci-fi pop culture. They intended to promote equal access to

progressive technology at a time when the internet was still in its infancy, understanding that a general adoption would end the racial power disparity and, hopefully, colour-based restrictions, once and for all.

Hence, it can be argued that authors like Womack and Nelson viewed Afrofuturism not merely as a subset of science fiction but as a cultural movement. This movement sought to establish connections between prevalent science fiction themes and those rooted in the history and heritage of African-descendant people in the Americas. These authors especially emphasized the issue of cultural appropriation and shed light on the often-overlooked Black scientists, frequently omitted from historical narratives.

According to Womack (2013), Afrofuturism is the use of imagination and creativity to modify things they wish to change, either from the past or the present, to have a better future. In her opinion, Afrofuturism means regaining racial identity in a distinctive, motivating way. To get out of their comfort zones and appreciate the beauty of humanity, the author stated how people have a desire to connect with both new and old concepts. This is where Afrofuturism takes place. It is a way of viewing the future and alternative realities via a Black cultural prism that includes both people from the African continent and its diaspora in the Americas, Europe, etc. She additionally pointed out that using Black people's experiences, whether they be from the past or the present, and setting them in a futuristic context not only gives people of colour hope but also emphasizes the fact that these people can belong to the future.

One can claim that the question of how to get out of limitations and its reality are at the heart of the Afrofuturist conundrum. It repeatedly asks how we arrive at a point in time or a planet in space or reality when there are no longer any structures. What would the world look like if free of race? In what world do identification categories no longer matter? Through the development of fictional universes, alternate realities, and technological advancements, Afrofuturism has worked to provide answers to these issues.

Dery (1994) emphasized the fact that Afrofuturism existed way before he gave it a proper name. Although the writer and critic coined the term, he did not just signal the emergence of a daring new aesthetic or social trend; rather, he was one of many who reflected and theorized emerging thematic strains in works by Black authors and artists that appeared to be unrelated at first. Womack (2013) also highlighted this fact by arguing that before the term was coined, people viewed particular works as standalone innovations within particular genres rather than as components of a whole conceptual framework. Before the term Afrofuturism was coined, for

instance, one might classify Octavia Butler's writing as Black science fiction and Sun Ra's music as avant-garde jazz but classifying them as members of the same movement would have been questionable. After all, what similarities can be drawn between Jean-Michel Basquiat's artwork and Missy Elliot's songs?

Womack (2013) highlights the fact that Afrofuturism existed way before it became popular as a proper genre. She argues that Afrofuturism is thought to have been spearheaded by the avant-garde singer Sun Ra, who has one of the most distinctive visual and musical approaches. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1914, he was a jazz musician and philosopher who sought to change the world with his new, yet as some claimed, odd perspectives. He thought he was from Saturn and had come to Earth to use music to heal others, especially Africans living in the diaspora. He believed that listening to music could improve telepathy and cause time travel. The persona was well-known for his belief in cosmic identity. He experimented with sound and technology while using his imagination as protection, escapism, and, to some extent, a means of deconstructing his own identity during a time of segregation. One can argue that the artist is the pure exemplification of Afrofuturism. He stated in one of his music videos that:

I'm not real, I'm just like you. You don't exist in this society. If you did, your people wouldn't be seeking equal rights. You're not real. If you were, you'd have some status among the nations of the world. I do not come to you as a reality, I come to you as a myth because that's what black people are: myths. I come from a dream that the black man dreamed long ago. I'm actually a presence sent to you from your ancestors. From *Face the Music: Space is the Place* (1972).

To change reality or even the future with the African diaspora as the driving force, many other musicians tried to follow Sun Ra's example and convey the same message and have the same influence. One can even mention Missy Elliot, Janelle Monae, Beyoncé, and many more artists in the modern world who thrived and celebrated their culture and heritage in futuristic Afrocentric realms.

Anderson and Jones (2016) mention Alondra Nelson who captured the term by stating that: "Afrofuturism can be broadly defined as 'African American voices with other stories to tell about culture, technology, and things to come.'" (p.8). the authors also mention Kodwo Eshun who further asserts: "Afrofuturism may be characterized as a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection and as a



space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken” (p.8). Such definitions broadened even more the perception of the concept of Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism and Afrofuturists are said by several scholars to have a strong connection to technology and technological development. Having access to technology gives Black people the chance to balance historically unfair power arrangements. If an imagined universe does not have a solid systematic base, it will expand and disintegrate at the same rate. These made-up worlds disintegrate in the absence of solid design thinking and systems design. Black people are given immediate and creative freedom when they can grasp such progress. Therefore, it presents a chance to upend, disassemble, and eliminate historically unequal power systems.

It is argued that in the past, people of colour have demonstrated structured intelligence. Black folks are therefore not unfamiliar with advanced thinking. To spark interest in this growing era and outline the potential of Black people prospering from a position of power while grounded here, this vision of the future, as it relates to Black people, seeks to highlight how it will affect them. People of colour may have visions of highly developed structures that are much more superior to those of their white counterparts in terms of being less permeable, more resilient to external threats, and capable of self-replication.

Throughout history, it has been the case that the dominant white culture has had access to a wide range of opportunities for growth and excellent futures. Changing this reality and turning the tables to provide the Black community access to such technical power and many resources would change the future. Movements like Afrofuturism give the Black community optimism that they can transform the fantastical into reality and alter the course of history and the future by giving them access to technology and different resources. In a world where they are in control of power structures and innovations in technology, African Americans who were robbed of their land, their customs, and their dignity have been given hope, a vision, and an opportunity to restore and reconstruct what has been taken from them and recover it due to Afrofuturism.

#### **II.4. Afrofuturism and Literature (Reconstructing Hope from the Ashes)**

Afrofuturism is an artistic movement that delves into the fusion of Black identity with technology. Artists in the Afrofuturist realm frequently employ elements of science fiction and

fantasy to envision futuristic settings where Black individuals and their cultures are fully integrated. This creative approach empowers them to construct alternative stories that question prevailing narratives about race and cultural identity. The origins of Afrofuturism can be traced back to the works of early 20th-century African American writers such as W.E.B Du Bois, Octavia Butler, and Samuel R. Delany. These writers utilized speculative fiction as a means to delve into issues related to race and identity. Afrofuturism is a captivating and multifaceted cultural and artistic movement that has made a significant impact on literature. It is a genre that combines elements of science fiction, fantasy, speculative fiction, and magical realism with African and African diasporic culture and themes. It reimagines traditional narratives and representations of Black identity in literature and allows authors to explore new possibilities for Black characters and communities in futuristic and speculative contexts, breaking free from historical stereotypes and limitations.

Afrofuturist literature often delves deep into African and African diasporic cultural heritage. It draws on mythology, folklore, spirituality, and traditions to create unique and richly textured worlds that resonate with readers who may not have encountered these aspects of culture in mainstream literature. Moreover, Afrofuturist literature often presents alternative histories and counter-narratives. It raises questions about what might have been if historical events had unfolded differently, challenging the dominant historical perspectives.

Additionally, Afrofuturist literature explores dystopian and utopian visions of the future. It addresses social and political issues, including racism, inequality, and injustice, while also offering hope and inspiration for a better world. Such literary genre incorporates science fiction elements while often critiquing and reimagining them from an Afrocentric perspective. This can include advanced technology, space exploration, and the fusion of African spirituality with futuristic concepts. In essence, Afrofuturist literature does not just reimagine the future; it also challenges the past as Lavender (2019) states: “The literary past can help us both to question and to envision what will happen next in African American culture and why” (p.4). It offers alternative histories, counter-narratives, and revisions of historical events. This is an act of reclamation, an opportunity to rewrite stories from the perspective of those who have long been marginalized or silenced. It empowers writers to engage in a form of literary activism, advocating for more inclusive and accurate representations.

Moreover, Afrofuturist literature is not confined to a single genre. It seamlessly blends various genres, including science fiction, fantasy, speculative fiction, and magical realism. This cross-genre exploration allows for fresh and innovative storytelling. With the previously

mentioned prominent authors, the genre reached globally, resonating with audiences worldwide. Its themes of identity, culture, and the human experience transcend geographical boundaries, making it a genre with broad appeal. Afrofuturist literature often serves as a platform for social commentary. It provides a space for authors to address contemporary issues, including racism, colonization, and cultural appropriation, within the context of speculative fiction.

Furthermore, it can be contended that Afrofuturism in literature can be defined as more than a genre; it is a transformative force that challenges, inspires, and redefines the literary landscape. Its invitation to explore the boundaries of imagination, culture, and identity is an invitation to partake in a literary journey that not only enriches our understanding of the African and African diasporic experience but also reaffirms the boundless possibilities of storytelling. It stands as a testament to the power of literature to shape our understanding of the past, present, and future. Lavender (2019) states:

Afrofuturism, then, is concerned with the possibilities for intervention within the dimensions of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory, and the future conditional. This move involves transforming Afrofuturism from an archive of texts, artifacts, and practices to a reading protocol that can be applied to a much wider range of cultural production (p.4).

Thus, it is reasonable to state that Afrofuturism in literature is a genre that invites readers to explore the boundaries of imagination, culture, and identity. It challenges traditional narratives and offers a fresh perspective on the African and African diasporic experience, making it a vibrant and essential part of the literary landscape. It dares to ask "what if" questions and opens up uncharted territories in literature. Through this exploration, it offers a fresh and invigorating perspective on the African and African diasporic experience. It is an experience that has often been marginalized or misrepresented in mainstream literature, but Afrofuturism rectifies this omission with stories that resonate with authenticity and vibrancy.

## II.4.1. Afrofuturist Visions: Du Bois, Black Utopia, and the Past-Future Nexus

In the realm of literature and cultural thought, the intersection of Afrofuturism, the visionary writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, and the concept of a Black utopia offers a unique and enthralling journey through time and imagination. One delves into the past and propels into the future, forging a connection that speaks to the enduring relevance of Du Bois' ideas and the transformative power of Afrofuturist narratives. Afrofuturism, with its imaginative storytelling and explorations of technology, space, and mysticism, serves as a portal to the future. It provides a platform for envisioning worlds that transcend the limitations of the present, allowing for the creation of Black utopias that challenge historical narratives and present-day disparities. It is within this liminal space, where past, present, and future converge, that this journey unfolds. Moreover, it is of paramount importance to grasp how the merging of Du Bois' wisdom with Afrofuturist literature converge to sculpt an envisioning of a more radiant future, one firmly rooted in the values of a fair and thriving Black society.

Zamalin (2019) in his book *Black Utopia: The History of An Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism* introduced W.E.B Du Bois (1868–1963). The preeminent Black intellectual of the 20th century would expound on Black utopianism and was a man with whom Black utopianism was seldomly connected. The author further argues that Du Bois' influence extends far beyond the realms of sociology and civil rights. His concepts and vision find a compelling echo in the Afrofuturist movement, a literary and artistic genre that dares to dream of alternate futures rooted in Black identity.

Zamalin (2019) argues that due to The Great War and the many revolutions that were happening at that time, Du Bois had the time to reflect on the future of his community. His short story *The Comet* (1920), which was included in his work *Darkwater* (1920), and his novel *Dark Princess* (1928), albeit long neglected as rich political theoretical writings, provided a picture of a possible paradise where people of colour enjoyed sovereignty over their lives. Utopia is depicted in *The Comet* as an experience of post-racist multiracial living after a comet destroys New York City, while *Dark Princess* saw it as a movement for decolonized political control in the Global South. Even though Du Bois' utopias varied, they all shared a countercultural intellectual and ethical perspective of American civilization. Not just in their unashamed belief in optimism, but also in their readiness to question fundamental presumptions of identity, community, and recognition.

According to Zamalin (2019), Du Bois' *The Comet* was a reflection on the shapes of an unrealistically utopian future to be built over the ruins of an established hierarchy that had crumbled. As Jim, a Black courier, and Julia, a white affluent housewife, search the streets for survivors from the comet's devastation, the widespread damage serves as both a metaphor for human frailty and the start of an emancipatory, non-dominant interracial ethics. Du Bois used the eerily silent streets of New York as a reflection on the fragility of social life and as a chance to envision communication free of societal constraints. However, *The Comet* was a part of Du Bois's effort to use deconstruction constructively, to turn the loss of identity into new knowledge, to further his lifetime goal of destroying white supremacy.

It can be argued that Du Bois changed the emphasis in what was initially his most renowned text, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), by highlighting new recognitions and collapsed distinctions, new identities being born from "silence" and through a sense of intellectual disorientation, which seems commonplace and usual in the newfound rupture. *Souls'* expression of what Du Bois believed to be an undiscovered Black identity—a double consciousness of being both Black and American—became in *The Comet* a vision of a secret post-racist community that signified racism's epistemic confusion and humanity's regeneration.

Zamalin (2019) further asserts that Du Bois thus destroyed the scientific logic that was founded on the idealistic fantasy that everything could be measured, known, tested, and fully understood. Instead of completely understanding social meaning, value emerged from sensitivity to human expressiveness—the various gestures, voice tones, and speech textures—which serve as a cue for reacting to and interacting with the person in front of them. This moment was depicted by *The Comet* in a way that defied logic and reason. It eluded the classification, of fitting one's identity into a more comprehensive framework of societal knowledge, which encompassed all of its crystallized misconceptions.

One can argue that such works captured Du Bois's lifelong belief in hope for a utopia where his people could live without any racial, class, or gender constraints. He believed in a future where social norms would be different, his community would live in different circumstances, diasporic identities would be reconstructed, and Blackness would be reimagined. His idea of a utopia was a world where citizens could be saved from their worst impulses, that they could live meaningfully, and nonviolently in their everyday encounters and politics.

Butler (2021) in his book *Critical Black Futures: Speculative Theories and Explorations* references scholar Phillip Luke Sinitiere who engages in thoughtful exploration alongside W. E. B. Du Bois about the topic of Black futures through a highlighting of his call for “looking forward into the past” as both an admonition and a methodology. He frames the chapter as an interrogative exercise, inquiring: “How did Du Bois imagine Black futures while remaining rooted in a methodology that privileged documentary research and historical argument?” (p.19). He contends that when the liberal arts and humanities that influenced Du Bois's historical thought, political convictions, and intellectual reflection are taken into consideration, the Black futures of Du Bois become more apparent.

Afrofuturism is as much about the past as it is about the future. Du Bois, with short tales like *The Comet* (1920) and *The Princess Steel* (1908) and like many Afro-diasporic writers who came after him, embraced themes of sexuality, gender inequality, and race to portray the realities of American society during the time of segregation. His writings are considered the foundational texts of Afrofuturism. Sinitiere (2021) argues that Du Bois regularly drew upon history to both mobilize fresh ideas and to strive for the alteration of the material conditions that Black people and other nonwhite communities confronted because he was equipped with a technique that always looked ahead into the past. To realign, rebalance, and redistribute power and material resources, Du Bois practiced critical Black futures or the production of knowledge. In his journalism and science fiction, Du Bois took into consideration Black futures.

In considering the status of African Americans in the middle of the 20th century in light of the political, educational, and economic progress since the end of the Civil War, Du Bois turned to the publication of Frederick Douglass's autobiography in the 19th century before pivoting to consider what the cultural landscape of America might resemble a century from now. He states: “I trust in 2045... Black American culture would reflect a group effort in art and literature, in education and social cooperation...Such collective cultural action might be rich enough to teach the third millennium the beginning of real and universal civilization ... and to make [people] proud that they shared the cultural heritage which gave birth to such movement” (Butler, 2021, p.19-20).

Sinitiere (2021) Du Bois' Black Futures produced knowledge to realign, recalibrate, and disperse power, and material resources. Additionally, his use of, critique of, and reworking of the idea of propaganda reveals another facet of his endeavor to gaze backward into the present. The author asserts that there are parallels between science fiction and Afrofuturism as well as literary and cultural features of Du Bois' study of race, class, and the colour line in the most

recent studies on Black futures. His historical and literary imaginations explored Black vitality with an eye toward the future while also examining the past, evaluating the present, and speculating on potential futures.

Sinitiere (2021) further argues that Du Bois often expressed his “unresting desire to be more than what we are and truer and better.” (p.32). The sentiment he presented was not merely a progressive era admonition for personal improvement, but efforts toward group transformation. He wished for his students to “taste the heritage of a mighty past, to pile the endowment of a greater future and above all to realize in our souls all that God meant us to be.” (p.32). Moreover, Du Bois mostly focused on freedom in the context of analyzing Africa’s past, present, and future and reimagining a future where things could be better for his community which is what Afrofuturism is all about.

Therefore, one may further contend that Du Bois had some knowledge of social construction and technology. Due to Du Bois' devotion to social justice and revolution, he was constantly interested in the future and encouraged people to consider Afrofuturism, especially the critical variety that addresses historical issues. Hence, he is considered one of the earliest scholars who understood and used the movement to highlight past issues and bring them to the surface for a better future along with sharing his hopes of a reconstruction process of diasporic identity in better futuristic circumstances, a context that gave value and recognition to his people.

W.E.B. Du Bois' visionary writings and Afrofuturist imagination have collectively forged a path toward the creation of a Black utopia. Du Bois, through his intellectual and creative endeavors, laid the groundwork for a future where Black communities thrive in equitable and just societies. His influence on Afrofuturism is undeniable, as it is through the imaginative and speculative storytelling of this genre that the seeds of a brighter and more inclusive tomorrow have been sown. The past and the future converge in a continuum where Du Bois' wisdom and Afrofuturist literature merge, offering a powerful vision of hope and progress.

#### **II.4.2. Octavia Butler and the Female Voice in Afrofuturist Narratives**

Various authors have been bringing the Afrofuturistic genre to light via the literary canon since the 19th century when they intervened in the white, male-dominated American science

fiction industry. Within the expansive landscape of Afrofuturistic literature, Octavia Butler emerges as a pioneering figure who has redefined the boundaries of imagination and representation. Considered the first Black female to use the genre, her prominence in the realm of speculative fiction is undeniable, marked by her profound ability to introduce a unique and potent female perspective to the genre. What sets Octavia Butler apart is her talent for transcending the confines of time and space within her narratives. Her storytelling ventures into the intricate territories of identity, power dynamics, and the intricate facets of the human experience. These explorations are not merely superficial forays; they delve deep into the complexities of these themes, challenging conventional perspectives and inviting readers to navigate uncharted intellectual terrain.

Octavia Estelle Butler (1947–2006) is regarded as one of the founders of Afrofuturism and the recipient of the Nebula and Hugo awards for science fiction literature. Butler is known for succeeding in capturing the true essence of Afrofuturism from a female African American perspective through her exploration of themes like violence, survival, race, gender inequality, social hierarchy, diversity, identity, and womanhood in her series, novels, short stories, essays, and speeches. The powerful characters that could be recognized by their physical traits appeared frequently in her tales as they fought against the oppression of vampires, demons, superhumans, and slave masters. Central to Butler's work is the significance of the female voice in Afrofuturism as her narratives bring to the forefront the experiences, challenges, and triumphs of female characters, granting them a level of prominence and agency that had often been underrepresented in the genre. In doing so, she pioneers a vision of Afrofuturism that is inherently inclusive, representing a broader spectrum of perspectives and identities.

It is commonly acknowledged that the author managed to create different new worlds where time travel and spaceships seemed normal. Even when the term Afrofuturism did not yet exist, the author managed to capture Afrofuturistic themes in her works such as *Patternmaster* (1976), the first book in the five-volume *Patternist series* (1976). With the publication of her fourth book, *Kindred* (1979), which is still a bestseller, she finally made a name for herself. Dana, the heroine of the book, alternates between present-day Los Angeles and the South during the Civil War, when she experiences the brutality of American slavery. Though the book was frequently turned down by publishers who could not understand how science fiction could be set on a Maryland plantation, it is a story of a familiar contradiction of time travel that is spliced into a neo-slavery storyline with a bleak clarity that was novel to American and African American literature.



The success of *Kindred* confirmed Butler's intention to produce a book that would allow readers to experience the suffering and dread that Black people have had to face throughout history. Following the publication of *Kindred*, the author proceeded to produce works of art that garnered prestigious honours, including *Wild Seed* (1980), *Dawn* (1987), *Parable of The Sower* (1993), *Blood Child and Other Stories* (1995), *Parable of The Talents* (1998), *Feldging* (2005), and several others. One can argue that she is one of the writers who depicted Afrofuturism in a period when discussing African and diasporic themes, as well as previous trauma, in a futuristic setting that is Afrocentric, was seen as strange and somewhat difficult to grasp.

Morris (2012) in her article *Black Girls Are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's Fledgling* argues that unquestionably, Butler is one of the writers whose works best represent Afrofuturism. In her article *Positive Obsession*, Butler claims that speculative fiction has the power to spark progressive political change and that this is an especially important undertaking for Black people. Morris (2012) quotes Butler who stated:

What good is any form of literature to Black people? What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction? At its best, science fiction stimulates imagination and creativity. It gets the reader and writer off the beaten track, off the narrow, narrow footpath of what "everyone" is saying, doing, and thinking— whoever "everyone" happens to be this year. And what good is all this to Black people? (p.154).

Butler's rhetorical questions and responses dispel the idea that speculative fiction is a "whites only" endeavor, claiming that a wide range of individuals might be inspired to adopt transgressive epistemologies by the genre. Butler's emphasis on the transforming power of speculative fiction also highlights her sense of the Afrofuturistic. That is, her works of speculative fiction not only adhere to the tenets of Afrofuturism but also are self-consciously interested in the connections between race, gender, sexuality, and ability that are at the core of Black feminist and womanist thought. Morris (2012) quotes Marilyn Mehaffy and Ana Louise Keating who stated: "Octavia Butler's work is thematically preoccupied with the potentiality of genetically altered bodies—hybrid multispecies and multiethnic subjectivities—for revising contemporary nationalist, racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes." (p.155).

Morris (2012) contends that Butler's writing is, in various ways, Black feminist and Afrofuturist. Her writings are dedicated to presenting the complex (and occasionally troubled) history of people of colour as well as future ideas that place Black people at the forefront, with a focus on Black females. Butler's fiction is essentially concerned with challenging established hierarchies of power and domination as well as proposing futuristic fixes based on collaboration and egalitarian principles. As a result, Butler repeatedly encourages readers to defy oppressive societal conventions and oppose heteropatriarchy, while also highlighting (or inventing) a range of experiences from the Afrodiaspora. Moreover, Butler's Afrofuturist work however does not limit itself to utopias, even while it emphasizes a dedication to an equal social vision. Butler's predictions of the future are frequently conflicted and show the constant fight for justice and peace.

Morris (2012) further posits that Butler's Afrofuturism offers a significant departure from the conventional portrayal of whiteness and Western ideals being reinforced by modern vampires and other key elements in speculative fiction. Instead, Butler reimagines vampires as formidable entities who are not immune to the influences of racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism, along with the associated forms of violence. These vampires are committed to forging futures that reject these oppressive ideologies, both for themselves and their loved ones. This highlights the potential for science fiction, although not always fully realized, to engage in critical examination and subversion of normative beliefs and practices.

Furthermore, it is contended that in addition to being classified as Afrofuturist, her literary works also provide support for Black women and their endeavors in reclaiming and reconstructing their identities, particularly in advocating for Black womanhood. This involves a process of decolonization aimed at dismantling preexisting stereotypes and ideologies, particularly those about Black women. Her writings frequently delve into topics related to the concept of a diverse society and explore the binary opposition between White and Black, contending that this opposition is rooted more in differences between the two groups than in any inherent notions of Blackness or whiteness. In essence, it underscores the idea that comparison between the two is fundamental to this division. Her narratives also address themes encompassing sexuality, gender, culture, ethnicity, and race, often placing them in futuristic settings. Some may argue that her Afrofuturistic writing style serves as a means to convey optimism regarding a future where the Black community can thrive, evolve, and resolve past challenges and traumas.

The pioneer stated “You got to make your worlds. You got to write yourself in. Whether you were a part of the greater society or not, you got to write yourself in” (National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2023). Furthermore, drawing from her statement, it can be asserted that Butler delved into themes of power dynamics, identity, and social injustices within her literary works, crafting imaginative realms that often mirrored aspects of her reality. Her narratives frequently revolved around Black protagonists who grappled with racial and gender-based discrimination on their transformative journeys. Remarkably, she achieved this while envisioning worlds that were devoid of racial barriers, embracing ideals of equality and inclusivity. Over time, Butler began to incorporate elements of African mythology, folklore, and futuristic technological advancements into her writing as her passion for storytelling and her desire to engage with a broader readership grew. Her distinctive perspective and her adeptness at melding personal experiences with dystopian and futuristic elements ultimately became hallmarks of her literary contributions.

One can further argue that Butler's literary contributions played a pivotal role in shaping the science fiction genre and pioneering some of its earliest instances of Afrofuturism. Within Butler's Afrofuturist narratives, we find a blend of social activism and artistic expression. Her parallel worlds prominently feature Black individuals as protagonists and heroines, and their struggles take center stage. She not only offered us a glimpse into a more promising future but also encouraged efforts to manifest that vision into reality. As a result, Butler has earned the moniker "the mother of Afrofuturism," and her work continues to fuel discussions on issues of racial equity and social justice. Her legacy serves as an ongoing source of inspiration for emerging generations of artists, prompting them to explore the intricate connections between race, identity, and the realm of science fiction.

In a 1999 journal entry, Butler reflected on her literary journey, stating, “I never bought into my invisibility or non-existence as a Black person. As a female and as an African American, I wrote myself into the world. I wrote myself into the present, the future, and the past” (National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2023). Butler accomplished this by leaving a lasting legacy of fortitude, imagination, and cohesion. Her work has inspired and continues to inspire millions of people around the globe to dream big and envision a future that is more fair, just, and inclusive for everyone.

Currently, it is widely acknowledged that many of her literary creations are undergoing adaptations for television and film productions. Ava DuVernay is presently making a television adaptation of *Dawn*. Viola Davis's production business is developing a Wild Seed-based

television series for Amazon Prime Video. An eight-episode television series based on the novel *Kindred* has been ordered by FX, with a script by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins. For HBO Max, Issa Rae and J.J. Abrams are developing the film *Fledgling*. A24 will shortly release Garrett Bradley's big motion feature *Parable of the Sower*. Author Damien Duffy and illustrator John Jennings have turned his works *Kindred* and *Parable of the Sower* into graphic novels, and they also have plans to publish a version of *Parable of the Talents*.

Hence, Octavia Butler's impact on Afrofuturism is monumental, characterized by her ability to redefine the genre and elevate the significance of the female perspective within it. Her work has a transformative quality, offering readers an opportunity to embark on a journey of empowerment, introspection, and enlightenment. It is a testament to her visionary storytelling and its enduring relevance in the ever-evolving landscape of speculative fiction.

### **II.4.3. Challenging Conventions: Samuel R. Delany's Visionary Afrofuturist Narratives**

In the ever-evolving landscape of speculative fiction, certain literary figures shine as beacons of innovation and inclusivity, reshaping the genre to encompass a wealth of perspectives and experiences. Samuel R. Delany stands prominently among these luminaries, celebrated for his profound contributions to Afrofuturism and the broader world of speculative literature. His work transcends the boundaries of conventional storytelling, drawing readers into intricate narratives that explore identity, power dynamics, and the human experience with unparalleled depth and complexity. At the heart of Delany's influence lies the celebration of queer voices and the exploration of racial identity in imaginative and transformative ways. His narratives open portals to diverse and inclusive worlds, inviting readers to traverse realms that challenge traditional norms and broaden the horizons of speculative fiction. Delany's impact extends beyond the written word, reaching the very core of the genre's evolution, where it continues to inspire and empower future generations of writers and readers.

The Science fiction pioneer also known as Chip Delany is a gifted writer with innovative ideas, one of the genre's first openly gay authors, and one of the first Black authors to be accepted into the business. Delany is also known to be one of the early and prominent voices in speculative fiction to include LGBTQ+ characters and themes in his work. His openness and inclusion of queer narratives have paved the way for more diverse representation

in the genre. He is considered as one of the fathers of Afrofuturism. When the Science Fiction Writers of America designated him one of the Grand Masters of the genre in 2013, he was given recognition. Delany, who was born in Harlem in 1942, wrote his first book when he was just 19 years old, launching a prolific career that has since produced more than forty published books and won several prestigious literary honours. His writing combines space opera with memoirs, sword-and-sorcery fantasy, neo-slave narrative, and sexual liberation beauty.

Rosenberg (2019) in her article *In Praise of Samuel R. Delany* stated: “The author of ‘Dhalgren’ and dozens of other books gives readers fiction that reflects and explores the social truths of our world”. The proof that diversity was supported in science fiction as early as the 1970s came from Delany. Compared to most of his white peers, his numerous works address topics of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity considerably more skillfully. Under the umbrella of Afrofuturism, the author published several works including masterpieces like *Dark Reflections* (2007), *Babel-17* (1966), *Aye and Gomorrah* (1967), and *Dhalgren* (1974). A significant contribution to Afrofuturism and the Black Science Fiction World is said to have been made by Delany.

In his book *Occasional View: More About Writing and Other Essays*, Delany (2021) features Pat Califia who argues that one of the most popular writers of contemporary science fiction is Samuel R. Delany. The worst (and majority) of science fiction employs an exotic location (Mars, a spacecraft, an alien species' hive), but keeps traditional characters with morals and social mores that are right out of the twentieth century in America. White heterosexual men have all the fun, and their exploits frequently involve excessive xenophobia and violence. Buxom blondes plan and simper in the background, occasionally getting to touch the hero's sword or ray gun for a moment. There are not any people of colour or queers. Delany is one of a rising number of fantasy and science fiction authors who are attempting to change that, along with Elizabeth Lynn, Joanna Russ, Tanith Lee, Marge Piercy, James Tiptree Jr., and Thomas Disch. His meticulously rendered, three-dimensional avatars come in a wide range of colours, ages, genders, and sexual inclinations.

Zamalin (2019) argues that Delany's era saw a large proportion of white writers and readers of science fiction. The lives of marginalized identities, gender nonconformists, people of colour, and women were frequently overlooked in favour of stereotyped white heroes. He stated: “To write, accurately, with knowledge of and respect for the marginal is to be controversial— especially if you’re honest about the overlaps. Because that means it’s harder to regard the marginal as ‘other.’ And at that point, the whole category system that has assigned

values like central and marginal in the first place is threatened.” (p.112). Delany believed that science fiction authors' work was quite similar to that of historians. The science fiction writer contrasts a future that is not determined by the needs of the present but instead defies common reason, in contrast to the historian who fights the logic of converting the past into something beneficial for the present.

In his interview with Dery (1994), Delany stated that there were very few Black English science fiction writers at that time and that things needed to change. He stated: “We need more images of tomorrow, and our people need them more than most...the historical reason that we have been so impoverished in terms of future images is because, until fairly recently, as a people, we were systematically forbidden any images of our past.” (p.190). Delany further argues that he had no idea from where in Africa his Black ancestors came from, which was the case for many Black people due to slavery. He argues that slavery destroyed every pattern of African social consciousness and every effort to maintain it. He argues that the systematic and deliberate destruction of African cultural heritage played a foundational role in the establishment of America. As a result, Delany emphasizes the significant importance of Black history, particularly within the realm of Black intellectual life today.

Moreover, it can be contended that Afrofuturism is a movement dedicated to the reclamation and revitalization of a cultural heritage that was previously eroded by the passage of time and the weight of history. During times of slavery and oppression, the significance of the cultural legacy, history, and ancestors of diasporic Africans was often overlooked, as efforts were made to assimilate them into white culture and society. In response, Afrofuturism emerged as a means to shine a spotlight on, recover, and celebrate this rich cultural heritage. It underscores the importance of acknowledging the past and its profound influence on the present and, crucially, the future. The past, with all its cultural and historical components, is an inseparable part of one's identity and cannot be dismissed, as it exerts a substantial influence on one's trajectory into the future. Notably, author Delany adeptly encapsulated this concept in many of his Afrofuturistic works.

One can further claim that Delany frequently used intersections in his writing and critical analysis. According to some academics, his work is difficult to comprehend and is comparable to stumbling through a quantum theory of many universes. When one believes they have thoroughly grasped it, he begins to dream about another. Because he likes to play with words and give them new meanings, comprehending his works requires focus. His literary style,

which frequently introduced readers to new worlds and people to dream about, is what piqued their interest in his writings, particularly among Black readers.

Moreover, it is plausible to state that Delany embraced the genre of Afrofuturism to put an end to the racist and sexist science fiction that was considered by many as being dominated by white culture and ideologies. He put an end where the hero is a white man with no coloured people included. He wrote about worlds in which Black people were at the forefront while also highlighting past issues and often challenging them. Along with Octavia Butler and other Black science fiction writers at the time, he succeeded in embodying all that Afrofuturism is about in his works which made him one of the founding fathers of the movement.

Hence, it is reasonable to state that Delany not only positioned individuals of colour in authoritative roles within futuristic and technologically advanced settings but also reshaped the prevailing notions about Black women, often depicting them as formidable superwomen capable of achieving remarkable feats. Furthermore, he challenged established perceptions of queer Black individuals and their roles within such contexts. Through his literary works, Delany engaged with issues related to the African diaspora and critically examined societal conventions in America. His writings exemplified the principles championed by Afrofuturism.

## **II.5. The Agency of the Past in Shaping the Future: The Philosophy of the Rhizomic Identity**

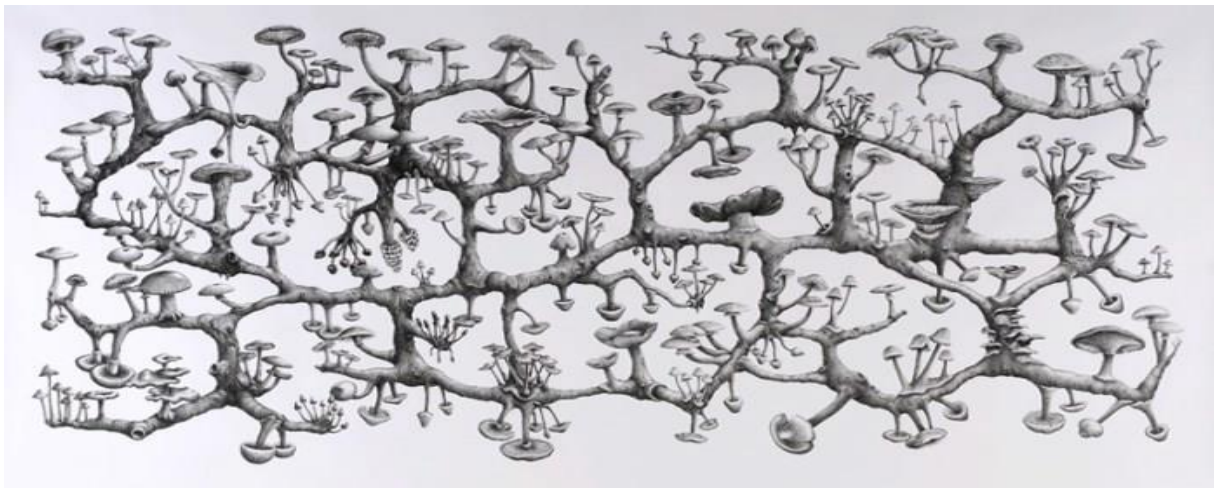
Numerous scholars, philosophers, and theorists have historically grappled with the intricate concept of identity formation. However, when it comes to hybrid identities like those of African Americans or diasporic groups, it is often perceived as a challenging and multifaceted subject of debate. Many have proposed theories and viewpoints on the development, alteration, and reconstruction of African American identities, which remains a topic of contention due to the complex historical experiences and circumstances faced by these communities, as well as the multifaceted and hybrid nature of such identities.

One theory associated with such concepts is the notion of "Rhizomic Identities". Boyce (2017) tackled this concept in her article *Rhizomic Identity, Performative Identity, In-Becoming Identity of the Characters in Maryse Condé's Narratives*. She introduces the concept by referring to its founding fathers Deleuze and Guattari who describe the rhizome in their introduction of their *A Thousand Plateaus* as a tuber that develops roots after being severed

from its parent plant. The people of the Caribbean, who were separated from their African roots by slavery but who have prospered on the island, re-establishing connections with the many people who came to work there, are given as an example to describe this phenomenon. The rhizome is analogous to the mangrove that guards the island from maritime erosion; it intertwines with other plants so that the original plant cannot be identified.

## Figure 2

*Richard Giblett Mycelium Rhizome Represented by Galerie Dusseldorf*



*Note.* Adapted from *The Philosophical Concept of Rhizome* by Mambrol (2017).

Boyce (2017) suggests that the concept of the Rhizome serves as the most apt symbol for elucidating the intricate process of African diasporic identity formation, deformation, and reformation. To illustrate this idea, the author draws a parallel with the belief in a single phoneme or signifier representing a singular concept in language. In religious contexts, it is believed that humanity originates from a singular divine source, with manifestations or reflections of this primal Root, which is God, present in our existence and understanding. In Western culture, the metaphor of the tree, with its original root and branching family trees representing the same lineage as the root, is often employed to symbolize the reunification of all things with the one, Origin. He employs Oriental and Caribbean cultures, characterized by a generational principle of ideas that is not limited to a binary structure but rather encompasses multiplicity, to illustrate this perspective. Given the historical displacement of Caribbean identity from its African roots due to slavery, the rhizome emerges as a fitting symbol to portray this identity. Similar to the rhizome, Caribbean identity has endured and thrived in its new environment by traversing, engaging with, and crossbreeding with various elements and influences.



Boyce (2017) illustrates this concept with the story of the author Maryse Condé who wrote about her experience with the lack of territorial historical roots which she felt and has expressed in her autobiography of her youth *Le Coeur à Rire et à Pleurer* (The Heart to Laugh and to Cry, 1999). When her high school teacher invited her to give a presentation on this topic, she was astonished to learn that Guadeloupe had no authors. She reflected her amazement and jealousy of her Haitian friends, who each had their nation, in her writing as she stated: “Ah, to be born in a real country, and independent country, and not in a krazur of departmental land! To fight for a national power! To possess a presidential palace with a president in a richly colored uniform!” (p.1133).

Guadeloupe was unable to secede from France and was afraid of losing its identity because of globalization, which is why Maryse Condé flew to Africa (Guinea, Ghana, Senegal) and wed Mamadou Condé, a Guinean actor. She authored her novel *Crossing the Mangrove* (1989) and collection of short tales *The Mixed Country* (1997) following their time in Africa, their divorce, and her return to Guadeloupe. She realizes there is no going back to Africa. There is no turning back the slave ships' voyage, which carried the slaves to the West Indies. African roots have been destroyed and cut off. Maryse Condé recognizes that, in addition to her Caribbean identity, which contributes to the Africans' rejection of her, she is unable to reintegrate into Africa (Boyce, 2017).

One can therefore argue that this diasporic identity is comparable to the rhizome, which has all the energy it needs to survive. These people were indeed severed from their roots, and mixed in the holds of the slave ships, where people of different tribes were chained together so that they could not understand each other and unite against their oppressors. But these people, disconnected from their origins and their maternal language nevertheless managed to survive and thrive. These men and women prospered in a place which is not theirs and thrived in a different home. Even though such a community lost every hope of going back to their roots, they managed to recreate and reestablish an identity that challenged any sense of identification with the colonizer and resisted stereotypes.

The rhizome is a tuber that may at any point throw a stem and link with another plant, generating a plant that has no resemblance to any of the original plants. It is also a vigorous plant that can reestablish roots and thrive in the most barren soil. Boyce (2017) states the introduction of Deleuze and Guattari who write in their introduction to *Rhizome*:

unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point with any other point, and any of its features do not necessarily reflect traits of the same nature, it involves regimes of very different signs and even states of non-signs...The rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity, of stratification, as dimensions but also a line of flight or de-territorialization as maximum dimensions, according to which multiplicity is metamorphosed by changing nature. Such lines, or lineaments, will not be confused with tree-like lines which are only links between points and positions (p.1135).

Moreover, one can claim that this concept can be referred to as cultural transplantation, de-territorialization, re-territorialization, and thriving despite being cut off from the roots. Some scholars even argued that being cut off from the roots and origins is necessary to thrive somewhere else different from one's homeland. Many writers have portrayed such theories in stories where the protagonists create and reconstruct a completely new and different identity from the one they previously were known for. They had to cut themselves from their roots to succeed somewhere else which is what Rhizomic identity is all about. Sometimes, this newly created identity is nothing like the original or the homeland identity. Therefore, as some would argue, notions of hybridity, de-territorialization, re-territorialization, multiplicity, and multiculturalism are crucial for diasporic identities to thrive.

The rhizome has an all-encompassing life flow that defies categorization by any structural or generative paradigm. A rhizome's engagement with other people constantly centers on performance and becoming, and it posits a partnership in which each person offers of himself and trades in all directions. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the arborescent connection, which is genetic and always returns to the same type of relationship, moves from one point (source) to another point in a single direction. The rhizome, on the other hand, must be connected to everything and everyone. As Deleuze and Guattari put it "the rhizome must be uprooted from its biological context and transplanted into a cultural context only" (Boyce, 2017, p.1136).

The Rhizome is a plant that grows in all ways and mingles with other plants, suggesting that life flows in all directions, in contrast to the symbol of the tree, where life flows in a certain path from the root to the leaves. It serves as the ideal metaphor for expressing the racial and socioeconomic equality of all African diasporic citizens. In this sense, Boyce (2017) contends that all cultures are interconnected and are diffracted as a kaleidoscopic whole without any one culture possessing or dominating the others. To do this, one must transcend the concept of race

and actively work to free themselves from their reliance on it, which was fostered for generations by colonialism.

However, one may contend that, if one has a firm grasp on what Rhizomic identities are, Afrofuturism can be regarded as rejecting the concept and putting it into question. Afrofuturism not only places Black people in a futuristic Afrocentric context, but also highlights their origins, heritage, and culture and its importance to its people. Contrary to the concept of the Rhizomic identities, this movement does not neglect the past, nor the customs, homeland, and roots that coloured people have pride in and celebrate. One cannot move to the future neglecting parts of their identity and what makes them who they are. Moreover, Afrofuturism does not deny the coloured people from their culture and roots when placing them in a futuristic context but rather celebrates it in highly technological contexts. Therefore, one can deduce that in such a movement, the past, the present, and the future are interconnected. One cannot prosper in a future that ignores the past or ignores the experiences, circumstances, culture, homeland, and heritage that shape their identity.

Additionally, many Afrofuturist works tend to celebrate the African heritage, origins, and culture in a futuristic way. Many authors and artists have kept the essence of what it is to be African or coloured and placed it in different worlds and realms where such aspects were celebrated and claimed. They portrayed what it meant to be African with all that the word has of meaning and placed it in a futuristic context where such culture is the dominant force and no socially constructed boundaries of race, class, colourism, oppression or sexism mattered or had any value. Afrofuturism can be seen as a world, that relates the past, present, and future and celebrates what had previously been ignored and distorted. As W.E.B Du Bois once stated in a 1946 Chicago Defender column “Nothing gives one greater courage than looking forward into the past, that is, carefully examining the present and then comparing it with what happened in years gone by.” (Butler, 2021, p.19).

It can be further asserted that Afrofuturism has gracefully embraced the concept of decolonizing identity and offered it a fresh perspective. Afrofuturism, arguably, stands as a culturally and sociologically liberating facet of African American literature, particularly for Black individuals. Rather than forsaking their origins, it carries them into a new realm where these communities thrive and flourish. Afrofuturism vividly illustrates the incredible journey of an oppressed people who not only survived but also thrived, defying colonialism and racism, while simultaneously expanding the boundaries of culture. Essentially, Afrofuturism involves reimagining the past and reinterpreting the present to envision new possibilities for the future.

It serves as a bridge, connecting the cultural richness of ancient African traditions with the boundless potential of the future.

Therefore, one can argue that Afrofuturism embodies the notion of looking back to move forward. The term "Afrfuturism" itself conveys the idea of retrieval or "going back and getting," offering valuable insights into the underlying concepts of Afrofuturism. In essence, Black individuals, whose history has been intentionally obscured, are embracing Afrofuturism as a tool for reimagining their past and as a means to speculate about a more promising future. The capacity to envision or speculate about alternative futures, ones significantly different from current realities, provides Black individuals with a space for liberation and the freedom to envision life from a different perspective. It may also encourage individuals from diverse racial and experiential backgrounds to contemplate what life could be like in a utopian Afrofuturist world.

One may thus conclude that this movement acknowledged and emphasized the role played by the past in determining the future of such individuals. It altered—and continues to alter—perspectives on how to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct identities without ignoring one's origins, heritage, customs, and traditions. According to Afrofuturists, the modern cannot survive without the traditional. Such cultural movement also changed the way we think about the past and how important it is to one's identity in the present and potential future.

## **II.6. The Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM)**

The Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a dynamic and transformative force within the realm of creative expression. Rooted in the African diasporic experience and the imaginative exploration of Black identity, BSAM transcends traditional boundaries, sparking a rich tapestry of art, literature, music, and culture. This movement is a celebration of innovation, reclaiming narratives, and envisioning Afrofuturistic worlds where the past, present, and future converge. It is a space where artists, scholars, and visionaries converge to challenge conventions, question assumptions, and embrace the limitless possibilities of speculative arts. Moreover, it is contended that the relationship between the Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) and Afrofuturism is one of influence and common themes.

Following *Unveiling Visions: Alchemy of The Black Imagination*, the first exhibition organized by John Jennings and Reynaldo Anderson at the Schomburg Library in New York in 2015, the Black Speculative Arts Movement, or BSAM, was born. It has developed into a community of creators, thinkers, and artists that represents a variety of viewpoints or lines of inquiry, such as Afrofuturism, African Futurism, Afrofuturismo, Afrofuturista, Afro-pessimism, Black Quantum Futurism, Astro Blackness, Afro-Surrealism, Ethno Gothic, Black Digital Humanities, Black (Afro-future female or African Centered) Science Fiction, The Black Fantastic, Magical Realism, and The Esoteric (Anderson, 2016). Although the aforementioned views may appear to be at odds with one another, they occasionally interact and overlap when discussing the terms "speculative" and "design," as well as the intersection of technology and ethics. Black Speculative Art is a creative, aesthetic activity that combines the worldviews of the African diaspora with science or technology and aims to understand, engage, design, or transform reality with the purpose of re-imagining the past, the contentious present, and acting as a catalyst for the future.

One can argue that while Afrofuturism, a specific cultural and artistic movement that emerged in the mid-20th century, primarily explores the intersection of African and African diasporic identity with science fiction, speculative fiction, and futuristic themes, BSAM, on the other hand, is a more recent and broader movement that encompasses various forms of speculative and imaginative arts and creativity by Black artists and creators. While it includes elements of Afrofuturism, it is not limited to it. BSAM celebrates a wide range of genres and expressions, including science fiction, fantasy, horror, and more. In essence, one can argue that Afrofuturism can be seen as a subset or component of BSAM, but BSAM extends its focus beyond Afrofuturism to include a broader spectrum of speculative and imaginative art forms and genres created by Black artists. Both movements share common themes related to Black identity, culture, and creativity in the context of speculative and imaginative storytelling.

Anderson (2016) further explored this concept in his book *Afrofuturism 2.0 and The Black Speculative Art Movement: Notes on a Manifesto*. He argued that Modern Black speculative thinking originated at the intersection of scientific racism, technology, the struggle for African independence, and the freedom to express one's creativity in the 19th century, but it has now developed into an Afrofuturist phenomenon that is only just beginning to get international recognition. As a result, participants of this Black speculative movement have engaged in creative interaction with the limit of space-time, the outside of the macrocosm, and the interior of the microcosm.

Anderson (2016) further argues that the ideas of the colour line, the colour curtain, and the digital divide have, however, been discussed historically before. With the help of the fields of sociology, anthropology, autobiography, and history as well as the Jim Crow and imperialist eras, Du Bois produced his famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in 1903 in which he stated that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (p.231). Furthermore, according to Du Bois, African Americans had acquired a metaphysical perspective known as a "Veil" as a result of their distinct experience, which gave them a particular perspective on life in the West. The Veil represented the inner lives of individuals of African origin in the Americas via literature and philosophy.

Numerous of these radical projects, including Du Bois's, would face repression or betrayal throughout a generation. But intellectuals, mystics, and artists like Sun Ra, Fela Kuti, George Clinton, Max Beauvoir, Octavia E. Butler, John Coltrane, Alice Coltrane, Samuel R. Delany, Jimi Hendrix, Jean Michel Basquiat, Audre Lorde, Chinua Achebe, Ngugiwa Thiong'o, Greg Tate, bell hooks, Alondra Nelson and many others ultimately sown the seeds for a Black speculative movement challenging white racism and Black parochialism. This manifesto, according to Anderson (2016), compiles and acknowledges the concepts created between 2005 and 2015 as the sources of the Black Speculative Art Movement (BSAM) and the *Unveiling Visions: The Alchemy of The Black Imagination* event that gave rise to it.

Anderson (2016) states in his manifesto that: “Black speculative art is a creative, aesthetic practice that integrates African diasporic or African metaphysics with science or technology and seeks to interpret, engage, design, or alter reality for the re-imagination of the past, the contested present, and as a catalyst for the future.” (p.233). Additionally, according to the author, the BSAM manifesto's objectives are designed as a pursuit or open-sourced line of investigation to change the dystopia and collapse in ethics among the African and diaspora populations that were uprooted by the collapse of space-time.

Anderson (2016) further argues that the explosion of social media platforms, as demonstrated by Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, as well as three seminal books—*The Big Sort* by Bill Bishop, which describes the re-segregation of people, *The Big Sort* by David Lewis, which details the global market collapse, and Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*—all occurred between 2005 and 2015—shaped the development of BSAM. The election of Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States, racist reactions and the subsequent failure of the liberal post-racial project, an increase in the use of crowdfunding and

other new technologies to create art, rising environmental stress, and the New Scramble for Africa were all tributary events.

BSAM is known to encompass a range of perspectives and lines of inquiry, making it a diverse and inclusive umbrella term. It draws inspiration from various individuals and groups, including but not limited to Martin Delany, Paschal B. Randolph, Toni Morrison, Sun Ra, Amiri Baraka, Tananarive Due, Ben Okri, Nnedi Okorafor, W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Afrofuturist* by Samuel R. Delany, Minister Faust, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, Jarita Holbrook, Milton Sanford Biggers, John Jennings, Octavia E. Butler, *Octavia's Brood*, Nalo Hopkinson, Cyrus Kabiru, D. Scott Miller, Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum, Steven Barnes, N.K. Jemison, D. Denenge Akpem, Ytasha Womack, Kapwani Kiwanga, John Akomfrah, and Kodwo Eshun, among others, have contributed to this dynamic field.

Anderson (2016) mentions Max Beauvoir, a scientist with a background in healing and activism, exemplified the fusion of these therapeutic philosophies within an Africanist context. This approach finds contemporary expression in the work of digital scientist Nettrice Gaskins, who explores the potential of reimagining African Cosmograms as cultural tools for engaging with digital technology, augmented spaces, and augmented reality. Gaskins builds upon the earlier research on African fractals conducted by Ron Eglash, and her work has implications for fields such as STEAM education, holistic wellness, and culturally grounded learning. This fusion of traditional African cosmology and modern technology is also evident in Nnedi Okorafor's novel *Akata Witch* (2011), where magic and technology intersect and overlap.

Anderson (2016) elaborates in his manifesto that BSAM wholeheartedly adopts the Africanist perspective on speculative design, diverging from the Western approach. It incorporates the intuitive aspects of esoterica, animism, and magical realism, which have roots in both the tangible world and the realm beyond. When these ideas are translated into practical theories and concepts tied to the physical world, they give rise to intersecting domains with other forms of knowledge creation.

One of the major concepts in the realm of the Black Speculative Arts Movement is the concept of Astro-Blackness. Anderson and Jones (2016) have explored this concept and argue that Astro-Blackness is an Afrofuturistic notion where a person's Black state of consciousness, freed from the stifling and crippling slave or colonial mentality, becomes aware of the myriad and varied possibilities and probabilities within the universe. Astro-Blackness, more specifically, is the emergence of a Black identity framework within arising worldwide techno-

cultural assemblages, migration, human reproduction, algorithms, digital networks, software platforms, and bio-technical augmentation, and it is a component of racialized identities that are increasingly materialized about modern technological advancements or techno-genesis, the theory that humans and technology have co-evolved together.

Anderson and Jones (2016) state: “This notion of Astro-Blackness suggests a shift from the modern era or nation-state bound analog notion of blackness transitioning through a digitized era toward and in tension with post-digital perspectives as a global response to the planetary and near planetary challenges facing black life in the early twenty-first century.” (p.8). Furthermore, this concept and Afrofuturism, both of which fall within the purview of the Black Speculative Arts Movement, have several characteristics and are believed to share a similar focus on reconstruction.

Additionally, the Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) stands as a testament to the boundless creativity, innovation, and imagination within the Black artistic and cultural landscape. While Afrofuturism finds its place as a crucial element within BSAM, this larger movement extends its reach far beyond this singular genre. It serves as a dynamic and inclusive platform where Black artists, scholars, and creators of all kinds unite to explore a diverse spectrum of speculative and imaginative art forms. The common threads of Black identity, culture, and creative expression weave through both Afrofuturism and the broader BSAM, offering a space for profound storytelling and visionary exploration.

BSAM transcends conventional boundaries, encouraging Black artists to challenge norms, question assumptions, and craft narratives that envision new worlds and futures. It is a movement that empowers individuals to embrace the limitless potential of speculative arts, fostering a reclamation of narratives and a celebration of innovation. As we reflect on the multifaceted dimensions of BSAM, it is evident that this movement stands at the forefront of transformative and inclusive cultural expression, redefining the boundaries of what is possible in the realm of creative storytelling and artistic exploration.

## **II.7. Afrofuturism In Black Panther (The Uncolonized Imagination)**

The Afrofuturistic movie *Black Panther* (2018) has established itself as an outstanding Black cultural text on many levels since its release. Due to the Black themes, it raises, which reframe Black portrayals of life and history that have largely been mired in normative Western



categorizations, the film has revitalized discussions on Afrofuturism. The comic-based movie is said to present Afrofuturist Black themes such as slavery, apartheid, Othering, marginalization in the African and the diaspora context, history, colonization, post-colonization, and decolonization as viewed and (re)conceptualized and (re)articulated through the dual lenses of techno culture and science fiction.

One cannot undervalue the impact that Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* will have on American film and Black culture. It has had incredible effects on American movies and, more crucially, Black culture globally. The movie has accelerated and strengthened the debates on Afrofuturism as a conceptual framework for both celebrating and analyzing global African popular culture. The film transports its viewers to a magnificent, complicated set of ideologies and ideals around Black identity and representation, Pan-Africanist expressions, national and Third World movies, discussions of gender and class, and African diaspora culture. The film's textures and comprehension appear to get better as time passes.

It is contended that the superhero movie was a trailblazer not just because of its great box office success, but also because of its underlying idea to construct a superhero story on a narrative that is dependent on Afrofuturism, depicting a fictional nation, Wakanda, that is hidden away in the African continent. The plan to appeal to a wide audience with a modern narrative that included powerful Black female characters and an exciting plot about good defeating foreign adversaries proved successful and reached a wide audience from all cultural Backgrounds.

White and Ritzenhoff (2021) in their book *Afrofuturism in Black Panther: Gender, Identity and The Remaking of Blackness* quoted Stan Lee, the creator and father of the Marvel universe who explained:

I wanted to create the first black superhero, but I wanted to avoid stereotyping... But, to avoid stereotyping, he [T'Challa] doesn't live in a regular tribe and so forth; he is the prince of a nation, and the nation is hidden under the ground. It's a country called Wakanda, and he is one of the greatest scientists in the world and his area; his country is more scientifically advanced than any... When you get to the hidden entrance and go down to Wakanda, it looks like you're in a scene from a science-fiction movie of the thirtieth century! But, in order not to be discovered by the rest of the world, 'cause he doesn't want his nation contaminated by today's civilization, it's hidden underground, and up above it

looks like just thatched villages where nobody would ever suspect what's below... he's one of the characters I'm most proud of because he was the first important black super-hero (p.2).

Therefore, one can argue that Black superheroes can exist in any reality and any realm, even ones where the definition of what it means to be Black is completely altered. The only constraints that apply are those created by the creator's imagination. The narrative presumption that superheroes should be white, or more precisely, non-Black, is contested. Given this, the Black superheroes who are included in science fiction themes serve as stimulating and innovative metaphors for understanding race and Black racial identity. They also serve as counter-hegemonic emblems of Black racial pride and advancement. The basis of this work is the idea of Afrofuturism. the movement has consistently had an upward gaze. To explore beyond the boundaries of the known world, Afrofuturism promotes freethinking that focuses on what is possible without limitations.

White and Ritzenhoff (2021) quote Taylor Crumpton who stated on the matter:

Afrofuturism Has Always Looked Forward. It is a fluid ideology shaped by generations of artists, musicians, scholars, and activists whose aim is to reconstruct "Blackness" in the culture. Reflected in the life and works of such figures as Octavia Butler, Sojourner Truth, Sun Ra, and Janelle Monáe, Afrofuturism is a cultural blueprint to guide society. The term was coined by Mark Dery in 1993 but birthed in the minds of enslaved Africans who prayed for their lives and the lives of their descendants along the horrific Middle Passage. The first Afrofuturists envisioned a society free from the bondage of oppression—both physical and social. Afrofuturism imagines a future void of white supremacist thought and the structures that violently oppressed Black communities. Afrofuturism evaluates the past and future to create better conditions for the present generation of Black people through the use of technology, often presented through art, music, and literature (p.4)

In the first chapter of their book entitled *I Dream a World*, White and Ritzenhoff (2021) argue that in contrast to previous superheroes and anti-heroes shown in films like *Blade* (1998), *The Meteor Man* (1993), *Blankman* (1994), *Spawn* (1997), and *Hancock* (2008), *Black Panther* is an Afrofuturist. By reimagining the past, present, and future of the African Diaspora, Afrofuturists produce science fiction that challenges our conceptions of what it means to be

Black. They merge elements of culture, tradition, time, space, and technology to present fresh insights into the essence of Black identity. The tradition of counter-memory, which is defined as "an ethical commitment to history, the dead, and the forgotten," is not something that Afrofuturism seeks to dismiss. Instead, it seeks to carry on that heritage by shifting the proleptic as well as the retrospective aspects of Black Atlantic temporality's international vectors.

Strong and Chaplin (2019) in their article *Afrofuturism and Black Panther* assert that *Black Panther* envisions for the audience an entirely freed African nation by looking to the past and weaving those threads into an alternate present and future. The history of Wakanda's beginning is the first part. Vibranium is a mysterious metallic element that causes conflict among five African tribes. A shaman from the Black Panther tribe ingests a "heart-shaped flower" that grants him supernatural and superhuman abilities, causing him to unite the tribes into one country. After this introduction, *Black Panther* relates several storylines, including the rise of young Wakandan King T'Challa after his father was murdered, the chase of vibranium by an arms dealer, and the development of the dealer's accomplice who is not what we initially believe.

*Black Panther* honours the concept of Sankofa, derived from the Twi language of the Ghanaian Akan tribe, signifying the act of reclaiming what might have been left behind. *Black Panther* offers an Afrofuturist perspective on Sankofa by blending pan-African languages, symbolism, design, iconography, and heritage. It challenges preconceived notions about African identity by exploring the tensions between an African nation untouched by colonization and its diaspora descendants, whose history is closely linked to slavery. It serves as a reclamation project as described by Lisa Yazsek, Professor of Science Fiction Studies: "The writers do more than simply combat the erasure of black subjects from Western history . . . their Afrodiasporic histories insist both on the authenticity of the black subject's experience in Western history and the way this experience embodies the dislocation felt by many modern peoples." (White & Ritzenhoff, 2021, p.23).

White and Ritzenhoff (2021) assert that a pan-African past, present, and future are reimagined in Wakanda. South African dialect Xhosa is used together with English by the characters. Wakanda is a land of vivid colour; every tribe has its style and pattern of clothing; beadwork, cowrie shells, prints, resins, and clay combine traditional and contemporary elements. Ruth Carter, the chief costume designer, studied and drew inspiration from the attire, headdresses, and jewelry of Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa. *Black Panther* categorically rejects colourism and celebrates performers with a dark complexion. In

stark contrast to constrictive and Westernized ideas of beauty and womanhood, female characters have natural hairstyles including braids, twists, clay-covered coils, shaved heads, and locs. Black Panther raises the possibility of what may happen to a culture and way of life in a country that has not been colonized by the West even in terms of style.

Additionally, Strong and Chaplin (2019) argue that the actual Wakanda was concealed under an imperceptible dome all this time. Wakanda has perpetuated the misconception that it was a "backward" country with nothing to offer, especially in the technologically advanced twenty-first century. This racist and paternalistic mentality was fully exploited by the locals and utilized as a weapon against the West. Wakanda was able to advance unhindered; its citizens were aware of the West without being intimidated by it. They see Western science and technology as beneath them, believing that communication gadgets are cumbersome, fabrics and jewels have little uses, and guns are savage. The outer world seems less lively, more erratic, and aggressive. Wakanda, in comparison, is a stable country with a long history where the holy and antiquated coexist with sleek, cutting-edge technology.

This movie does not need a white saviour. Strong and Chaplin (2019) argue that Black Panther has grown in popularity since its debut. People of African descent have particularly felt the effects of it. The film's aesthetic splendor and compelling storyline are simply one factor in the worldwide seismic response from Black moviegoers. It seems as though there is widespread mental relaxation among the crowd. Black viewers' experiences with films are frequently challenging since coming to terms with one's identity as a Black person—historically, spiritually, and culturally—requires a difficult trip that no one can do for you.

White and Ritzenhoff (2021) contend that Black Panther provides viewers with representations of Black people that are presented from a wholly Black cultural perspective rather than through the racist frame imposed by studios on many mainstream films. It also provides relief from studio films that primarily rely on an inversion of racial codes—a structural element that places Black spectators in a position to view themselves from a mainstream perspective. Black Panther is a film that might just hold up a mirror, not one distorted by racism and White supremacy but one that allows the viewer to say, "I am." As The Weekend and Kendrick Lamar remind viewers in the closing song of the movie, "You need a hero, look in the mirror, there go your hero" (p.29).

Thus, Black Panther's major themes are Afrofuturist in nature and center on the position of a Black leader in a society predominantly ruled by white power systems. Wakanda is a

fictitious African country that has advanced technologically and scientifically, and which the rest of the world thinks to be poor despite having hidden amounts of the super-metal vibranium. Because they are aware of how other African countries' mineral riches have been in the past plundered by outsiders, Wakanda's leaders have long shunned the global stage. The action overnight transforms Wakanda from a remote backwater into a world superpower. Furthermore, it can be contended that the mere mention of "Wakanda" encapsulates the essence of Afrofuturism, as the film has effectively distilled the movement's core beliefs and values, presenting its themes with grace. Consequently, although the foundational concepts of Afrofuturism have existed for some time, Black Panther revitalizes them across various forms of media. This is partly due to its success in introducing the concept to a wide and diverse audience.

One can assert that the film's capacity to envision a futuristic and alternate non-colonized Africa offers viewers positive representations of Africa that go beyond stereotypes of famine, sickness, civil conflict, and other societal evils. Additionally, it gave Black moviegoers a sense of pride and a bond with a Pan-African identity. Time and space are frequently bent in Afrofuturism initiatives, fusing the spiritual with ancestral history and potential futures in ways similar to Black Panther. When the protagonist, King T'Challa visits his deceased father on the ancestral dimension, this motif is most prominent in the movie. Their unbroken line of kinship highlights the importance of knowing one's past. Due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which created and recreated kinship patterns inside the institution of slavery, Black individuals who were estranged from their family ancestries found this section of the film to be particularly poignant.

Moreover, the Afrofuturistic vision in Black Panther thrives on its imaginative spirit. It dares to embrace the idea that understanding the present and shaping the future is best achieved by drawing from the lessons of the past. Fueled by Afrofuturism, the film envisions a future that encourages its viewers, particularly those of African descent and the diaspora, to acknowledge and honour Africa as their roots while comprehending the socio-economic factors, like colonization, that have hindered social progress. Black Panther consistently reinforces the notion that imagination empowers us and that if we can conceive it, we can bring about change – which fundamentally encapsulates the essence of Afrofuturism.

## II.8. Afrofuturism Vs Afro-Surrealism

Afrofuturism and Afro-Surrealism emerged as captivating and dynamic movements within the broader spectrum of speculative arts. These two visionary expressions, sharing a profound connection to the African diasporic experience and Black identity, offer distinct and unique journeys into the imaginative landscapes of storytelling, art, and culture. Afrofuturism propels individuals into futuristic realms where technology, mythology, and Afrocentric themes converge, inviting the exploration of a future that transcends conventional limitations. In contrast, Afro-Surrealism ushers individuals into a surreal dreamscape where reality is stretched, reshaped, and challenged, defying traditional narratives to explore the depths of the unconscious and the absurd. Both movements are woven with rich threads of cultural reclamation, social commentary, and empowerment, yet they traverse vastly different paths. This exploration of Afrofuturism and Afro-Surrealism navigates the intricate intersections and deviations that make these movements extraordinary and indispensable components of the speculative arts landscape.

Despite sharing a common root, the labels "Afrofuturism" and "Afro-Surrealism" can be very different or quite comparable. Adams (2019) in his article *Afro-Surrealism: Embracing & Reconstructing the Absurdity of Right Now* discussed the parallel between the two concepts. He explains that Surrealism is referred to be a 20th-century unconventional or uncommon art movement that aims to free the unconscious mind's creative expression. bizarre pictures, lucid dreamscapes of uncontrolled mind. The goal of surrealism is to explore ideas and notions directly as they emerge. Surrealism in artistic forms like paintings can appear as illogical juxtapositions, but it is done consciously and naturally. Art has traditionally served as a catalyst for audiences to consider social constructions, societal changes, and ostensibly "uncomfortable" realities that the general public finds difficult to accept. To authentically express their thoughts while also educating their audience on important topics via unconventional ways of communication, Black surrealist creatives may have gravitated into the genre.

Hlophe (2019) on the other hand argues that Afro-surrealism is a kind of art that draws inspiration from Black cultural aesthetics to emancipate people and deepen knowledge of how Black people live. While still criticizing the structures that are forced on them, Afro-surrealists want to educate the public about the invention of racial, societal, and normative structures. African American surrealists are interested in exposing the "right now," which is another way

of describing what is happening right now on a global scale that affects the way of life for people of colour.

Adams (2019) further quotes Lacey Murphy and Kevin McCoy who stated in *Afro-Surrealism: What Black is and Can Be* that: “From stop and frisk policies to racially motivated 911 calls and other forms of racial profiling prevalent in society today, black Americans are continuously policed simply by race and appearance. This is why the mission of exposing the “right now” is crucial”. The author continues by describing Afro-surrealism as a part of the Black arts movement that takes our world and transforms it into a different scenscape while maintaining some of its similarities. Black artists have chosen to use this genre to express their feelings of worry, liberty, and injustice because it allows them the freedom to be as unusual and free as they would like. Black abstract art as a whole is referred to as the Black Speculative Arts Movement or BSAM. Afro-surrealism was elevated to the fore of the Black artist movement due to BSAM's assistance in gaining recognition for it.

Hlophe (2019) argues that it is crucial to understand how all of these diverse genres naturally link to one another because they share a desire to engage with the immoral treatment of Blackness in a broader area, even though surrealism is only a small part of a larger time. Like the other subgenres, Afro-surrealism explores the absurdity and weirdness of the Black experience through art forms like music, paintings, photography, sculpture, film, and even literature. The stories these artists convey, albeit occasionally bizarre, are yet genuine at their core because they have their roots in darkness. Surrealist imaginations were shared in many ways by artists who work across different platforms. These unique worlds dominated by Blackness and unadulterated Black conscious thought are still being created by Black artists. Unapologetic use of universal Black vocabulary and signaling is made in these artistic platforms. Afro-surrealist art aims to move viewers by symbolically examining how Blackness functions in white America through absurdity and emotion.

Womack (2013) delves deeply into the realms of both Afrofuturism and Afro-surrealism, examining how they relate to one another and the effects they have on society. She also highlights the cultural importance of both genres. Mark Derry, referenced by Womack (2013) suggests that African Americans can be seen as the forebears of those who claim to have been abducted by aliens, emphasizing a unique connection between these two phenomena. An illustration of how surrealism and real life may coexist to create a human who rejects the expectations that others have of him. Sun Ra embraces this Afrofuturistic aesthetic wholeheartedly, disregarding the hardships associated with living a Black lifestyle and asserting

his extraterrestrial identity. Before it was coined by Miller (2013) in his piece, *Afro surreal Manifesto: Black is the New Black*, the term Afro-surrealism was first used in 1988 by Amiri Baraka, a well-known author affiliated with the Black Arts Movement. Miller (2013) clarified that Afro-surrealism is about what is happening right now, not what has already happened or what will happen in the future, but rather what is occurring present day. *The Invisible Man* (1953), by Ralph Ellison according to Miller, is a prime instance of Afro-surrealism.

According to Miller (2013), Afrofuturism is a diasporic intellectual and cultural movement that uses science, technology, and science fiction to imagine what the future might hold for people of colour. The present is what Afro-surrealism is about. There is no need to speculate about the future with tomorrow's tongue. There have already been concentration camps, bombed-out cities, famines, and forced sterilization. He claims that the potential future has existed for so long that it is currently the past. Miller (2013) describes the term as:

Afro-surreal presupposes that beyond this visible world, there is an invisible world striving to manifest, and it is our job to uncover it. Like the African Surrealists, Afro-surrealists recognize that nature (including human nature) generates more surreal experiences than any other process could hope to produce... Afro-surrealists restore the cult of the past. We revisit old ways with new eyes... Afro surrealists use excess as the only legitimate means of subversion, and hybridization as a form of disobedience... The Afro-surrealist life is fluid, filled with aliases and census-defying classifications... Afro-surrealists are ambiguous. "Am I black or white? Am I straight, or gay? Controversy!" Afro-surrealism rejects the quiet servitude that characterizes existing roles for African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, women, and queer folk. Only through the mixing, melding, and cross-conversion of these supposed classifications can there be hope for liberation. Afro-surrealism is intersexed, Afro-Asiatic, Afro-Cuban, mystic, silly, and profound. (p.116).

One can therefore claim that the goal of Afro-surrealists is to increase social awareness and expose the "right now," which is another way of describing what is now taking place on a global scale that has an impact on Black people's quality of life. Black people, especially African Americans, adapted surrealism and made it their own. They used it as a tool to provoke audiences to understand social structures, social reforms, and so-called "uncomfortable" truths that the white-straight-male-western-civilization seems unable to absorb, with a message that Black people exist and can do. Afrofuturism and Afro-surrealism nevertheless represent two



distinct universes despite having the same message and goal. In other words, one can claim that while Afrofuturism is aspirational and does not always establish connections between the present and the imagined future, but rather focuses on past issues to solve them in a utopic world, Afro-surrealism, on the other hand, represents concrete manifestations of Black agency and empowerment. The genre of fiction known as Afro-surrealism focuses on showing the "here and now," or challenges that are specific to the Black person in the present.

Hlophe (2019) also mentioned the differences between the two movements arguing that both Afrofuturism and Afro-Surrealism use the fantastic to analyze racial oppression, however Afro-Surrealism focuses on the significance of Black inventors of futuristic technologies, while Afrofuturism analyzes the relationship between the past and the present. Another kind of art-making that is based on inquiry through a Black perspective is Afro-surrealism. Afro-Surrealism views surrealism and modernism as the expressions of Black artists' modes with Blackness at its core.

Moreover, it is contended that according to Miller's definition, Afrofuturism relies on the "there and then," and it is more of an escape than anything that offers precise answers rooted in the present. Miller's assertions, however, have come under fire, with some claiming that because Afro-surrealism is more practicable due to his Negritude<sup>4</sup>, he gave it more weight and that his use of the term "Afrofuturism" is largely unfavorable. One may argue that both of these subgenres symbolize Blackness and African Pride under one roof. Hlophe (2019) quotes Rali Chorbadzhiyska who stated: "The focus of Afro-Surrealism is the present, but it does not deny succession of time and the importance of the past as an agent in shaping the now". Therefore, one can deduce that despite their differences, both concepts refer to Black people's historical experiences and aim to improve both the present and the future of the African diaspora.

The distinct realms of Afrofuturism and Afro-Surrealism, while deeply rooted in the African diasporic experience and Black identity, offer divergent pathways into the imaginative landscape of speculative arts. Afrofuturism propels individuals into futuristic domains where the fusion of technology, mythology, and Afrocentric themes invites the exploration of a boundless future. In stark contrast, Afro-Surrealism guides us into a surreal dreamscape, stretching and reshaping reality to delve into the unconscious and the absurd. Despite their

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<sup>4</sup> Negritude refers to the affirmation or consciousness of the value of Black or African culture and identity. In other words, the quality or fact of being of Black African origin.

divergent trajectories, both movements share a common thread of cultural reclamation, social commentary, and empowerment.

## **II.9. Afrofuturism Visualization and Imagery**

Artistic representation within the realm of Afrofuturism serves as a profound and transformative force that goes beyond mere aesthetics. It is a vital vehicle through which the African diasporic experience and Black identity are reimagined, reclaimed, and redefined. Afrofuturism, at its core, is a movement that embraces a visionary fusion of technology, mythology, and cultural heritage to envision a future that transcends the constraints of the present. In this futuristic landscape, art becomes a dynamic means of conveying narratives, exploring themes of empowerment, and challenging historical narratives. It provides a platform for artists to navigate the intricate intersections of race, culture, and innovation, and in doing so, it fosters a deeper understanding of the rich tapestry of Black identity. Exploring artistic representation in Afrofuturism reveals the significant role of art in reshaping and reimagining the narratives of the African diaspora. Afrofuturist art, featuring futuristic and science fiction elements, addresses crucial social issues within the Black community. It offers a distinctive perspective, fostering inclusive visions of the future and empowering African Americans to embrace their heritage while shaping new, unbound narratives.

The objective of Afrofuturism is to examine the possibilities of a future in which Black people can fully participate and thrive. It envisions a society in which Black people can use their intellect and creativity to develop their own distinctive cultures and technology while also having access to all the same opportunities and resources as everyone else. Moreover, Afrofuturism is about celebrating the Black experience in all of its richness and diversity, and art helps bring this purpose to wider audiences. The movement is known for its commitment to reclaiming stories that have been erased, using technology and science fiction to restore a fractured past and imagine a different future. In the world of visual art, as well as music, movies, songs and many artistic creative productions, the origins of Afrofuturism can be read back into artists working before the term was coined. Many see the beginnings of the movement in Sun Ra and Janelle Monae's visuals as they captured through their music the essence of the movement drawing links between ancient African traditions, techno-culture, and cyberculture.

### Figure 3

#### *Sun Ra: A Joyful Noise*

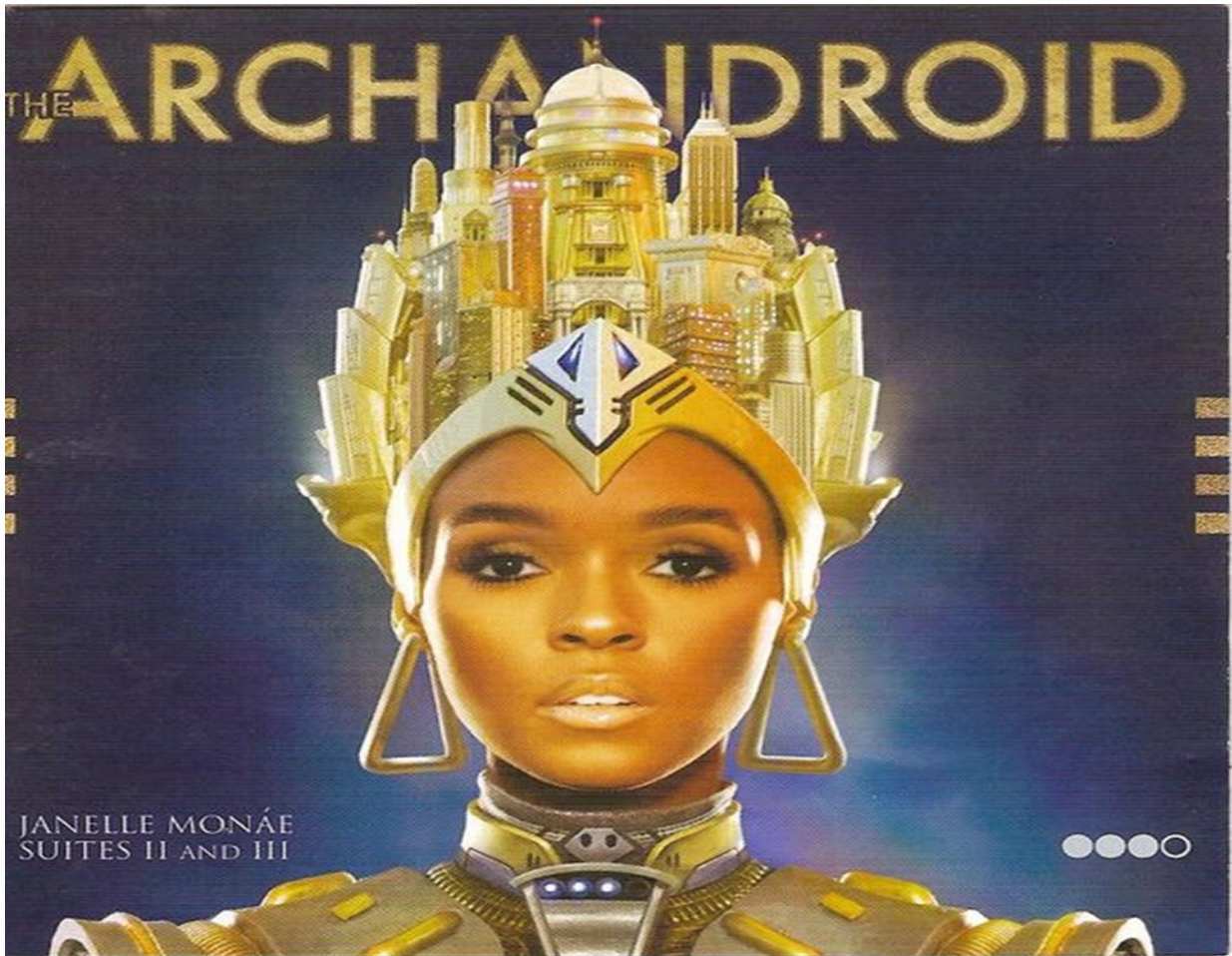


*Note.* Adapted from Lefresne (2018). This figure represents a 1980 jazz film by Robert Mugge documenting performances by Sun Ra and his Arkestra in Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Baltimore, including interviews and rehearsal footage.

Janelle Monáe's Afrofuturistic visualization seamlessly blends music, fashion, and narrative storytelling to create a powerful representation of black identity and empowerment. Through her alter ego, Cindi Mayweather, Monáe explores themes of freedom, resistance, and self-discovery in a futuristic, dystopian world. Her albums, such as "The ArchAndroid" and "Dirty Computer," incorporate elements of science fiction and speculative fiction, reimagining the future from a Black, queer perspective. Monáe's visual artistry, characterized by bold costumes, innovative music videos, and elaborate stage performances, challenges traditional norms and celebrates the beauty and resilience of Black womanhood. Her work embodies the spirit of Afrofuturism by envisioning a future where marginalized voices are central to the narrative and black women are empowered to define their own destinies (Hassler-Forest, 2022).

**Figure 4**

*The Archandroid (Suites II and III)*



*Note.* Album cover by Janelle Monáe, 2010.

Jean-Michel Basquiat's paintings are also considered to be a dynamic manifestation of Afrofuturism's core principles. His artistic brilliance, deeply rooted in the African diasporic experience, aligns seamlessly with Afrofuturism's visionary approach. His works, often adorned with rich symbolism and vivid imagery, transcend traditional boundaries to engage with themes of race, society, and innovation. As a prominent figure within the art world, Basquiat's impact resonates strongly with Afrofuturism's mission to challenge norms, empower voices, and envision a future that embraces the diversity of Black experiences. Together, they create a dynamic dialogue between past, present, and future, offering a profound reflection on the complexities of Black identity and culture.



**Figure 5**

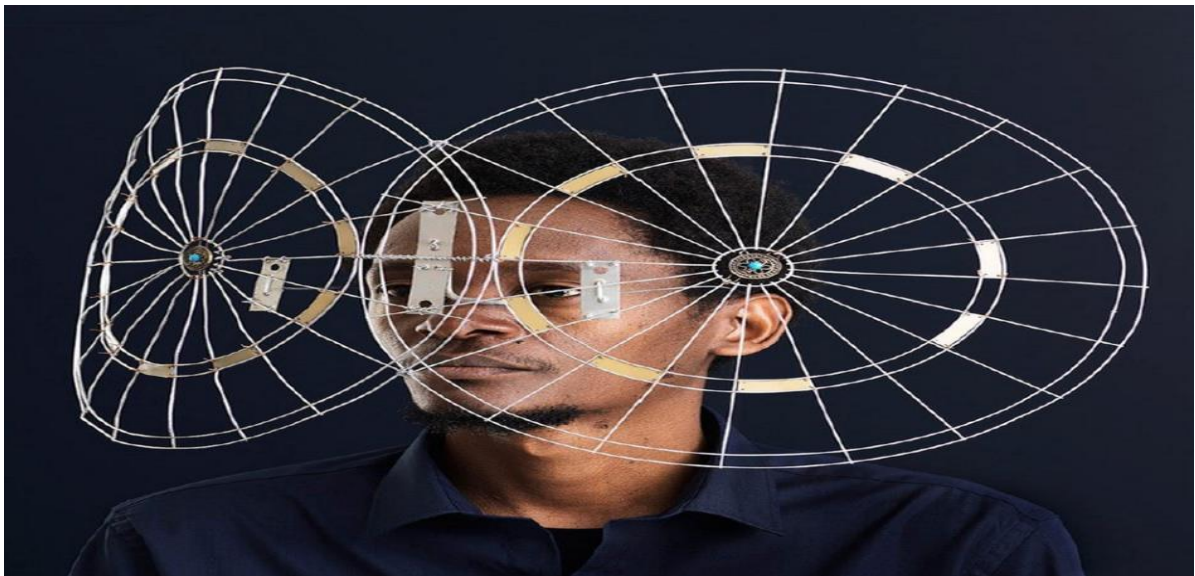
*Dusthead*



*Note.* From "Dusthead," by Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1982. Acrylic, oil stick, spray enamel, and metallic paint on canvas. In *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art*, by P. Hoban, 1998, Penguin Books. Copyright 1998 by the Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

**Figure 6**

*The Craftsman Cyrus Kabiru*



*Note.* Adapted from lunaticcharlie (2020). This figure tells a story of reclamation that looks towards the future, repurposing trash to create futuristic spectacles.

One can argue that artists like Manzel Bowman, Ataulie, Lina Iris Viktor, Osborne Macharia, Cyrus Kabiru, and Jessi Jumanji are changing perspectives on Black culture through their artistic works. They are delivering all that Afrofuturism is about to larger audiences via nowadays' media forces like Instagram and Twitter. Such platforms enabled these artists to reach broad and larger audiences from all around the globe to redefine certain concepts and challenge stereotypes. Afrofuturism serves as the umbrella and the platform through which these artists can explicitly share their artistic visions on the Black culture and community. After all, it redefined what the future would look like if seen from an African lens. It reestablished the meaning of a futuristic world with Africans and African culture and heritage at the forefront.

**Figure 7**

*Sublime Intervention: The Celest*



*Note.* This figure is adapted from "The Celestial Beauty of Interventions" by A.B. Bowman, 2019, Academic Press.



In Afrofuturist art, traditional elements, including symbols, mythology, and cultural heritage, serve as powerful anchors that connect individuals to their roots. These traditional aspects are reimagined and reinterpreted in the context of a futuristic world, giving rise to innovative narratives that challenge and expand upon historical themes. This interplay between the traditional and the Afrofuturistic not only provides a deep sense of cultural continuity but also reclaims and empowers narratives that have often been marginalized or overlooked. Artists within the Afrofuturist movement use their creative expressions to challenge existing norms and societal expectations. They navigate the complexities of race, identity, and belonging, infusing their works with new possibilities that envision a future where diversity is celebrated, and where people of all backgrounds can thrive. The blend of tradition and Afrofuturism in art catalyzes profound social commentary, inviting viewers to explore the intricate intersections of past, present, and future while envisioning a world that transcends conventional boundaries.

### Figure 8

*Watchtower*



*Note.* Adapted from Bowman (2018). This figure illustrates the concept of a watchtower, symbolizing vigilance and protection.

## Figure 9

*Adult Swim*



*Note.* Adapted from Bowman (2018), illustrates Afrofuturistic themes through its blend of animation and surrealism in modern media.

Additionally, it is argued that to illustrate this movement and give it vivid descriptions, the values, beliefs, and future visions that Afrofuturism represented had to be translated into artwork and imagery. After all, imagery may enhance a person's experience by helping them immerse themselves more fully by appealing to their senses. One can experience something deeply when they see it (a sensory experience), and artists can elicit in their audiences the emotion they want to convey. Thus, imagery can help audiences understand and relate to abstract ideas like theories and concepts such as Afrofuturism. To give a precise idea about the visual aspect of Afrofuturism, one can mention the Black Panther movie which is one of the well-known artistic works that represented and illustrated the visuals of the concept to its fullest. From the developed characters to the futuristic setting, along with costume design and the celebration of the African heritage, the movie can be said to be an excellent portrayal of the visual and cultural aspects of Afrofuturism creating what is usually referred to as Black Utopia.



**Figure 10**

*An Afrofuturistic Utopia, Wakongo River: Beyond Human Challenge*



*Note.* Adapted from Dianingana (2017), showcasing an Afrofuturistic interpretation of utopia along the Wakongo River, exploring themes of innovation and cultural evolution.

The highly technological and cyborg aspects introduced in Afrofuturism open doors to imaginative possibilities. They invite viewers to envision a future where technology harmonizes with Africanism, transcending conventional limitations. This fusion explores the relationship between humanity and technology, offering a fresh perspective on the coexistence of organic and mechanical components. The result is a dynamic dialogue between African heritage and advanced technology, where traditional symbols and futuristic elements coexist, complement, and challenge one another. This unique interplay fosters a profound reflection on identity, culture, and innovation potential. Afrofuturist artists who engage in this blending not only celebrate the richness of the African diasporic experience but also invite us to reimagine a future

where the boundaries between the organic and the technological blur, opening a world of endless possibilities.

**Figure 11**

*KIPIRIRI 4*



*Note.* Adapted from Osborne Macharia's "Kipiriri series" (2016), portraying futuristic Afrocentric aesthetics and narratives.

In essence, the fusion of African heritage with highly technological and cyborg realms in Afrofuturist art is a testament to the enduring power of creative expression. It allows us to navigate the intricate intersections of past and future, transcending conventional narratives to envision a world where culture and technology coexist in harmonious synergy. This exploration



challenges norms, empowers voices, and propels us into an Afrofuturistic realm where imagination knows no bounds.

**Figure 12**

*Gikosh*

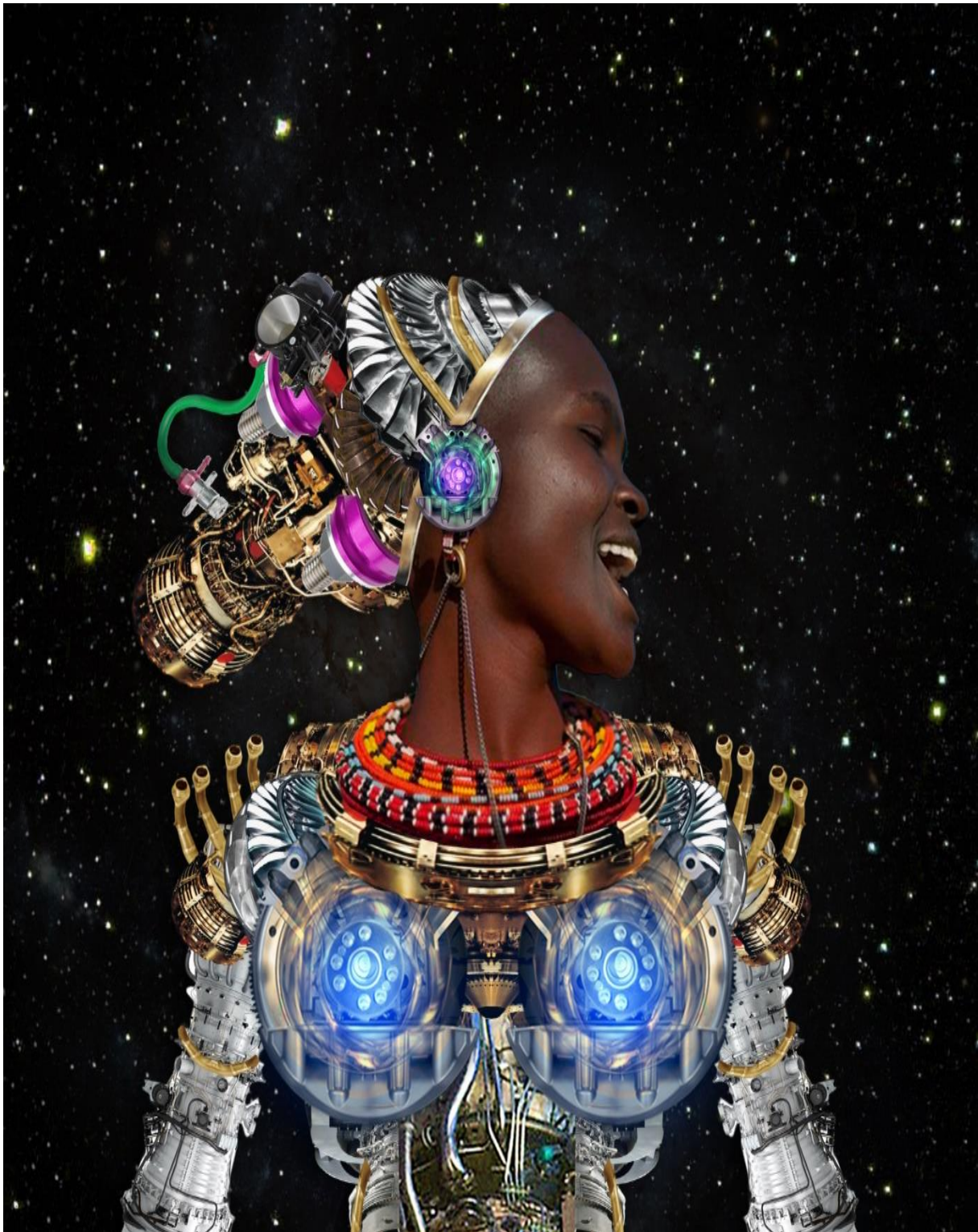


*Note.* Adapted from Osborne Macharia's portrayal of African protagonists in an alternate, futuristic society, incorporating salvaged airplane parts. (Ahuja, 2021).



**Figure 13**

*Turbine*



*Note.* Adapted from Bowman (2018). This figure illustrates the use of specific materials/techniques/subjects depicted in "Turbine".

## II.10. Afrofuturism's Evolution: Journeying from 1.0 to 3.0

The trajectory of Afrofuturism has undergone a remarkable evolution, akin to navigating through distinct versions from 1.0 to 3.0. This journey unfolds as a narrative of creative exploration, challenging historical narratives, and envisioning alternative futures. Delving into Afrofuturism's evolution offers a captivating exploration of how it has transcended its initial expressions, evolving into a dynamic and influential force that continues to shape conversations about identity, culture, and the boundless possibilities of the future. This odyssey through Afrofuturism's transformative phases, from 1.0 to 3.0, reveals not only its artistic and cultural dimensions but also its profound impact on reshaping narratives and empowering marginalized voices within the broader landscape of speculative fiction.

When talking about the trajectory of Afrofuturism and Afrofuturistic discourse, Anderson (2016), pioneering the inception of such concepts, chooses an overarching approach, highlighting three distinct phases of Afrofuturism: 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0. Although very similar, every phase of the movement holds a certain perspective and definition according to the context in which it was created. Each phase of Afrofuturism attempted to adapt to the drastic social, economic, and political changes of the world. As a result, the movement needed to adjust to the world's ongoing and constant change.

Originally emerging in the 19th century as a vehicle for expressing African self-determination and unleashing creative expression, Afrofuturism represents a systematic body of Black speculative thought. However, over time, this movement has evolved into a rapidly expanding global phenomenon. At its core, Afrofuturism is centered on the act of envisioning, tracing, and reclaiming Afrocentric futures. Furthermore, Afrofuturism 1.0 is a term often used to describe its early origins, rooted in the music of Sun Ra and the literary works of figures like Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delaney. Some argue that Afrofuturism 1.0 is more closely associated with the pre-modern era or the period following World War II but predating the widespread emergence of the World Wide Web (Anderson, 2016).

As per Anderson (2016), Afrofuturism, also referred to as Afrofuturism 1.0, was primarily centered around twentieth-century techno-culture, exploring themes related to the digital divide, technology, music, and literature within Western contexts. It encompassed the imaginative and creative expressions of African Americans, particularly in their engagement with science fiction, music, art, and technology. However, as technology continued to advance and the world entered the era of a social media-driven environment, featuring platforms like

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google, and Wikipedia, Afrofuturism needed to adapt and evolve in response to these changes.

In his article *Afrofuturism 2.0 and The Black Speculative Art Movement: Notes on a Manifesto*, Anderson (2016) gives a deeper understanding of the concept of Afrofuturism 2.0. He argues that Modern Black speculative thinking has its roots in the struggle for African self-determination and artistic expression in the 19th century, as well as in scientific racism, technology, and all three factors together. However, it has now developed into a new worldwide phenomenon. Anderson (2016) defines Afrofuturism 2.0 as:

The beginning of both a move away and an answer to the Eurocentric perspective of the 20th century's early formulation of Afrofuturism that wondered if the history of African peoples, especially in North America, had been deliberately erased. Or to put it more plainly, future-looking Black scholars, artists, and activists are not only reclaiming their right to tell their own stories, but also critiquing the European/ American digerati class of their narratives about cultural others, past, present, and future and, challenging their presumed authority to be the sole interpreters of Black lives and Black futures (p. 230).

Afrofuturism is a critical initiative to establish a humanity free from the constraints of white Enlightenment universalism, critical theory, science, and technology. Anderson and Jones (2016) stated in their book *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro Blackness*:

The goal of this volume is to build upon the previous definition and identify the twenty-first-century contemporary expressions of Afrofuturism emerging in the areas of metaphysics, speculative philosophy, religion, visual studies, performance, art, and philosophy of science or technology that are described as "2.0," in response to the emergence of social media and other technological advances since the middle of the last decade. Whereas Afrofuturism was primarily concerned with twentieth-century techno-culture, the digital divide, technology, music, and literature in the West; Afrofuturism 2.0 is the early twenty-first-century technogenesis of Black identity reflecting counter histories, hacking, and or appropriating the influence of network software, database logic, cultural analytics, deep reliability, neurosciences, enhancement and augmentation, gender fluidity, posthuman possibility, the speculative sphere,

with transdisciplinary applications and has grown into an important Diasporic techno-cultural “Pan-African” movement (p.10).

Afrofuturism 2.0 has seen its scope expand significantly, now encompassing a wide range of disciplines, including geopolitics, philosophy of science, metaphysics, cultural aesthetics, and considerations of the digital divide. This expansion was necessitated by the shifting cultural and social landscapes on a global scale, as well as the pervasive influence of social media in shaping contemporary thought. These transformative forces in society led to the emergence of Afrofuturism 2.0, representing a more comprehensive iteration of the movement.

Anderson (2016) further argues that Afrofuturism 2.0 carries the same message and goals of Afrofuturism which is indebted to earlier movements like the Black Arts Movement, Negritude, The Harlem Renaissance, and other speculative African movements from the continent and its diaspora along with engaging the ideas of philosophers like Du Bois, Wright, Everett, and others to break through the Colour Line, the Colour Curtain, and grasp the digital divide in the face of similarly pertinent 21st-century concerns. Moreover, Afrofuturism 2.0 is an emerging Pan-African transnational, trans-contextual, techno-cultural social philosophy characterized by other dimensions that include African or African diasporic metaphysics, aesthetics, social sciences (such as Afrocentricity, Black/African feminist and womanist thought, or Black queer practice), theoretical and applied science, and programmatic spaces. Afrofuturism 3.0 on the other hand is explained by Anderson (2016):

Semantics denotes a range of ideas about the world, from the popular to the highly technical, i.e., using devices to layer visual or aural rhythms and effects to produce complicated patterns. The semantic web is part of Web 3.0 which inventor Tim Berners-Lee describes as a platform that supports dynamic graphical applications such as virtual 3D worlds with huge spaces of data. Afrofuturism on Web 3.0 is grounded in genres such as cyberpunk or postmodern sci-fi, Afropunk DIY culture, electronic music, and virtual performance. Web 3.0 combines specialized forms of representation such as alphabets, visual images, music, choreographic notations based on geometric, linguistic, and scientific formulations, programming languages, hardware (robotics or mobile devices), and software (game platforms). These forms and representational, vernacular spaces produce cultural data such as heritage artifacts, geometric motifs that depict nature and the universe, music, performances, and games. The

combination of cultural data—images, artifacts, sounds, and spaces—and virtual worlds is what I refer to as Afrofuturism 3.0 (p.33-34).

Anderson (2016) argues that according to Duane Deterville, the Afriscape is created when metaphysical, African Continental, and African Diasporic places are combined with virtual reality in the realm of ritual space. Additionally, the author claims that by using the concepts of Afrofuturism and Afriscape as our glasses, we may comprehend the augmented vernacular in novel ways. Afrofuturism 3.0 is a utopian vision that may be seen as a web of cultural art and data or as a simple paradigm change in the online creative activities of people of African descent. He further argues that Afrofuturism refers to the "Space Age," ancient African iconography, cosmology, and metaphysics, as well as psychedelic art, cultural objects, and electronic soundscapes that represent the techno-vernacular creative practices of an eccentric, visionary, and creative community of producers. The practice of enhancing space can theoretically also refer to the layering of quilts at safe houses with embedded codes, the use of multiple projections on various surfaces as part of an installation, the use of multiple projected avatars, or the blending of music samples with other sounds to immerse listeners. Additionally, to further investigate this evolution, designers are creating Web 3.0 programs and interfaces utilizing open-source, web-based software that utilizes cultural, and visual systems to create applications that activate digital objects, patterns, and other items.

In other words, vernacular cartography, and augmented space, as an extension of techno vernacular creative production, presents artists and makers with fresh opportunities to sample, remix, or re-purpose cultural artifacts or data and create Afrofuturistic narratives through science, science fiction, technology, sound, architecture, the arts, and other cultural and interpretive modes of analysis. One can argue that one of the goals of Anderson's book was to examine how Web 3.0 and other technologies are extending the frontiers of digital culture and inspiring Afrofuturists to interact in these brand-new realms.

Additionally, according to Anderson (2016), 3.0 is the real speculating and producing of Afrofuturistic material by Africans on the continent and in their respective countries. *Critical Black Futures* acknowledges the difficulty of directly addressing a global phenomenon despite its pan-African focus. Even while identical events take place concurrently and from a variety of angles, nothing that is perceived as a result of similar events is the same. This refers to how different contexts, subjectivities, bodies, and geographical territories operate as dynamic, interdependent systems or universes acting toward their interpretation of the concept—in their own right.



It can be contended that the three branches of the Afrofuturism movement share a common goal, albeit adapted to different contexts. Afrofuturism has transformed and progressed to stay in sync with the fast-paced evolution of science and technology. Consequently, artists, writers, filmmakers, designers, and other creative individuals inspired by Afrofuturism can integrate these technological advancements and sensibilities into their creations. They form an integral part of a burgeoning global movement that aims to uphold this aesthetic through culture, creativity, and innovative expression.

Afrofuturism's evolution from 1.0 to 3.0 encapsulates a profound narrative of cultural innovation and resilience. The movement's journey reflects not just a chronological progression but a continuous response to the shifting dynamics of the world. As Afrofuturism enters its 3.0 phase, characterized by unprecedented connectivity and intersectionality, it beckons us to witness and participate in the ongoing dialogue between tradition and the future. The Afrofuturist odyssey persists, inviting all to contribute to its ever-expanding narrative.

## **II.11. Conclusion**

The main concern of this chapter is to introduce the movement of Afrofuturism, focusing on the beginnings of the movement with the pioneers that embraced it way before it was coined by the scholar Mark Dery in 1994. The scholar gave the movement a proper name, yet the concept established itself several years back in time with artists such as Sun Ra and writers such as W.E.B Du Bois, Samuel R. Delany, and Octavia Butler. Such pioneers embraced the speculative fiction genre with an Afrocentric twist. They managed to capture past issues faced by Africans mainly in the diaspora and placed them in futuristic contexts with powerful Black protagonists. Such a genre opened many possibilities for Black people and made them question what the future would look like if power structures and access to different power resources and technology were in their hands.

Afrofuturism is recognized as a significant movement that began in the 19th century to fundamentally alter some stereotypes of Black people, re-identify Africans, especially African Americans of the diaspora, and give them a platform that is exclusively Afrocentric, heavily focused on representation, and set in a futuristic environment. This thriving movement is comprised of Black diasporic writers, philosophers, musicians, painters, and theorists. Even if this movement beyond the boundaries of literature, novels continue to be the major medium for

Afrofuturism since they offer a clear demonstration of all the guiding principles, ideals, messages, and goals the movement carries. The major objective of the Afrofuturistic movement is to deconstruct any outdated perceptions that persist in today's society about these people as well as the identity that was once imposed by white supremacists. Moreover, there is a distinct inclination toward reconstruction in Afrofuturism, which is regarded as a driving force capable of reshaping our interpretations of numerous Black and diasporic concepts, as well as redefining our perspectives on history.

# **Chapter Three**

The Evolution of Black Womanhood: The Renegotiation of The Black Female's  
Identity

## **Chapter Three**

### **Black Womanhood Redefined: The Renegotiation of The Black Female's Identity**

#### **III.1 Introduction**

Womanhood has undergone significant shifts over time, marked by a series of transformative events that have shaped its trajectory. Establishing their identities amidst societal pressures and gender biases has been a challenging process for women, often viewed as a form of rebellion against prevailing stereotypes. The need for change became apparent, nevertheless, what better way for women to voice their desires than by harnessing the power of the pen? Writing, which could reach a wide audience, was undoubtedly one of the many yet most effective means for women to voice their desires and expectations. Even those who did not support these unconventional and rebellious literary styles were curious to read what these women were authoring.

This chapter delves into significant historical upheavals that challenged prevailing perceptions of women's societal roles, debunking the notion of their confinement to domesticity and ornamentation. It underscores the inception of Feminism as a unifying force among women sharing common objectives and visions. Nonetheless, it confronts the issue of marginalized representation endured by Black women within the mainstream feminist movement, attributable to intersecting forms of discrimination grounded in both gender and race. Consequently, the focal point of this chapter revolves around movements such as Black Feminism, Womanism and Africana Womanism which emerged to address the distinct adversities faced by women of colour. These movements aimed to cultivate inclusive environments fostering solidarity and empowerment, while recognizing the intricate interplay of gender and racial disparities.

#### **III.2 Chronicles of Femininity: An Anthology of Women's Writings**

Women's writing is a genre of writing that focuses on writing by and about women while bringing together a variety of approaches and viewpoints. Moreover, this genre exemplifies the relationship between women, literature, and representations. The aim is for the diverse viewpoints to engage in constructive debate, igniting discussions within the publication and shedding light on the issues that fuel modern feminist and womanist literary criticism and theory. In its most basic sense, women's writing is an academic field that defines the place and

status of women in society, more specifically, where they stand in the literary world in which they are characterized by their gender. This concept was created at the point when feminist literary critique first appeared, and Feminism began to take shape. This literary genre was initially a distinct area of study, but it has now become notably distinctive due to a gender issue rather than because it wrote some of the time's most daring pieces.

One could consider this genre to be a form of art that depicts women and their most fundamental desires. Jacobus (2012) exemplifies this form of art in her book *Women Writing and Writing About Women* by quoting the pioneer Virginia Woolf who stated: “The burden and the complexity of womanhood were not enough; she must reach beyond the sanctuary and pluck for herself the strange bright fruits of art and knowledge. Clasp them as few women have ever clasped them, she would not renounce her own inheritance - the difference of view, the difference of standard.” (p.11). Virginia Woolf, one of the pioneers of the women's writing genre, emphasizes the nature of women's access to culture and their entry into literary discourse as well as the significance and desire for education and knowledge both culturally and politically as they were the result of all efforts. The author emphasizes that the path of knowledge is also the path of liberation in levels of gender, cultural, and political challenges faced by women.

One can therefore argue that a group of women representing this form of literature addressed males and imposed their recommendations by speaking out, drawing men who were typically uninterested in them to hear them. This genre also revealed something about the gap faced by female writers in a patriarchal culture, where language itself may serve to reinforce the systems that oppress them. Moreover, those women gathered to change the perspective on womanhood as a term that represented silence, stupidity, and hopeless desire which were seen as a necessary sacrifice for men to feel their masculinity. As a result, the concepts of ignorance and utterance, as well as the demand for an impossibility, frequently appeared in women's literature.

Mccormick (2016) argues that if we look back into history, the concept of sexual conflict was initially established by ancient Greek philosophy. For instance, Aristotle believed that nature constantly aimed for perfection but also asserted that a woman was just a less-than-perfect version of a male, who was seen as the ultimate embodiment of nature's objective. On the other hand, while religious scriptures frequently included powerful or romanticized representations of women, the Greek poet Sappho glorified the love between women. Therefore, even though this conflict has always existed, the literature on female emancipation and empowerment has never had a chance to overtake that on their oppression.

It can be contended that women's writing as a genre has been centered on the ideology of identity reconstruction. It was a depiction of the reality faced by women mostly in the nineteenth and later the twentieth centuries focusing on the misleading and gender biased stereotypes that governed society at that time. This critical genre's ability to expose the intricate workings of patriarchy or to unravel alternative interpretations hidden inside conventional texts is another characteristic. In this way, the canon of literature has been questioned from within as well as from without, from a position of exclusion, silence, and tyranny.

Mccormick (2016) asserts that patriarchy's dominant position was largely clear until the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there are innumerable instances of resistance to the prevalent, female-disempowerment-promoting gender divisions. Writing provided a forum for examining the injustice and cruelty experienced by women, as well as a place to ponder the possibility of a different sort of society, one in which the lives of women may be improved, and the dominant role(s) of men might be challenged.

Mccormick (2016) continues to state that novelists, poets, playwrights, and other social critics and political writers started to advocate for a complementary relationship between the sexes rather than one of competition in the eighteenth century. Ironically, women's roles were being praised more and more while more strict ideas about what was considered acceptable behaviour were being embraced: women were to be idolizing mothers, caring wives, and domestic angels, and those who did not live up to this ideal were to be despised as "whores". Men, on the other hand, dominated the public domain, enjoyed financial freedom, and were commodified owners of their spouses. It is however odd that men frequently engaged in extramarital relationships with other women which demonstrates the Victorian patriarchy's hypocritical double standards.

One can claim that since the literary realm was controlled by men at that time, the few women who dared to voice their opinions using the power of the word had no choice but to hide their true identities. Most female writers who are well-established in the literary world either adopted male names, projected themselves in their characters, or used gender-ambiguous pseudonyms in their quest to speak the harsh reality that was still blurry to the conventional society in which they lived. Writers like Virginia Woolf, the Bronte sisters, Louisa May Alcott, and undoubtedly Mary Ann Evans who wrote under the pseudonym George Eliot are considered the pioneers of women's writings.

The intended purpose of the pseudonyms was to ensure that the writings of these women were evaluated impartially and free of the prejudices associated with writings by women. Ciuraru (2011) talked about women writers who used pseudonyms to avoid the harsh critics of

Victorian society in the 19th century. The writer emphasizes that a “Nom de Plume” otherwise known as a pen name or pseudonym was an essential part of the creation of an authorial identity. What is in a name? is a perennial subject that Ciuraru explores in depth while providing a distinctive literary history and exploration of identity, creativity, and self-creation.

Thus, this anthology offers a comprehensive exploration of the diverse literary contributions of women across different periods and regions. It highlights the enduring impact of women writers on the literary landscape, shedding light on their unique perspectives, narratives, and creative expressions. Such writings provide an in-depth look into themes such as femininity, identity, and the human experience. Overall, it serves as a testament to the significant role women have played in shaping the world of literature, offering readers a deeper understanding of the rich tapestry of women's voices in literary history.

### **III.3 Feminism: The Development of Feminist Consciousness**

In an attempt to rebel against gender-biased stereotypes, assert a decolonized individual identity, and practice political, social, and economic equality of the sexes, women gathered their forces and joined under an ideology known as Feminism. The movement found revolutionary and radical expression at the end of the eighteenth century, most famously in works such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). However, it would be another century before there would be a political campaign for women to gain political equality. Nevertheless, the suffragettes, who fought for women's voting rights, were instrumental in defining the first modern usage of the word "Feminism" to convey women's ambitions and the promotion of their political, economic, and social rights.

Moreover, Feminist literature, one can argue, aims to dispel gender stereotypes, or address relevant political issues and attitudes toward women in society. It is not limited by culture or religion; therefore, a wide range of subjects are covered, including politics, racism, religion, and the institution of marriage, among others. These subjects have all contributed to the history of literature's greatest works, which is a rich patchwork quilt. Feminist literary criticism is diverse because Feminism's concerns cut across so many cultural, social, political, and psychological aspects. Regardless of the type of analysis used, the ultimate objective of feminist criticism is to advance our appreciation of women's values and contributions to the world while deepening our understanding of women's experiences in the past and present.

One can argue that at its core, Feminism is the ideology advocating for equal treatment of both men and women in all aspects of life. Originating primarily from Western societies,

Feminism has extended its reach globally and is championed by various organizations dedicated to promoting women's rights and interests. It is widely recognized as a social framework with the central objectives of achieving gender equality and empowering women. The movement primarily focuses on women, who often perceive men as potential competitors.

Mccormick (2016) argues that examining how literature (and other cultural outputs) support or challenge the social, political, economic, and psychological oppression of women is the focus of feminist critique. In contrast to the conventional inclination and the general perception of women, feminists present alternative ways of thinking. The movement makes a distinction between the terms "sex" and "gender," which relate to our genetic structure as either female or male and, respectively, our cultural programming as either feminine or masculine. In other words, neither men nor women are born with a feminine or masculine nature. Instead, these gender categories are products of society, making this perspective on gender a prime example of social constructionism.

Despite the movement's reputation for complexity, many academics and researchers attempted to define the term. Raina (2020) in his article *Feminism: An Overview* defined Feminism as a broad spectrum of political movements, ideologies, and social movements with the shared objective of defining, establishing, and achieving the equality of the two genders in politics, the economy, personal life, and society. The fundamental tenet of Feminism is to promote women's equality and fairness in all areas of life and to give them equal access to the resources that are often available to men without restriction. Furthermore, Feminism examines a wide range of topics, including the history of women's oppression and potential ways to get over the anxiety of authorship by creating their own literary standard.

Raina (2020) furthermore explains in his above-mentioned article that Feminism is derived from the Latin word 'Femina' meaning 'woman' and was originally applied to the women's rights movement and equality problems. Because there are so many psychosocial and cultural constructions of femininity, Feminism is a genuine endeavor to analyze, understand, and clarify. Beasley (1999) explained the concept further in his book *What is Feminism?* He uses the definitions, amongst them the definition of the *Encyclopedia of Feminism* (1987) which states:

There are many individual definitions of Feminism, and its fundamental meaning is in dispute. Dictionaries usually define it as the advocacy of women's rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes, and in its broadest use the word refers to everyone aware of and seeking to end women's subordination in any



way and for any reason . . . Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women (p.45).

Another definition Beasley gave was the one of *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics* (1993) which states:

There is no political doctrine of Feminism per se, and the various groups and currents of thought among feminists are often in bitter disagreement. The movement seeks equal political and social rights for women as compared with men. The main common theoretical assumption which is shared by all branches of the movement is that there has been a historical tradition of male exploitation of women (p.45).

Beasley (1999) gives various definitions from various dictionaries and sources stating that it is crucial to understand Feminism in its basic and brief form as brief definitions tend to simplify a tangled area of knowledge's nuanced complexity to tidy phrasing. These statements have limited usefulness if you want to properly understand the meaning of the term 'feminist' and appreciate its variety of forms precisely because they are clear-cut and succinct. Moreover, in terms of taking a critical posture toward how women are treated and imagining a better state of affairs, Feminism appears to provide ethical and moral norms. The assumption made by dictionaries and other concise definitions of Feminism is that all feminist ideologies share the idea that women have experienced and will continue to experience discrimination due to their sex. Such a strategy strongly suggests that feminist ideology is in some way biased toward collective concerns as opposed to just individual ones.

Beasley (1999) argues further that according to feminist theorists, Feminism is innovative, creative, and rebellious in some way from the conventional. They regard their work as specifically addressing the role of sexual perspectives in mental processes and posing a challenge to male bias. Feminist writers contend that traditional or mainstream Western thought is actually 'malestream' thinking and that its legitimacy must be called into doubt. According to the author, the idea of Feminism was developed through three stages of thought, each of which corresponds to a certain set of beliefs. According to the critic, the first approach is based on the idea that women and women theorists have been left out of Western social and political theory therefore it is feminist intellectuals' responsibility to bring them back in (while leaving most of traditional thought relatively intact). This is regarded as the inclusion/addition strategy in which the focus is on pragmatic issues surrounding the reformation of Western ideology while taking into consideration what is politically feasible.

The second approach that Beasley (1999) addresses is that according to scholars Clark and Lange, who represent the second perspective, conventional political theory is barren in the light of modern feminist ideas. This is also known as the go back to the drawing board strategy or critique, reject, and start again. Given that traditional thought is seen as being founded upon beliefs on sexual hierarchy, such an approach expresses doubts about the success of any objective to "correct" traditional perspective.

According to Beasley's third stage, there is the belief that it would be difficult to create a theoretical framework free of any past influences, particularly the history of male dominance. This viewpoint contends that we cannot escape our social and intellectual environments and, ironically, that traditional thought may be seen as a means of developing feminist theory since the more we comprehend the sexual politics of our cultural and intellectual heritage, the better able we are to critique and reshape it. Here, feminist ideology is seen as exposing the incomplete and sexualized nature of current theoretical knowledge. This strategy is known as deconstruct and transform. If conventional thinking is compared to a wool sweater, the point of view may be stated as "don't throw away the wool, but rather unravel and restitch the jumper, perhaps multiple times." (p.24)

Beasley (1999) maintains that women's subordinate status in society and politics has been widely accepted and affirmed by mainstream social and political worldviews, either directly or implicitly, according to feminist writers. Through the years, women have been constrained to specific positions of partial helpmates, where they are defined in terms of men's requirements for pleasure, the provision of services, children, and other things. Women were regarded as inferior, faulty, or imperfect in this partiality-based view of gender. Nowadays, most of Western thought still reflects this point of view.

Furthermore, feminists discovered in conventional thought a view of women as distinct but complementary. This narrative purports to value both genders equally. In reality, however, women are not simply seen as different but as the complete opposite of males. In other words, women are defined as males rather than primarily for men. The standard is man, and when compared to that ideal, women are defined negatively. Man becomes the idealized version, and woman is the being with excess or deficient parts. In these ideas, the relationship between men and women was considered to be different but complementary, as Simone de Beauvoir emphasized: "He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (Beasley, 1999, p.27).

Beasley (1999) puts forward the idea that feminists believe that one of the primary issues with mainstream Western social and political thought is its propensity to universalize experiences related to men, that is, to portray men's experiences as defining that which is shared

by all people. Contemporary feminist writers frequently observe a distinctive formulation of the mainstream theory that groups concepts into dualisms at first (oppositional pairs). A hierarchy can also be found in each dualism. Instead of a coupling where both sides are equally weighted, one side of each opposition is portrayed more favourably and more important than the Other. In other words, a set of lop-sided conceptual pairs traditionally organizes Western thought in advance. Such pairs tend to be easily recognizable because they are such an accepted premise in the “Western” understanding of the world, as shown in the list below:

**Table 1**

*Reframing Mainstream Theories: Challenging Dualisms and Oppositional Pairs*

man/woman.	freedom/bondage.
subject/object.	active/passive.
culture, society/nature.	public/private.
human/animal general.	universal/particular.
reason/emotion.	Politics, Law, morality/personal.
logic/intuition.	Familial, biological.
selfhood, being/Otherness.	Presence/ absence.
non-being.	Light/dark.
independence/dependence.	Good/evil.
autonomy/interconnection.	Adam/eve.

*Note.* Adapted from *What Is and Is Not a Pair* by Beasley (1999, p. 9).

As a movement that claims to be revolutionary with remarkable standpoints against the patriarchy and traditional thought, one can only wonder what is distinctive about Feminism, how it revolutionized femininity and womanhood, and what it offers to the international table of discussion. One can posit that there are many ways and approaches through which someone can understand the distinctiveness of Feminism depending on the perspective from which one views it. The author argues that there are at least five ways to approach this issue.

The initial viewpoint presented by Beasley (1999) suggests the notion that some feminists advocate for similarity. They attempt to change the perception of women as flawed

or inferior in popular thinking because they believe that men and women are essentially the same. These feminists advocate for an approach in which women are recognized as having the same level of "humanity" as males, as defined by conventional wisdom, and in which female oppression is defined as the limitation of women's human potential. This is an assimilation suggestion that women are expected to enter the male-dominated sphere because they are perceived as being capable of doing what men do and as capable of being "men".

The second perspective that Beasley (1999) offers is that other feminists support the idea that women are separate from males, or at least perceive their agenda concerning women's cultural composition as distinct. The idea that the sexes are different but complementary must be rethought from this perspective. The assumption of hierarchy that underlies this description of the sexes found in conventional Western social and political theory is challenged by such an approach, which operates within the framework of difference. Contrary to conventional wisdom, which holds that women's differences from males are signs of their inferiority, these feminists promote sexual diversity. Gynocentric Feminism is the term used to describe this strategy. Concerns around separatists, or women's purposeful decision to maintain some sort of separation from men, may be on their agenda.

Beasley (1999) further suggests a third perspective of feminist thought by stating that the 'sameness' and 'different' positions are often presented as an either/or choice, although a growing number of diverse feminist writers in the 1990s expressed reservations about this framework of antagonistic alternatives. They avoid the sameness/difference dichotomy by reorienting their analysis to the issue of power organization and effects. Although such writers in some ways give more credence to a perspective recognizing women's (socially and culturally constituted) "difference", they are less inclined than the previous grouping to celebrate the strategic or other possibilities of femininity. Instead, they minimize the importance of the issue of the similarity or differences between men and women in favour of thinking about potential strategies which resist or destabilize sexual hierarchy. The narratives of women provided by conventional social and political philosophy are intended to serve as illuminating case studies for the analysis of power.

An additional perspective put forth by Beasley (1999) is that many feminist authors employ an alliance or coalitional structure. Men and women can be partners in related (quite similar) battles since they are not so much of the same kind (in an ontological sense) as possible political allies. The question of sexual difference—whether or not women and men are sexually similar—is seen through the prism of political conflict. Arenas of resemblance and/or connection are produced by political conflict and alliance in response to sexual or other types

of power. On this premise, it can be said that it is beginning a reinterpretation of mainstream theory, which is concerned with portraying women as defective males and/or with that theory's portrayal of women as distinct and inferior.

Nevertheless, this viewpoint gives little consideration to social, cultural, or other comparisons between the alleged traits of the sexes. Women and men may be seen as similar or distinct by feminist writers who adopt this approach, but regardless of their opinions, these writers exhibit significant skepticism toward any position that categorizes all women as a single group. Therefore, the issue of sexual diversity is not seen as being particularly important in and of itself. Instead, sexual diversity becomes one viewpoint among many with a focus on potential coalitions that challenge structures of authority. This method is typically used by feminists who are interested in issues of race and ethnicity, but it has also been used by some socialist and poststructuralist/postmodernist Feminisms (Beasley 1999).

Finally, Beasley (1999) suggests that some feminists believe that women are ethically superior to males and are therefore better than men. This theory entails an inversion, rather than reworking, of the common conception of the sexes as different but complementary. In this instance, the conventional theory's assumption that sexual difference is related to a hierarchical connection between the sexes is proven to be false. The idea that women are superior to males is frequently associated with the idea that women are naturally and inherently superior. The inherent advantage of women may be seen as resulting from their unique moral and ethical makeup, their unique physical characteristics, or the uniqueness of their shared experience.

Taking into account the above-mentioned classifications and perspectives, one can argue that the distinctiveness of the movement lies in the commonly accepted fact that women are the center of analysis. Even though Feminism is not identified with women only, the concept of womanhood is placed at the center. The act of positioning women as the subject is based on a critique of traditional ideas of male supremacy and primacy, yet the repositioning of women and the critical framework for that repositioning both open analytical possibilities. The broader notion of what might be referred to as "politics" or "social" life, an extended definition of what is to be studied, goes hand in hand with this new substance, focus, and orientation within feminist philosophy which was new in terms of mainstream Western thought. As an illustration, the home, the private sphere, bodies, sexuality, emotion, and children are included in the study, a shift that according to Beasley (1999) is aptly summarized by the slogan "the personal is political." (p.19).

The complicated ideology of Feminism changed history, redefined what it meant to be a woman, and gained popularity over the years since it stood for ideas and ideals that went

against the patriarchy and conventional wisdom. Many women came together to speak up for their rights and aspirations, carrying on their legacy. The movements went through various phases known as "waves," and each one made a significant contribution to the process of redefining femininity.

### **III.3.1. Waves of Feminism: Tracing the Journey of Feminist Thought**

In the annals of social progress and gender equality, the history of Feminism is a complex and ever-evolving narrative. It unfolds as a journey of perseverance, activism, and transformation. At its core, Feminism represents a collective effort to challenge and transform deeply ingrained systems of inequality and discrimination. The movement has evolved, giving rise to distinct "waves" of Feminist thought and action, each with its defining characteristics and goals. The successive waves of Feminism, offer insight into the changing landscape of gender equality, social justice, and the ongoing pursuit of a more equitable world. By examining the waves of Feminism, one can better understand the enduring impact and evolving nature of this vital movement.

Commonly referred to as the "waves of change" as how the feminist struggle has changed over time. It is commonly acknowledged that four waves can be identified throughout the history of the feminist movements. Each wave denotes a certain cultural era and women's media participation. The social, political, and cultural standing of women in society has been changed by the feminist movement, which is based on several political and social initiatives. Feminism has taken many different shapes and gone through numerous waves, but its significance for easing women's oppressed status in contemporary societies continues to grow. Moreover, each wave serves as a critical chapter in a larger story of progress, resilience, and the relentless pursuit of justice.

#### **III.3.1.1. First-Wave Feminism: Forging Equality**

In many ways, the French Revolution and the late eighteenth century marked the beginning of Feminism as we know it today. At this time, new constitutions were being drafted, declarations of men's rights were being made and expanded, and it was becoming abundantly clear that men's rights were sex-specific and did not apply to women. First-wave Feminism was built on the principles of feminist thinking and action. As a result, the women's movements and feminist movements got their start in the middle of the nineteenth century in the United States and the United Kingdom. It was a movement created by women for women demanding several

rights that had long been ignored by the public: rights to education, rights to guardianship, and employment rights, but most importantly, rights to citizenship and legal and political representation.

Gray and Boddy (2010) explored the concept of the waves of Feminism in arguing that the first wave of Feminism was marked by Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) in which she acts in response to those who disregarded women's rights, disregarded their right to an education, supported discrimination, and supported all forms of inequality in society. Mary Wollstonecraft was considered one of the founding mothers of Feminism as her book was often referred to as the feminist declaration of independence or a feminist Manifesto. However, many people who read it for the first time might interpret it as a cry for aid from a woman who was furious because she thought it was incredibly unfair that the only career options available to an unmarried woman were those of a seamstress, governess, lady's companion, servant, or prostitute/courtesan. She believed that in these conditions it was impossible to truly achieve independence, dignity, and decency.

Falco (2010) argues that as a woman who supported herself by writing, Wollstonecraft referred to herself as "a new genus" (p.17) and she was most likely right. Even the most famous female novelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, like Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters, could hardly be considered to have made a living solely from their writing. As a woman who defended her ideology and wrote at a time when Feminism and democracy had not fully emerged, one can argue that she was indeed one of the early feminists who set the pillars of the movement as we know it today.

Mohajan (2022) argues that women in the early first-wave Feminism were liberal, naturalistic feminists who saw suffrage for women as the most important socio-political issue. Its main initiative was an individualist and reformist assault against sexist regulations and societal standards. Their main purpose was to make it clear in policy that women are not men's property but rather human beings in their own right, as well as securing voting rights. In addition to promoting women's suffrage, they battled against women's exploitation and subjugation. It is a crucial period in history that brought about substantial social change and established a larger foundation for equality for women in every sphere, including the right to vote, the right to education, the right to inherit their father's property, and others. It sought to transform society away from patriarchy and liberate people from racial prejudice's tyranny.

Major organizations were created during the first wave of Feminism to further feminist objectives and express their aspirations and needs. Following the demise of the "American Equal Rights Association" in 1866, the "National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA)" and

the "American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA)" were established. While the AWSA demanded that women have the right to vote, the NWSA sought to strive for the national uplift of women. Finally, the two organizations merged to create the "National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)" in the same year. Young feminist Alice Paul founded the "National Woman's Party (NWP)" in 1916 after NAWSA dissolved (1885-1977) (Mohajan, 2022).

#### Figure 14

*The woman suffrage headquarters on Euclid Ave., 1912. Holding the flag is Florence E. Allen. (Library of Congress)*



*Note. Adapted from Cleveland's Feminist Voices: A History of the Women's Movement by Simakis (2019), retrieved from the Library of Congress.*

It is argued that numerous suffragists' and suffragettes' contributions to the success of rights liberation and vindication came from different fields, and their writings and demands were echoed to the authorities, announcing various legal requirements that were frequently disregarded when the topic of women was brought up. Important figures such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Millicent Fawcett, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, and many other influential



women came to the surface to alter the reality that was no longer tolerable as it was controlled by the patriarchy that could just not accept women to have what we see today as basic rights. By continuing their protests, one can argue that women from all social levels put their health, careers, and reputations in danger. The organizations described above, who stood in for these women's needs and desires, turned the suffrage prisoners into heroes, held celebrations in their honour, and gave them commemorative pins. To garner public support for their cause, women went on press tours dressed as inmates and spoke about their experiences. The anti-suffrage groups tried their best to put an end to what they labeled a movement of "mad women," but the movement was too powerful to be halted, and because women were making such a significant contribution to the war at the time, their voices could not be silenced either.

Mohajan (2022) asserts that on June 4, 1919, the US Senate approved the 19th amendment, and in 1920, Congress granted women the right to vote. Women began to have partial or full voting rights in the majority of European nations and colonies in the 1950s. Women were granted the right to vote in the majority of European countries, including Russia, Germany, Austria, and the UK in 1918; Belgium in 1919; the US and Canada in 1920; Ireland in 1928; and Spain in 1931, among others. It focused on achieving political and legal rights, such as women's fundamental rights to access to public spaces, education, employment, and voting. Additionally, it advocated for women to assume respectable positions within the household for women and enjoy equal property rights. It also emphasized the importance of women's reproductive, sexual, and economic rights in society. During this movement, three basic forms of Feminism—liberal, radical, and cultural Feminism—have flourished.

Moreover, for women, the first wave brought both positive and negative developments. Global activists were brought together for a shared cause, and the movement moved forward with ease thanks to a rigorous structure. However, one can argue that it was somehow flawed because it largely ignored the predicament of Black women and concentrated instead on that of white women, many of whom were middle-class Westerners. The public opinion was set to believe that the US Constitution's 15th amendment, which would have granted Black males the ability to vote before them, was opposed by some campaigners. Additionally, it was also believed that it reinforced segregationist and racial intolerance.

### **III.3.1.2. Second Wave: The Resurgence of Feminism**

The 1960s marked the beginning of second-wave Feminism, which lasted for three decades, ending in the 1990s. In this movement, sexuality and reproductive rights were the main

talking points. After World War II, when a large number of women started working, the movement began to challenge preconceived ideas about what a woman's place should be in the home, the workplace, and society. Several political Feminisms, including Marxist, socialist, ecological, essentialist, and existentialist Feminisms, gained in popularity throughout this phase.

Gray and Body (2010) argue that second-wave Feminism, which developed after World War II when many women entered the labour field, took many different forms in contrast to first-wave feminists. Women's roles in the home, the workplace, and society as a whole were contested by second-wave feminists. They made the sexual division of labour clear and helped to advance women's equality in the workforce. Second-wave feminists worked to address a variety of concerns, such as equitable pay, access to childcare, employment and educational opportunities, reproductive rights, and the safety of women and children. Feminists strove to offer a new and more female-focused perspective when it came to certain psychoanalytic theories during this period as there was a certain amount of criticism that challenged the basics of such theories.

Gray and Body (2010) further contend that early on in the second wave of Feminism, gender was stressed, and gender binaries predominated, with racial and economic problems being seen as secondary to gender: “There are two sorts of people in the world, the superior and inferior, or in terms of power relations, the dominant and the subordinate. We are all equal irrespective of our gender. Social relations that obliterate this fact must therefore be transformed and recreated in ways that reflect equality in terms of gender” (p.3). The scholars argued that second-wave Feminism had different perspectives and roles and they explained them as it is shown in the following table:

**Table 2**

*Some Forms of Second-Wave Feminism*

Type	Liberal – equal opportunity – Feminism	Socialist (Marxist) (UK) and radical (US) – Feminism	Cultural – difference – Feminism	Social-welfare Feminism – shares much with liberal Feminism	Black and lesbian Feminism	Postmodern – academic – difference-recognition Feminism	Post-colonial – Third World - Feminism
Key project or argument	Promote women's rights, equal opportunity for and equal treatment of women while not upsetting the capitalist status quo - ignore nonwhite, middle-class, heterosexual women' Argues women should have the <i>same</i> opportunities as men even though they're <i>different</i> – see differences between the sexes as complementary	Collective and revolutionary stance to attack subordination, exploitation, and abuse of women as a product of the inequalities caused and maintained by capitalism Sought to uncover the root causes of female oppression and revolutionize consciousness by arguing that women were equal to men	Argues that women have innate, ethical characteristics and values that are superior to men's. Hence cultural feminists sought to reclaim women's roles, especially motherhood, with pride highlighting the way they were devalued by men	Rallies state to compensate for the inequities generated by the capitalist market system. Reinstates 'working class' women. Highlights how welfare creates an underclass of women and Contradicts the stereotype of the no-good welfare queen	<i>Black Feminism</i> pushes a social welfare feminist perspective. Highlights the exclusionary nature of most 'white, middle-class' feminist discourse. <i>Lesbian Feminism</i> highlights the dominance of heterosexuality	Creates a discourse that re-writes (re-rights) Feminism in response to its past failures, thus making Feminism plural or all-encompassing by questioning Western universalisms	Dominant feminist discourse presumes a white, middle-class a woman who has made some gains in the equality war and overlooks the fact that many women in poor and marginalized communities remain oppressed
Key concern – rallying cry	<i>Rights and representation</i> Choice and right to participate in the economy Work in the public sphere was seen as an add-on to women's work in the home Freedom of expression hence the tendency to take a permissive line on pornography	<i>Redistribution</i> Criticized patriarchy, gendered division of labour, and care as unpaid women's work. Sought distance from male-dominated Left/Marxism Sought to socialize domestic labour by removing it from its naturalized – by liberals – association with women's work in the home	<i>Reconfiguring women's</i> differences by highlighting, indeed celebrating, the virtues of women. See sex as a biological fact and gender as socially constructed but counter androgynies and complementary differences. Hence run the risk of essentialism – women as nurturers. This gave rise to an ethics of care	<i>Reform</i> The government should provide resources and opportunities for women. Questions the liberal, socialist, and radical ideas modeled on the middle-class woman championing those unable to participate in the labour market who, therefore, were suffering from shrinking welfare benefits	<i>Reimagining (equality)</i> Challenged the hegemony of the white middle-class heterosexual woman. Caught between this and the male-dominated civil rights movement	<i>'Re-writing'</i> Initially, most academic feminists were socialist or radical feminists who came from the educated, white, middle class in their formative years. Has extended critiques of capitalism from class and production to racial difference, homophobia, sexuality, ideology, and culture	<i>Repositioning</i> Postcolonial Feminism, for example, critiques Western imperialism and its subordination of whole peoples, races, and ethnic groups. It draws attention to the importance of Indigenous and local cultures and argues from their standpoint or perspective against Western hegemony
Campaigning platform	Juridical reform Affirmative action and anti-discrimination campaigns. Peaceful protest	For radicals, all women were part of the oppressed underclass Politicized personal and private	Theories that proclaim the power of women from strong CF are available in Daly's Gyn/Ecology and Collard's Ecofeminism and weak CF in Gilligan's Ethic of care	Better conditions for women on welfare and working-class women	Relations of domination and white – heterosexual – privilege that disempower Black – and lesbian – women	Pluralism and difference Undermining 'othering' by reclaiming women as subject	Feminization of poverty – the bulk of the world's poor are women and poverty affects women disproportionately
Proffered solution	Equal rights and freedoms for women in a democratic society Pro-women and pro-family legislation	Capitalist restructuring and redistribution	Different voice Feminism – women's voices must be heard, cultural spaces for women created	Better childcare Livable welfare benefits Opportunities for work	Education and organizing of Black and lesbian women and advocacy for their rights	Deconstruction of discourses to show they contribute to women's oppression by promoting male-dominated discourses	Organization and empowerment of women in poor communities

Main programs	Abortion rights – Prochoice; affirmative action campaigns; measures to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace	Rape Crisis movement, women’s shelters, domestic violence and sexual assault services; ‘pro-sex’ sex education; and an end to sterilization abuse	Women’s virtue and value of women’s contribution <i>vis a vis</i> ethic of care	Focus on work-family agenda and calls for expanded state programs.	Moves focus on racism beyond (white) self-examination Organization and education of Black women	Women’s studies programs Feminist journals Feminist literature	Critique programs that continue to disempower women, especially in NGOs controlled by men and overseas Western based - organizations
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*Note.* This table summarizes different types of Second-Wave Feminism, highlighting their key projects, rallying cries, platforms, solutions, programs, and contributions to feminist discourse. Adapted from "Some Forms of Second-Wave Feminism" by Gray & Body (2010), p. 5.

### III.3.1.2.1. Empowering Women: Simone De Beauvoir and *The Second Sex* (1949)

Establishing equality for women was not the only goal of second-wave Feminism. In addition, it emphasized the philosophical underpinnings of what it meant to be a woman in a world where men predominated. The French feminist, philosopher, and author Simone de Beauvoir popularized the notion that women were viewed as males. A discussion concerning how women had been treated and regarded, as well as where they were about males, was started by her 1949 book *The Second Sex*. The patronizing belief that a woman is not as much herself as a male is has always been something Beauvoir criticized.

Because she frequently addressed complex and philosophical topics in her writings, Beauvoir was not only a feminist writer but also regarded as a philosopher. Beauvoir (1949) asks, "What is a woman?" (p.13). Ultimately, she concluded that "one is not born but becomes a woman" (p.13). A woman, she explained, is not born but rather acquired. This gave women all across the world inspiration. She argued that stronger social power structures had an impact on non-political spheres of life, such as family and relationships. Her book made an effort to expose the fabricated nature of womanhood and to reject it. A woman wanting freedom, according to her, must face her biology. Compare this to extreme feminist positions that aim to elevate women's bodies. The main argument of *The Second Sex* is that men have oppressed women for ages and have treated them as their "Other". Therefore, according to Beauvoir, the category of Otherness is necessary for the formation of the self.

It can be contended that Simone de Beauvoir illustrated the notion that men often perceive women as the "Other" when they assume the role of the "Self." Typically, the situation

is reversed. According to Beauvoir's Introduction, she argued that being a woman is a result of circumstances, not a necessity or an inherent trait. In her framework, women are positioned as the "Other" in contrast to men, who are considered the "Absolute." Beauvoir maintained that transcendence and immanence coexist in the human experience. Nevertheless, men have historically had the liberty to exercise their transcendence through various initiatives, while women have been confined to a routine and uninspired existence of immanence. Beauvoir endeavored to fathom the origins of this profoundly unequal relationship and to discern the attitudes, assumptions, and mechanisms that uphold it.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1949) concludes by outlining the changes needed for a woman to restore her freedom and identity. She first argues that women should be allowed to transcend through their creative endeavors, with all the hazards involved. According to Louise de Beauvoir, ensuring women's equality requires that they be financially independent of men. To achieve this freedom, Beauvoir believes that women would benefit from non-alienating, non-exploitative productive labor. Simply put, having more liberty would be very beneficial for women. When it comes to marriage, Beauvoir asserts that while the nuclear family is bad for both couples, it is worse for the woman. Like all real decisions, getting married must be freely chosen according to the author. Since only an individual can choose the kind of life they want to lead, Beauvoir recommended against focusing on predefined frameworks or limitations.

De Beauvoir (1949) further argues that femininity is not innate but rather a social construct created through extensive socialization. According to her, these three characteristics were mostly responsible for women's inferiority. Women were first taught to always assist males, which is how they came to be and how they relate to them today. Second, to be accepted by society, women were urged to externalize qualities associated with femininity including docility, altruism, and attractiveness. Third, women have had fewer rights than men historically. She contends that women's inferiority did not make them historically unimportant; rather, it was the historical unimportance that condemned women to an inferior position. Card (2003) in her book *The Cambridge Companion to Simone De Beauvoir*, displayed certain interviews where De Beauvoir explained such concepts. The author stated in one of the interviews:

The point is not for women simply to take power out of men's hands since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It is a question precisely of destroying that notion of power. That's it. On this, I completely agree women must master many, many things, but not seize power and dominate others. I'm certain, in fact, that this idea of domination is one of the features of the masculine

universe that must be totally destroyed, that we must look for reciprocity, collaboration, etc. (p. 190-191).

Additionally, one can argue that the author challenges the idea of power itself, claiming that feminist ideology aims to destroy power from the inside out rather than seize it. She goes on to say that femininity is more about appreciating our feminine side than wanting to be manly. It is about stepping away from masculinity and enjoying every facet of femininity. Many women at the time questioned the true nature of femininity and what it meant to be a woman in response to the concerns posed by De Beauvoir in her book. The author claimed that the woman felt confused and unsure of herself. Like De Beauvoir, many women had lost faith in the existence of women, the idea that they would always exist, the idea that it is necessary to wish for them to exist, or even the idea of where they should exist in this world. But most importantly, defining what it is to be a woman was a crucial need, and to answer such a deep question, many feminist writers produced such works as *Sister Outsider* (1984) by Audre Lorde, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf and many other who sought to answer questions.

### **III.3.1.2.2. Rebellious Against Conformity: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)**

The second wave of feminist debates focused on more intricate questions about women's rights issues. When the activist and writer Betty Friedan released her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, many people credited her with launching the second wave of Feminism. She referred to the unsaid, unspoken frustration of women restricted to the job of homemaker as "the problem that has no name" since it was a sentiment that many women were unaware they shared. During the second wave of women's rights activism, Friedan rose to prominence as one of the most important advocates for middle-class white women.

The work of Beauvoir serves as the foundation for Friedan's work. To address the challenges many women were encountering, however, one can argue that Friedan not only used philosophical ideas to describe Feminism, but she also included oral histories and her own experiences. To find out if other women experienced the same levels of dissatisfaction and "malaise" as housewives, Friedan initially conducted a study on the place of women in society. She was surprised to find that she was not alone, and the information for her first book came from her interviews. She criticized the segregated "sphere" of motherhood and housework that

women were consigned to in her book. Men, on the other hand, were permitted to excel in the "man realm" of power, politics, and employment. In her book, feminist Betty Friedan urged women to leave their comfort zones and take up the cause of gender inequality (National Women's History Museum, 2020).

According to the National Women's History Museum (2020), within the first three years, Friedan's book sold over three million copies and helped revive the feminist movement. Women of the middle class across the nation started to band together to promote the social and political equality of women. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was enacted by President John F. Kennedy the same year *The Feminine Mystique* was released. Women may no longer be paid less than males for performing "equivalent labor" in the same position, according to the new regulation. A group of women in the White House, led by labor organizer Esther Peterson, produced such a game-changing Act.

In 1961, Peterson was selected to lead the Department of Labour's Women's Bureau. To further equality, she persuaded President Kennedy to create the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. Eleanor Roosevelt and Dorothy Height were among the radical women who served on the commission. Peterson represented the Kennedy administration by submitting a draft of the Equal Pay Act to Congress after working with the panel. Two additional legal triumphs after the Equal Pay Act of 1963 helped advance the cause of women's rights. Some feminists' rights were upheld by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the *Griswold v. Connecticut* Supreme Court decision in 1965, which fueled their advocacy for women's equality. Employers were prohibited from discriminating against workers on the grounds of race, religion, sex, or national origin under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Many acts followed afterward that served against gender-biased standpoints. Some women now have more freedom in their private and public lives as a result of these legislative wins. However, many women of colour continued to live under disenfranchisement (National Women's History Museum, 2020).

It can be posited that with the aid of fresh ideas and viewpoints presented in feminist works like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and by well-known feminists who were then just starting to gain notoriety, the second wave of Feminism marked the transformation and regeneration of women's rights. Thus, starting in the early 1960s, women began to have more assertive demands and wishes to alter the established order. This trend persisted throughout the 1970s and 1980s and continues now. Even at that time, when the Second World War was in progress and provided women with employment options, there was

still a significant deal of discrimination since women were still not paid equally to males. It was nevertheless regarded as a significant step toward greater future hopes and accomplishments.

Mohajan (2022) contends that the second wave of Feminism broadened the scope of feminist politics to include women's personal lives in the fight against sexist male behaviour. The second wave of Feminism is driven by both white and non-white women in the West as well as in developing nations, in contrast to the first wave, which is only led by white middle-class women in the West. In this period, the slogan "The Personal is Political" was created by feminist Carol Hanisch in 1969, while "Identity Politics" was created by the Combahee River Collective (CRC) in 1977. Each of these slogans represented the pinnacle of second-wave Feminism and exposed social, political, and cultural injustices. Moreover, they showed how oppression based on race, class, and gender was all interconnected.

One can argue that the initiative to educate women about their sexuality and reproductive rights was encouraged. It operated in opposition to civil rights and anti-war attitudes. It also covered a wide range of other issues, including the right to an adequate standard of living for children, the establishment of adequate childcare facilities, the establishment of birth control and abortion rights, and the right to equal access to political and economic positions. Additionally, it focused on themes related to marital rape, sexual assault, misogyny, legal disparities, pornography, prostitution, and the sexual exploitation of women's bodies. In addition, it seeks to alter divorce and custody laws and establish rape crisis centers and women's shelters. It requires numerous efforts to eradicate gender disparity in society.

### **III.3.1.2.3. Women's Liberation Movement: Paving the Way to Equality and Empowerment**

During the 1960s and 1970s, the women's rights movement, also known as the women's liberation movement, was a varied social movement with a strong American foundation that aimed to provide women more individual liberty and equal opportunities. It was part of the second-wave Feminism and was contemporaneous with it. The women's rights movement's second wave of Feminism focused on every aspect of women's experience, including politics, work, the family, and sexuality, while the first wave of Feminism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was primarily concerned with women's legal rights, particularly the right to vote.

After World War II, one can assert that women's lives in developed nations saw a significant transformation. Life expectancies rose sharply, household technology reduced the duties of housework, and the expansion of the service industry created thousands of occupations



that did not require physical strength. Despite these economic changes, cultural attitudes (particularly those related to women's employment), and legal precedents continued to support sexual inequality. Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* (1949) in which she articulated the oppressive repercussions of prevalent ideas of femininity. By emphasizing that males could also be freed due to women's liberation, it became a big seller all over the world and increased feminist awareness.

Gloria Steinem, according to the National Women's History Museum (2020) is a feminist author, who attracted widespread attention by disguising herself as a Playboy Bunny. Her exposé, "*A Bunny's Tale*," brought attention to the misogyny and low pay experienced by women in these clubs. Steinem went on to emerge as one of the second wave's most well-known figures. She co-founded "New York" and "Ms." magazines and wrote about anything from rape to abortion as political problems. In 1969, Steinem made her first public speech during a rally for abortion rights in New York State. She soon started writing and publishing books that would inspire a new wave of Feminism. Her writings were published with a wide range of other feminist works such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* in 1969, Juliet Mitchell's *The Subjection of Women* in 1970, and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* in 1970, during a time when the women's liberation movement was developing.

In support of women's rights and freedom, the movement included women's liberation organizations, advocacy, protests, consciousness-raising, feminist theory, and a wide range of various individual and group actions. The concept was coined as an allegory for contemporaneous campaigns for freedom and emancipation. An uprising against colonial powers or an oppressive national government to secure independence for a national group and put an end to persecution was at the core of the concept. It was frequently viewed as opposing individualistic Feminism. Although there were substantial disagreements between the organizations and conflicts within the movement, the people and groups were connected by shared ideologies. The concepts of the women's liberation movement from the 1960s and 1970s have been the subject of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry written by women. Among these feminist authors were Gloria Steinem, Simone de Beauvoir, Frances M. Beal, Carol Hanisch, Shulamith Firestone, Audre Lorde, Kate Millett, Robin Morgan, Marge Piercy, and Adrienne Rich (National Women's History Museum, 2020).

Overall, the Women's Liberation Movement has been a transformative force in the pursuit of gender equality. It has challenged societal norms, inspired change, and empowered women to break free from constraints that have held them back for generations. As we reflect on its history, we recognize the significant strides made while acknowledging that the journey

toward full equality continues. The Women's Liberation Movement stands as a testament to the power of collective action and the enduring fight for justice and inclusivity.

#### **III.3.1.2.4. Challenging Conventions: Germaine Greer and *The Female Eunuch* (1970)**

In the second feminist wave, Germaine Greer wrote *The Female Eunuch* (1970). The book examined the restrictions placed on women's lives and selves within the broader context of the era's liberation movements. It sparked a surge of awareness among women all over the world, became a global bestseller, marked a turning point in the history of the women's movement, and was widely reprinted and translated. Greer's writing career was launched by this, which was followed by several popular and academic works including *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work* (1979) and *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility* (1984).

One can argue that the biggest contribution made by Greer is her understanding that elevated ideals cannot change the common, everyday circumstances that affect how women move in various contexts. According to Greer, a woman seeking an immediate end to her tyranny is left feeling hopeless by both conventional political methods and the Marxist expectation of a revolution. Greer suggests that instead of trying to change the world, the woman should start by reevaluating herself. The body is where the female eunuch starts. If the degree of inferiority or inherent dependence, which is unavoidably feminine is unknown, a case for female liberty cannot be made. In other words, Greer argued the romantic role and the limits of women's sexuality stating that gender roles are not natural or innate but learned. The author was against any stereotypes, laws, or powerful statements that conditioned girls to conform to a very restrictive femininity.

Greer (1970) further explains her ideology stating that we may be aware of who we are, but not of what we may have become. To uncover the developmental opportunities that conditioning has buried, women must challenge basic assumptions about what it means to be a woman. So, we must begin with cell sex, which is the very first step. Chromosomal variations have little significance unless they are developmental. No growth takes place in a vacuum. From the beginning, preconceptions whose origins we do not know and whose characteristics we cannot easily abandon define what is considered feminine. According to Greer's new idea, anything we see or think we understand could be false. This theory aims to explain how bystanders have concealed and perverted female sexuality.

According to Greer (1970), our perception of and approval of the girl we know (or aspire to know) is conditioned according to Greer. Her book *The Female Eunuch* looks at the causes of this kind of indoctrination. Women are viewed as sexual objects, their value and utility directly dependent on the desires of other sexual beings, primarily males. Her sexuality is rejected and misunderstood throughout the process. Her internal organs are hidden from images of femininity, just as her body is hidden from images of independence. Greer claims that the castrate acquires "timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy, and preciousness" as desirable characteristics.

Greer (1970) critiques all systems and ideologies in her book that downplay the value of women's contributions to society and the global economy. She also rejects conforming to what society considers to be ideal standards for being a wife, lover, sister, etc., as well as what a perfect home and marriage should entail. She further asserts that when women accuse males of abuse, rape, or sexual assault, it is rapidly assumed that they are indulging in a rebellion against men in which they are either waging conflict with or attacking them. Sadly, it only encourages misogyny and additionally, it makes it more difficult for both sexes to combat injustice. Women are still defined by male ideas, and despite prior development, they still have not fully established their potential. The recurring theme that she addresses in different contexts throughout the book is "Woman has yet to become." In contrast to "equality Feminism," which encouraged women to want to "be like men" rather than be like a newly defined woman, Greer has defined a style of Feminism called "liberation Feminism" with the goal of describing how women may act in the world.

In conclusion, Germaine Greer's groundbreaking work, *The Female Eunuch* (1970) has left an indelible mark on the feminist movement and the study of gender. This influential book challenged societal norms, ignited discussions on women's liberation, and encouraged readers to critically examine the role of women in modern society. Greer's work continues to inspire and provoke thought, underscoring the enduring importance of her contributions to feminist literature and gender studies.

### **III.3.1.3. Third-Wave Feminism: The Modern Feminist Frontier**

In response to the perceived limitations of the second wave of Feminism, the emergence of a third wave in the 1990s marked both a continuation and a reaction. Within this movement, branches such as postcolonial Feminism, ecofeminism, and gender studies gained prominence. Feminist intellectuals involved in this wave actively advocated for social justice on behalf of

women. Unlike the second wave, the third wave did not adhere to a single, rigid ideology. It was characterized by greater diversity in terms of individual preferences, personal expressions, and attitudes toward sexuality. Third-wave feminists tended to approach issues of class and race with more caution and sensitivity, which set them apart from some second-wave feminists. Consequently, contemporary feminists have shown a greater willingness to engage in activities that were once considered controversial and to leverage their influence in areas like media, politics, and the political process.

Mohajan (2022) claims that diverse ways of thinking and movements from the 1990s to the 2000s are representative of the third wave. Heteronormativity and body positivity are brought to light. In her well-known piece *Becoming the Third Wave* from 1992, feminist Rebecca Walker, the daughter of Alice Walker, introduced the term "third-wave Feminism." It is driven by Generation X academics and activists who were born in the developed world in the 1960s and 1970s. In actuality, many third-wave feminists are the daughters of second-wavers. Accordingly, Rebecca Walker is regarded as the pioneer of this movement. She made sure to embody the third-wave feminist, who was raised in opposing feminist systems and does not share her mother's second-wave feminist experiences or viewpoints.

Mohajan (2022) quotes Walker (1992) who made a well-known plea in which she stated: "So, I write this as a plea to all women, especially women of my generation: Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power" (p.41). At the time, feminists and women characterized this wave in terms of what it meant to them personally. For certain women, this entailed pursuing a career, working full-time, and raising children. For others, it involved deciding against marriage and opting to remain single because they found it more convenient to maintain their single status rather than leaving the workforce after a career to become a full-time mother.

Mohajan (2022) further contends that third-wave feminists consider themselves to be strong, capable, and forceful social agents who, in comparison to the first and second-wavers, have greater opportunities and less sexism. Because of the strong and rebellious nature of the women who participated in this movement and the lack of sexism in the workplace, the third wave of Feminism is frequently referred to as "power Feminism." It begins with the upheaval brought on by the new postcolonial and neoliberal international order. With comprehensive philosophies like cultural Feminism, Black Feminism, and postmodern Feminism, it gives a dynamic analysis that receives international recognition. It emphasizes "universal womanhood," which focuses on shifting from collective goals to individual rights.

This movement supported abortion rights and campaigned against rape, group sexual assault, sexual violence at work, and unjust maternity leave laws. It was international because it embraced sexuality positively and acknowledged that women are of all colours, ethnicities, countries, faiths, and cultural origins. The third wave of Feminism included several feminist movements, including netgrrls, transFeminism, riot grrl, cybergrrl, girlie, and grrl Feminism. All these movements sought different societal rights and goals, but one could argue that they all shared a common starting point and motivation, which was to reconstruct womanhood and decolonize culture by eradicating the hegemonic stereotypes that had previously excluded such women from many rights (Mohajan, 2022).

Third-wave feminists frequently take contradiction, pluralism, and hybridity for granted because no single narrative of oppression applies to all women in all circumstances all the time. Mohajan (2022) states that According to Gamble (2001), third-wave Feminism is mostly a byproduct of university cultural studies programs and popular media. It can take a variety of forms, some of which are more prevalent than others, and it affects change in a variety of ways. Researchers consider it as having two forms for the sake of this discussion: Both post Feminism and integrative Feminism are fundamentally neoliberal in outlook.

In conclusion, third-wave feminists have situated themselves within a historical timeline that can be traced back to the second wave of the feminist movement. Yet, they compellingly argue that the feminist experience today is notably distinct, primarily due to the rapid advancement of the internet and technology. The transformative impact of these digital tools has reshaped how Feminism is practiced and how its message is disseminated. Third-wave Feminism, rooted in history but firmly anchored in the present, continues to evolve, adapt, and advocate for gender equality in an ever-changing world.

#### **III.4. Intersectionality and Black Feminist Thought: Bridging Perspectives**

It is contended that The Civil Rights Movement had already reached its peak by the time the second wave of Feminism emerged. After being freed from slavery, African American men and women still had to battle prejudice, brutality, and segregation to exercise their fundamental human rights. Additionally, despite the 19th Amendment's guarantee that men and women could vote, Jim Crow laws, literacy requirements, and grandfather clauses continued to bar African American men and women from exercising their right to vote. African American women were once more battling for their rights as women as well as their emancipation from racial oppression as the second wave of Feminism gained momentum.

The struggles of African American women throughout the feminist movement were described in *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female* by Beal (1969). In particular, she discussed how Black women are exploited in society and the differences in Feminism between white and "non-white" feminists. The National Organization for Women (NOW), which Betty Friedan co-founded, saw her resign as president in the same year. Despite the organization's commitment to diversity, Black women's issues were largely ignored. For instance, there were disagreements between Friedan and some of the African American members over Friedan's use of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to promote more jobs for middle-class white women, even though many African American men and women experienced racial job discrimination and were living below the poverty line. When Friedan retired in 1969, African American women had already begun to create their feminist groups (National Women's History Museum, 2020).

According to the National Women's History Museum (2020), The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), founded in 1973, was the first Black women's organization to meet in the 1970s. The Combahee River Collective was founded in 1974 with a similar goal, but it also concentrated on sexuality-related concerns that were frequently ignored. In their statement, they claim that they are dedicated to fighting racial, sexual, heterosexual, and socioeconomic oppression and how these oppressive systems interact. Revolutionary academic and activist Angela Davis started writing and publishing books that would help lay the groundwork for the Black feminist movement as these women worked toward their common objectives. Following the publication of an article in 1972 on the damaging perceptions of Black women in society, she wrote a book titled *Women, Race & Class* in 1981. Future feminists could explore many forms of oppression with the help of both the *Combahee River Collective* and *Women, Race & Class*.

In the previous study, it is argued that one of the pioneers of the movement is author Gloria Jean Watkins, more known as bell Hooks. To celebrate female legacies, she used the nom de plume bell hooks, which was also spelled in lowercase to focus attention on her message rather than herself. The author published her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* in 1981 and it undoubtedly served as a groundwork for many feminists and Black feminists. In her book, she analyzes the contemporary movement and criticizes mainstream Feminism for ignoring the issues that Black women face in the struggle for equality as a whole. Instead, she uses Black Feminism to offer an inclusive approach to action.

It can be posited that Hooks highlights the uneasiness that persisted during two centuries of struggle as well as the early stages of feminist philosophy. It was only acknowledged as a white women's movement almost to the very end. Ironically, active involvement in the feminist

movement for Black women frequently meant compromising the integrity of the Black rights struggle, and vice versa. Supporting Black men further encouraged the patriarchal social structure, while siding with white women signified embracing their racism. Black women did not exist on paper or in conversation because the term "Blacks" referred to Black men and the term "women" pertained to white women.

Hooks (1982) stated in her book:

At a time in American history when Black women in every area of the country might have joined together to demand social equality for women and a recognition of the impact of sexism on our social status, we were by and large silent. Our silence was not merely a reaction against white women liberationists or a gesture of solidarity with Black male patriarchs. It was the silence of the oppressed—that profound silence engendered by resignation and acceptance of one's lot. Contemporary Black women could not join together to fight for women's rights because we did not see "womanhood" as an important aspect of our identity. Racist, sexist socialization has conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification. In other words, we were asked to deny a part of ourselves—and we did. Consequently, when the women's movement raised the issue of sexist oppression, we argued that sexism was insignificant in light of the harsher, more brutal reality of racism. We were afraid to acknowledge that sexism could be just as oppressive as racism. We clung to the hope that liberation from racial oppression would be all that was necessary for us to be free. We were a new generation of Black women who had been taught to submit, to accept sexual inferiority, and to be silent (p.1)

Moreover, this page of her book emphasized the fact that renegotiating identity for women up until the late 19th century was not only a question of womanhood but rather one of racism. Gender issues were considered secondary to racism as women not only needed to reconstruct their identities as women but more so as Black women. The author argues that despite inspiring hundreds of women to write about women's issues, the women's movement known as Feminism did not result in in-depth critical analyses of the reality of Black women.

It is contended that Hooks and other Black feminists asserted that white feminists had only given lip service to the diversity of women's experiences and that their unwillingness to "speak for" Black women had helped to perpetuate racism by shifting the onus of responsibility from white women to women of colour. A separatist posture was required to draw attention to the exploitation and mistreatment of working class and Black women because radical, socialist,

and Black feminists found themselves constrained by male-dominated leftwing or civil rights movements.

From a Marxist perspective, Angela Davis contended in her landmark work on Black Feminism, *Women, Race and Class* (1981), that sexism and racism would not be removed until the capitalist economic system that gave rise to them had been eliminated. Thus, Black feminists united Black women, fought for their rights, and dismantled white privilege and dominance to shift the conversation around racism away from (white) self-examination. Taking a Black feminist viewpoint and working with Black clients, social workers aimed to significantly highlight the diversity of women's experiences and asserted that sex, race, and class create a hierarchical structure of power relations among women despite their shared experiences (Gray & Boddy, 2015).

One must take into account the fact that women of colour have never had the luxury of merely fighting for their womanhood while ignoring issues of racism, sexism, and even economic and social injustice, as the *Combahee River Collective* (1977) states: “We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us... We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy” (p.212). Moreover, Black Feminism seeks to empower Black women by focusing on how racism and sexism combined to generate Black women's socioeconomic problems and disadvantages.

Naples (2021) in her book *Companion to Feminist Studies* mentioned Brewer who tackled the topic of Black Feminism. The author argues that Black feminist activists and philosophers have accomplished something truly remarkable. They now see knowledge production from a different epistemological and ontological perspective. Black feminists present interwoven networks rather than dichotomous opposing thinking. This articulation changes the disciplinary frames of academic researchers, activists, and, most importantly, those working to implement significant social change on the ground. The author continues to argue that a variety of Black Feminisms exist, including radical, queer, trans, and liberal viewpoints. Radical Black feminists articulate an anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-heteropatriarchal, and anti-imperialist praxis, whereas liberal feminists are more likely to concentrate on reforms within the current system. Even though not all Black feminists have advocated for ending capitalism, they have all acknowledged racial and gender inequality and the importance of both in the lives of Black women. The Combahee River Collective, however, is essential to comprehending a radical perspective on Black Feminism.



Brewer (2021) furthermore argues that in the 1970s, the *Combahee River Collective*, a group of militant Black lesbian feminists, was at the forefront of Black feminist activism. They founded the Combahee, and in the roughly forty years since the *Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977) was published, their analysis has become a crucial pillar in discussions of modern Black Feminism. The Combahee River Collective made it abundantly apparent that their brand of Black lesbian Feminism stands in solidarity with progressive Black men while also being fully aware of the detrimental effects of male socialization in this culture. The Collective argued that we understand that to free all oppressed people, the political and economic structures of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy must be destroyed.

Brewer (2021) claims that the right description to define Black women's relationship to white American Feminism is undoubtedly "difficult". Black Feminism is frequently discussed in the US about white supremacy, race, sexuality, and gender. The desire for women's rights has not only come from white women. Too often, white women's feminist activism has involved articulating rights for racially white women while actively supporting systemic racism and reiterating negative racial stereotypes about Black women. Although Black suffragettes in the early 20th century considered Feminism as crucial to addressing societal injustices, they frequently brought up racial issues. In the lynching era, Ida Wells-Barnett (1895) understood and made a persuasive case that white males utilized the rape of Black women to defend the purity of white women and their susceptibility to Black male assault. Wells made a compelling case that white folks utilized this mystification to excuse the lynching of Black men. Additionally, "problematic" is a word to describe Black women's historical relationship to white American Feminism given white middle-class women's fixation with gender and their apparent unwillingness to accept race.

By repeatedly drawing attention to these issues, Brewer (2021) argues that well-known Black feminists united the fight against sexism with the fight against racism. Black women's early conceptualization of gender and race was thereby entwined, supporting thought and deed in the fight against slavery and the campaign for women's rights. It could be said that Black women in the US helped to create a feminist consciousness despite the racism that still exists today. Cooper's 1892 publication *A Voice from the South by a Black Women of the South* holds the distinction of being the first academic study on Black women. According to scholar Deborah King (1988), Cooper frequently spoke and wrote of the double enslavement of Black women, a "double enslavement of race and gender". Such radical ideologies would reappear in the Combahee River Collective's fight for a Feminism that was in line with the abolition of patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. Combahee's explicit development of

activist tactics and conceptual frameworks that stressed the simultaneity of oppression in Black women's lives is significant. Barbara Smith and a few other ladies were adamant that the killing of Black women was more than just a racial issue in the Boston area in 1973. The terrible killings of poor Black women by the authorities demonstrated how racism, gender, and class are interconnected thinking.

Along with writers such as Angela Davis, bell Hooks, and many other Black feminists who shed light on the fact that race and gender are interconnected issues mainly for the Black community, the Black feminist sociologist Deborah King (1988) also argues that brought out the multiplicative effects of gender, class, and race. These do not just have an additive relationship to one another (i.e., when race, class, and gender are added) but rather influence each other. In her writings, King criticizes the oppositional dualism, parallelism, and additive thinking that characterizes intellectual thought in Western Europe (Naples, 2021). Racism and sexism are discussed from the perspective of gender. Most analyses of racism that focus solely on race moreover neglect to address this issue.

Moreover, it is contended that the roots of Black Feminism stretch back to the era of colonialism and slavery. Accounts of Black women who were forcibly displaced from their homes and subjected to slavery can be found in historical records. These women critically examine the violence that permeates their daily lives and actively resist the forces that seek to dehumanize them. Black women have played prominent roles in liberation movements, from the post-slavery era to anti-colonial struggles, emphasizing that any movement for emancipation must squarely confront the distinct forms of oppression that Black women face, encompassing issues related to race, class, gender, and sexual identity.

Furthermore, Black women experienced life differently. Their perceptions of sexuality, identity, and race varied and still do. Black women sought to express those experiences and demonstrate how non-white women's experiences differ significantly from those of white women due to differences in race and/or class and how difficult it is for these experiences to be voiced or amplified. Black feminists therefore discovered that these experiences cannot be understood if their components (such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality) are placed on a distinct plane. Without understanding and taking into account all the social, racial, sexual, and other components behind it, one cannot comprehend the formation or the deconstruction process of identity mainly the Black women's identity. Such factors establish a context that greatly broadens our understanding of the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identity. Such framework interweaves multiple elements that can aid in better understanding the

experiences of Black women as distinct and different from those of white women, and this is when intersectionality comes to the fore.

Intersectionality can therefore be defined as a theoretical framework for analyzing how a person's numerous social and political identities interact to produce various forms of advantage and discrimination. The concept of intersectionality reveals several advantages and disadvantages. Gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, ability, weight, and outward appearance are a few examples of these variables. These overlapping and crossing social identities could be oppressive and liberating at the same time. This definition was given by Runyan (2018) in her article *What Is Intersectionality and Why Is It Important?* published in the bimonthly magazine of the American Association of University Professors, AAUP.

Runyan (2018) starts her article by stating: “Building coalitions across identity categories is essential to the fight for social justice” (p.10). She emphasizes the importance of this fusion as an important part of identity construction for coloured people as it highlights the importance of the various factors that should be taken into consideration, such as race, ethnicity, sex, class, and gender, instead of analyzing their experiences with each element separately. She states that in several of her writings, Kimberle Crenshaw, who initially introduced the concept of intersectionality to feminist theory, provides thorough information regarding the term. Given her expertise in the field of civil rights and her position as a professor of law, Crenshaw is a legal Black feminist who links philosophy to race and racism to the law.

The progenitor of the term described intersectionality as “a method and a disposition, a heuristic and an analytical tool” (Runyan, 2018, p.10). Its ability to address what Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins calls the independent phenomena of oppression—whether based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, or other social categories—speaks to why the term is now so valuable. Although Crenshaw first used the term intersectionality in the 1980s about the growth of critical race legal studies and her research, it is founded on an idea that Black and indigenous feminists and other women of colour have been grappling with for many decades. The phrase has spread throughout academia and developed far beyond legal studies to combat one-dimensional and exclusionary analyses of oppression in many fields. The exclusion of women of colour from antiracist studies and indigenous women from colonial scholarship, for example, or the narrowing of feminist inquiry to just looking at the experiences of white, western women.

Runyan (2018) further argues and highlights the fact that intersectionality's connotations might, however, be lost or even misused as it becomes more institutionalized in academia and

widely accepted in popular culture. With today's identity politics and cultural conflicts, which have recently erupted into the right-wing politics of white male victimization, it is all too frequently reduced to ticking off identification categories in so-called politically acceptable ways of being misrepresented. It is crucial to review the history of this constantly changing notion at a current political juncture.

Runyan (2018) points out the fact that the experiences of Black women were different from those of Black men and drastically different from those of white women as she states, “gender is always raced and race is always gendered” (p.12). Indeed, intersectionality came of age in the twentieth century, a time of profound societal change. Long-standing systems of dominance came to an end as a result of anticolonial battles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; the creation of a worldwide women's movement; civil rights campaigns in multicultural democracies; the end of the Cold War; and the defeat of apartheid in South Africa. Deeply ingrained socioeconomic inequality and the resulting societal issues were obvious to be long-term issues. What was different was a fresh perspective on social injustices and the potential for societal reform. Considering the interconnectedness of the social issues brought on by nationalism, racism, sexism, and colonialism offered a fresh perspective on the prospects for social transformation. Many people began to believe in a brighter future, seeing new opportunities for their own lives as well as those of others. This legacy is drawn upon and carried by intersectionality. What were formerly scattered ideas about how individuals, social issues, and ideas are connected are now at the heart of intersectionality as a recognized method of critical inquiry and activism.

To distinguish oneself from white Feminism, intersectional Feminism takes into account the many experiences and identities of women. The emergence of intersectionality challenged the concept that 'gender' was the major element determining a woman's fate, according to Hooks (1982). It is therefore argued that several Black feminists in the 19th and 20th centuries, like Anna Julia Cooper, challenged Black women's historical exclusion from the feminist movement in the United States. This was in opposition to prior feminist movements' theories that women were a homogenous group with similar life experiences, led mostly by white middle-class women. Feminists started looking for explanations for how class, race, and gender interact to define the female destiny once it was shown that the types of oppression faced by white middle-class women were distinct from those experienced by Black, poor, or disabled women.

Hesse-Biber (2014) coined the term intersectionality about Black Feminism stating that Black feminist scholars, most notably Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw, have criticized feminist research for the very real threat of reiterating subjugation. They claimed that

by ignoring race as an identity category and lumping all women together as being distinct, the oppression of Black women was increased. She quotes one of the Black women she interviewed when asked about race, gender, and sexuality as identities that described her stating:

People see your Blackness, and the world has affected me by my Blackness since the very inception of my life. . . . My sexuality is something that developed later on, or I became aware of later on, [because] I think it has always been what it is been, but I think that it was just something that developed in my psyche. But being Black is something that I've always had to deal with: racism since day one and recognizing how to navigate through this world as a Black person, and even as a Black woman (p.113).

This emphasizes how crucial it is to take race into account when looking at identity construction. According to Black feminist researchers, race and gender are linked for Black women and cannot be seen as separate from one another. Black women in academia were able to exploit the realization that they were outsiders to their advantage by identifying power dynamics based on race and gender as sources of empowerment rather than sources of oppression. Instead of adhering to white feminist ideology, they adopted a position that allowed them to express themselves as Black women. By pointing out that the current frameworks of difference provided no context for comprehending the lives and identities of women of colour, they took up the fight for social justice within universities (Hesse-Biber, 2013).

*Black Feminist Thought*, Collins' significant 1992 publication, examined the interaction between Black Feminism, postcolonial theory, and feminist theory. Collins' work uncovered a perspective that enabled the identification and investigation of how social location shapes a perspective related to lived experience. With the help of this method, important concerns regarding knowledge and the function of power in its construction could be raised. The notion of knowledge in the public as well as its construction and acquisition processes were broadened. Hesse-Biber (2014) continues to argue that it was made possible to do empirical research to identify and disprove stereotypes about Black women, their families, and the employment experiences and political and social contributions of Black women. The adoption of the intersectionality method was significant because it began to reveal the invisible history of Black women. Collins' ground-breaking work established identity politics as a crucial source for comprehending identity formation at the intersection of the axes of race, class, and gender. Since then, it has prompted discussions on colour blindness, analyses of Black sexual politics, and investigations of how oppression is distributed in a post-racial American nation.

Hesse-Bieber (2013) emphasizes Crenshaw's (1991) perspective, according to which social power operates to exclude people who are different within the frames of gender and class, and

that gender politics can obscure intragroup distinctions, typically at the expense of Black women. According to Crenshaw, focusing on the intersections between categories is made possible by using intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and an empirical study methodology. By identifying disparities among group members and facilitating a renegotiation of how differences find expression to form identity, identity politics take place at these locations and allow for a reconceptualization of identity. The author demonstrated the three forms of intersectionality presented by Crenshaw (1991) as follows:

- **Structural Intersectionality:** The axes of race and gender overlap where women of colour are found. Due to this distinction, Black women's experiences can be seen as markedly distinct from those of White women.
- **Political Intersectionality:** It contests the marginalization of organizations with various political agendas brought on by a preference for one discourse over another. According to Crenshaw (1991), the intersection of opposing discourses highlights the diversity of the various facets of identity and highlights distinctions within the group. This prevents the purposeful silences that occur when one group's political agenda takes precedence over another, as when antiracists attempt to alter perceptions of Black men.
- **Representational Intersectionality:** a paradigm that contests cultural representations of women of colour and contestations of them, and which contends that to prevent marginalization, answers to representations of either race or gender must address both of them.

By analyzing the relationships between intersecting sites of structural axes, Hasse-Biber (2013) further suggests that the theory of intersection emphasizes complexity. It may not always take into account all aspects of identity; for instance, African American feminist researchers stress racism and sexism by concentrating on race and gender identities. Others have used the confluence of gender, disability, and sexuality to highlight underrepresented female bodies. It is possible to acquire insight into how each axis' discourses of power construct identity and prolong oppression and marginalization by examining how they connect. She adds that although the intersectionality method allowed for an expansion in scope and focus, it was criticized by others for being overly particularistic. Intersectional thinking has received criticism for seeing Black women's unique experiences in a vacuum that ultimately compares them to those of white women. To move away from explanations based on their inability to create traditional families or as victims of the heritage of slavery, Black women were able to situate themselves in a matrix of domination based on reality due to the intersectionality approach. Rather, intersectionality

allowed them to look at the realities of their lives in contemporary circumstances that were important to them.

One can argue that one way that intersectionality research attempts to address some of these criticisms is by recognizing that the different identities that a person may have are likely to overlap with each other and intersect in a dynamic way rather than by privileging one axis of difference over another (for example, race over class). An examination of the relationships between the axes is made possible by the intersectionality method, which locates the locus of power at the intersection where the elements overlap and interweave. This method allowed researchers to draw attention to the various identities and forms of discrimination that Black women experience. The shift away from emphasizing one identity category over another helped to incorporate knowledge of the saliency of numerous aspects of identity and how they interact to shape experience and practice.

Ultimately, research on intersectionality is more than just a study of the gender distinctions between men and women. Investigating the connections between sociocultural categories and identities is the goal of intersectionality research. To depict the complexity and ephemeral character of identity and experience, it attempts to blend differentiating axes. An intersectional analysis considers a collection of factors that affect a social individual in combination, rather than considering each factor in isolation. Indeed, intersectionality study has opened up new avenues for investigating and comprehending the lives, identities, and marginalization of women. Its roots are in Black Feminism, but its effects may be observed globally in a wide range of gender and sex-related fields.

### **III.5. Contours of Contemporary Feminist Thought: Postmodern and Poststructuralist Echoes**

Within the realm of contemporary feminist discourse, the exploration of postmodern and poststructuralist influences delves into intellectual landscapes shaped by these philosophical currents. This intricate journey begins with an acknowledgment of the evolving nature of Feminism, recognizing the need to navigate and understand the complex currents that have emerged in the wake of Postmodernism and Poststructuralism. The intellectual landscape of feminist theory underwent a transformative evolution with the emergence of postmodernist and poststructuralist influences. This paradigm shift challenged traditional notions of identity, power, and knowledge, opening up new avenues for understanding and critiquing the complexities of gender and societal structures. In the crucible of postmodernist and

poststructuralist thoughts, Feminism found a powerful ally that deconstructed grand narratives, questioned essentialist assumptions, and paved the way for a more nuanced and inclusive exploration of women's experiences.

As feminist ideology progressed, the intellectual terrain experienced the impact of Postmodernism and Poststructuralism. This shift signaled a departure from grand narratives and a rejection of fixed truths. Postmodern and poststructuralist influences brought forth a more nuanced understanding of language, power, and identity. Feminists engaged with these philosophical currents to deconstruct traditional norms and explore the complexities inherent in the construction of gender. Within these contours, it can be argued that Feminism embraces a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity. Postmodern and poststructuralist echoes encourage feminists to critically engage with language, challenge power structures, and navigate the complexities of contemporary issues. Such feminist discourse goes beyond a singular wave, embodying the continual dialogue and transformation that characterize contemporary feminist thought.

It can be contended that Postmodernism, with its emphasis on deconstructing grand narratives and challenging fixed truths, injects a spirit of fluidity into feminist thought. This perspective prompts feminists to question traditional assumptions about gender, power, and identity, inviting a nuanced understanding that transcends rigid categorizations. In this context, Feminism becomes a dynamic and ever-evolving conversation, responsive to the diverse experiences and identities that shape the contemporary landscape. Complementing this, poststructuralist influences further enrich the feminist discourse by highlighting the complexities of language, discourse, and power. Poststructuralism challenges essentialist notions of identity and explores how language constructs and shapes our understanding of gender. This influence encourages feminists to critically engage with language, recognizing its power to empower, marginalize, and deconstruct societal norms that perpetuate inequality.

Gannon and Davies (2007) explore postmodern, poststructural, and critical theories, discussing how they impact feminist research. The labels associated with these theories are sometimes conflated and at other times adopted in oppositional ways. Additionally, the specific meaning attributed to each label lacks uniformity, as it depends on the vantage point from which the speaker or writer engages with the theories. Individuals who align with each label exhibit notable and productive divisions, often overlooked when these perspectives are collectively referred to under one umbrella term. The authors quote Butler (1992) who stated:



A number of positions are ascribed to postmodernism as if it were the kind of thing that could be the bearer of a set of positions: discourse is all there is as if discourse were some kind of monistic stuff out of which all things are composed. The subject is dead, I can never say "I" again; there is no reality, only representations. These characterizations are variously imputed to postmodernism or poststructuralism, which are conflated with each other and sometimes understood as an indiscriminate assemblage of French feminism, deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucaultian analysis, Rorty's conversationalism, and cultural studies (p.71).

Gannon and Davies (2007) argue that in critical, poststructural, and postmodern feminist perspectives, a fundamental principle involves a reconsideration of objectivity. According to these viewpoints, any account is inherently situated—it emerges from a specific context, time, and individual or individuals. The narrative is crafted with a particular purpose and audience in mind, rendering it consistently partial and specific. Such an account possesses its ability to shape perspectives and should remain open to challenges, underscoring the importance of a critical approach for a comprehensive understanding of these concepts. The authors further argue that deconstruction, as a theoretical framework, is often associated with Poststructuralism and Postmodernism. It originated from the works of philosopher Jacques Derrida, who proposed that language and texts are complex and inherently unstable, challenging traditional notions of fixed meanings.

In the context of Feminism, deconstructive perspectives aim to unravel and question the assumed stability and objectivity of concepts, particularly those related to gender, power, and identity. It can be asserted that the idea is to deconstruct or dismantle prevailing norms, hierarchies, and binary oppositions that are embedded in language and discourse. It can be argued that by adopting deconstructive perspectives, feminists aim to expose and challenge the inherent biases, assumptions, and power structures within language and discourse. This approach encourages a critical examination of how knowledge is produced, questioning established truths, and recognizing the influence of diverse perspectives. In essence, deconstructive perspectives within Feminism seek to dismantle traditional frameworks, opening up space for a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of gender, identity, and societal power dynamics.

Gannon and Davies (2007) further assert that many poststructural and postmodern feminist writers began as critical theorists and maintained a strong critical edge in their writing.

Those within the "critical" perspective often emphasize a distinction from those employing postmodern and poststructural approaches by asserting their commitment to the realization of "real" social change. This insistence implies a specific understanding of social transformation that goes beyond theoretical abstraction. In contrast to more deconstructive perspectives, critical theorists envision social change as a tangible and substantial outcome, suggesting a transformative impact on societal structures, norms, and power dynamics.

In line with these perspectives, Gannon and Davies (2007) contend that power is perceived as intricate and inherently precarious. The possibilities for agency, resistance, freedom, and emancipation are seen as contingent and limited. What sets apart critical, postmodern, and poststructural theories is their varied interpretations of power, freedom, and agency, serving as distinguishing features between them. The inquiry into whether Poststructuralism and Postmodernism perspectives can be considered "female" or feminist even when formulated by men delves into the intricate interplay of gender, knowledge production, and theoretical frameworks. Within these paradigms, gender is construed as a socially constructed and malleable category, with knowledge creation seen as intricately interwoven with power dynamics and societal discourses. Poststructuralist and Postmodernist ideologies challenge essentialist perspectives on gender, rejecting the notion that specific traits inherently pertain to one gender or another. Instead, gender is perceived as a dynamic and socially constructed concept, shaping and being shaped by cultural, historical, and linguistic influences.

From this theoretical standpoint, it can be posited that the designation of a perspective as a feminist transcends the gender identity of its originator. The emphasis shifts from the individual producer's gender to how the theory engages with and deconstructs traditional gender norms. These perspectives explore the performative nature of gender identity and acknowledge the pervasive influence of power structures in molding gender roles. In essence, Poststructuralism and Postmodernism frameworks facilitate a critical examination of the conceptualization and construction of gender, fostering a more fluid and nuanced understanding that transcends binary distinctions. This inclusive approach accommodates diverse voices and perspectives, irrespective of the gender identity of the knowledge producer.

Hesse-Biber (2014) in *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* explores the notions of feminist postmodernist and poststructuralist theories arguing that the essentialist statements made from a feminist perspective and feminist empiricism are challenged by feminist Postmodernism and Poststructuralism as being based on the wrong principles. She argues that such theories place an emphasis on the particularity of context and time and acknowledge these

influences in forming a variety of realities. Feminist Postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches aim to emphasize the variety of women's lives and identities and examine how they are viewed and shaped, both by themselves and by others, rather than adopting ideas of the universality of difference. These ideas came into existence as a means of identifying and thoroughly examining the various axes of difference that make up women's identities in the acknowledgment of distinctions among women.

Hesse-Bieber (2013) further posits that exploring the relationships between factors like gender, sexual orientation, class, and race helps us better understand how society, culture, and history influence identity. The author further looks at some of the ways that these theories help women's differences—not just those with men, but also those with one another—be acknowledged and understood. She demonstrates how Black Feminism served as the foundation for the critique of the postmodernist approach that gave rise to intersectionality. She also demonstrates how intersectionality gives means to confront power dynamics within various facets of identity and in how they interact and offers insight into how knowledge and comprehension of many facets of women's existence can be advanced and strengthened in a way that is attentive to the most pertinent circumstances.

Hesse-Bieber (2013) offers a perspective on Postmodernism, suggesting that rather than adhering to a single fundamental reality, the theory posits the existence of multiple subjective and relative truths constructed by individuals. Beyond individual subjective experiences, the way we perceive these truths is influenced by societal, cultural, and linguistic factors. Consequently, postmodernist thought moves away from the empirical pursuit of objective truth, providing avenues to investigate women's experiences and behaviour within the specific contexts in which they unfold. This stands in contrast to a framework rooted in presumptive hegemonic norms that categorize women as members of a group deviating from the norm.

Hesse-Biber (2014) continues by stating that Postmodernism shifts the emphasis from frequently arbitrary and artificial (binary) categorizations like "man" and "woman" and instead emphasizes the relative experience of each individual. It challenges the accuracy of categorizations and presumptions based on cultural, societal, and class distinctions; it dismantles these socially constructed categories to examine differences in individual experience within these groupings; and it questions the validity of these distinctions and assumptions. As a result, it questions the groupings themselves. The author further posits that Poststructuralism, on the other hand, has been characterized as a loose set of theoretical positions. It denies modernist claims that are founded on objectivity, the idea of unchanging truth, and a single

reality. It contradicts the notion of “essentialism” that identifies “woman” as an identity category that is constant and unchangeable. Instead, it acknowledges how reality is socially constructed and the danger of maintaining and continuing constructions that result from power interests. Poststructuralism thus offers a valuable conceptual framework for the conduct of feminist research.

It can be contended that Poststructuralism also offers methods for analyzing the realities that are constructed by and suit the interests of dominant males. According to the poststructuralist perspective, knowledge is inherently unstable and influenced by social and material reality. For feminist researchers, this entails investigating the influence of patriarchy and how it shapes social structures. The core of feminist Poststructuralism is thus the conviction that there are other, more fruitful approaches to analyzing gender than those that rely on essentialist or patriarchal arguments.

Continuing her argument, Hesse-Biber (2014) asserts that as women use cultural, historical, political, and personal concepts to make sense of themselves and their relationships with the world they live in, the study of women's experiences emphasizes their complexity and diversity. The diversity of realities' meanings allows for the inclusion of conventional scientific methods to ascertain what is known, but feminist poststructuralists see this as only one discourse among many that are available. The focus is put on language and discourse by viewing knowledge as socially created, unstable, and contextualized. It is believed that language is both a part of the experience and not only its representative. Since it depends on experience for understanding and expression, language cannot exist independently of experience. As a result, a lot of feminist authors and academics have concentrated on the language used to describe the world and the people who inhabit it to demonstrate how knowledge and perceptions are formed before being adopted and reinforced.

Beasley (1999) asserts that this idea, as well as themes like the shifting, fragmented, highly contextualized, and constructed complexity of meaning, power, and the self—as opposed to universalized conceptions of centralized order—are all present in the work of Michel Foucault, who is probably the most well-known figure associated with poststructuralist thought. As a response to Marxism's emphasis on (economic) "materiality," Foucault contends that Saussure understood the significance of meaning. As Saussure intended, Foucault picks up on Saussure's interest in systems of meaning and extends his theory of the constitution of meaning/truth through difference and exclusion inside language to larger groups of signs (discourses/knowledge).

According to Beasley's (1999) further argument, Foucault is less focused on language and texts in the literal sense than many other poststructuralist thinkers and is instead more interested in how meaning and truth are used in social life as a whole. The author goes on to say that power is not something that one has or that it is confined to any privileged individuals or places. Instead, it is demonstrated by actions and is inherent in all interpersonal interactions. Power is distributed among several different factors rather than being organized around one (such as the fundamental reason for economic or sexual inequality). Foucault contends that power is consequently constructive and not only coercive. For instance, it creates subjectivities or identities that are not just mental but also physically embodied.

It can be posited that Foucault's proposition gains particular resonance as it encourages a rethinking of power dynamics and opens avenues for diverse feminist perspectives. Embracing the notion that critical theory aims to enable alternative thinking and actions, feminists can leverage this approach to challenge entrenched power structures, gender norms, and societal expectations. By incorporating poststructural and postmodern insights, feminist discourse can become more nuanced and intersectional, recognizing the multiplicity of identities and experiences. This collaboration among critical, poststructural, and postmodern theories within feminism offers a robust framework for interrogating, deconstructing, and reconstructing the complex fabric of gender relations and societal norms, fostering a more inclusive and transformative feminist praxis. Gannon and Davies (2007) quote Foucault who stated: "The project for any critical theory is to make it possible to think differently and thus to open the possibility for acting differently. This has profound implications for social practice and social research. In this sense, critical theory, poststructural theory, and postmodern theory can work together rather than in antagonism with each other." (p.78).

Hesse-Biber (2014) illustrates postmodern and poststructuralist Feminism by drawing on the insights of numerous authors and scholars who have made significant contributions to the field. She references H el ene Cixous (2003) who investigates how literature creates and maintains a binary male/female taxonomy. She contends that writing must be informal, irrational, and naturally flowing to convey the feminine voice. This is in contrast to the formal, conventional writing style that has developed and serves as a representation of the male voice. The binary classification system established by the predominance of one writing style over the Other perpetuates gender distinctions and divides people into "man" and "woman" categories.

Another feminist author, Luce Irigaray (1996) is presented by Hesse-Bieber (2013) and bases her writing on binary language and its effects on gender identity, self-experience, and

identity formation. Irigaray criticizes binary-based categorizations of the masculine and feminine by extending observations on hierarchical power inequalities. Only a gender-neutral vocabulary, according to her, can ultimately erase the ubiquitous gender identities created by binary thinking to allow for a pluralistic, postmodern comprehension of many perspectives. Irigaray goes on to say that to confront and overcome gender stereotypes generated by language, they should be emphasized and mirrored again.

Moreover, these authors' and other writers' emphasis on language is founded on the idea that power and language (or knowledge represented through language) are inextricably linked. By examining how language contributes to and supports the essentialist notions of women as merely "different from men," feminist Postmodernism and poststructuralist approaches position themselves against feminist empiricism and viewpoint epistemology. Instead, these methods encourage the study of womanhood's multiplicity and look for the various realities, points of view, and voices that capture the diversity of women's lives.

Hesse-Bieber (2013) asserts that one author who must be mentioned in this context and who is seen as a person who changed the way viewed such perspectives and theories is bell Hooks. One of the most well-known and frequently mentioned African American writers, Hooks' writing frequently addresses the shortcomings of Feminism against Black women. Her work also focuses on pedagogy and education, which she believes are crucial to reducing racial and gender inequality. Since she admired her great-grandmother, hooks used her name as her nom de plume. She decides to not capitalize it in part to set herself apart from her namesake and in part to emphasize how much more important the content of her work is than who she is as a person. Many people believe that her 1982 book *Ain't I a Woman* is the key text on the subject of Black women and Feminism. Throughout the book, hooks explain how slavery, Black women's roles, and capitalism are related. She also illustrates how these issues continue to have an impact on Black women even now.

One can argue that feminist Postmodernism suffers from its core concept that there is no such thing as a "woman's experience" and that the only way to understand what it means to be a woman is to listen to the many diverse perspectives that emerge from women from other cultures, classes, and communities. Feminism has been criticized for being negatively impacted by the postmodern idea that there is no such thing as a universal truth and that we can only study collections of individual facts because it deprives the movement of a sense of community and a shared objective. Beasley (1999) states:

Feminist writings influenced by postmodern/poststructuralist thinking stress plurality rather than unity and, in particular, reject conceptions of women as a homogeneous category. The emphasis here is upon differences both within and between subjects (not just sexual differences) and relatedly the diversity of forms of power. Sexual hierarchy is not accorded any straightforward priority. In contrast to much of feminist thought, feminists who have taken up postmodernist / poststructuralist themes disavow universalized and normalizing accounts of women as a group (such as, all women are either the same as men or have a unique voice) on the basis that a Feminism framed by such accounts becomes itself complicit in subordination (p.81).

Beasley (1999) thus argues that notably, postmodern/poststructuralist feminists use words like "universalizing" and "normalizing" to point out flaws in other theories as well as in feminist theory. In this context, universalism can be characterized as a method of analysis that establishes what is "normal" (acceptable, excellent, suitable, or natural) by asserting only similarities and referring to that which is pervasive. According to postmodern/poststructuralist feminists, universalism marginalizes what is perceived as different, bringing about normalization, which labels difference as abnormal and associates a negative perception with non-conformity.

Beasley (1999) further proposes that according to postmodern and poststructuralist feminists, the notion of universalizing principles is far from innocent. Instead, these feminists argue that such principles often have a close association with dynamics of dominance, subordination, and the stifling of nonconformist voices. They point to the concept of the universal human being, as depicted in traditional Western philosophy, which, despite its supposed neutrality, is rooted in a masculine norm. This serves as a vivid example of how these universalizing principles can be inherently gendered. Similarly, the idea that women can be homogenously categorized as a single group is believed to create a hegemonic female subject, which overlooks the rich historical, sociological, and other forms of diversity that exist both within and among women. In essence, postmodern and poststructuralist feminists highlight how the seemingly universal can often mask and reinforce underlying power dynamics and gender biases (Beasley, 1999).

It can be posited that postmodern/poststructuralist feminists question the idea that women share a single identity that is based on a universalized experience of oppression and draw attention to the necessary exclusion of anything that does not fit within this because they

are critical of universalizing/normalizing practices. In light of this, postmodern/poststructuralist feminists take a skeptical position regarding the emphasis on women as a collective, which usually distinguishes feminist frameworks. These theories oppose the privilege of men over women, just as Lacanian feminist writers, but not based on any specific traits that are thought to set women apart as a group, such as a distinct female experience. Nothing about the category of "women" in postmodern philosophy is fundamental; it lacks any inherent characteristics or preexisting substance that would allow it to be the focus of Feminism. Instead of organizing political struggles around identities like being a woman, a homosexual person, or a Black person, postmodern/poststructuralist feminists focus on destabilizing the many ways that power is exercised. These feminists have mixed feelings about any effort to find and celebrate a (favourable) distinctive group identity(ies).

Beasley (1999) further argues that feminist work concentrating on race and ethnicity shares this opposition to a unitary view of the mechanisms of power and emphasis on distinctions. Nevertheless, rather than addressing various disparities, such work is typically more prone to focus on a few, specific characteristics that exist both inside and across humans (for example, sex, class, and race/ethnicity). They question the inherent rigidity and power structure of traditional categories like sex, class, and race/ethnicity. This calls into question any simple presumption that such categories have precedence over other differences in social analysis, let alone the precedence of one category (such as sex) over others.

Hesse-Biber (2014) contends that deliberate attention to diversity is pivotal in capturing a nuanced representation of various experiences, acknowledging their inherent complexity. This emphasis becomes particularly pronounced in the sphere of research practice within feminist Postmodernism and Poststructuralism. Instead of succumbing to reductionist methodologies, these theoretical frameworks perceive the intricate interplay of factors shaping diverse lived experiences as a strength. By veering away from oversimplification, researchers guided by feminist postmodernist and poststructuralist principles strive to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of individuals' lives. This approach values the richness of diverse narratives, ensuring that research outcomes encapsulate the intricacies and nuances of varied experiences within the broader context of societal and cultural structures.

Ultimately, the contours of contemporary feminist thought, shaped by postmodern and poststructuralist echoes, illustrate a dynamic and nuanced evolution within the broader feminist discourse. These theoretical frameworks have significantly contributed to challenging



essentialist notions of gender, dismantling binary constructions, and emphasizing the performative nature of identity. By deconstructing traditional power structures and acknowledging the complexity of subjectivity, postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives have widened the intellectual landscape of feminist scholarship, fostering inclusivity and a richer understanding of diverse experiences.

Furthermore, these echoes have prompted critical reflections on language, discourse, and the intricate interplay of power dynamics within feminist theory. The emphasis on the situated and partial nature of knowledge, coupled with a recognition of the role of language in shaping reality, has led to a more reflexive and self-aware feminist inquiry. While these frameworks may not be without controversy, their impact is undeniable in challenging the status quo and pushing feminist thought towards a more intersectional, inclusive, and socially aware paradigm. The ongoing dialogue between various feminist perspectives, including those with postmodern and poststructuralist influences, continues to shape the trajectory of feminist scholarship, ensuring its relevance and responsiveness to the evolving complexities of gender and society.

### **III.6. Womanism: Reshaping the Identity of Black Women**

In times when women gathered their voices and joined together to fight patriarchy and stereotypes about womanhood and reclaim what was once lost in the shadows of male patriarchy, Black women decided that it was no longer an option to stay silent. Along with the sexism that controlled social status and had a huge impact on women, racism was also something to be fought and a notion to be altered for Black women to be able to voice their needs and desires and imagine possible futures where they had equal recognition and respect. Such racist and sexist socialization had conditioned these women over the years to devalue their womanhood and to regard race as the only aspect or form of identification, however, sexist oppression was as harsh of a factor as any other oppressing form of racism and unfortunately, during many years, Black women faced both. It was not only a matter of being Black, but rather a matter of objectifying and dehumanizing such individuals along with neglecting any aspect of femininity and womanhood that shaped such women.

Black women who had been taught to submit, to accept sexual inferiority, and to be silent could no longer adhere to such a stance. It was time to break the long years of silence and oppression and begin to articulate the long harsh years of experiences. In particular, they emphasized the female aspect of their being and neglected any Black or white male patriarchy.

Such needs and desires were shaped and recorded in such movements as Black Feminism, yet many Black women argued that such movement was not enough and did not detach itself from what Feminism (which was mainly centered upon middle-class white women and their cause advocating for white females) stood for. Even though these movements supported the same cause (the liberation and recognition of women and bringing equality between the sexes to the table of discussion), many argue that what movements such as Womanism brought was way more efficient when it came to the cause of Black womanhood.

Hooks (1982) argues that ironically, white feminists often romanticized the experience of Black women rather than addressing the detrimental effects of that oppression, even though the recent women's movement highlighted the fact that Black women were doubly victims of racist and sexist oppression. Feminists indicate that even if Black women are oppressed, they can avoid the negative effects of oppression because they are strong, but that is simply not the case. Feminists accept that Black women are victims while also praising their power. The majority of the time, when people allude to the strength of Black women, they are describing how they believe these women to be able to endure oppression.

Hooks (1982) further asserts that they disregard the truth that resisting oppression while remaining strong is not the same as defeating it and that transformation should not be confused with endurance. These problems are frequently misunderstood by observers of the Black female experience. Society as a whole was affected by the feminist movement's tendency to romanticize the experience of Black women. The stereotypical portrayal of the "strong" Black woman, formerly seen to be degrading, has now come to be considered as the pinnacle of Black female excellence. Black women were praised for their particular commitment to motherhood, for their "innate" capacity to carry heavy loads, and for their growing availability as sex objects at a time when the women's movement was at its height and white women were rejecting the roles of breeder, burden bearer, and sex object.

Even when Black Feminism served as a fundamental stone in advocating for Black women and Black womanhood, some scholars argue that it was still attached to Feminism and feminist white-centered perspectives. Many Black women argued that a new movement was needed that was fully Afrocentric and put Black women and their voices in the forefront. A sense of decolonization from all previous stereotypes, experiences, sexism, and racism that once identified the concept of Black womanhood continued to develop and evolve. One can argue that according to an old proverb, "the past is neither dead nor past". Everything, notion, and person has a past. When examined in greater detail, that history sheds light on the murky corners and crevasses of the present. No circumstance, idea, or individual can ever be fully

comprehended without looking into their pasts. Decolonization and decolonial initiatives therefore necessitate a thorough understanding of colonial history and its related discourses. Only with such understanding would it be possible to successfully break free from the bonds of colonization and dominance.

It is contended that the process of dismantling colonial interpretations and analyses of society is generally referred to as decolonization. It strongly echoes the ideas expressed by Fanon (1961) in *The Wretched of the Earth*. For those who have been colonized, decolonization of the mind truly entails going back into the past to identify ourselves, become proficient in our cultural knowledge systems, develop critical consciousness, and regain our humanity. For Black women, this notion was much needed to regain humanity and every aspect of what makes them 'women' and 'Black', reconstructing what a Black woman truly means and represents and that is when Womanism comes to the surface.

Womanism is known to be a social and cultural ideology that is based on the history and experiences of people of colour. Its main focus is the struggles faced by Black women as they attempted to reclaim their womanhood and identities as both Black women and women in general. Hence, to restore dignity to a woman's daily tasks, Womanism mixes spirituality with ecology. This movement, in contrast to Feminism, focuses on both femininity and culture (specifically Black culture), as both ideas are crucial to a woman's existence as one's femininity cannot be separated from the context in which it lives. Therefore, this intersectionality between the culture itself and womanhood is what shapes the identity of Black women. In other words, Womanism affirms the notion that a woman's culture, which in this instance serves as the intersection's focal point rather than class or another trait, is not a part of her identity but rather the lens through which it exists. Hence, a woman's Blackness does not contribute to her Womanism. Instead, she views her identity as a womanist through the perspective of her race as Black.

As a result, one can assert that a woman's Blackness is not a component of her Feminism; rather, it is the lens through which she perceives femininity. Yet, given that both groups have unique perspectives on womanhood and Feminism, the sexism experienced by women of colour in the feminist movement must be acknowledged. Several feminists concur that due to the problematic ways some feminists have handled Blackness throughout history, the experience of Black women will not be accepted by Feminism as being equivalent to that of white women. Womanists view Womanism as a philosophical framework that exists independently of feminist theory rather than as a component or extension of Feminism.

In her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), the author gives various definitions of the concept of Womanism and states:

From Womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious. A Black feminist or feminist of colour. From the Black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'You acting womanish' i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another Black folk expression: You trying to be grown. Responsible, In charge, and Serious (p.11).

Also:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: 'Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and Black?' Ans.: 'Well, you know the coloured race is just like a flower garden, with every colour flower represented.' Traditionally capable, as in: 'Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.' Reply: 'It wouldn't be the first time.' (p.12).

Walker (1983) gives two other definitions stating: "Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender." (p.12). Thus, one can claim that the intersectionality, or the dismantling of interconnected forms of oppression that have an impact on the lives of Black women (and other women of colour) and their communities, has always been a concern of Womanism and/or Black Feminism (some women prefer the latter self-designation, though they are not synonymous). Black women are subjected to numerous forms of oppression at once. These injustices include racial, gender, and class oppression. Womanism takes all these notions and puts them into question in the process of reconstructing the Black female's womanhood. White Feminism has typically placed gender analysis over considerations of race and class as a political movement. Black women have not had the luxury of discussing gender without mentioning race or class. White Feminism and

Womanism are not the same, despite having some similarities. According to Walker's explanation, "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender". Although they do not have the same goals, the two occasionally overlap in their objectives and share the desire to abolish gender inequality.

Smith (2016) argues that in the past, white Feminism has prioritized white women's gender problems over concerns about race and class. For instance, at the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, white women argued that sexism took precedence over the effort to abolish slavery; African women activists were not permitted entry to the event. Black women had been working unpaid outside their homes for years before white women began marching for the right to labor outside the house. More so than gender inequality, slavery had a bigger influence on African women's lives. Because they were labeled slaves in America, Black women experienced gender oppression. The author further states that because they were Black and enslaved, Black women worked just as much and as hard in the masters' fields as Black men did, as Sojourner Truth famously argued in her "*Ain't I a Woman*" speech. Slaves' bodies and sexuality were completely under the power of their masters. They might be raped, forced to reproduce with male slaves to extend the master's holdings of human property, or pushed into giving in to the sexual cravings of white slave masters.

Womanism came to be to discuss such issues faced by Black women over the years and bring them to the international table of discussion. Moreover, one can assert that Womanism is a societal concept that sets itself apart from Feminism by including Black women, promoting womanhood, and working to create and maintain an inclusive culture across all societies. This movement is about and against all forms of oppression, not just the one problem that these women faced. In essence, the terms "womanist," "Womanism," and "womanish" are all connected to Black womanhood and have an impact on both literary and sociocultural environments. Even though numerous African American writers made significant contributions to the topic of Womanism, novelist and activist Alice Walker is still credited with giving it a formal name and description.

Alice Walker, who herself had experienced such trauma as a child, watched Black women dealing with problems like ignorance and bigotry and being condemned to endure the horrors of prejudice, racism, crime, and poverty. One can claim that nearly every one of her novels is on Womanism, with key themes including female solidarity and wholeness, identity, and enlightenment in her Black society. Her writing style is probably comparable to that of other Black American writers like Toni Morrison. Her works are replete with the notion of addressing African American women's individual experiences, illuminating a female

relationship with another, and acknowledging the challenges that they share with other marginalized sexist and racist cultures—all of which are at the heart of Womanism.

Walker (1983) frequently made it clear in her works that Womanism is a mindset, a way of being, or a deep willingness to believe in oneself despite all previously established ideologies and stereotypes, and she asserts that Black women's identity has always been taken away because they are constantly referred to as something rather than someone even when they are most successful. She highlighted the value of what it is to be a Black woman and embedded it in the context of culture and Black heritage. One can argue that no woman is only a woman, and a Black woman has way more to her than what the history told from a white perspective has condemned her to be.

It can be contended that Womanism assumes a pivotal role in the process of self-identification, particularly for Black women. It transcends mere gender inequality to address the complex interplay of multiple factors that shape one's identity. For many womanists, the concept of self isn't a stand-alone entity, detached from its surroundings. Instead, the self is seen as intricately connected to family, environment, and, perhaps most importantly, the community and heritage. Furthermore, womanists actively emphasize and embrace all facets of their African heritage and shared experiences, elevating them to a sacred status deserving of celebration, untouched by the harsh forces of racism, colourism, and oppression.

One may further claim that Womanism, a more general term that encompasses Feminism as a subtype, is innately pro-humankind even though Feminism is incorporated within it. This theology focuses more on racial and class oppression than gender inequality. Black women's experiences, Black culture, Black mythologies, spiritual life, and oral tradition are all taken into account by the theory/movement known as Womanism, which advocates for the survival of the Black race. Such a movement also gave a chance to coloured women to envision possible futures where their womanhood is not objectified nor dehumanized but rather celebrated and embraced while neglecting all differences based on colour, class, or gender.

Because both movements shared some ideas on women, some academics frequently draw comparisons between Feminism and Womanism. Nonetheless, one may contend that distinctions between the two are simple to make. Feminists frequently view males as competition and prioritize fighting for gender equality. Moreover, their movement was only focused on white women who frequently avoided anything deemed feminine. Womanists, on the other hand, stand with Black men in their fight against all forms of oppression and support them. They prioritized gender reconciliation over gender equality and took into account the needs and aspirations of Black, Latina, and white women in addition to their own. They valued

womanhood and female sexuality and worked to create standards by which women of colour might assess their experiences in both thought and action.

In her famous line, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" Walker (1983) distinguished between the two, arguing that a womanist is distinct from a feminist in the same way that purple is distinct from lavender. These women of colour express their politics and beliefs through Womanism, a manifestation of Black women's struggles. She connects Feminism to the light lavender shade, which deftly draws attention to the association between Feminism and white women. In contrast to Womanism, which she links to the colour purple because it is the royal hue. In conclusion, it can be said that despite their many disparities, both groups fight for the same fundamental principle, which is their womanhood, and consequently have some things in common. Nonetheless, compared to Black women's starting point, white women came from a more privileged position.

One could argue that these two concepts, while closely intertwined, position Womanism as the overarching framework that encompasses Feminism, rather than the other way around. Nevertheless, the demarcation between these movements is becoming increasingly blurred, especially as contemporary Feminism places a greater emphasis on women of colour. Womanism plays a crucial role in granting agency, recognition, and identity to Black women who had previously been overlooked. The notion that women of African descent should assert their African womanhood and differentiate themselves from Feminism has been and continues to be, widely advocated and endorsed.

### **III.7. Between Womanism and Black Feminism: Unveiling Distinctions**

With more attention brought to the case of Black women and their cause of reclaiming their status and womanhood along with reconstructing their identities on the ground basis of their values and principles away from any previous stereotypes or white patriarchy, movements such as Womanism and Black Feminism gained more popularity and people along with many Black scholars and authors started questioning whether they align with Black Feminism or Womanism. Is the naming truly important? And is it inappropriate to identify as both? Are the two cultural movements truly different from each other? Such questions were highlighted when speaking about Womanism and Black Feminism.

Brewer talked about Womanism and Black Feminism in the book *Companion to Feminist Studies* by Naples (2020) and stated that according to Alice Walker, the whole understanding of being a woman is the core of Womanism. Walker argues that a womanist is

conscious of her worth. In fact, according to Walker, the term itself implies Blackness. It is not necessary to introduce it with the term Black Feminism. Walker nevertheless drew parallels between Black Feminism and Womanism. It is obvious that when Walker first used the term Womanism in 1983, she had Black women's emancipation in mind. As Walker eloquently articulated, Womanism is deeply woven into the fabric of the Black political struggle. The scholar further mentions that Walker does use the term Womanism to link Black women to Feminism. A womanist, according to Walker, is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female, which further clarifies the meaning of the term. As such, Womanism does not serve as a stand-in for Black Feminism, but rather, the two ideologies are related to one another.

Collins (1996) in her article *What's in A Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond* shared her concerns about such matters and gave her thoughts and analysis about this naming issue since it was not just about naming anymore but rather a sense of identification. The author starts by claiming that in many aspects, the decision-making process for Black women is similar to that of African Americans as a whole. African American women in the 1980s and 1990s developed a "voice," or a self-described, collective Black women's viewpoint about Black womanhood, building on the ground-breaking works of Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and other Black women who "broke the silence" in the 1970s. Furthermore, Black women spoke back about how they were portrayed in dominant discourses using this perspective. Black American women's thoughts and experiences have attained visibility as a result of this struggle that was previously unimaginable.

One can argue that contemporary African American women find themselves in a distinct historical epoch. Presently, Black women are increasingly vocal, yet this newfound agency brings forth a unique set of concerns. It becomes imperative to scrutinize how Black women's voices are assimilated within higher education settings, where the acceptance of Black women's texts often surpasses the acceptance of Black women themselves. This strategy of symbolic inclusion may give the illusion of progress, but it obscures the fact that the standard institutional rules and structures that systematically oppress and marginalize African Americans persist largely unchanged.

Black women's decision to speak up in public according to Collins (1996) proved risky at first, but paradoxically it helped a new challenge to arise. Long-standing disparities among Black women constructed along axes of sexuality, social class, country, and religion emerged as a result of the new public safe space created by their success. How Black women's voices



jointly establish, support, and preserve a static Black women's self-defined stance is currently more important than whether African American women can create a singular voice about the Black woman's position. Such solidarity is necessary in light of the problematic political environment that Black women as a group are experiencing. The current essential problem is to maintain group cohesion while acknowledging the enormous variability that exists within the definition of Black women.

In her study, Collins (1996) further claims that the fundamental difficulty of embracing variety among Black women is shown in the present arguments over whether the perspective of Black women should be referred to as "Womanism " or "Black Feminism." Walker offered four definitions of the word "womanist" in 1983. A "womanist," in Walker's first definition, was a Black feminist or a woman of colour. Walker thus uses the two names practically interchangeably on some basic level. Many African American women, like Walker, do not see much of a distinction between the two because they both advocate for the self-definition and self-determination of Black women.

Collins (1996) references Barbara Omolade, capturing her statement: "Black Feminism is sometimes referred to as Womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by Black women who are themselves part of the Black community's efforts to achieve equity and liberty" (p.10). It can be argued that although African American women who identify as Black feminists, womanists, or both, or in some cases, neither share many of the same values, there seems to be a growing focus on identifying the differences, if any, between those that identify as womanists or Black feminists. After all, the label given to the collective viewpoint of Black women seems to matter as much as the movement itself.

Walker's (1983) various uses of the term Womanism in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* provide new insight into the reasons why so many African American women prefer the term Womanism to Black Feminism. Walker provides two opposing definitions of Womanism. Walker makes it obvious that Black women's concrete history of racial and gender subjugation serves as the foundation for Womanism. Walker contends that Black women's concrete history develops a womanist worldview accessible largely and possibly solely to Black women by borrowing the phrase from the Southern Black folk idiom of moms to female offspring, "You acting womanish." The characteristics of "womanish" girls liberated them from the norms that had long constrained white women. They acted in bold, brave, and rebellious ways. Womanish girls had a thirst for knowledge that went beyond what was deemed beneficial for them. They were capable, authoritative, and serious.

Walker (1983) simultaneously implies that Black women are somehow superior to white women due to this Black folk culture, despite her denial that womanists are traditionally universalists, a philosophy invoked by her metaphor of the garden where there is space for all flowers to bloom equally and differently. Walker contrasts the experiences of Black women with those of white women by defining womanly as the opponent of the foolish, irresponsible, not serious, and girlish. According to the definition of Womanism, it differs from and outranks Feminism due to the differing experiences of Black and white women with American racism. The author popularized the analogy, stating that "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender," a widely echoed quote. Black women are "womanists," but white women are still only "feminists," which appears geared to set up this type of comparison. According to the author such usage of the terms is completely consistent with Black nationalist beliefs that hold that Blacks and whites cannot coexist as equals while sharing the same space or taking part in the same social institutions. Black integration or assimilation within a system based on Black enslavement is often not considered useful in Black nationalist theory, which holds that white people as a collective have a stake in maintaining a system of white supremacy. Due to Black hardship, Black nationalism also promotes the idea that Black people are morally superior to white people.

It can be posited that Walker's usage of the term Womanism suggests that these two seemingly opposing ideologies can, to some extent, be reconciled by Black women who adhere to these Black nationalist presumptions and who also see the need to address feminist challenges in African American communities. In this situation, whites in general and white women in particular are the "enemy," and Womanism provides distance from them while still bringing up the gender question. This version of Womanism, which supports racial separatists, provides a vocabulary for discussing gender issues within African American communities without confronting the racially divided environment that typifies American social institutions.

Finding ways to encourage inter-racial female cooperation is a key concern for many white feminists, but this use of Womanism avoids it. Black nationalist female African Americans often show little enthusiasm in collaborating with white females; in fact, white females are seen as contributing to the issue. A further crucial issue for African American women, regardless of political viewpoint, is that Womanism looks to offer a way to promote greater relationships between Black women and Black men. Walker's description again offers direction when she says that womanists are dedicated to the survival and wholeness of all people, both male and female. Many Black women believe that Feminism is, at best, just for women and, at worst, is out to harm or exterminate men which is not and never was what

Womanism is about (Collins, 1996). Womanism seemingly supplies a way for Black women to address gender oppression without attacking Black men.

Collins (1996) cites Walker who gives Womanism a visionary interpretation. Walker has a Black child who asks: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and Black?" (p.11). As part of her second definition, the response was "The coloured race is just like a flower garden, with every colour flower represented" (p.11), both condemn colourism in African American communities and expand the definition of humanity to include all people. When interpreting this verse metaphorically, Womanism thus offers a vision in which men and women of many races coexist like flowers in a garden while maintaining their cultural originality and integrity.

This definition of Womanism according to Collins (1996), appears to have roots in a pluralist interpretation of Black empowerment, another important political tradition in African American politics. According to the pluralist perspective, society is made up of numerous ethnic and interest groups that compete with one another for commodities and services. Giving all groups equal access to opportunity, rights, and respect is the essence of equity. Pluralism offers a modified version of racial integration that is based on collective integration rather than individual assimilation by maintaining the originality and integrity of Black culture. Many Black women theorists have been drawn to this fusing of pluralism and racial integration in this interpretation of Walker's "Womanism," clearly rejecting what they believe to be the constrained picture of Feminism projected by North American white women. Womanism is a constantly developing ethical philosophy; it is not a closed, rigid set of ideas but rather one that changes through time as a result of its opposition to all forms of oppression and dedication to social justice.

Walker's definition, Collins (1996) asserts, successfully alludes to three significant yet incompatible philosophies that shape Black social and political thought: Black nationalism through her claims of Black women's moral and epistemological superiority through experiencing racial and gender oppression, pluralism through the cultural integrity offered by the metaphor of the garden, and integration/assimilation through her claims that Black women are "traditionally universalist." Walker's conceptions of Womanism show a similar contradiction to how Black nationalism and racial integration coexist in an uneasy relationship, with pluralism filling the contested space between the two. Walker showcases the capacity of marginalized individuals to develop a moral perspective and societal standpoint born from their experiences of oppression. She achieves this by anchoring Womanism in the unique experiences of African American women and extrapolating broader insights about the potential

for realizing a humanistic vision of community through these experiences. This perspective holds promise as a basis for constructing a fairer and more human-centered society. In essence, Walker's use of the term "Womanism " creates a conceptual framework that authentically captures philosophical distinctions among African American women.

Black women's use of Womanism has a particularly significant characteristic that relates to the part of Walker's definition that is yet unacknowledged. Before the frequently quoted sentence, "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Collins, 1996, p.12), there is a line that may be more problematic for individuals who identify as womanists. A womanist is also "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually" (p.12), according to Walker, just before she cautions that womanists are by definition devoted to wholeness. Considering the enduring hesitance of Black women to openly discuss the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, particularly the often perceived "taboo" topic of lesbianism, the relatively limited discourse among womanists on this facet of Womanism becomes significant.

Collins (1996) also refers to Barbara Smith, a Black feminist and critic who argues that African American women have not yet accepted homosexuality in African American communities and mentions that in her essay *The Truth That Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s* (1990). Smith acknowledges the expansion of Black women's literature in the 1980s but also points out that Black lesbians are still underrepresented in Black feminist intellectual creation. Although both womanists and Black feminists assert that some of the most influential and strong Black women intellectuals were and are lesbians, this principle frequently goes unmentioned in the writing of African American authors.

Moreover, it can be argued that a clear analysis of the use of the term Black Feminism draws the difference between such movement and Womanism. A feminist agenda covers several important topics on a global scale. A key issue for women worldwide is, first and foremost, the economic condition of women and concerns related to their global poverty, such as educational possibilities, industrial development, environmental racism, employment policies, prostitution, and inheritance laws about property. A second area of concern is the lack of political rights for women, including the right to vote, the freedom to organize, the ability to travel openly, the right to hold office, the right of political prisoners, and the fundamental human rights crimes against women including rape and torture.

A significant global focus for feminists involves marriage and family matters, encompassing regulations governing marriage and divorce, child custody agreements, and domestic responsibilities. Another major area of concern for feminists worldwide pertains to

women's health and well-being, spanning issues like AIDS, sexuality, pregnancy, and reproductive rights. The expansive feminist agenda on a global scale takes diverse forms among different populations and in various regions. Black American women, by adopting the term Black Feminism, are positioned to examine how the unique challenges affecting Black women in the United States connect with the broader struggles for women's liberation globally.

Many African American women have long battled against this exclusive Feminism and taken part in what seems to be whites-only feminist activities, despite their media eraser. In certain instances, Black women have long openly opposed racism within feminist groups run by white women. Sojourner Truth's famous line "Ain't I a Woman" epitomizes this age-old custom. At times, even though Black women's involvement in feminist organizations is mainly invisible, they held positions of leadership inside those organizations. Collins (1996) asserts that when Feminism is presented as an ideology and political movement that is exclusively for white people, racism is evident. By using the term "Black Feminism," this racism is disrupted. When the descriptor "Black" is used, it undermines the false universal of Feminism, which holds that both white women and Black women are included in its purview. The phrase "Black feminist" draws attention to the paradoxes behind the presumption that Feminism is white and aims to remind white women that they do not comprise the only or the normative feminists as many Black women believe that white women do not share their feminist consciousness.

Furthermore, one could posit that many African American women are uneasy when they hear the term "Black Feminism," since it forces them to examine their attitudes toward sexism and the oppression of women. Even though they may accept the fundamental concepts on which Feminism is based, the majority of African American women see their own experiences repackaged in racist school curricula and media, and many of them reject the label Feminism because they believe it to be associated with whiteness. Many believe that Feminism only operates within the parameters of being white and American while seeing its antithesis as being Black and American.

Collins (1996) contends that Black women frequently select "race" and disregard the less important issue of "gender" when presented with these two constrained and deceptive options. In this instance, there is a call to reclassify Black women who identify as feminists, categorizing them as either non-Black or as possessing a purportedly lesser degree of Black authenticity. Black political theories, particularly Black nationalist and cultural pluralist ones have long relied on Black racial unity as a foundational principle. Nevertheless, the label "Black Feminism" upends this long-standing and largely assumed premise.

Building upon Collins' perspective, it is reasonable to claim that the term "Black Feminism" is used with several challenges. One involves the challenge of balancing Black women's sincere concerns with the pressure to incorporate and reframe them within white feminist paradigms. For instance, the Feminism of African American women and women of colour continues to place a major emphasis on safeguarding political rights and economic development through collective action to transform social structures. However, the emphasis on issues like personal identity, accepting difference, deconstructing women's multiple selves, and the oversimplified conception of politics expressed by the phrase "personal is political" that currently permeates North American white women's Feminism in the academy can work to rob Black Feminism of its critical rim.

Furthermore, a white woman with a different feminist goal may take notice of current Black women intellectuals' attempts to explain a long-standing Black women's intellectual tradition known as Black Feminism. Black women's concerns that are not viewed as feminist, particularly those that just affect women, are given significantly less support. In a sense, Black women's energy is diverted away from tackling socioeconomic concerns facing African American communities by the constant drumbeat of having to assist white women in their efforts to develop an anti-racist Feminism that gives Black women access to the worldwide network of women's action. Some Black women quite rightly doubt Black Feminism's motivations because they seem to be so favourably received by white women in the context of the dualistic racial politics of the United States.

The direct opposition that Black Feminism faces to some aspects of Black religious traditions is another difficulty for the movement. For instance, the prominence of white lesbians in North American Feminism as a whole is directly at odds with the religious beliefs of many Black women, who believe that homosexuality is a sin. While some African American women may accept gays, lesbians, and bisexual people as individuals, particularly if they are also African Americans, Black women collectively have distanced themselves from societal movements that they believe demand acceptance of homosexuality. "Why must I accept lesbianism to support Black Feminism?" a young Black lady questioned (Collins, 1996, p.14). For Black women, it is still troublesome that Feminism is associated with lesbianism.

Black Feminism also faces difficulties due to the perception of its separatism. Many Black Americans believe that Black Feminism is only for Black women and rejects Black men. Sherley Ann Williams explains her preference for Womanism by stating: "One of the most disturbing aspects of current Black feminist criticism (is) its separatism or, rather, its tendency to see not only a distinct Black female culture but to see that culture as a separate cultural form

having more in common with white female experience than with the facticity of Afro-American life". (Collins, 1996, p.15). This is a legitimate criticism of Black Feminism that needs to be addressed if its core principles are to avoid the risk of growing farther removed from the experiences and interests of African American women. But it also raises the more general issue of how difficult it remains to situate Black Feminism between Black nationalism and white Feminism in North America. In other words, Black Feminism must reconcile with both a white feminist agenda that is blind to its racism and a Black nationalist agenda that is unable to acknowledge its sexism. It is still difficult to find a place that can satisfy these seemingly incompatible objectives.

Collins (1996) thus encourages the idea that no name or label can ever fully capture what a Black woman is all about. Such titles could never do credit to a Black woman since she is so complex and embodies so many different attributes. Black women's presence in hierarchical power relations, according to Collins, produces various yet connected allegiances to a Black woman's self-defined standpoint. This is demonstrated by African American women's efforts to distinguish between Black Feminism and Womanism. While there may not be much of a difference between African American women who identify as Black feminists and womanists on the surface, Black women's varied experiences in neighborhoods, schools, and labor markets result in substantially different opinions about the tactics they believe will ultimately lead to their self-determination.

This association can serve to separate Womanism from global women's issues even while it draws on a historical philosophy and a set of social institutions centered on the importance of racial unity for Black survival. Black Feminism's linkages to the domestic and international struggles that women are currently facing help to clarify its political agenda on gender, but its purported association with whiteness helps to fuel its rejection by the same group that it seeks to represent. It is reasonable to claim that there is currently no terminology that sufficiently captures the essence of what various organizations of Black women alternately refer to as Womanism and Black Feminism. Perhaps it is now appropriate to move beyond naming and examine the key contributions made by both womanists and Black feminists to the general problem of examining how gender shapes a variety of relationships within African American communities. Such a review could include many aspects.

Additionally, it can be argued that it is imperative to recognize that the discourse surrounding Womanism versus Black Feminism predominantly occurs within the sphere of relatively affluent Black women. Both Black Feminism and Womanism stand to gain insights by addressing the growing disparity between the concerns prioritized by privileged Black

women, particularly those within academic circles, and what a substantial portion of African American women outside of higher education may deem significant. Despite potential physical similarities and shared geographical locations, the experiences of these African American women markedly diverge. One may raise questions about how closely the subject matter discussed by recently emerging voices of Black women in academia aligns with and speaks to the preoccupations of the majority of Black American women who continue to grapple with literacy challenges.

Collins (1996) claims that since a huge proportion of Black women are still confined to communities built around the remnants of racial apartheid centers, Black women scholars investigate fascinating questions about centers and margins and attempt to deconstruct Black female identity. Many Black women are left doing the dry cleaning, cooking the fast food, and dusting the computer of the sister who has just finished writing the newest theoretical disquisition on Black women when discussions of centers and margins, even the process of coming to voice itself, do not simultaneously address issues of power. A clearer understanding of how gender oppression interacts with racial oppression for both Black men and women should result from moving the focus from the oppression of Black women to how institutionalized racism manifests itself in gender-specific ways. This change may give African Americans as a group, greater political options. Just as sexism does not necessarily dwell in masculine bodies, neither does Feminism. It might be time to dissociate political ideologies like Feminism, Afrocentrism, and Black nationalism from the socially constructed categories of people engendered by racist and sexist historical relationships. Although Black males cannot share the experiences of Black women, they can support African American women by promoting anti-racist and anti-sexist ideals in their academic and political endeavors.

Such strategy appears to be advantageous to the Black community as a whole since it demonstrates sensitivity to the heterogeneity that currently exists within the phrase "Black community," including differences in class, nationality, sexual orientation, and age. So, the Womanism /Black Feminism discussion offers a great chance to demonstrate how to create a sense of community via diversity rather than sameness. For African American women, bringing Alice Walker's seemingly incompatible definitions of womanist and Black feminist to life entails taking on the challenging task of analyzing the various ways in which Black women have been impacted by interconnected systems of oppression (Collins, 1996).

Expanding upon Collins' analysis, it can be argued that among Black women, there exists a spectrum of experiences where some must grapple with internalized oppression linked to poverty, while others must contend with internalized privilege associated with being middle



or upper-class. Certain Black women find themselves compelled to confront the privileges tied to their heterosexual behavior or the fact that being an American citizen affords them freedoms not available to women in other parts of the diaspora. To advance relatively diverse African American women towards Walker's pioneering concept of Womanism, it becomes imperative to address the interconnected nature of various oppressive institutions and explore how such intersectionality can inspire resistance. Establishing guidelines for fostering connections across differences is essential for Black women and men, guided by a commitment to social justice and participatory democracy.

In the exploration of Womanism versus Black Feminism, the vibrancy of thought within the broader context of feminist theory is discovered. These two movements, while distinct in certain aspects, are united in their commitment to addressing the unique challenges faced by Black women. Womanism, rooted in the African American experience, emphasizes the significance of culture, community, and heritage in the struggle for justice. Black Feminism, on the other hand, embraces a broader coalition of women of colour while maintaining a shared commitment to dismantling oppressive structures. Moreover, it can be contended that the dynamic tension between Womanism and Black Feminism serves as a testament to the resilience and complexity of the Black women's movement. It illustrates that within this dialogue, there is room for diverse perspectives and strategies for social change. In this ongoing discourse, we find not a competition but a powerful synergy, strengthening the collective voice of Black women and propelling the broader feminist movement toward a more equitable and inclusive future. Womanism and Black Feminism, while unique in their approaches, are interconnected facets of a unified struggle for justice and liberation.

### **III.7.1. Africana Womanism: Continuity of Evolution and Empowerment**

Africana Womanism emerged as a revolt against all earlier Black woman-related ideologies. Clenora Hudson-Weems, an African American author and trailblazing theorist, scholar, and activist, introduced the term in the late 1980s. She devoted her works to providing a detailed descriptive distinction between Africana Womanism, Feminism, Black Feminism, and Alice Walker's Womanism. This movement, which is centered on African culture and Afrocentrism, is largely influenced by the experiences, difficulties, demands, and aspirations of African women of the diaspora. Hudson-Weems frequently makes it clear that her theory is a method with unique African requirements and sensitivities rather than merely an idea.

African American women have never been subjected to the same restrictions or evaluation criteria as other women in America. It can be claimed that Black women have a particular set of difficulties anywhere in the world. Consequently, it would be prudent to take the distinctions into account when researching or coming up with solutions for Black women's historical and contemporary situations. In her book, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (2019), Hudson-Weems revisits her theory and makes a persuasive case for a paradigm created for and by Black women. The theorist defines Africana Womanism, explains why it is necessary, sets it apart from other ideologies, and outlines how it has developed in the new version.

This movement is generally acknowledged as a theoretical concept and approach that establishes a new paradigm and provides an alternative to all types of Feminism. It uses terminology and has a notion that takes into account both gender (Womanism) and African descent from whether Africa or the diaspora (Africana: The movement seems to prefer the name Africana over African, which is the feminine variant of the Latin word Africanus, which means Of Africa). It was eventually determined that the idea is neither an extension of nor a supplement to the Feminism that some Africana women have grown to accept, including Walker's Womanism and Black Feminism. It critically examines the mechanisms of disagreement among mainstream feminists, Black feminists, African feminists, and Africana womanists.

It can be contended that Hudson-Weems often contends in her works that the formation of the concept set the contributions of African women apart from those of African male intellectuals, Feminism, and Black Feminism. To avoid blending in with other social groupings, she thought it was time for African women to develop their ideals. As a result, the term "Africana Womanism " is more appropriate for the Africana woman, who is both a self-identifier and a self-definitor. These facts relate to the diverse problems, views, and desires of African women. Furthermore, women of colour in the Americas have rearranged their identities in such a way that two facets of their makeup—Blackness and womanhood—can occasionally cast them in contradictory, dangerous roles. Black women therefore had distinct perspectives and ways of living than Black men, white women, and white men.

Several academics, including Hudson-Weems, have commonly noted that unlike the white feminist, who is engaged in a centuries-old conflict with her white male counterpart for treating her as his property, Africana women do not consider men as their main enemies. White men have historically had more institutionalized power to oppress white women than African

American men have ever had to mistreat African American women. Black women are denied the luxury of being consumed by gender issues in the struggle against racial injustice.

Hudson-Weems (2019) stated:

Africana Womanism is a term I coined and defined in 1987 after nearly two years of publicly debating the importance of self-naming for Africana women. Why the term "Africana Womanism"? Upon concluding that the term "Black Womanism" was not quite the terminology to include the total meaning desired for this concept, I decided that "Africana Womanism," a natural evolution in naming, was the ideal terminology for two basic reasons. The first part of the coinage, Africana, identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base-Africa. The second part of the term, Womanism, recalls Sojourner Truth's powerful impromptu speech "And Ain't I A Woman," one in which she battles with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood. Without question, she is the flip side of the coin, the co-partner in the struggle for her people, one who, unlike the White woman, has received no special privileges in American society. But there is another crucial issue that accounts for the use of the term woman(ism). The term "woman," and by extension "Womanism," is far more appropriate than "female" ("Feminism") because of one major distinction--only a female of the human race can be a woman. "Female," on the other hand, can refer to a member of the animal or plant kingdom as well as to a member of the human race. Furthermore, in electronic and mechanical terminology, there is a female counterbalance to the male correlative. Hence, terminology derived from the word "woman" is more suitable and more specific when naming a group of the human race. (p.22-23).

Verner (1994) wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* stating:

Africana Womanism in essence says: We love men. We like being women. We love children. We like being mothers. We value life. We have faith in God and the Bible. We want families and harmonious relationships. We are not at war with our men seeking money, power, and influence through confrontation. Our history is unique. We are the inheritors of African American women's history, and as such we shall not redefine ourselves nor that history to meet some politically correct image of a popular culture movement, which demands the

right to speak for and redefine the morals and mores of all racial, cultural and ethnic groups. Nor shall we allow history to be "shanghied" to legitimize the "global political agenda" of others. We reject the status of the victim. Indeed, we are victors, Sisters in Charge of our destiny. We are Africana culture keepers: Our primary obligation is to progress our cultural way of life through the stability of family and the commitment to community. The rite of passing generation-to-generation knowledge free from outside manipulation, coercion, or intimidation ensures traditional integrity, which fosters a climate of cultural security. Traditional cultures should not be obligated to bow to redefinitions foisted upon them by elitist entities that gain their authority via the drive of well-organized media hype.

Therefore, it is possible to view Africana Womanism as an ideology that all women of African heritage should adhere to. Focusing on the experiences, challenges, requirements, and aspirations of Africana women in the African diaspora, it is rooted in African culture and Afrocentrism. It sets itself apart from Feminism and Alice Walker's Womanism. The reality and racial inequities in society are more prominently addressed by Africana Womanism. The movement emphasizes the relationship between an Africana woman's attempts to live authentically, such as prioritizing her needs even when those needs are not of primary concern for the dominant culture, and her family, her community, and her career in today's society that prioritizes the empowerment of women and individualism over human dignity and rights in the face of oppression, human suffering, and fatality.

Hudson-Weems (2019) argues that Africana women who do embrace Feminism do so because it is theoretically and methodologically legitimate in academia and because they want to be accepted as respectable members of the academic community. Also, they adopt Feminism due to the dearth of a framework that is appropriate for their particular requirements as Africana women. While some have accepted the title, more and more Africana women are now reevaluating the historical truths and the goals of the modern Feminism movement in the university and the community. Some women are concluding that Feminism does not adequately capture their situation or their struggle. As a result, Feminism, specifically Black Feminism, which refers to African American women in particular, is very problematic as a description of the real African woman and sparks a lot of discussion and argument among modern scholars and women in general.

Hudson-Weems (2019) continues to make the case that it is clear that neither the terms Black Feminism nor African Feminism are adequate to categorize women with such diverse

realities as Africana women, especially given that both terms, by their titles, identify with Feminism. She further argues that Feminism, a label created and embraced by white women, refers to an agenda created to address the interests and aspirations of that specific group. It makes sense that white women would identify with Feminism and the feminist movement for this reason. Despite this, it is still problematic to group all women's histories under white women's histories to give the latter a dominant position. It exemplifies the height of racism's haughtiness and dominance by implying that white women are the only ones capable of engaging in true female activities.

Hudson-Weems (2019) even appears to flip the script, asserting that what white feminists have done is use the methods and ways of Africana women activists as models or blueprints for the structure of their theory before naming, defining, and approving it as the only genuine substantive movement for women. As a result, when they describe themselves as feminists and engage in feminist activities, they are associating with strong, independent Africana women whom they both admire and envy. They have encountered such women from the earliest days of American slavery up till the modern Civil Rights Movement. The author furthermore criticizes Walker's Womanism by stating that it is obvious that the focus of this case is nearly entirely on the woman, her sexuality, and her culture.

The concluding statement, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" firmly confirms Walker's idea of the relationship between the womanist and the feminist. There is practically no distinction, merely a small variation in colour tone. On the Other hand, the Africana womanist differs greatly from the mainstream feminist, notably in her viewpoint and method of approaching social issues. This is to be expected because their historical realities and current social position are manifestly different. Women of colour and white women originate from distinct social backgrounds, hence Feminism as a philosophy does not apply equally to both groups of women. Hudson-Weems (2019) states:

Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to Feminism, Africana Womanism is not Black Feminism, African Feminism, or Walker's Womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana womanist. The conclusion is that Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both White Feminism and Black Feminism,

and to the extent of naming in particular, Africana Womanism differs from African Feminism (p.24).

Hudson-Weems (2019) further affirms that Africana women are not considered feminists because both Africana men and women do not share this belief. The feminist movement is widely regarded as being the movement of white women for two reasons, according to the Africana community. First of all, unlike the white feminist who is waging a centuries-old war with her white male counterpart for treating her as his property, the Africana woman does not consider the man as her main enemy. The institutional authority that white men have had to oppress white women has never been shared by African American men with white women. She quotes Joyce Ladner who stated: "Black women do not perceive their enemy to be Black men, but rather the enemy is considered to be oppressive forces in the larger society which subjugate Black men, women and children" (p.25).

Secondly, because they are wary of and distrustful of white groups, Africana women reject the feminist movement. In actuality, the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.) and other structured White organizations, in general, have never been able to inspire the majority of African Americans. The majority of Africana people are low-level workers who rely on the trust and support of their communities. Because of historical instances of betrayal, they are compelled to be wary of institutions started, run, and governed by White people. Africanans are typically not issue-oriented, in contrast to members of the dominant culture. Instead, they concentrate on concrete measures that can help oppression be lessened or ended, which are crucial for the Africana community's survival. According to Hudson-Weems (2019), Africana intellectuals who are adamant on aligning themselves with groups that cannot afford them leadership or high exposure typically subordinate their race to fitting in with White intellectuals. Regrettably for those Africana intellectuals, philosophy and scholarship transcend even self-identity, and they appear to find satisfaction in simply being a member of a white organization.

When it comes to Black Feminism, Hudson-Weems (2019) argues that the term Black feminist refers to an African American woman who, like the white feminist, has somewhat embraced the goals of the feminist movement and believes that gender issues are crucial to her search for emancipation and self-hood. Black feminists are on the periphery of the feminist movement and do not hold positions of authority or leadership. Hooks (1982) acknowledges this, as evidenced by her call for Africana women to actively engage in the feminist movement by shifting "from margin to center." White feminists frequently designate Black feminists as the voice of Africana women. Yet, this tangential support for Black feminists is only temporary because they will never be as significant as white feminists. For instance, bell Hooks will never

achieve the same stature as either Betty Friedan or Gloria Steinem. As spokespeople and representatives for Africanans in general and African women in particular, she and other Black feminists are, at best, afforded only ephemeral recognition. Black feminists push a position that is directly at odds with that of the Africana community, revealing a lack of an African-centered historical and contemporary perspective.

A group is nearly always successful when it takes charge of its conflict and shapes it to satisfy its needs and expectations as a whole. When one's goals are achieved, it creates a more tranquil reality for everyone involved, and one is more likely to have a positive and supportive relationship with others because one knows that the needs of the people are respected and taken care of. Africana Womanism, as opposed to Feminism, Black Feminism, African Feminism, or Womanism, is a realistic alternative for the Africana woman in her collective struggle with the entire community; it expands the likelihood that Africana people will one day be treated with dignity and that everyone will be treated with humanity. In essence, recognizing and addressing Africanans shared struggle is a crucial first step in ensuring the survival and peace of humanity (Hudson-Weems, 2019).

Moreover, it can be argued that the term "Africana Womanism" was not intended to mock or reject Walker's Womanism or Black Feminism, which some women of colour have identified with. Africana Womanism was created to serve as a reminder to Africana women that they should demand and prioritize themselves in addition to equitable treatment for themselves and their children, equal career prospects, and employment for their male counterparts. Because it involves being more accepting of all women of colour, Alice Walker's Womanism differs from Africana Womanism. Hudson-Weems, in contrast, seems to take the position that no one will show up for Black women like Black women stand up for themselves or African American women assuming responsibility for themselves, and their families, including African American males.

Hudson-Weems (2019) outlines eighteen fundamental tenets that form the movement's core. The author states that an Africana womanist is 1) a self-namer "nommo"; 2) a self-definer; 3) family-centered; 4) genuine in sisterhood; 5) strong; 6) in concert with the Africana man in struggle; 7) whole; 8) authentic; 9) a flexible role player; 10) respected; 11) recognized; 12) spiritual; 13) male compatible; 14) respectful of elders; 15) adaptable; 16) ambitious; 17) mothering; and 18) nurturing. She states that: "Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and, therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women." (p.154-155).

One could argue that each of the traits listed above has a distinct significance and together they form the basis of Africana Womanism. The relevance of self-identification as an Africana person throughout society is covered by the first Self-naming theory. The term "Africana" distinguishes itself from "Feminism" and Black variants, and it also signifies that the movement is called for the people it advocates for. The second widely accepted paradigm, self-definition, seeks to foster a sense of togetherness among all Africans by highlighting the difficulties faced by African women via a Pan-African lens. For people to recognize one, one must first acknowledge and identify oneself within any dominating culture or civilization. As a result of the other components being grouped as a whole, there is still a sense of unity in the belief in the growth of the Black community as a collective.

It can be contended that Hudson-Weems emphasizes the crucial component that Africana womanists do not view motherhood as a burden. The right to raise and care for one's children has historically been denied to Black women in the diaspora. Motherhood is therefore valued in Africana Womanism. According to Hudson-Weems, the traumas suffered by Black people have called for the restoration and upliftment of entire communities, not just one gender. This hypothesis simply makes sense for African families who have endured generations of abuse and dissolution due to racism, colonialism, and enslavement. Black women who want to battle for their families do not have to feel guilty or deficient because of this, according to the Africana Womanism paradigm.

Furthermore, self-affirming is Africana Womanism. Black women are judged by a criterion that "de-womanizes" and denigrates them. Black women's strength and value are acknowledged by Africana Womanism. Women of colour never remained quiet, frail, or feeble. In fact, according to Hudson-Weems, precolonial African culture is rife with female leadership and strength, and African cosmology views women as equal to males rather than as an attachment. African women have been referred to with offensive names and stigmatized as being "whores, bitches, and mommies". Hudson-Weems (2019) references Toni Morrison who challenges the recognition of the true meaning behind these cliches when she states that every woman aspires to be kind and nurturing, sexually comfortable in her own skin, competent and strong. This is an illustration of the harmful effects and undervaluing of African women by Western standards and conceptions. A distorted image of Black women is produced by these criteria. Qualities that ought to be admired end up being mocked and derided.

According to Hudson-Weems (2019), Africana Womanism advocates for standards that are founded on Black criteria and recognize the advantages of being a Black woman. Africana Womanism is a movement that speaks to the struggles and aspirations of Black people and is



based on African culture. The author, in the second part of her book, uses some illustrations with some works that were claimed to be feminist and asserts that they are rather Africana womanist works. Her first selected work was *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston. She also demonstrates the essence of her concept through works such as *So Long a Letter* (1979) by Mariama Bà and *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) by Paule Marshall.

Hudson-Weems (2019) claims that she does not want to eradicate nor replace what other movements before hers had offered to the cause of womanhood and gender issues, but rather add a new perspective to the whole ideology and give people a new lens through which they could see such concepts differently. Such a movement also changed all previous perspectives on how women should see men and their cause. It was never a matter of revelry but rather standing together in the face of a bigger cause that could open possibly better futures for the whole community mainly in the diaspora. According to the author, it is apparent that these women's issues are not a result of their gender alone. They are victimized primarily because they are Black, and they are also victimized further because they are women living in a culture where men predominate. In the end, Africana communities must work together to find solutions to the issues affecting Africana women, such as physical abuse, sexual harassment, and generalized female enslavement committed both inside and beyond the race. African Americans must first rid themselves of all forms of racism since it is no longer an option to endorse or tolerate any sort of female subjugation. According to this reasoning, Africana Womanism considers racial and social class oppression to be much more serious than gender oppression.

To conclude, Africana Womanism is a theoretical framework developed within feminist thought to address monolithic tensions within Feminism as a whole as well as to provide a forum for the perspectives, viewpoints, and dialogues of women of African descent (including those from African America, the African-Caribbean, and continental Africa). While expressing widespread epistemic presuppositions among Africana women, it incorporates a variety of theoretical approaches. This not only echoes the need for varied viewpoints in occupational research but also supports the investigation of fresh conceptions of gendered employment in the context of Africana womanhood. Additionally, Africana Womanism promotes self-acceptance. According to a criterion that de-womanizes and denigrates them, Black women are judged. Africana Womanism acknowledges Black women's strength and value and promotes the fact that they have never been submissive or frail.

Moreover, through the exploration of Africana Womanism and Womanism, it becomes evident that these two approaches are not in opposition to each other but rather complementary facets of a broader feminist discourse. The significance lies in recognizing the multifaceted

nature of women's experiences within the African diaspora. Africana Womanism, with its foundation deeply embedded in African and African American culture, serves as a lens through which to view the intricate web of history, heritage, and community. It highlights the interconnectedness of Black women's experiences with their broader cultural and social contexts. This perspective is invaluable as it allows us to understand how the struggles and triumphs of Black women are deeply intertwined with their rich cultural and historical tapestry. On the other hand, Womanism, as championed by figures like Alice Walker, emphasizes the strength of sisterhood and solidarity among women of colour. It broadens the scope to encompass the shared experiences of women from various backgrounds, united in their commitment to dismantling oppressive systems. Womanism emphasizes collective empowerment and the importance of women working together to achieve justice and equality.

In this dialogue, it is not a matter of choosing one over the Other but recognizing that both offer invaluable perspectives that broaden the scope of Black womanhood and femininity. Together, they create a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the struggles and triumphs of Black women. Moreover, recognizing the unique perspectives offered by Africana Womanism and Womanism allows us to celebrate the diversity within feminist thought. Moreover, it reinforces our shared dedication to achieving justice, equality, and the empowerment of women within the African diaspora.

### **III.8. Conclusion**

Historically, conceptions of identity were heavily shaped by race, class, and gender. Femininity was linked to traditional roles of motherhood and housekeeping, dictated by a predominantly male-dominated society. The feminist movement emerged as a revolutionary force to challenge these gender norms and the male-dominated culture. It redefined femininity and reshaped history. Yet, criticism exists that the movement primarily addressed the concerns of middle-class white women, overlooking the needs and aspirations of Black women. Movements like Black Feminism, Womanism, and Africana Womanism emerged to challenge stereotypes and decolonize the identities of women of colour. These movements address not only gender discrimination but also racial biases, renegotiating womanhood and identity. While rooted in African diasporic experiences, they have a global impact on redefining femininity for Black women.

To examine the detrimental and systemic nature of controlling images and stereotypes of Black women, this chapter relies on the work of feminists, Black feminists, womanists, and

Africana womanist researchers. An anti-Black woman agenda can be promoted in today's media, which leads to ongoing attacks against African people. The majority of the public's present ideas about African American femininity are based on stereotypes. This part of the research intended to actively involve Africana women as agents of their image liberation through an empirical investigation of the many movements that backed the cause of Black women reconstructing their identities and reversing stereotypes. Female African Americans are shifting their perspectives on who they are and how they wish to be recognized.

# **Chapter Four**

Towards an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto: A Womanist Afrofuturist  
Reconstruction of The Black Female's Identity

## **Chapter Four**

### **Towards an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto: A Womanist Afrofuturist Reconstruction of The Black Female's Identity**

#### **IV.1. Introduction**

Afrofuturism empowers Black women by showcasing their pivotal roles in reshaping narratives, re-envisioning futures, and challenging stereotypes within the genre. Through various mediums like art, literature, and music, Black women in Afrofuturism dismantle oppressive structures, celebrate their stories, and advocate for equity while exploring themes of identity, intersectionality, and cultural heritage. Afrofuturism reconstructs Black womanhood by celebrating and amplifying the multifaceted nature of their existence. It rejects monolithic portrayals and embraces the diversity of Black womanhood, encompassing various identities, experiences, and expressions of femininity. This chapter explores the connection between Afrofuturism and Womanism in reconstructing Black women's identities. It emphasizes the urgent need for an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto in a landscape where the voices and stories of Black women are often sidelined. Acknowledging the lack of such a comprehensive framework, the significance of such a Manifesto becomes crucial. Therefore, chapter four explores the importance of this Manifesto in amplifying the voices, experiences, and aspirations of Black women within the intersection of Afrofuturism and Womanism.

#### **IV.2. Future of Her Making: Embracing Black Feminine Futurity**

In a world where history and destiny intertwine, there exists a profound narrative that deserves our attention—the story of Black women. These remarkable individuals are not just living in the present; they are, in many ways, representatives of the future. Their experiences, dreams, and aspirations hold the potential to reshape our understanding of identity, resilience, and progress. In the rich mosaic of human existence, Black girls have emerged as luminous threads that bind the past, present, and future into a tapestry of hope and resilience. From writers and artists to scientists and leaders, their collective contributions form a testament to the enduring strength and boundless potential of Black women, challenging traditional notions of what the future holds.

The notion of "Black girls are from the future" encapsulates the idea that Black girls possess unique insights, wisdom, and abilities that can bring about transformative change. It emphasizes the importance of centering Black girls' voices and experiences, uplifting their contributions, and providing them with the opportunities and resources necessary for their success. It is a powerful affirmation that highlights the resilience, strength, and potential of Black girls and women. It challenges harmful stereotypes and narratives that have historically marginalized and underestimated them. By proclaiming that Black females are from the future, it acknowledges their inherent value, brilliance, and capacity to shape the world. It suggests that Black females possess a unique perspective and voice that can contribute to creating a better future for themselves and their communities.

This affirmation also recognizes the historical and ongoing contributions of Black women in various fields and movements. It acknowledges their leadership, innovation, creativity, and intellectual prowess, which have often been overlooked or erased in mainstream narratives. Additionally, the statement implies that Black girls/women have the power to redefine and transcend limitations imposed on them, whether those limitations are societal, structural, or cultural. It encourages Black girls to dream big, envision new possibilities, and actively participate in shaping their destinies. It inspires Black women to challenge long-standing negative preconceptions about themselves and position themselves in technologically sophisticated, futuristic settings where they may succeed and take the lead. As Dary (1994) stated: "Black to the future, back to the past...History is a mystery because it has all the info You need to know. Where you're from, why'd you come and that'll tell you where you're going. We gotta unite, we gotta work together in unity and harmony. Black to the future." (p.8).

Butler (2021) mentions author Caitlin O'Neill who investigated the origin of such a powerful statement and explored the concept. The author recounts the story of Renina Jarmon who relocated to a new location, enrolled in graduate school, and ended her relationship all at once in the fall of 2009. A few days before New Year's, Jarmon contacted her father from her tired, overworked, and exhausted state. She took some time to tell him she was lonely. Her father, a wise confidant, persuaded her to go back to Brooklyn, New York, where she had built a network of friends and relatives since starting her undergraduate studies at the New School. When she got back, Jarmon's life in College Park, Maryland, with all of its difficulties, would be waiting for her. Following her father's suggestion, Jarmon gathered her belongings, dressed in a pair of stylish silver leggings, and left for home.

O'Neill (2021) states that Jarmon recalled with affection how, upon seeing her and her sparkly silver pants, her home girl asked her, "Girl, where did you come from in the future?" (p.61). Jarmon welcomed the New Year surrounded by tenderness, confident that she had made the correct decision. She would create the Twitter hashtag #Black girlsarefromthefuture a month later to honour her experience and her silver leggings, at least a year before #blackgirlmagic was used. In 2013, Jarmon would self-publish a book titled *Black Girls Are from the Future: Essays on Race, Digital Creativity, and Pop Culture*. She had been writing for years as a contributing writer to *Racialicious* and a part of the Crunk Feminist Collective. The author argues that if taken at face value, Jarmon's tale can be seen as a pleasant lesson on the value of self-care and chosen family, but what makes it most intriguing is the query made by her "homegirl". Has Renina Jarmon arrived from the future? To fully understand this, it is crucial to return to the writings of bell hooks, a groundbreaking Black feminist theorist and the author of important texts like *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women* and *Self Recovery*, where Hooks describes an experience that uncannily parallels the conversation Jarmon had with her father twenty years earlier. Hooks was addressing a student at the time, but she was also commenting about her own difficult experience teaching at a tiny liberal arts institution where she was not appreciated or encouraged in her work.

A student in Hooks' campus support group for young Black women called her late one night saying she was struggling to heal from a breakup and was thinking about taking her own life. Hooks comfortingly revealed to the other lady what she referred to as a "spell" she frequently employed to help her get over heartbreak and exhaustion. Hooks argues that the most significant portion of the spell is the only portion accessible to readers of the book. She states: "When you wake up and find yourself living someplace where there is nobody you love and trust, no community, it is time to leave town...Pack up and go...you can even go tonight...Where you need to go is any place where there are arms that can hold you, that will not let you go" (O'Neill, 2021, p.62). Although leaving may be difficult, if not impossible, for many Black women, it may be possible to take this advice in moderation, like Jarmon who returned "home," if only for a short time, to ring in the New Year prosperously and surrounded by arms that had guided and loved her over the years.

According to O'Neill (2021), there is a certain quality to the way Renina Jarmon recounts how her hashtag was created using the words of bell hooks from the early 1990s. In Hooks' wisdom, there is a feeling of foresight and a timeless quality. in her emphasis that self-care and healing are essential to Black women's survival in both the late 20<sup>th</sup> and the early 21<sup>st</sup>

centuries. The bell hooks of 1993, who casts healing spells for Black women who are always recovering from the white heteropatriarchal capitalist government, may be speeding toward the future as Jarmon looks back to the past. Jarmon and Hooks are unquestionably from the future yet they, like all Black women, are unavoidably and profoundly affected by the ghosts of history's past and have a foot (or, in some cases, an arm) firmly planted in the past.

O'Neil (2021) also quotes Walidah Imarisha (2015) who claims: "Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction" (p.63). Furthermore, the decision made by a Black woman to practice self-care and advocacy is, nevertheless, solely a work of science fiction. By interfering with a global narrative that demands their dehumanization, Hooks, and Renina Jarmon both participate in the Black womanhood's tradition of speculative fiction. In a society that routinely minimizes the worth of Black women's contributions, it is important to recognize that Jarmon and Hooks' decision to invest in themselves as well as the Black women's community that supports and values them goes against conventional thought. Black women must be ready to travel across the fabric of time and space, whether into the past or the future, in search of spaces of potential and affirmation to potentially pave the way for Black futures where Black women thrive.

O'Neill (2021) further argues that in this sense, the hashtag #blackgirlsarefromthefuture acquires fresh significance as Black women and girls throughout the globe picture themselves succeeding, establishing spaces where they are honoured, performing an act of time travel, and making present a reality that has not yet come into existence, a society where Black women are respected and safe "#blackgirlsarefromthefuture because they have to be." (p.64) and as sci-fi author Samuel Delany once said, "We need images of tomorrow, and our people need them more than most." (p.64). The author also quotes the fiction author Nalo Hopkinson who stated in an interview with The Globe and Mail. When asked what historical period she wishes she could have lived through and why, she replies, "None of them. I figure this current era of history is the one with the best chance of quality of life for a Black, female, disabled, middle-aged, queer person who's most comfortable not fitting in. The odds still aren't great, mind you. But I'll take my chances with the 21st century." (p.65).

O'Neill (2021) clarifies that Hopkinson's overall denial of the subject at hand is not an unusual response for Black folks when confronted with such a blatantly offensive inquiry. Her insistence on the present, while being a woman with many oppressed identities, calls for more attention and highlights the need for a renewed emphasis on literary genres that accomplish the



task of confronting contemporary realities while creating alternate futures. Additionally, speculative fiction gives Black women an invaluable opportunity to fully engage their imaginations and their capacity to imagine themselves as the most vulnerable and endangered members of society in imagined futures free from racial, sexual, and gender oppression.

Morris (2012) posits that Nalo Hopkinson and other writers like Nnendi Okorafor, through their Afrodiasporic tales of fantasy and folklore, adeptly merge tradition with a futurist vision. These authors, as noted by Kimberly Nichelle Brown (2010), craft decolonizing texts that disrupt conventional notions of possibility. In their narratives, Black women not only possess the agency to transform their lives, communities, and even species but do so routinely and unapologetically. This stands in stark contrast to mainstream speculative fiction, which often relegates women, especially women of colour, to peripheral roles or accessories. Hopkinson and Okorafor assert that Black women and girls are not just relegated to the future; they actively shape and symbolize the present and future.

Hopkinson's storytelling, as outlined by Morris (2012), skillfully navigates between fantasy and folklore, creating narratives that challenge and reimagine what is achievable. By blending Afrodiasporic traditions with futuristic elements, she constructs worlds where Black women are not confined by normative expectations but are instead empowered to be transformative forces. Similarly, Okorafor's exploration of precolonial Africa serves as a catalyst for re-envisioning the continent's past and future. Through her narratives, she invites readers to question established narratives and embrace the potential for Black women to lead and influence across various realms.

The core assertion made by these authors is the insistence on the presence and significance of Black women and girls in shaping the future. Morris (2012) suggests that their works destabilize normative notions, challenging the tendency in mainstream speculative fiction to sideline women of colour. Authors like Hopkinson and Okorafor contribute to a literary landscape where Black women not only have a place in futuristic narratives but actively define and signify the unfolding possibilities of the future, emphasizing their agency and importance in the present moment.

Womack's (2013) exploration of Afrofuturism in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* underscores the transformative potential of this cultural and creative movement, especially for Black women. Central to her perspective is the idea that Afrofuturism serves as a liberating force, providing a platform for marginalized voices to break away from

historical stereotypes and imagine alternative futures. The author emphasizes the role of speculative fiction and fantasy as powerful tools that allow Black women to reshape narratives, not confined by societal expectations or limiting beliefs. In envisioning and creating these alternate realities, Black women can assert agency, challenge oppressive norms, and redefine their roles in ways that align with their aspirations and potential.

The core message in Womack's view is that Afrofuturism empowers Black women to transcend the limitations imposed by stereotypes, offering them a space where they can thrive and lead. By engaging with imaginative storytelling, Black women become architects of their narratives, shaping futures that celebrate their multifaceted identities, strengths, and contributions. In essence, Womack (2013) encourages a forward-looking mindset that sees beyond existing constraints, inviting Black women to participate actively in the construction of narratives that reflect their agency, resilience, and the richness of their experiences. This perspective aligns with the broader Afrofuturist goal of using creativity to envision and manifest more equitable and liberated futures.

Furthermore, it can be argued that a science fiction genre that emphasizes the agency of historical Black people, particularly historical Black women, and sets them in futuristic settings where they can overcome past challenges and prosper, was and will always be greatly needed. Afrofuturism therefore emerged as a forum for these individuals to express their demands and aspirations and to create worlds in which they may take the lead. In envisioning the role of Black women in the future, Afrofuturism offers a framework to explore various possibilities and reimagine their experiences. In the future, Black women can occupy positions of power and leadership, challenging the historical exclusion and underrepresentation they have faced. They can be political leaders, CEOs, innovators, and cultural influencers, shaping the direction of society.

Black women can thus be at the forefront of technological advancements and scientific discoveries. They can be inventors, engineers, and scientists, contributing to groundbreaking innovations that positively impact their communities and the world at large. In the future, Black women may create and inhabit Afrocentric spaces that celebrate their culture, traditions, and aesthetics. These spaces can foster creativity, artistic expression, and community building, providing platforms for Black women to showcase their talents and ideas. Black women can take a leading role in environmental activism and sustainability efforts. They can advocate for eco-justice, addressing the disproportionate impact of environmental issues on marginalized communities and spearheading initiatives for a more sustainable and equitable future.

It can be contended that Black women can redefine narratives around mental health and wellness, centering self-care, healing, and holistic approaches. They can pioneer alternative and Afrocentric healing practices, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit. They can preserve and transmit intergenerational knowledge, ensuring the continuity of cultural traditions, wisdom, and histories. They can serve as guardians of ancestral knowledge, fostering a strong sense of identity and heritage among future generations. Additionally, Black women in the future can actively work toward dismantling systems of oppression and building inclusive societies. They can forge alliances with other marginalized communities, advocating for social justice, equity, and intersectional Feminism. Afrofuturism recognizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding Black womanhood. It acknowledges the interconnectedness of race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity. Afrofuturist narratives can explore the experiences of queer Black women, disabled Black women, immigrant Black women, and others, promoting inclusivity and amplifying diverse voices.

Afrofuturism thus encourages exploring a range of possibilities, allowing for individual and collective visions of the future of Black women that challenge and transcend existing limitations and biases. Afrofuturism empowers Black women by placing them at the center of their narratives. They can be portrayed as agents of change, shaping their destinies, and actively participating in the transformation of their communities and societies. Afrofuturism celebrates their agency, resilience, and capacity to create change. The movement challenges Eurocentric beauty standards and embraces the diverse beauty of Black women. It celebrates natural hair, dark skin tones, and unique features, emphasizing their beauty in all its forms. Afrofuturist art and media promote self-acceptance, self-love, and the celebration of individuality and fluid, multifaceted identities.

Afrofuturism has a strong tradition of embracing and celebrating Black women in futuristic contexts. It offers a platform to explore the intersection of race, gender, culture, and technology, creating narratives that center on Black women and their experiences. Its works often place Black women at the forefront, portraying them as complex, multidimensional characters with agency and power. Their stories challenge mainstream narratives and amplify their voices and experiences. It envisions futures where Black women are liberated from oppressive systems and stereotypes. They are portrayed as catalysts for change, reclaiming their power, and challenging the status quo.

This science fiction movement provides space to redefine beauty standards and aesthetics, celebrating the diversity and richness of Black women's appearances and expressions. It

embraces Afrocentric hairstyles, futuristic fashion, and cultural symbols as integral elements of Black women's identity. It acknowledges the intersectionality of Black women's identities and explores the unique challenges and strengths that arise from it. It delves into the complexities of race, gender, sexuality, and class, creating narratives that reflect the multiplicity of Black women's experiences. Moreover, it showcases Black women as pioneers in technology, science, and innovation. They are depicted as inventors, scientists, hackers, and visionaries, pushing boundaries, and shaping the future with their intellect and creativity after all change as Delany confirms is much needed for a better future: “We need images of tomorrow, and our people need them more than most” (Dery 1994, p. 190).

Afrofuturism highlights the importance of community and collective strength for Black women. It imagines futures where Black women come together, supporting, and uplifting each other, forming networks of solidarity to overcome adversity. It often incorporates elements of African spirituality and ancestral connections. It recognizes the spiritual power and wisdom passed down through generations, weaving these themes into futuristic narratives. By embracing Black women in the future, Afrofuturism challenges dominant narratives, disrupts stereotypes, and offers alternative visions that celebrate and empower Black women. It creates spaces where their voices, experiences, and contributions are valued and centered, fostering a sense of pride, inspiration, and possibility for Black women and girls.

### **IV.3. Awakening the African Divine Feminine: Afrofuturism's Magical Realms**

The concept of the Divine Feminine is generally known as a spiritual and philosophical idea that recognizes and celebrates the feminine aspect of the Divine or the sacred. It is a concept that can be found in various religious and spiritual traditions throughout history, including but not limited to ancient goddess worship, paganism, certain branches of Hinduism, and contemporary spiritual movements. The Divine Feminine is often seen as complementary to the Divine Masculine, representing a balance and harmony between feminine and masculine energies. It emphasizes qualities traditionally associated with femininity, such as nurturing, compassion, intuition, creativity, and interconnectedness. The concept recognizes the power and importance of feminine energy in spiritual experiences, as well as in broader societal contexts.

Razak (2016) in her article *Sacred Women of Africa and the African Diaspora: A Womanist Vision of Black Women's Bodies and the African Sacred Feminine*, the concept of the Devine Feminine is explored. According to the author, The Divine Feminine is often associated with goddess figures or archetypes, who embody these feminine qualities and serve as symbols of wisdom, healing, fertility, and transformation. The reemergence of the Divine Feminine in contemporary discourse can be seen as a response to patriarchal and male-dominated structures and a call for the revaluation and empowerment of feminine principles and qualities. It seeks to restore a sense of balance, harmony, and equality between genders and encourages individuals to reconnect with their feminine nature, regardless of gender identity.

Razak (2016) claims that various representations of sacred women, elemental feminine forces, deified ancestors, or Black goddesses served as collective manifestations of the African Sacred Feminine—a term she uses to describe various African elaborations of female divinity—and as embodiments of female social and cultural power. Although some people could see this phrase as legitimizing gender binary concepts, the author uses it in acknowledgment of the reality that femininity and masculinity are concepts that are culturally produced. While people of all genders and sexual orientations exist in Africa, as they do everywhere else in the globe, many pre-colonial African communities celebrated the African Sacred Feminine via culture and art.

Simpson-Wilkey, McKoy, and Bridges (2020) explored the concept of the African divine feminine in their book *Recovering the African Feminine Divine in Literature, the Arts, and Practice*. This comprehensive work provides a contextual understanding of how scholars and authors worldwide are reclaiming the African divine feminine, intertwining it with African spiritual beliefs. The book's focus on this concept contributes significantly to discussions about cultural survival and the formation of an Afrocentric identity, both in Africa and the diaspora. The book serves as a vital source for understanding the multifaceted ways in which scholars and authors globally engage with the concept of the African divine feminine. By delving into literature, the arts, and cultural practices, the text offers a comprehensive examination of how the African feminine divine is being reclaimed and redefined.

One significant aspect highlighted in the book is the intrinsic link between the African divine feminine and spiritual beliefs. The exploration extends beyond geographical boundaries, encompassing both Africa and its diaspora. The intertwining of these elements becomes a crucial force in shaping cultural identity and survival. The book underscores how the revival of the African divine feminine serves as a means of reclaiming narratives, challenging historical

erasures, and fostering a renewed sense of connection among people of African descent (Simpson-Wilkey et al., 2020). Furthermore, the concept of the African divine feminine is portrayed as a dynamic force influencing not only religious or spiritual practices but also permeating various aspects of cultural expression. The arts, including literature, become platforms for the reimagining and celebration of the African feminine divine. By examining the impact of this concept, Simpson-Wilkey, McKoy, and Bridges (2020) contribute to the ongoing discourse on cultural resilience and the formation of a more inclusive and Afrocentric identity. Through meticulous analysis and case studies, the text illuminates how the African divine feminine becomes a catalyst for cultural revival, challenging dominant narratives, and contributing to a more holistic understanding of African heritage in both continental Africa and the diaspora.

Moreover, one can assert that Afrofuturism embraces the African Divine Feminine in its exploration of the intersection of African diasporic culture, technology, and spirituality. Within Afrofuturist frameworks, the concept of the Divine Feminine takes on a unique and culturally specific expression, intertwining ancient African spiritual traditions, futuristic visions, and the empowerment of Black women. Afrofuturism recognizes the importance of feminine energy, wisdom, and power in shaping narratives of the future. It celebrates and uplifts the diverse experiences, perspectives, and contributions of Black women, acknowledging their central role in envisioning and creating alternative futures.

In Afrofuturist works the Divine Feminine is often portrayed through strong Black female leads that draw inspiration from African, Afro-diasporic, or African-inspired traditions along with a blend of technology and magic. These representations reflect the qualities traditionally associated with the Divine Feminine, such as healing, creativity, intuition, Black girl magic, and resilience. Afrofuturism therefore embraces such a concept and explores the reclamation of feminine power and agency within narratives of liberation and resistance. According to Womack (2013), it challenges oppressive systems and narratives that marginalize and silence Black women, highlighting their strength and ability to shape their destinies. Moreover, “Women have a different approach in the way that they use Afrofuturism” (p.99).

It can be asserted that Afrofuturism recognizes the interconnectedness of spirituality, technology, magic, African mythology, and cultural identity. It embraces the use of technology as a tool for liberation, self-expression, and spiritual exploration, intertwining futuristic elements with ancient African spiritual practices. By embracing the African Divine Feminine, Afrofuturism invites a reimagining of power dynamics, gender roles, and societal structures. It

envisions futures where Black women are at the forefront, leading and shaping their communities, and where feminine energy is revered and celebrated.

Womack further (2013) stated that because many Afrofuturist writers integrate science, nature, and magic as one, their works are often categorized as science fiction, Afro-surrealism, magical realism, and fantasy. Moreover, the boundary to be drawn is tenuous. The author stated:

In general, Afrofuturism is a home for the divine feminine principle, a Mother Earth ideal that values nature, creativity, receptivity, mysticism, intuition, and healing as partners to technology, science, and achievement. The divine feminine is the other side of the information-gathering process, and tapping into it is a process of choice for many Afrofuturists. There's a widespread belief that humankind has lost a connection to nature, to the stars, to a cosmic sense of self, and that reclaiming the virtues of the divine feminine will lead to wholeness. Many men in the genre embrace the principle as much as the women do (p.103).

Womack (2013) further claims that one way that Afrofuturism differentiates from previous futurist and science fiction groups is by valuing the Divine Feminine. Technological advancement by itself cannot provide a free-thinking future in Afrofuturism. A healthy relationship with nature is essential to a prosperous future. In Afrofuturism, the feminine side of mankind is given full rein. The genre has a strong emphasis on the unconscious and intuition, which metaphysical studies refer to as the feminine aspect of us all. This feminine aspect is not constrained by popular historical interpretations or Western mythology. Afrofuturist women can control their creative voice. They create their standards and lenses with which to perceive the world and how they want the world to see them.

Womack (2013) quotes LaFleur who stated in her all-female Afrofuturist art show: "My Mythos examines how we create personal mythologies as a vehicle for transformation to achieve a new truth... the artists are visionaries guiding our consciousness into their imagined realities. Most mythical creations are borrowed from ancient stories, but in Afrofuturism, artists are encouraged to create their own." (p.100). Additionally, to redefine Black and female expressions, Afrofuturists employed their creativity, art, technology, and belief in the Divine. Afrofuturism may be the first movement in which Black women artists are acknowledged for the strength of their imaginations and are equally portrayed as the future's face and the movement's constructors. Thus, it can be posited that the notion of the Divine Feminine within the Afrofuturist world is represented mostly by the supernatural, Black women who have

powers beyond the human forms or norms. It is also portrayed by strong Black females who alter their lives on their terms much like what Nnedi Okorafor did with Binti (the protagonist of the chosen story for this thesis) in her Binti trilogy. Womack (2013) stated: “Afrofuturism has a star-is-born quality to it. There is just a supernatural quality to engaging in the work.” (p.105).

Strong and Chaplin (2019) argue that Afrofuturism prominently features the Divine Feminine as a central theme, citing *Black Panther* as an illustrative example. The portrayal of powerful women in *Black Panther* resonates with the concept of the African divine feminine, reflecting a departure from negative tropes associated with Black femininity. The movie celebrates women who are decoupled from European ideas, emphasizing their significance in the past, present, and future. Characters like Nikita and General Okoye exemplify free thinking and agency, challenging stereotypes often perpetuated by scholars like Patricia Hill Collins and Melissa Harris-Perry. The egalitarian relationships between men and women in Wakanda, depicted as seamless and natural, highlight the influence and autonomy of women in guiding society.

Strong and Chaplin (2019) further assert that the all-female warrior army, the Dora Milage, sworn to protect the King of Wakanda, further symbolizes a celebration of women's power. The shaved and tattooed heads of these warriors not only challenge conventional notions of beauty but also draw from historical realities, notably the Kingdom of Dahomey in modern-day Benin. In Dahomey, fearsome female warriors coexisted alongside powerful kings, emphasizing the historical precedence of empowered women in African societies. *Black Panther* consciously incorporates these aspects of precolonial Africa, contributing to the broader narrative of reclaiming the African divine feminine and showcasing the strength and leadership of Black women.

Hence, the depiction of the African Divine Feminine is embodied by resilient Black women who shape their destinies according to their own terms. In various narratives, including *Black Panther*, these strong Black females exert agency and redefine their lives independently, contributing to a nuanced representation of empowered womanhood. This portrayal challenges conventional stereotypes and underscores the multifaceted nature of the African Divine Feminine, emphasizing autonomy and self-determination.

To conclude, the investigation of the African Divine Feminine within Afrofuturism enables a broad and diverse spectrum of tales that question conventional assumptions and



present alternative future visions that are powerful, inclusive, and transformational. In exploring the nexus of African diasporic culture, technology, and spirituality, Afrofuturism honours the Divine Feminine. The notion of the Divine Feminine assumes a special and culturally particular manifestation within Afrofuturist frameworks, weaving together antiquated African spiritual traditions, futuristic ideas, and the empowerment of Black women.

#### **IV.4. Womanism in Afrofuturist Narratives**

Afrofuturism is generally acknowledged as a cultural, artistic, and philosophical movement that combines elements of science fiction, fantasy, history, and African diasporic cultures to imagine alternative futures for people of African descent. Central to Afrofuturism is the profound reimagining and reconstruction of various facets of Black identity, with a particular focus on Black womanhood. This transformative process involves the deliberate challenge and subversion of longstanding narratives and stereotypes that have historically marginalized Black women. Afrofuturism serves as a creative platform empowering Black women to actively envision, shape, and assert control over their narratives, identities, and prospective futures. In essence, Afrofuturism opens the mind and emancipates the spirit.

In Afrofuturist art, literature, music, and other forms of expression, Black women are often depicted as powerful, complex, and multidimensional beings. They are not confined to the limitations placed upon them in the past or present, but rather they embody strength, resilience, creativity, and agency. Afrofuturism also explores themes of technology, spirituality, and mythology, drawing inspiration from African traditions and merging them with futuristic elements. This fusion allows Black women to transcend conventional boundaries and envision themselves as creators, innovators, and leaders in imagined future societies, as Womack (2013) asserts: “Female Afrofuturists create their norm, and the rest of the world just tries to catch up.” (p.105).

Womack (2013) further quotes the Jamaican artist Grace Jones who stated: “I’ve always been a rebel. I never do things the way they’re supposed to be done. Either I go in the opposite direction, or I create a new direction for myself, regardless of what the rules are or what society says.” (p.106). Being a Black woman of influence, she defied all expectations with her eccentric attitude and stunning appearance. When she first appeared on the international scene in the late 1970s, her Afrofuturism was in no way traditional. Jones, according to the author, revolutionized what it meant to be beautiful, Black, and feminine. She used fashion as her

preferred tool to subvert gender norms and beauty ideals, hypnotizing people even when they were uncomfortable. Jones has always been Jones, despite having stylists and producers on her side: “But I’m a free spirit. Where is the wrong? How do I put a limit to freedom?” (p.108).

According to Womack (2013), it is no coincidence that there are so many Afrofuturist women in the arts and beyond and nuanced Black women characters in Black science fiction literature. She adds that Afrofuturism provides a setting where women are empowered to work and make decisions in a society that values equality. The acceptance of women's bodies in all forms, sizes, ages, and abilities is fundamental in a womanist Afrofuturist environment. She goes on to say that in such a setting, there is a democracy, a division of the workforce, a desire to value nurturing and collaboration above aggressiveness and competitiveness, and an effort to combat racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and classism.

To illustrate the intersection of such concepts, Womack (2013) mentions the pioneer, Octavia Butler. Butler offered a model for how women, especially women of colour, may function in these distorted realities and far-off realms in a hyper-male science fiction universe where science and technology rule. Butler paved the way for multifaceted Black women in historical and contemporary contexts who are both fragile in their triumphs and brave in their perilous quest to enlighten mankind. Despite being a science fiction novelist, Butler also incorporates magical surrealism, or what would appear to be magic, in her chosen universes, much like author Nalo Hopkinson. The transformational power of love, the usage of African diasporic mysticism, and Butler's use of religious metaphors are further themes that many Afrofuturists include in their work. She provided many women a voice and supported their muddled blend of womanist problems, racial issues, science fiction, mysticism, and the future.

Womack (2013) quotes science fiction author N.K. Jemisin who as a young girl began to write science fiction and fantasy. She did not, however, create any Black or female protagonists until she came across Octavia Butler as a teenager:

Octavia Butler in her way served as a role model...The [sci-fi] genre itself sends a very clear message that you are not welcome here. I know that every Black female writer felt, ‘Oh, here’s someone like me, and it’s OK for us to be here.’ Without that moment of validation, that it’s OK to be here, I don’t know if you’d have as many Black women writing in this arena... While reading, I said ‘Holy crap, I think this woman is Black.’ I looked for a photo, and there was none.

Instead, the book's cover was plastered with the image of a white woman...I had never seen that in sci-fi before (p.111)

It is plausible to state that due to Butler and authors like Tananarive Due and Nalo Hopkinson, there are more depictions of women in science fiction, and the rise of female science fiction authors is altering the dynamics of women characters in both science fiction and fantasy. Jemisin believes that in most science fiction, female anatomy and function are more fascinatingly depicted than women as a whole. It is a woman via the male vision, she claims—what a woman must appear like to be fascinating to males. However, it is not as frequent as it once was. Butler's effect on authors, directors, and painters is credited by many Afrofuturist writers and artists as the reason for their intricate plotlines and the prominence of woman heroes in Afrofuturist literature and art. As a standard and source of inspiration, they cite Butler's classic writing. Staycee Pearl, a well-known choreographer and performance artist, is mentioned by Womack (2013) as one of many artists who dedicated a performance named Octavia, a dance production that analyzes Butler's work and personal narrative. Many other artists and writers dedicated their works to Butler due to her significant impact on them and their imagination.

Afrofuturism is thus renowned for its support of and embracing of the ideas, principles, creations, emotions, behaviours, and experiences of Black women. It is an ideology that examines the creativity and grace of African and African American women, and it is also utilized to create a society where Black bodies have time and room to live within their culture. Therefore, one can argue that Black womanhood is Afrofuturism. Black femininity in the discussion of African futures has shown itself to be capable of finding a position and a platform due to Afrofuturism. Black women do not only exist as passive objects in Afrofuturistic settings but rather thrive and accomplish in worlds beyond our imagination. Womack (2013) states:

Afrofuturism is a free space for women, a door ajar, arms wide open, and a literal and figurative space for Black women to be themselves. They can dig behind the societal reminders of Blackness and womanhood to express a deeper identity and then use this discovery to define Blackness, womanhood, or any other identifier in whatever form their imagination allows. Afrofuturists are not the first women to do this. Fine artist Elizabeth Catlett, author Zora Neale Hurston, and anthropologist/choreographer Katherine Dunham, among others, used imagination, art, and technology to redefine Black and female expressions. However, Afrofuturism as a movement itself may be the first in which Black

women creators are credited for the power of their imaginations and are equally represented as the face of the future and the shapers of the future. Afrofuturism celebrates women like Catlett, Hurston, and Dunham for using the imagination as a space of resistance and establishes a lineage of this history of thought. (p.100-101).

Some may posit that Black women's imagination, image, and voice are not constrained by the contemporary cultural expectations, stereotypes, and sensitivities in Afrofuturism. The Black woman is not expected to conform to Middle America's expectations to demonstrate her independence from the government or to live up to the current bloggers' notions of beauty. Furthermore, she is not expected to uphold any standards previously created on Blackness that are often considered misleading. Women create ideas, personalities, art, and beauty without being constrained by social norms, gender expectations, or colour-based categorizations of beauty. The end product is what some critics refer to as unclassifiable art.

Womack (2013) mentions one of the well-known Afrofuturistic artists to illustrate her perspective. In her song "Q.U.E.E.N." with Erykah Badu, Janelle Monáe challenges the idea of being a freak or displaying a natural independence that does not conform to society's modest expectations for women of colour. Free-form dance and unconventional clothes are viewed as sexual, provocative, and generally disturbing. They contradict accepted behaviour, especially about dancing and appearance. The mere appearance of a coloured woman in control of her body was disturbing and for others instantly triggered objectification. Womack (2013) quoted Monáe who stated in Q.U.E.E.N: "They call us dirty because we break all your rules down...Even it makes others uncomfortable, I wanna love who I am" (p.102).

one can therefore claim that Afrofuturism is the force empowered by all the principles and values most carried by Womanism. Afrofuturism and Womanism are two distinct but interconnected frameworks that provide powerful lenses for understanding and uplifting the experiences of Black women. While Afrofuturism focuses on speculative and imaginative futures, Womanism is a social, political, and cultural philosophy rooted in the experiences and perspectives of Black women. When combined, these frameworks can deepen our understanding of the complexities of Black womanhood and offer pathways for empowerment and liberation. In other words, Afrofuturism and Womanism can intersect and complement each other, creating a powerful framework that embraces and uplifts Black women's experiences, identities, and aspirations. When Afrofuturism incorporates womanist principles, it strengthens its focus on social justice, community, and the empowerment of Black women.

Afrofuturism and Womanism both challenge dominant narratives that have historically marginalized Black women. Afrofuturism offers a space for envisioning alternative futures, where Black women are not limited by oppressive systems. Womanism, on the other hand, centers the lived experiences and perspectives of Black women in the present, addressing their unique struggles and advocating for their liberation. Moreover, both Afrofuturism and Womanism embrace intersectionality, recognizing that Black women's identities are shaped by the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social factors. They reject single-axis analysis and instead promote a holistic understanding of Black womanhood, considering the diverse ways in which identities and experiences intersect. Afrofuturism can embrace this intersectional lens, using speculative narratives and artistic expressions to challenge and subvert these oppressive systems. It can imagine futures where these systems are dismantled, and Black women are free from their constraints.

Womanism emphasizes the liberation and empowerment of Black women within their communities, promoting self-determination, solidarity, and social justice. Afrofuturism, through its imaginative and speculative nature, offers a space for envisioning liberated futures for Black women, where they can fully express their agency, challenge oppressive systems, and thrive. Furthermore, both Afrofuturism and Womanism celebrate the cultural heritage and histories of Black women. Afrofuturism engages with African and African diasporic aesthetics, spirituality, and traditions, reclaiming and reimagining them in futuristic contexts. On the other hand, Womanism highlights the contributions and experiences of Black women throughout history, reclaiming their stories, wisdom, and cultural practices. Afrofuturism can furthermore actively center and amplify the experiences, perspectives, and voices of Black women. By foregrounding their stories and narratives, Afrofuturism acknowledges and affirms the unique challenges and complexities of Black womanhood.

Additionally, one can argue that Womanism and Afrofuturism share a commitment to community and collective action. Womanism emphasizes the importance of building supportive networks and promoting the well-being of the entire community. Afrofuturism often imagines futures where collective liberation is achieved, where Black women work together to dismantle systems of oppression and build more equitable societies and Womanism places great importance on community and collective action. Afrofuturism can therefore reflect and envision futures where Black women actively engage in community building, supporting one another, and working collectively towards social and political change. It can portray Black women as leaders, organizers, and catalysts for community empowerment.

By combining Afrofuturism and Womanism, the multifaceted dimensions of Black womanhood, challenge oppressive narratives, and envision transformative futures can be explored. These frameworks provide tools for understanding the complexities of Black women's experiences, celebrating their resilience, and advocating for their empowerment and liberation in all spheres of life. Afrofuturism can draw inspiration from the cultural heritage and traditions of Black women, celebrating their diverse cultural expressions. It can integrate womanist principles of cultural reclamation and reinterpretation, infusing futuristic narratives and aesthetics with African and African diasporic cultural elements. This fusion can create empowering and affirming representations of Black womanhood.

Afrofuturism and Womanism envisage a future in which Black women are not objectified or treated as the Other by placing them in positions of power and reclaiming a place for them. Womanism places Black women in the center and as the standard. It enables her to participate in the process of individuation, establishing her as a complete person deserving of all the rights that go along with being a human. She is respected as a powerful individual which also eliminates the white gaze, the lens through which most of the Western world is seen, by prioritizing and concentrating on Black women. Therefore, one can argue that such principles and vision are embraced and celebrated by the movement of Afrofuturism.

Borain (2021) in her thesis entitled *Audacious Black Female Heroes in Speculative and Afrofuturist Fiction from the Nigerian Diaspora* focuses on the interconnectedness of Afrofuturism and Womanism. She quotes writer Alice Walker who stated in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* (1983) that a womanist is: "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior." (p.11). Moreover, Borain argues that such principles are carried by the Afrofuturist movement and many writers who identify as Afrofuturists such as Tomi Adeyemi and Nnedi Okorafor often center their Afrofuturist novels upon Black women, akin to womanists, to reimagine and reconfigure Black futures and Black womanhood.

Borain (2021) claims that when discussing Afrofuturism, the womanist lens is thus appropriate because it addresses oppression because of race, class, and gender:

Many Black female novelists writing in English have understandably not allied themselves with radical white feminists; rather, they have explored the gamut of other positions and produced an exciting, fluid corpus that defies rigid categorization. More often than not, where a white woman writer may be a feminist, a Black woman writer is likely to be a "womanist". That is, she will

recognize that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy...Womanism is rooted in Black culture which accounts for the centrality of family, community, and motherhood in its discourse and as an ideology has extended beyond the frontiers of Black America to being embraced by many women in and from Africa, and in other parts of the world (p.13).

Borain (2021) further argues that such audacious and willful Black women are often present in Afrofuturist novels, most likely as the protagonists. Novels such as *The Icarus Girl* by Helen Oyeyemi (2005), *Who Fears Death* (2010), *The Book of Phoenix* by Nnedi Okorafor (2015), and *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi have used such interconnectedness of Afrofuturism and Womanism. The writer also mentions other authors such as Marge Piercy, Octavia E Butler, Toni Morrison, and Nalo Hopkinson who have also adopted the Afrofuturist womanist approach in their writings.

De Witt Douglas Kilgore is cited by Morris (2012) as saying that Nnedi Okorafor and other African American authors occasionally produce wonderful and scant works. However, Kilgore goes on to say: "Black women who contribute to SF, Fantasy, and Horror have reached the point where the history they recover can potentially become future history." (p.161-162). The author also makes the case that science fiction has given female authors, mainly Black female authors, and their female characters a sense of autonomy. This offers female authors the latitude to imagine a future in which most people have Black skin and Afro-textured hair, and where the protagonists are bold, young women who prevail against repressive systems.

Borain (2021) posits the idea that Afrofuturist writers not only reimagine the past but also provide a fresh outlook on the future that includes an appreciation of African mythology and tradition. Young women who are "womanish" because they are the reverse of what Walker refers to as "girlish" are created by the Afrofuturist authors in their works to achieve this. They do enormous endeavors that question the established quo in the face of patriarchal tyranny and/or in opposition to evil spiritual and magical powers without being careless, negligent, or indifferent. They particularly meet the requirements for being audacious because they are brave in these Afrofuturist narratives that envision a day where Black women are the leading figures in society.

Borain (2021) continues by stating that Marleen S. Barr's book *Afro-Future Females* (2008) follows the "future history" that Black women can restore. Barr had previously put

together *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* (1981), the first collection of academic essays on women in science fiction, but the book she edited, *Afro-Future Females*, is the first to specifically address Black women in science fiction. In *Afro-Future Females*, Barr compiles articles and stories that celebrate Black speculative fiction. The collection stresses how celebrated Black novelists like Toni Morrison, Octavia E. Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and others are and have inspired the work of the Black authors who are defining science fiction's newest wave. Barr gathered articles and tales that glorify Black science fiction in *Afro-Future Females*.

With regard to novels that explore Womanism in Afrofuturist fiction such as *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018), *Who Fears Death* (2010), *Kindred* (1979), *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), Borain (2021) also mentions Kola Boof's *The Sexy Part of the Bible* (2011). The protagonist of the book is a Black woman who has been cloned and overcomes societal injustice to become powerful. It shows that there are stories with themes that promote comparable womanist values. Boof's novel and others like it uphold womanist principles and are therefore helpful resources to indicate and confirm a growing trend in female authors' construction of womanist Afrofuturist heroes.

Borain (2021) further argues that all three of the authors from the Nigerian diaspora in her research (Nnedi Okrofaor, Tomi Adeyemi, and Helen Oyeyemi) construct strong Black female heroines that stand out for their daring bravery and action in speculative settings while conceiving worlds where power systems are challenged. However, as previously mentioned, they were not the first African American and/or Afrodiasporic women writers to garner praise for their science fiction that altered the course of women's history. Shortly after Marge Piercy published *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Octavia E. Butler (1970s) and Nalo Hopkinson (1980s) were engaging with the same genre and dealing with related issues. Such protagonists “are remarkable too for challenging the science fictional norm of hero by being Black as well as female and sexually autonomous.” (p.10).

Thus, it can be argued that *Kindred* (1979), a work regarded as an early example of Afrofuturism written by a Black woman, serves as yet another illustration of this Afrofuturistic approach. A testament to Butler's interest in presenting heroic Black women in speculative fiction is Dana, the book's Black female heroine. Dana goes back in time from the 1970s to the antebellum South, a precursor to the fortitude that Black female heroines have inherently. The retro-futuristic action in *Kindred*, which explores time travel into the past and reimagines the present and the future, gives the slave characters in the novel hope for a future in which they can enjoy freedom, much like Afrofuturism does with various contemporary works. The story



expresses the author's wish for women to have even greater freedoms in the future than they enjoyed in the 1970s.

Additionally, this thesis emphasizes Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* trilogy, which best adheres to the Afrofuturist womanist idea. Okorafor places her protagonist in the forefront of her Afrofuturist visualizations and focuses on Walker's womanist beliefs that girls are empowered to become “womanish” (Walker, 1983, p. 11) and demonstrate “outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior” (p. 11). They want “to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one” (p. 11) and are “[i]nterested in grown-up doings” (p. 11). They are “Responsible. In charge. Serious” (p. 11). Moreover, Okorafor has frequently discussed how she came to recognize that Black girls in the diaspora now have a specific need for a hero they can identify. One may thus contend that these womanist Afrofuturist perspectives are not only cherished and accepted but also essential to provide Black women a picture of a future where they can lead and prosper.

Womack (2013) also argues that Afrofuturism places Womanism in the forefront and plays as a healing genre. She argues that some Afrofuturists are concerned about collective memory and trauma, and several women artists and authors embrace the aesthetic as a means of self-healing. Denenge D. Akpem is mentioned by Womack (2013) and examines how ritual healing through art may heal trauma, especially in women. She teaches Afrofuturism as a means to freedom. She explored the potential of Afrofuturism as a ritual in her performance work *Alter-Destiny* 888. On August 8, 2008, the performance officially debuted at the Roger Smith Hotel in New York. crafting and destroying clay figures, crafting an elaborate headpiece in honour of the trickster God Pan, and smashing the leftover clay into dust were all part of the ten-day singing festival that Akpem performed. She claims the piece was based on Sun Ra's concept of the alter destiny and metamorphosis which highlights her Afrofuturist perspective as a way of healing trauma and a celebration of womanhood. Denenge D. Akpem stated that:

But it was personalized in the sense that I focused primarily on the question of whether one has the power to alter one’s destiny and whether one might act as a conduit to affect global destiny or to heal trauma in collective cellular and psychic memory... noting that women hide their trauma... What alternate destinies were set in motion through this performance installation, I am honestly not sure. What I do know is that the intention was there; the manifestation occurred” (p.114-115).

Moreover, it may be posited that through Afrofuturism, Black women, akin to womanists, can challenge the narrow beauty standards imposed by mainstream media and celebrate their natural hair, features, and diverse expressions of beauty. They can redefine their relationships with their bodies and reclaim their autonomy and self-determination. Afrofuturism provides a platform to address the historical erasure of Black women's contributions and experiences. It allows for the exploration and reimagining of African and African diasporic histories from a woman-centered perspective, highlighting the achievements, struggles, and triumphs of Black women throughout time.

By reconstructing Black womanhood through Afrofuturism, Black women can reimagine their roles in society, redefine their relationships with technology and the environment, and create narratives that reflect their dreams, aspirations and lived experiences. It is a powerful tool for empowerment, liberation, and envisioning a future that is inclusive and equitable for all. It offers a dynamic and visionary space where Black women can challenge and reimagine societal norms, stereotypes, and limitations that have historically shaped their experiences. In the realm of Afrofuturism, womanists take control of their narratives, shaping their identities and futures on their terms. Through literature, visual art, music, film, and other creative mediums, Afrofuturist expressions empower Black women to envision alternate realities where they are the protagonists of their own stories, free from the constraints of oppressive structures.

One can additionally assert that Afrofuturism also provides a platform for Black women to address historical erasure and reclaim their ancestral heritage. By drawing from ancient African civilizations, spiritual traditions, and cultural practices, Afrofuturist works reconnect Black women to their roots, fostering a sense of pride, belonging, and cultural continuity. Through this reconnection, Afrofuturism empowers Black women to embrace their cultural heritage and reshape narratives that have often overlooked or distorted their contributions. Furthermore, Afrofuturism challenges societal norms and expectations, deconstructing oppressive systems that have perpetuated the marginalization and mistreatment of Black women. It critiques and dismantles the intersections of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, envisioning a future where Black women are valued, respected, and given equal opportunities to thrive.

In the process of reconstructing Black womanhood, Afrofuturism extends beyond offering a path to individual liberation. It serves as an inspirational force for collective transformation, prompting Black women to unite, exchange their narratives, engage in

collaborative endeavors, and construct nurturing communities that validate and reinforce their diverse experiences. Through these joint initiatives and shared visions, Afrofuturism emerges as a dynamic catalyst for profound social change, working toward the realization of a future in which Black women are not only acknowledged and celebrated but also equipped with the empowerment to shape their destinies and the broader narrative of society actively.

In this journey of reconstructing Black womanhood, Afrofuturism can align with womanist principles of activism and social transformation. It can portray Black women as activists, change-makers, and visionaries who challenge injustice and advocate for equity and liberation. Afrofuturist narratives can inspire and empower Black women to become agents of change in their own lives and communities. By embracing Womanism, Afrofuturism becomes a more inclusive and intersectional framework that affirms and uplifts the experiences of Black women. It fosters a celebration of their identities, promotes social justice, and envisions futures where Black women are free to express their full humanity, agency, and power.

#### **IV.4.1. Hybridity and Womanism in Afrofuturist Visions**

The concept of hybridity generally refers to the blending, mixing, or fusion of different elements, identities, or cultures. It challenges the idea of fixed, pure, or singular categories by acknowledging and embracing the complexities and fluidity of human experiences. In the context of culture and identity, hybridity recognizes that individuals and communities are often influenced by multiple cultural, social, and historical contexts. It acknowledges that people can possess multiple affiliations, traditions, and ways of being that are shaped by interactions, migrations, and exchanges. Hybrid identities therefore can emerge from the blending of various cultural, ethnic, or racial backgrounds, resulting in unique expressions and experiences.

Hybridity is also known to extend to other domains beyond culture. It can encompass the merging of different disciplines, perspectives, or methodologies. For instance, hybridity in art can involve combining different artistic styles or mediums to create innovative and boundary-pushing works. In science and technology, hybridity can refer to the integration of different fields or approaches to generate new knowledge and advancements, and in science fiction, hybridity can refer to the fusion of the human and the fantastic or the non-human. The concept of hybridity challenges essentialist notions of identity or culture, recognizing that they are not fixed or homogenous. Instead, it celebrates the diverse and dynamic nature of human

existence, highlighting the potential for creative and transformative possibilities that emerge from the blending of different elements.

Moreover, an argument can be made that the concept of hybridity is embraced and celebrated by the movement of Afrofuturism. The concept of hybridity and Afrofuturism intertwine in fascinating ways, amplifying, and enriching each other's narratives. Both explore the fusion of diverse elements to reimagine new possibilities, challenging existing power structures and narratives. Hybridity, in the context of Afrofuturism, refers to the blending of different cultural, historical, and futuristic elements to create a unique and dynamic identity. It embraces the multiplicity of African diasporic experiences, weaving together ancient traditions, contemporary realities, and speculative futures. Afrofuturism embraces hybridity as a source of strength and resilience, celebrating the fusion of diverse influences to form a distinct and powerful voice.

Within Afrofuturism, hybridity extends beyond cultural elements and incorporates the integration of technology, science fiction, and fantastical concepts. It allows for the creation of narratives and identities that challenge the boundaries of what is considered "normal" or "natural." It can be asserted that hybrid characters and themes in Afrofuturist works may embody a fusion of human, machine, or extraterrestrial attributes, offering a fresh perspective on identity, agency, and the possibilities of the future. Afrofuturism embraces hybridity as a means of reclaiming agency and transcending limiting narratives. By embracing a hybrid identity, Afrofuturist works challenge notions of fixed identities and disrupt the oppressive structures that seek to confine and define Black experiences. Moreover, hybrid characters in Afrofuturist narratives often symbolize resilience, adaptability, and the power to forge new paths in the face of adversity.

Furthermore, one can assert that Afrofuturism and hybridity share a common thread in their exploration of cultural and historical heritage. Afrofuturist works draw from the rich tapestry of African traditions, spirituality, and historical events, often merging them with futuristic and speculative elements. This blending of past, present, and future creates a sense of continuity, allowing Afrofuturism to reclaim, reimagine, and reconstruct narratives that have been marginalized or erased. Afrofuturism's embrace of hybridity also challenges the concept of a singular and monolithic African diasporic experience. It recognizes the diversity within Black communities, acknowledging the influence of various cultures, languages, and histories. This recognition encourages the celebration of multiple voices, perspectives, and expressions of Blackness, fostering a more inclusive and expansive understanding of identity.

Additionally, the concept of hybridity within Afrofuturism is a powerful tool for imagining and redefining the future. By embracing a fusion of cultural, historical, and speculative elements, Afrofuturism challenges dominant narratives, amplifies marginalized voices, and offers a platform for celebrating the diversity and dynamism of African diasporic experiences. It invites us to explore and embrace our hybrid identities as sources of empowerment and transformation. It may be posited that when exploring hybrid women through an Afrofuturistic lens, one delves into a realm where the boundaries of identity, embodiment, and power are expanded and reimagined. Afrofuturism offers a unique perspective that embraces the fusion of cultural, technological, and fantastical elements to shape narratives of hybridity that center the experiences of Black women. In Afrofuturist visions, hybrid women embody a convergence of diverse influences, drawing from African diasporic traditions, futuristic technologies, and speculative imaginings. They challenge the limitations of traditional gender roles and binaries, presenting an array of possibilities that transcend societal norms and expectations.

It can be suggested that through an Afrofuturistic lens, hybrid women navigate the intersections of race, gender, and culture, forging identities that defy conventional categorizations. They embody a fluidity that empowers them to transcend limitations and embrace the complexity of their existence. Afrofuturism furthermore celebrates the multiplicity of their experiences, affirming that their hybrid nature is a source of strength, resilience, and empowerment. Hybrid women in Afrofuturist narratives often wield extraordinary abilities, harnessing technology, magic, or genetic enhancements to shape their destinies. They become catalysts for change, challenging oppressive systems and fostering social justice. Their hybridity enables them to navigate and subvert power dynamics, offering alternative perspectives and pathways to liberation.

Hence, Afrofuturism explores how hybrid women reclaim and reshape narratives of identity and representation. They challenge the erasure and marginalization of Black women's experiences by asserting their agency and crafting their own stories. Afrofuturism provides a space for the celebration of diverse and non-conforming bodies, challenging beauty standards and embracing the unique aesthetics of hybridity. Through Afrofuturism, hybrid women also engage with ancestral heritage, drawing inspiration from ancient African civilizations, spiritual practices, and cultural traditions. They weave these elements into their hybrid identities, fostering a connection to their roots while envisioning futures that honor and reclaim their cultural legacies.

In the broader context, the Afrofuturistic lens emerges as a profoundly potent and dynamic framework for delving into the intricate world of hybrid women. By placing their experiences and narratives at the center of the discourse, Afrofuturism effectively operates as a tool for dismantling the confining limitations imposed upon these women. It extends an open invitation to envision a future where the concept of hybridity is not only embraced but celebrated in all its diverse facets. In this visionary future, Black women, embodying hybrid identities, find themselves empowered to take the reins of their narratives, redefine their stories, and actively shape the unfolding chapters of their lives. Afrofuturism, with its inclusive and forward-looking stance, thus offers a pivotal platform that not only enhances the visibility of hybrid women but also fosters their liberation and self-determination. It acts as an inspirational force, urging us to challenge existing paradigms and collaborate in forging a more inclusive, equitable, and harmonious future.

In an Afrofuturistic context, it is possible to posit that hybrid women refer to individuals who embody a fusion of human and non-human elements, blending biological, technological, or even fantastical attributes. This concept challenges traditional notions of identity, gender, and what it means to be human, opening up new possibilities for self-expression, empowerment, and societal evolution. Advancements in technology, genetic engineering, and the integration of artificial intelligence contribute to the emergence of hybrid women. These individuals may possess augmented physical capabilities, enhanced cognitive abilities, or even the integration of non-human features into their bodies. They navigate the intersection of organic and synthetic, embracing their unique attributes as sources of strength and resilience.

Hybrid women in the future exemplify a fluidity of identity, embracing a spectrum of possibilities. They transcend conventional limitations and stereotypes, actively shaping their own identities and defying societal expectations. By blurring the boundaries between human and non-human, they challenge the notion of a fixed and binary understanding of gender, creating space for a more inclusive and expansive understanding of identity. These hybrid women also embody a sense of exploration and innovation. They actively engage with cutting-edge technologies and scientific advancements, utilizing them to push boundaries, solve complex problems, and create positive change in various fields. Their unique perspectives, influenced by their hybrid nature, offer fresh insights and approaches to tackling societal, environmental, and technological challenges.

Many authors embraced the concept of hybridity about Black womanhood in an Afrofuturistic context. Womack (2013) talked about her fascination with the idea of placing

hybrid women in a futuristic context where they can be anything they desire and challenge existing stereotypes. She states in the initial section of her book:

when I was in the fourth grade, I was Princess Leia for Halloween. Leia, the princess and born leader of the rebel forces in Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope, was my heroine in elementary school. It is a distinct memory, because wearing all white with a wooden sword on your hip in a rainstorm and trying to explain that you're a cosmic princess to candy-giving neighbors isn't a memory you forget. With two giant braids twisted into coils and pinned neatly on either side of my head, I found the idea of being a galactic princess with guts and brains to be pretty cool (p.5).

Womack (2013) also explored the concept of hybrid women in other Afrofuturistic writings such as *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi. The story takes place in the kingdom of Orïsha, where magic has been suppressed and the maji, individuals with magical abilities, have been oppressed. The protagonist, Zélie Adebola, is a young girl maji who embarks on a quest to restore magic and overthrow the oppressive monarchy. The book touches upon the legacy of the Divîners, who are individuals with magical ancestry. Like the protagonist Zélie, Divîners are believed to have descended from the gods and possess a variety of powers. They are characterized by their distinctive white hair, which sets them apart from others in society. The Divîners can be seen as having mixed bloodlines, with a combination of human and godly heritage. The Divîners' unique characteristics, such as their white hair and magical abilities, set them apart from ordinary humans and illustrate a form of hybridity in the context of their ancestry.

Furthermore, it can be argued that *Children of Blood and Bone* explores the theme of heritage and the blending of different bloodlines. The relationships between characters with different magical abilities and backgrounds hint at the potential for hybridity in their lineages, showcasing the diversity and complexity of their identities. The protagonist is a Black girl who is mixed with different forms of magic and fantastic elements. She is placed in a futuristic context in which she redefines the concept of identity. As an Afrofuturistic novel, the story explores the concept of hybridity and hybrid women in the future where they are in control of their legacy.

According to Chikafa-Chipiro (2019), Hybrid women play a significant role in Afrofuturism, as seen in the representation of Black womanhood in the film *Black Panther*. The

film reimagines Black womanhood in an Afrofuturistic context, presenting Black women from Africa and the African diaspora as an imagined community with a shared history of domination and othering. These representations of Black women in Afrofuturism draw on the legacy of African women warriors and challenge traditional patriarchal norms. Additionally, Afrofuturism offers a means to view possible and alternative futures, allowing for the cultivation of diverse solution possibilities and expanding the solution space in terms of inclusivity. By placing the often-disenfranchised Black voice central in the design narrative, Afrofuturism fosters more culturally relevant and inclusive engineering design thinking. In this way, Afrofuturism empowers hybrid women by providing a platform for their voices and experiences, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and just future.

*Brown Girl in the Ring* by Nalo Hopkinson (1998) is another novel that portrays such a concept. The concept of hybridity is explored in various ways, including the depiction of women with hybrid qualities. The novel incorporates elements of Afro-Caribbean folklore, magic, and futuristic urban life. The novel features characters with connections to supernatural or spiritual realms, blurring the boundaries between human and divine. Mami Géremi, Ti-Jeanne's grandmother, possesses unique spiritual abilities and is seen as a conduit to otherworldly forces. Her role as a healer and seeress reflects a form of hybridity between the physical and the spiritual. Genetic Hybridity is also explored in the character of Ti-Jeanne. She is the product of a mixed heritage, with a Trinidadian mother and a French-Canadian father. This mixed ancestry contributes to her unique qualities and positions her as a bridge between different cultural influences and experiences.

Beyond genetic or physical attributes, one can claim that *Brown Girl in the Ring* explores symbolic hybridity as characters navigate a world shaped by both technology and traditional folklore. The blending of futuristic elements and Afro-Caribbean mythology creates a hybrid environment, and the characters must navigate this hybridity to find their place and purpose. By portraying characters with mixed heritage, spiritual abilities, and connections to both the physical and supernatural realms, *Brown Girl in the Ring* presents a vision of hybrid women in an Afrofuturistic context, who straddle different worlds and embody the richness of diverse cultural influences. These representations highlight the complexity and strength of these characters and offer a reflection of the hybrid identities and experiences found in Afro-Caribbean communities.

*Parable of the Sower* (1993) by Octavia Butler is another narrative in which the blending of fantastical and supernatural elements is a common theme. This novel follows the journey of



Lauren Olamina, a young woman with hyperempathy, a condition that allows her to physically experience others' emotions. As she navigates a dystopian future, she develops her belief system and strives to create a community that embraces change and adaptation. One can argue that a form of religious hybridity is also explored as Lauren develops her religious philosophy called Earthseed. Earthseed draws inspiration from various religious and philosophical traditions, incorporating elements of Christianity, African spiritual traditions, and Lauren's insights. This synthesis of different beliefs and ideas reflects a form of religious hybridity, one that challenges all existing beliefs.

*Xenogenesis* (1987) is a science fiction series also written by Octavia Butler, consisting of three novels: *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989). It is contended that the series further explores themes of hybridity, identity, and the consequences of inter-species relationships. The books delve into the concept of hybridity and the role of women within various hybrid dynamics. The series delves into the internal struggles and conflicts experienced by the hybrid characters. They must grapple with their mixed heritage and navigate the tension between their human and Oankali identities. The novels explore the question of individual autonomy and the choices these hybrid women must make in defining their paths.

Within the hybridization process, gender and power dynamics play a significant role. The Oankali, who are a genderless species, take on both male and female characteristics when interacting with humans. The hybrid women in the series become essential in negotiating relationships and bridging gaps between the Oankali and humans. They hold unique positions within these interspecies dynamics, showcasing the complexity of their roles and the challenges they face. Through the exploration of hybridity and the role of women within these hybrid dynamics, *Xenogenesis* offers a thought-provoking examination of identity, power, and the consequences of inter-species relationships. The series showcases Octavia Butler's talent for crafting complex narratives that challenge traditional notions of biology, gender, and societal structures.

Another example to illustrate the concept of hybrid women in a futuristic context is the novel *The Prey of Gods* (2017) by Nicky Drayden. set in a future version of South Africa, the story revolves around a diverse cast of characters, including hybrid women and various other beings. The novel combines elements of science fiction, fantasy, and mythology. In the book, the hybrid women are individuals who possess both human and animal characteristics. They are powerful and play significant roles in the narrative. Each hybrid woman has her unique abilities and traits that make her distinct from others. *The Prey of Gods* refers to a concept in the novel

where ancient gods return to Earth and feed on human worship and adoration. The gods in this story are not benevolent; they are rather capricious and seek to regain their former glory and power.

The hybrid women, along with other characters, find themselves entangled in a struggle against the gods and their hunger for power. They become key players in the battle to save humanity and prevent the gods from wreaking havoc on the world. The hybrid women in the novel embody Afrofuturist themes by representing a fusion of traditional African spirituality, mythology, and futuristic elements. They are unique individuals who possess both human and animal characteristics, combining ancient mythological creatures with futuristic enhancements. Through the hybrid women, the novel explores questions of identity, power, and agency, highlighting the complexity of their existence and the struggles they face. They navigate the challenges of a changing world, often grappling with their dual nature and the expectations placed upon them. Additionally, *The Prey of Gods* incorporates Afrofuturist elements in its portrayal of a future South Africa. The story incorporates advanced technology, futuristic settings, and a blending of traditional African cultural elements with futuristic imaginings. By merging Afrofuturism with a diverse range of characters, including the hybrid women, the novel challenges traditional narratives and offers a unique perspective on future societies, cultural heritage, and the potential for empowerment and transformation.

In the process of navigating and investigating such concepts, one must particularly name a writer who made significant contributions to the area of Afrofuturism, which embraces hybrid women and hybridity in a futuristic setting, and who offered her vision and insight solely to make her stamp on this genre of writing. Nnedi Okorafor is a prominent author known for her works in the realm of Afrofuturism. Her stories often feature strong female characters and explore themes of identity, culture, and technology within an Afrofuturistic context. While she has written numerous works that touch upon these themes, one can provide a brief overview of her acclaimed novel *Who Fears Death* (2010) as an example.

In *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor presents a post-apocalyptic future set in a fictionalized Sudan. The story follows Onyesonwu, a young woman born of a union between an Okeke (a marginalized ethnic group) woman and a Nuru (a dominant ethnic group) man. Onyesonwu possesses unique powers and abilities, making her a hybrid figure in the narrative. As a hybrid woman, Onyesonwu grapples with questions of identity, belonging, and the discrimination she faces due to her mixed heritage. She becomes a central figure in a quest to confront and defeat a powerful sorcerer who threatens her community.

It is plausible to assert that Okorafor's portrayal of hybrid women in *Who Fears Death* showcases their strength, resilience, and ability to challenge societal norms. The novel addresses issues of gender, race, and power dynamics within an African context, weaving together elements of traditional African spirituality, technology, and futuristic concepts. Overall, Okorafor's works, including *Who Fears Death* and others like the *Binti* trilogy (2015-2018) (which is the case study for this thesis), delve into Afrofuturist themes by featuring hybrid women who navigate complex social landscapes, challenge cultural expectations, and embrace their unique identities and abilities. These narratives explore Afrofuturism's potential to reimagine African cultures, create empowering narratives, and envision futures that are shaped by a blend of tradition and technology.

Hybrid women of the future highlight the potential for embracing diversity and hybridity as a source of strength and beauty. Through an Afrofuturistic lens, they celebrate the fusion of different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences, fostering cross-pollination of ideas and fostering a rich tapestry of perspectives. This diversity not only contributes to individual growth but also fuels collective progress, encouraging collaboration and mutual understanding across boundaries. Hybrid women in the future represent a paradigm shift in our understanding of identity and gender. By embracing a fusion of human and non-human elements, they challenge societal norms, celebrate diversity, and offer innovative perspectives.

Furthermore, it can be argued that Womanism serves as a critical lens through which to navigate the nuanced terrain of the hybrid self. This theoretical framework offers insights into how individuals negotiate and assert multifaceted identities shaped by intersecting dimensions of race, gender, and cultural heritage. Womanism, rooted in the experiences of Black women, provides a robust analytical tool for understanding the complexities inherent in navigating hybrid identities within broader sociopolitical contexts. It delves into the multifaceted nature of identity, allowing for the exploration of intersections that encompass various aspects of an individual's self.

Due to their frequent associations in a variety of situations, the notions of hybridity and Black womanhood have always had some connection. Snider (2019) asserts in her thesis *Self-Defined: A Womanist Exploration of Michelle Obama, Viola Davis, And Beyonce Knowles* that the hybrid self is essential to revealing the tension and effort experienced by Black women, akin to womanists, who try to counteract dominating images in crooked room settings. The formation of hybrid identities compels us to acknowledge the limitations placed on Black womanists who enter unsafe environments. These personas are a part of every woman, but

depending on the context in which the subjects choose to identify themselves, they were more apparent.

Snider (2019) asserts that Black women in most case scenarios cannot always wait for the best opportunities. The evidence lends credence to the idea that Black women who are ready to take risks may be more successful in self-defining in hazardous circumstances. The two-pronged personality is important in that it enables us to comprehend the complexities and dimensions that Black women who are seeking authentic expression have to offer. In essence, these distinctions might be substantial and opposed, according to the dichotomies frequently accepted in a hybrid identity.

Moreover, it is possible to posit that hybridity and Womanism intersect in powerful ways, offering a nuanced understanding of identity, empowerment, and social justice for women of African descent. Hybridity, as previously explained, refers to the blending and fusion of diverse elements, including cultural, historical, and futuristic influences. It recognizes the complexity and fluidity of human experiences, challenging fixed categories and embracing the multiplicity of identities. Womanism, on the other hand, is a sociopolitical and cultural framework that centers on the experiences and perspectives of Black women. Coined by Alice Walker (1983), Womanism expands upon Feminism by addressing the specific intersectional struggles faced by Black women and advocating for their liberation and empowerment within their communities.

It can be further claimed that when hybridity and Womanism come together, they provide a lens through which the diverse and multifaceted experiences of Black women can be explored and celebrated. First, a key component that both concepts share is centered on embracing complexity. Through what has been explored in the previous chapters, one can argue that both hybridity and Womanism reject simplistic, monolithic representations of Black women. They recognize and celebrate the multiplicity of identities, experiences, and cultural influences that shape Black women's lives. This includes acknowledging the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, fluidity, and other dimensions of identity.

Second, one can posit the idea that confronting preconceptions is another similarity between these two notions as hybridity and Womanism challenge and dismantle stereotypes that limit and devalue Black women. By embracing hybrid identities and rejecting fixed categories, they affirm the right of Black women to define themselves on their terms and defy limiting expectations imposed by society. Moreover, hybridity and Womanism emphasize the agency

and power of Black women. They reject narratives that portray Black women as passive victims and instead celebrate their resilience, resourcefulness, and capacity to effect change. Both concepts provide frameworks for recognizing and amplifying the agency of Black women in shaping their own lives and communities.

Additionally, cultural preservation and innovation is also a common theme between the two. One can claim that hybridity and Womanism highlight the importance of both preserving cultural heritage and embracing innovation. They acknowledge the value of ancestral traditions and the contributions of Black women to cultural, artistic, and intellectual spheres. At the same time, they encourage the exploration of new ideas, identities, and possibilities, fostering a sense of liberation and creativity. Therefore, one can further argue that both concepts also highlight the importance of collective action and solidarity. They recognize the interconnectedness of Black women's experiences and advocate for intersectional approaches to social justice. They promote collaboration, allyship, and community building, recognizing that the liberation of Black women is intertwined with broader struggles for equity and justice.

In conclusion, the intricate interplay between hybridity and Womanism weaves a rich tapestry of perspectives, celebrating the multifaceted nature of Black women while recognizing their agency and empowerment. These frameworks serve as powerful tools for challenging stereotypes and embracing the diverse identities of Black women. As these concepts intersect, they foster a sense of collective liberation, resonating through individual narratives and communities. By integrating the concept of hybridity within a womanist framework, we are prompted to envision a future that prioritizes inclusivity, equity, and liberation, grounded in the principles of self-determination. In this intricate web of ideas, the strength and resilience of Black women illuminate a path toward a more enlightened and empowered society.

#### **IV.4.2. Reversal of Controlling Images and Stereotypes: An Afrofuturist Womanist Lens**

Within the realm of identity reconstruction and liberation, the intersection of Afrofuturism and Womanism offers a compelling perspective. Both frameworks provide unique avenues to challenge controlling images and stereotypes that have historically marginalized Black women. Afrofuturism, with its emphasis on speculative narratives and cultural reclamation, and Womanism, with its focus on intersectionality and community empowerment,

converge to create a dynamic lens through which to examine and reverse these harmful narratives. This chapter delves into the intricate relationship between Afrofuturism and Womanism as they work in tandem to dismantle stereotypes, celebrate the resilience of Black women, and envision a future liberated from the constraints of oppressive imagery. By exploring this intersection, we gain insights into the transformative power of these frameworks and their potential to reshape the narrative of Black womanhood.

Stereotyping often means that people are reduced to a few essentials, fixed in nature by a few, simplified characteristics. It is closely related to racism and influences diasporic identity. Dijkstra (2014) in her thesis entitled *Hybrid Identities and Reversed Stereotypes: Exploring Identity in Nnedi Okorafor's Nigerian American Speculative Fiction* outlined Hall's technique for reversing stereotypes, which he used and advocated in many of his research. In this process of challenging racist imagery, Hall suggests three potential "trans-coding" tactics, which he describes as "taking an existing meaning and re-appropriating it for new meanings" (p.13): reversing stereotypes, replacing negative images with positive ones, and engaging in internal conflict.

Dijkstra (2014) asserts that the first counterstrategy to stereotyping is called "reversing stereotypes," and it entails avoiding one stereotype by substituting another. For instance, a picture of a wealthy Black man is substituted for the stereotype of the impoverished, passive Black man. This tactic does not truly avoid stereotyping because the new figure is just as much of one as the old one was; the only difference is that it presumably now represents the Black man who is driven only by money and enjoys bossing people around. The preceding stereotype is not overturned or subverted by moving from one stereotype to the next. The new stereotype is at least a different viewpoint and a more favorable picture than the previous, thus the change may be welcomed. However, in the end, this tactic cannot fully transcend dichotomous modes of thinking, which form the foundation of stereotyping, because they are based on binary oppositions.

According to Dijkstra (2014), Hall's second counterstrategy communicates a celebration or an embrace of diversity by replacing the "negative" imagery that continues to dominate popular representation with a variety of "positive" pictures of Black people, Black womanhood, Black life, and Black culture. Flipping the binary opposition, creates a positive counterpart for the undesirable quality, elevating the undesirable picture. Demonstrating that the person being stereotyped is more complicated than the image contradicts the propensity of earlier preconceptions to limit the persons involved to simply a basic set of a few qualities. The

issue with this approach is that while it increases happy images, it does nothing to offset its negative equivalents. It only broadens the available options. This approach attempts to undermine the dichotomy but does not break it down.

Dijkstra (2014) argues that the ultimate strategy is effective in bringing it about. By highlighting the difficulties and ambiguity of representation, binaries are questioned from within. By de-familiarizing the gaze and deconstructing these pictures, this tactic tries to make stereotypes and the modalities of representation they employ work against themselves. According to Hall, it is more focused on the style of depiction than it is on providing fresh material. While understanding that there can never be any ultimate triumphs since meaning can never be fully fixed, it acknowledges the fluctuating, unstable nature of meaning and works with it. It also engages in a sort of battle for representation. The author further states: “In speculative fiction, everything is possible because everything can be re-imagined...the genre speaks most clearly to those who are dissatisfied with the way things are which is precisely because those things can be redefined in speculative fiction... Belonging and stereotyping are often addressed out of dissatisfaction.” (p.19).

It can be argued that Afrofuturism is a genre that purports to transcend conventions and stereotypes previously set for Black womanhood. One can further assert that Afrofuturism challenges and reverses stereotypical portrayals of Black women. It offers an opportunity to redefine narratives and subvert negative stereotypes that have historically marginalized them. Black women can be depicted as powerful, intelligent, and self-determined beings, who break free from limited and harmful representations. An Afrofuturist womanist perspective offers a potent framework for dismantling controlling images and stereotypes that have plagued Black women throughout history. By combining the principles of Afrofuturism and Womanism, a powerful resistance against oppressive narratives and construct new can be forged, liberating stories that celebrate the complexity, agency, and resilience of Black women.

Considering the intersection of both Afrofuturism and Womanism, one can claim that both serve as powerful tools to challenge and resist controlling images and stereotypes that have historically marginalized and misrepresented Black women. They provide frameworks for reclaiming agency, affirming identity, and fostering narratives that center the lived experiences of Black women on their terms. Controlling images and stereotypes are harmful representations that have been perpetuated by dominant cultures and media, reducing Black women to limited, one-dimensional caricatures. These images often reinforce harmful narratives of

hypersexuality, subservience, and other negative stereotypes, which perpetuate systemic oppression and undermine the self-worth and dignity of Black women.

Afrofuturism, one may also add, as a cultural and artistic movement, disrupts and subverts these controlling images and stereotypes by envisioning alternative narratives and futures. It challenges the dominant narratives by imagining new possibilities where Black women are not confined to limiting archetypes but are complex, empowered, and central figures in their own stories. Afrofuturism empowers Black women to define and shape their own identities, narratives, and representations by embracing their multifaceted experiences, cultural heritage, and imaginative potential. Afrofuturism, with its emphasis on speculative futures and imaginative possibilities, allows one to envision alternative narratives that challenge and subvert controlling images and stereotypes. It encourages one to transcend the limitations imposed by dominant cultures and create spaces where Black women can authentically express their multifaceted identities. Afrofuturism empowers Black women to redefine their narratives, reject one-dimensional portrayals, and imagine futures where their worth, dreams, and contributions are fully recognized and celebrated.

Womack (2013) contends that Afrofuturist women have a penchant for rewiring their audience members. The genre's inspirations and symbols appear to have emerged mysteriously. Figures like Grace Jones, Octavia Butler, Erykah Badu, and Janelle Monáe defy easy categorization. Their personal lives and backgrounds are shrouded in secrecy, resisting clear alignment with any particular creative trend or historical context without a sufficient explanation. Womack (2013) also quotes singer Janelle Monae who stated in her song *Faster*:

Am I a freak? Or just another little weirdo? Call me weak, or better yet—you can call me your hero, baby...That's what I've always been fighting for...making sure that people love themselves for who they are, and we don't pick on people because we're uncomfortable with ourselves, or who they are. That's been my message, from when I was young to now. There are lots of young girls out there who are struggling with their identities, afraid of being discriminated against or teased. I take risks and use my imagination so that other people will feel free and take risks. That's my hope. (p.104-105)

Additionally, Womanism as a sociopolitical framework, also confronts controlling images and stereotypes by centering the experiences and perspectives of Black women. It emphasizes the importance of self-definition and self-representation, rejecting external



standards that seek to define Black women's worth and identity. Womanism asserts the autonomy and agency of Black women, affirming their diverse roles, achievements, and contributions across various spheres of life. By embracing womanist principles, Black women can challenge and dismantle the controlling images and stereotypes that have historically constrained their narratives and limited their possibilities.

Snider (2019) asserts that eschewing controlling images is essential to the social progression of Black women. She argues that These characters in question were developed from a white patriarchal perspective to retain political and economic power, which is the major issue with controlling images. If stereotypes were limited to visuals without any negative connotations or effects, perhaps one would not need to worry about them as much. The depictions have a universal aspect and have been normalized to the point that even though the images themselves change in the popular imagination, Black women's portrayal as the Other persists since they were created during slavery and are still highly prevalent now.

However, according to Snider (2019), despite these potential challenges, Many Black womanists have been instrumental when using their experiences and status as agents of change. She mentions a few womanists such as Michelle Obama, Viola Davis, and Beyoncé to illustrate how such powerful Black women carry all the principles and values of Womanism and how they succeeded in reversing the stereotypes set on Black womanhood, reconstructing controlling images and self-define. This process of self-defining is according to the author a womanist identity concept that allows Black women to determine who they are as individuals. It also provides them with a sense of autonomy needed to determine their path in life.

Additionally, one can claim that Womanism, as a framework rooted in the experiences and perspectives of Black women and celebrated by Afrofuturists, provides the tools to reclaim agency and challenge oppressive systems. It calls for the centering of Black women's voices, experiences, and liberation, rejecting external standards that seek to redefine, reconstruct, and constrain their identities. An Afrofuturist womanist approach therefore invites Black women to affirm their intrinsic worth, embrace their cultural heritage, and engage in collective action to dismantle the systems that perpetuate controlling images and stereotypes.

Snider (2019) mentions Patricia Hill Collins and other womanist scholars who indicated: "Liberation occurs when Black women can foster and develop a collective voice. Unlike in Western traditions, individuality is not encouraged, and self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Rather, self is found in the context of

family and community” (p.12). Such statements simply serve to reinforce the reality that Black women’s efforts to redefine themselves and break stereotypes are as firmly ingrained in Womanism as they are in Afrofuturism.

It is therefore within reason to propose that both Afrofuturism and Womanism encourage critical engagement with media and popular culture, fostering alternative narratives that challenge and subvert controlling images. They provide spaces for Black women to reclaim their own stories, redefine beauty standards, and celebrate the fullness of their identities. These frameworks empower Black women to resist and challenge the external gaze that seeks to define and confine them, allowing them to assert their truths, perspectives, and representations. Afrofuturist Womanism encourages such communities to construct narratives that challenge and subvert controlling images. By envisioning futures where Black women are liberated, empowered, fully recognized, and respected, Black women can disrupt the dominant narratives that seek to confine and define them. This includes creating stories, art, and media that portray Black women as complex, diverse, fluid, and multidimensional beings.

Furthermore, it is possible to posit that Afrofuturism and Womanism foster a sense of community, solidarity, and collective action. They encourage collaboration and allyship among Black women and their allies to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems. By amplifying diverse voices and experiences, Afrofuturism and Womanism create spaces for collective liberation and the construction of new narratives that honour and celebrate the complexities and richness of Black womanhood. This perspective emphasizes the power of community and collective action in challenging oppressive narratives. By fostering solidarity and collaboration among Black women and their allies, they can amplify voices, challenge harmful representations, and advocate for systemic change. Through collective efforts, they can disrupt and dismantle the systems that perpetuate controlling images and stereotypes.

An Afrofuturist womanist lens, one may further argue, recognizes and embraces the intersectional nature of identity and experiences. It acknowledges that Black women exist across various dimensions of identity, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and more. Centering intersectionality ensures resistance to limiting images and stereotypes as well as inclusivity and receptivity to the varied realities of Black women. Additionally, Afrofuturist Womanism recognizes the importance of both cultural heritage and innovation. It honours the wisdom, traditions, and resilience of past generations while embracing the possibilities of the future. By drawing from ancestral knowledge and cultural practices, Black women can find strength and

inspiration to challenge controlling images and stereotypes while also forging new paths of self-expression and liberation.

To conclude, Afrofuturism and Womanism offer powerful frameworks for countering controlling images and stereotypes that have historically marginalized Black women. They provide tools for self-definition, reclamation, and collective resistance against oppressive narratives. Through these frameworks, Black women can reimagine and shape narratives that authentically reflect their diverse experiences, challenge harmful representations, and foster a future of empowerment, liberation, and justice. An Afrofuturist womanist perspective against controlling images and stereotypes empowers Black women to reclaim their narratives, challenge oppressive systems, and envision liberating futures. It invites people to imagine and create narratives that celebrate the complexity, agency, and beauty of Black women while fostering collective action and solidarity to dismantle harmful representations.

By embracing this dynamic framework that synthesizes Afrofuturism and Womanism, the journey toward a more equitable, just, and inclusive world for Black women becomes discernible. Within this paradigm, the emphasis is placed not only on the agency and self-determination of Black women but also on their collective power to redefine the narratives that have historically marginalized and silenced them. As Black women reclaim their voices, assert their agency, and sculpt their identities free from external constraints, they engage in a profound act of resistance against the perpetuation of stereotypes and limitations. It is through this active assertion of self-determination that Black women can challenge the narratives that have long defined their experiences, paving the way for a future liberated from the constraints of oppressive imagery.

#### **IV.5. Towards an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto: Redefining Black Womanhood**

In a world where the echoes of history resound with the struggles and triumphs of Black women, emerges a vision that transcends the boundaries of time and space—a vision rooted in the rich soil of Afrofuturism and nurtured by the resilience of Womanism. This vision, a beacon of hope and empowerment, gives birth to an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto—a proposed roadmap to liberation, equity, and empowerment for Black women and the communities they hold dear. The Afrofuturist movement, with its fusion of African diaspora culture and

technology, propels one into a future where the possibilities are as limitless as the cosmos. Womanism, with its steadfast focus on the unique experiences of Black women, forms the bedrock of their journey, ensuring that no voice goes unheard, no story remains untold, and no injustice goes unchallenged.

Afrofuturism and Womanism are intricate, developing cultural and philosophical frameworks, and various groups of individuals may have different concepts and values attached to them. Therefore, it may be said that, unlike Manifestos for certain political groups or artistic movements, there is not a singular, widely recognized Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. One may counter that individuals frequently write Manifestos or statements to express their ideals and aspirations, drawing influence from Afrofuturism and Womanism. These writings might not reflect a unified or official position, but they can be potent declarations of individual or group commitment to a particular set of perspectives and ideals.

O'Neill (2021) in his essay *Towards an Afrofuturist Feminist Manifesto* explores the significance and necessity of engaging with Black future texts for the survival of African-descended people and the thriving of Black women and girls in the twenty-first century. The paper highlights the long history of work that Black women have contributed to the Black speculative fiction tradition and establishes an Afrofuturistic feminist genealogy, investigating works from Octavia Butler to Janelle Monae and privileging the speculative fiction, fantasy, and other creative productions of Black women. Even though this paper is not framed through an Afrofuturistic womanist lens, it still advances knowledge of Afrofuturism and Feminism by highlighting the significance of Black women's contributions to speculative fiction and investigating the potential for envisioning futures for marginalized communities.

O'Neill (2021) asserts that even though the author does not use Womanism as his theoretical framework, his article nonetheless emphasizes some of the fundamental ideas of an Afrofuturist Black feminist credo. His work is based on in-depth analyses of three futurist Manifestos: *The Foundations and Manifesto of Futurism* by F.T. Marinetti (1909), *The Mundane Manifesto* by Ryman et al. (2004), and *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto* by Martine Syms (2013). Be it poetry or speculative fiction, the author contends that Black feminist writing shapes the quality of the light upon which we base our hopes and dreams for survival and change. These aspirations and dreams are first transformed into words, then into ideas, and then into more concrete action.

This paper according to O’Neill (2021) underscores the pressing need for an Afrofuturist feminist perspective that can effectively address the unique requirements of Black feminists and Black women writers concerning future visions. Rather than being a distraction from current challenges, these future visions should be harnessed as tools to mobilize global movements for tangible change. The essay emphasizes that if we accept the assertion made in the *Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977) that the liberation of Black women necessitates the dismantling of all systems of oppression, leading to global liberation, then it is imperative to explore speculative fiction and thought by Black women. These creative works can envision potential paths to liberation, emphasizing the necessity of first imagining a better future before realizing it.

O’Neill (2021) further argues that it is important to note that the work does not claim to provide specific demands or prescriptions typically expected from a Manifesto. Instead, it lays the foundational groundwork for such a Manifesto by identifying the need for critical intervention, situating this need within a broader discourse, and suggesting potential approaches for determining a course of action. In essence, the essay does not aim to provide the definitive guide for the future of Black women’s speculative fiction but highlights the uncharted territory that exists. It acknowledges the longstanding commitment of Black women to envision and write visionary futures, transcending the boundaries of science fiction or community organizing. Whether expressed through historical narratives like Harriet Ann Jacobs's or contemporary works by authors like Rivers Solomon, Black women, and gender-diverse individuals possess the ability to manifest liberatory futures through the power of the spoken and written word.

This essay has thus illuminated the critical importance of an Afrofuturist feminist perspective that can effectively respond to the unique needs of Black feminists and Black women writers. It underscores the transformative potential of speculative fiction and thought as tools for envisioning and catalyzing material change on a global scale. In other words, this essay does not presume to be a definitive Afrofuturist feminist Manifesto with specific directives; instead, it has performed the essential foundational work of identifying a crucial intervention, placing it within a broader discourse, and suggesting potential avenues for future action. It serves as a beacon illuminating the vast unexplored territory in Black women’s longstanding commitment to imagining and narrating emancipatory futures.

Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that the work in focus marks the inception of the pressing need for an Afrofuturist womanist perspective, a harmonious convergence of

Afrofuturism and Womanism. By highlighting the profound impact of speculative fiction and imaginative thought, this essay has illuminated the promising trajectories leading to the emancipation of Black women. Nonetheless, it is equally essential to recognize that Womanism within the Afrofuturist paradigm remains largely uncharted, representing a domain rich in potential exploration, growth, and transformation. As the intersection of these two dynamic frameworks expands, the transformative power they hold in reshaping the narratives of Black women and inspiring social change will continue to be a compelling and evolving area of discourse and scholarship.

While such work does not present a definitive Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto or explicitly outline womanist principles within an Afrofuturist context, it serves as a clarion call for further exploration and integration of these powerful ideologies. Afrofuturism and Womanism share common ground in their commitments to empowerment, equity, and justice. A comprehensive Afrofuturist womanist perspective could amplify the voices of Black women, addressing their unique needs and aspirations while fostering a more inclusive and intersectional vision for the future. One might posit that it is essential to recognize the potential of Womanism within Afrofuturism as a means to address the pressing demands of the present while imaginatively shaping a future of true liberation. Through this integration, it is conceivable that one can forge a path that embraces the strengths of both frameworks, celebrating the resilience, creativity, and agency of Black women in all their dimensions.

From the literature review within this thesis, it is evident that several salient points emerge, which must be elucidated to provide a foundational structure, akin to a Manifesto. In the context of this research endeavor, the concept of an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto is introduced, a proposed framework to be intricately interwoven with the selected novel under scrutiny and the trajectory of its central character. This proposed Manifesto is underpinned by a multifaceted and intricate set of principles and tenets, the synthesis of which has been informed by a comprehensive review of existing literature and scholarship:

- ***Intersecting Afrofuturism and Womanism***

In crafting an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, it is essential to delve into the rich convergence of Afrofuturism and Womanism, two powerful frameworks that illuminate the experiences and aspirations of Black women. This intersection creates a dynamic space where cultural, social, and futuristic imaginings intertwine, forging a path toward empowerment and liberation. In a world where the narratives of Black women have frequently been marginalized

and their voices suppressed, there emerges an urgent need to not only recognize but actively reshape the future.

Afrofuturism and Womanism, with their distinctive and interconnected lenses, offer the tools to undertake this transformative journey. By amalgamating the realms of cultural expression, speculative fiction, social justice, and intersectionality, these frameworks become indispensable instruments of change. In response to this imperative, the proposed Manifesto endeavors to articulate a comprehensive set of principles and aspirations. It seeks to usher in an Afrofuturist womanist vision that challenges prevailing power structures, envisions a world characterized by equity and justice, and unleashes the boundless possibilities of a future where Black women stand at the center of their narratives.

This proposed Manifesto's core objective is thus embracing Afrofuturism and centering Womanism. In this intersection, Afrofuturist Womanism asserts the importance of recognizing the multifaceted nature of Black women's experiences. It goes beyond a mere overlay of Afrofuturist aesthetics onto womanist principles; instead, it delves into the core of both ideologies, extracting elements that enrich and inform each other. Afrofuturism, known for its imaginative and speculative narratives, provides a platform for envisioning liberated and empowered Black women in futuristic settings. Womanism, deeply rooted in the struggle for equity and justice, ensures that these speculative futures are grounded in the lived realities and aspirations of Black women.

The intersection also prompts a critical engagement with the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Black women. Afrofuturist Womanism acknowledges that the narratives of Black women have often been marginalized or silenced. By embracing both Afrofuturist and womanist perspectives, the Manifesto becomes a vehicle for reclaiming these narratives, providing a space where these women can author their own stories, free from the constraints of historical oppressions. Moreover, Intersecting Afrofuturism and Womanism challenges traditional notions of power and agency. It envisions Afrofuturist womanists as not just passive recipients of futuristic scenarios but as active participants and shapers of their destinies. The intersection invites a reimagining of power dynamics, where Black women become central figures in narratives of technological innovation, cultural resurgence, and societal transformation.

Ultimately, intersecting Afrofuturism and Womanism within this Manifesto is a groundbreaking exploration that transcends the boundaries of conventional thought. It is a call

for a new paradigm where speculative futures and socio-political realities converge, offering a space where the dynamic, resilient, and empowered nature of Black women can be fully realized. This intersection is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived experience, a guiding principle that shapes the Afrofuturist Womanist vision and empowers the community to envision and actively create futures where Black women stand at the forefront of progress and transformation.

Combining the visionary elements of Afrofuturism and the transformative principles of Womanism, this Manifesto aims to articulate a vision that celebrates the agency, resilience, and creativity of Black women. By embracing the power of imagination and demanding intersectional justice, a future where Black women thrive in all dimensions of their existence can be constructed. Towards an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto is claimed to envision a future where Black women thrive, reclaiming their narratives, healing from historical trauma, and shaping their destinies. The suggested Manifesto challenges existing power structures and calls for the active participation of Black women in creating a future that is just, equitable, and liberated. By centering Afrofuturism and Womanism, the potential to transform society, unleashing a new era of possibilities for Black women and humanity is unlocked.

The recognition of imagination as a potent force in envisioning transformative futures is intricately connected to the central theme of "Intersecting Afrofuturism and Womanism" within the proposed Manifesto. The power of imagination becomes a vital bridge that links the speculative narratives of Afrofuturism with the socio-political grounding of Womanism, creating a space where Black women can actively shape alternative realities that reflect their dreams and desires. In the context of Afrofuturist Womanism, the acknowledgment of imagination as a powerful tool aligns with the call to actively engage with the complexities of the present while envisioning potential futures. By challenging conventional notions of time, space, and possibility, Black women within this intersection reclaim the narrative agency to create worlds where they stand at the forefront of technological innovation, scientific discovery, and artistic expression. The imaginative reinterpretation becomes a means of navigating historical traumas and systemic oppressions, providing a space where Black women can transcend limitations and actively shape their destinies.

The manifestation of this imaginative reinterpretation is evident in the creative endeavors drawn from Afrofuturist womanist traditions — speculative fiction, visual arts, music, and cultural production. This creative expression becomes a tangible realization of the envisioned futures, where Black women are not only protagonists but creators of narratives that



challenge the status quo. The power of art, recognized within the Manifesto, becomes a transformative force that shapes alternative realities, contributing to the narrative of Afrofuturist Womanism. The interconnectedness of imagination and the struggle for social justice is a crucial linkage between these points.

The imaginative process, as described in the Manifesto, is not an isolated exercise but deeply connected to the ongoing fight against biases and structural inequalities. The narratives crafted by visionary creators within Afrofuturist Womanism serve as more than just stories; they become beacons guiding society towards a more inclusive and equitable future. This imaginative activism, rooted in the intersection of Afrofuturism and Womanism, inspires tangible action and transformation by challenging entrenched biases and advocating for a world where Black women are not only present but actively recognized and respected.

- ***Centering Black Voices: Narrative Reclamation and Representation***

This proposed Afrofuturist womanist vision centers the voices and lived experiences of Black women, amplifying their wisdom, power, and contributions to society. It rejects monolithic narratives that attempt to define Black womanhood in limiting ways. Instead, it celebrates the multiplicity of the identities of Black women. Furthermore, in this Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, the principle of narrative reclamation and representation stands as a foundational pillar, emphasizing the critical need to transform and diversify the stories told about Black women in futuristic settings. This principle goes beyond mere storytelling; it is a deliberate effort to reshape societal perceptions, challenge ingrained stereotypes, and empower Black women to be active contributors in the construction of their own narratives.

This Manifesto calls for a bold confrontation of entrenched stereotypes and biases that have historically marginalized and distorted the image of Black women. It challenges one-dimensional narratives that often reduce such individuals to limiting archetypes, such as the “tragic mulatto”. By acknowledging and challenging these stereotypes, Afrofuturist womanists pave the way for a more nuanced and authentic representation in futuristic contexts. Afrofuturist womanists actively engage in the creation and promotion of a diverse range of stories. This involves not only highlighting the struggles and triumphs but also celebrating the everyday complexities of Black women’s lives. The Manifesto encourages Afrofuturist womanists to be storytellers, writers, filmmakers, and artists who contribute to a vast array of narratives that showcase the multifaceted nature of their experiences.

The narrative reclamation extends to portraying the realities, dreams, and agency of Black women authentically. This suggested Manifesto insists on stories that resonate with the lived experiences of Black women, offering a mirror to their realities while also providing a canvas for their dreams and aspirations. This portrayal underscores the agency of Black women as protagonists and visionaries in their own right, actively shaping their destinies. Afrofuturist womanists strive to create counter-narratives that defy limiting expectations and break free from traditional molds. By introducing alternative storylines and representations, the Manifesto aims to disrupt hegemonic narratives that perpetuate harmful tropes. Afrofuturist womanists become architects of new narratives that reflect the diversity and dynamism of their lives.

By actively reshaping representations in futuristic contexts, this Manifesto seeks to redefine societal norms and challenge prejudices. This cultural intervention is not merely about visibility but about fundamentally altering the lens through which Black women are seen and understood. In essence, narrative reclamation and representation within Afrofuturist Womanism is a call to action. It urges Afrofuturist womanists to pick up the pen, the camera, the brush, and the microphone to assert their narratives boldly. Through these diverse stories, Black women akin to womanists aim to disrupt oppressive narratives, liberate the imagination, and contribute to a future where Black women are celebrated in all their complexity and agency.

- ***Intersectionality and Hybrid Identity Celebration***

In this Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, the principle of intersectionality and identity celebration serves as a cornerstone, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of Black women's identities. This principle urges a profound recognition of the intricate intersections of race, gender, and cultural heritage that shape the lived experiences of Black women. By embracing and celebrating this complexity, Afrofuturist womanists create a transformative space where the richness of identity becomes a source of strength and unity.

At the core of Afrofuturist Womanism is an acknowledgment of the intricate layers that comprise the identities of Black women. This complexity arises from the intersection of various aspects such as race, gender, cultural background, socio-economic status, and more. This proposed Manifesto encourages a deep exploration of these layers, recognizing that Black women cannot be reduced to singular categories. Instead, their identities are a mosaic of influences that demand to be understood in their entirety. Afrofuturist Womanism celebrates intersectionality not as a challenge but as a powerful force that defines the unique experiences of Black women. This Manifesto emphasizes that the intersection of race, gender, and cultural

heritage is not a source of conflict but a wellspring of resilience and creativity. By celebrating these intersections, Afrofuturist womanists set the stage for a profound appreciation of the diverse narratives and perspectives that arise from within the community.

This envisioned Manifesto explicitly highlights the trio of race, gender, and cultural heritage as pivotal elements in the intersectional identity of Black women. It recognizes the impact of systemic oppressions that stem from the interplay of these factors. Afrofuturist Womanism urges an exploration of how these interconnected elements shape individual and collective identities, laying the groundwork for a nuanced understanding of the challenges and triumphs within the Afrofuturist womanist community. By acknowledging that Black women exist along a spectrum of identities, this articulated vision fosters an inclusive ethos that values every unique narrative. This celebration of diversity not only honours the individuality of each woman but also strengthens the collective identity of Afrofuturist womanists as a vibrant and multifaceted community.

This guiding framework thus acknowledges and celebrates the concept of hybrid women from an Afrofuturistic womanist lens. These hybrid women are the pioneers of a new era, transcending traditional boundaries and classifications. They seamlessly weave together the tapestry of their multi-faceted identities, forging a path that is uniquely their own. Such women embrace the complexities of their heritage, be it cultural, racial, or gender-related, as sources of strength and resilience. In doing so, they become living testaments to the beauty of intersectional identities. They navigate the interplay between tradition and innovation, bridging the gap between old wisdom and new horizons. Hybrid women are visionaries who redefine what it means to be a woman in a rapidly changing world. They are the embodiment of progress, empathy, and unity, weaving the threads of their diverse backgrounds into a tapestry of hope, inspiration, and limitless potential.

- ***Collective Voices and Community Building***

Central to the ethos of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto is the principle of community building and collaboration, a foundational concept that recognizes the collective strength derived from fostering supportive networks among Afrofuturist womanists. This principle is a celebration of unity, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts in creating spaces where ideas, creativity, and solidarity flourish. At its core, community building and collaboration within the Manifesto underscore the understanding that strength lies in unity. This proposed Afrofuturist womanist vision recognizes that collective action is a powerful force for

change and calls for intentional efforts to build and nurture communities where every voice is heard and valued. By emphasizing collaboration, the Manifesto envisions a network of Afrofuturist womanists supporting each other, collectively navigating challenges, and amplifying their shared vision for the future.

The proposed charter encourages the creation of spaces where ideas can flourish, fostering an environment that nurtures creativity and innovation. Afrofuturist womanists are envisioned as active contributors to a community where diverse perspectives are not only acknowledged but celebrated. These spaces become incubators for the cultivation of new ideas, artistic expressions, and visions of Afrofuturist futures that are both imaginative and rooted in the shared experiences of the community. Emphasizing the importance of supportive networks, this Manifesto envisions a community where solidarity is not just a concept but a lived reality. Afrofuturist Womanism calls for intentional efforts to uplift and support one another, recognizing that collective well-being is intertwined with individual well-being. This principle promotes a culture of mutual support, where the achievements and challenges of one are celebrated and faced collectively.

Crucially, community building, and collaboration extend beyond the individual to amplify the collective voice and agency of the Afrofuturist womanist community. This proposed guideline envisions collaborative efforts that extend beyond individual pursuits to address broader societal issues. Black women are called to engage in collective initiatives that contribute to systemic change, using their united voice to challenge existing norms and pave the way for more inclusive, equitable futures. Thus, the principle of community building and collaboration is a celebration of the strength that arises when like-minded individuals come together. By emphasizing collaboration, the Manifesto envisions a community where ideas flourish, creativity thrives, and solidarity becomes a guiding principle. In these spaces, Afrofuturist womanists actively contribute to a collective narrative, fostering a future where the strength of community becomes a driving force for positive change and transformation.

- ***Embracing Ancestral Wisdom: Cultural Resurgence and Heritage Connection***

In the essence of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, the principle of cultural resurgence and heritage connection emerges as a guiding force, urging a profound reconnection with African and diasporic cultural elements. This principle stands as a testament to the transformative potential inherent in the exploration and incorporation of cultural richness within Afrofuturist imaginings. This Manifesto advocates for a deliberate effort to infuse Afrofuturist

narratives with the vibrant tapestry of African and diasporic cultures. It recognizes that these cultural elements hold a wealth of stories, traditions, and perspectives that are integral to the identities of Black women. By weaving these elements into Afrofuturist imaginings, the Manifesto invites a dynamic fusion of past, present, and future, creating narratives that are not only forward-looking but deeply rooted in cultural authenticity.

Embracing the power of cultural resurgence, Afrofuturist Womanism invites Black women to reclaim ancestral traditions, languages, and practices that may have been marginalized or erased. This resurgence is not a mere nostalgic journey; rather, it is a transformative act of reclaiming agency and identity. The suggested framework encourages Afrofuturist womanists to draw strength from the resilience embedded in their cultural heritage, recognizing that this connection serves as a powerful foundation for envisioning futures that are uniquely rooted in a strong sense of cultural identity. Another aspect of this principle is the recognition that language is a carrier of culture. The envisioned Manifesto champions the exploration and revival of languages that carry the histories, philosophies, and nuances of African and diasporic cultures. By incorporating diverse linguistic elements into Afrofuturist imaginings, the richness of communication reflects the diversity and authenticity of Black women's cultural experiences.

Moreover, this transformative framework underscores the significance of incorporating traditional practices and rituals into Afrofuturist narratives. Whether drawing inspiration from indigenous ceremonies, rites of passage, or communal traditions, Afrofuturist Womanism envisions futures that honour and perpetuate these practices. This deliberate connection to cultural rituals serves not only as a form of cultural preservation but also as a means of fostering community bonds and empowerment. Thus, cultural resurgence and heritage connection within the realm of Afrofuturist Womanism is a call to reimagine futures that are deeply anchored in the strength, wisdom, and beauty of African and diasporic cultures. It is an invitation to Black women to envision and actively shape Afrofuturist worlds where cultural identity is not just preserved but becomes a driving force for innovation, resilience, and a profound sense of belonging. Through this principle, Afrofuturist womanists become a catalyst for a cultural renaissance that transcends time, shaping futures that are both futuristic and deeply rooted in the rich soil of heritage.

In the spirit of self-determination and collective empowerment, one can argue that this proposed Manifesto is a clarion call to all who dare to dream and envision a world where Black women are not only surviving but thriving. It is a suggested declaration of intent that honours

their ancestors' wisdom, embraces their diverse African heritage while recognizing its richness of it, and dismantles the oppressive systems that have sought to confine them.

- ***Education and Knowledge Empowerment***

The principle of education and knowledge empowerment within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto underscores the pivotal role of education in equipping individuals with the tools to critically engage with technology, culture, and societal structures. At its core, this principle is a call to advocate for educational systems that empower Afrofuturist womanists, recognizing the transformative potential of knowledge as a means to dismantle oppressive systems and actively shape Afrofuturist womanist futures.

The proposed Manifesto advocates for an educational paradigm that goes beyond conventional boundaries, one that equips Afrofuturist womanists with the critical thinking skills needed to navigate the complexities of technology. Recognizing the dynamic nature of the digital age, the principle calls for educational systems that foster a deep understanding of technological advancements, encouraging Afrofuturist womanists to actively participate in shaping and influencing the technological landscape. Emphasizing cultural competency within education, this Manifesto recognizes that a well-rounded education empowers Afrofuturist womanists to critically engage with and contribute to cultural discourse. This involves not only understanding their own cultural heritage but also appreciating the diverse cultures that form the Afrofuturist womanist community. Education becomes a tool for cultural preservation and appreciation, allowing Afrofuturist womanists to actively shape narratives that reflect their unique cultural identities.

This conceptual framework positions knowledge empowerment as a powerful means to dismantle oppressive systems. Education becomes a weapon against systemic injustices, providing Afrofuturist womanists with the intellectual tools to challenge biases, discrimination, and institutional barriers. By fostering critical awareness, education becomes a catalyst for societal transformation, driving Black women to actively participate in dismantling oppressive structures. Furthermore, education and knowledge empowerment are envisioned as pathways to actively shape Afrofuturist womanist futures. The suggested Manifesto thus calls for educational systems that not only transmit knowledge but also encourage Afrofuturist womanists to be architects of their own destinies. Education becomes a transformative force, enabling individuals to envision and actively contribute to futures where technology, culture, and societal structures are shaped by the agency and perspectives of Afrofuturist womanists.

Ultimately, the principle of education and knowledge empowerment is a call to transform education into a dynamic force for empowerment and change. By advocating for educational systems that equip Afrofuturist womanists with critical tools, cultural awareness, and the capacity to dismantle oppressive systems, this Manifesto envisions a future where education becomes a catalyst for shaping Black women's narratives and actively contributing to a more just and inclusive society.

- ***Intersectional Solidarity***

Intersectional solidarity, another aspect addressed in this Manifesto, embodies the profound understanding that the challenges and aspirations of all women, especially Black women, are inextricably linked. It is a testament to the recognition that the struggles they face, whether rooted in gender, race, class, or any other facet of their identities, converge to form a complex web of interlocking barriers. In the context of the proposed Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, intersectional solidarity signifies an unwavering commitment to unity and collaboration among Black women and their allies. It acknowledges that liberation cannot be achieved in isolation; instead, it is a collective endeavor that transcends individual experiences and identities.

This suggested Manifesto emphasizes that the empowerment and liberation of Black women are intricately connected to the empowerment and liberation of all marginalized groups. It champions the idea that by addressing the intersecting systems of oppression, whether they be based on race, gender, or any other axis of identity, the barriers that hinder progress and collectively work toward a more just and equitable future can be dismantled. In essence, intersectional solidarity serves as a guiding principle within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose that is essential for achieving the vision of empowerment, equity, and justice for all.

- ***Decolonizing the Minds***

Another facet addressed by this envisioned Manifesto is that such a framework is not merely a statement but can serve as a living testament to the indomitable spirit of Black women—their strength, resilience, creativity, and unyielding determination to shape a future where they are seen, heard, and celebrated. It serves as a call to decolonize the mind from all previously set stereotypes and controlling images. One can navigate the uncharted realms of possibility, forging a path toward an Afrofuturist womanist future that is as bold and beautiful as the souls it seeks to liberate as author O'Neill (2021) stated: "Black women's gravely

imperiled pasts, presents, and futures necessitate the charting of alternative futures and reimagined pasts that continue to push the limits of our understanding of the current global sociopolitical and economic positioning of the Black Woman” (p.65).

Furthermore, decolonizing the minds stands as a pivotal point within the proposed Manifesto, representing a profound commitment to dismantling the entrenched narratives and structures that perpetuate colonial legacies. At its core, this principle recognizes that the battle for emancipation extends beyond external systems of oppression; it delves into the very fabric of thought and perception. Such a principle involves a conscious effort to challenge, unlearn, and reframe the ingrained ideologies that have historically marginalized Black women. It is a call to critically assess inherited knowledge and narratives, acknowledging the biases embedded in historical accounts and societal norms. By doing so, Afrofuturist womanists pave the way for a mental liberation that empowers them to envision futures untethered from colonial constraints, where their identities and aspirations are authentically reflected.

This point also underscores the importance of cultural reclamation in the process of decolonization. It involves reviving and celebrating the diverse cultural practices, languages, and traditions that colonial histories sought to suppress. Afrofuturist womanists, by reconnecting with their roots, not only reject the erasure imposed by colonization but actively contribute to a resurgence of cultural identity. This act of decolonizing the minds becomes a radical act of reclaiming agency, as Afrofuturist womanists forge paths towards futures that are not only liberated from the shadows of colonialism but also celebrate the richness and authenticity of their diverse cultural heritage.

- ***Healing and Liberation***

The Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto places a significant focus on prioritizing the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of the African American community, particularly emphasizing the identity of Black women. This principle acknowledges the lasting effects of historical traumas on the identity of Black women and supports healing practices that contribute to shaping futures where comprehensive well-being takes center stage, nurturing resilient and flourishing communities. Such a principle is a vision where resilience is cultivated through practices that nourish the mind, body, and spirit. The proposed Manifesto advocates for a future where healing is not just reactive but proactive — where the community actively engages in practices that promote mental clarity, emotional balance, and physical vitality. In such futures,



Afrofuturist womanists are not just survivors but thrivers, shaping their destinies with a sense of agency and well-being.

This suggested framework thus stands as an unwavering rejection of the constraints that have historically confined Black women within oppressive systems. It aspires to construct a future where Black women no longer bear the burden of discrimination and violence, and where their very existence is unburdened by these harsh realities. This future is one where the entirety of Black women, their bodies, minds, and spirits, are not only celebrated but held in the highest regard. It is a society where the rich tapestry of Black womanhood is not just recognized, but ardently valued. This recognition extends to their diverse experiences, desires, and identities. Furthermore, it acknowledges the profound and enduring historical trauma that Black women have shouldered across the annals of time. In doing so, this Manifesto unveils a vision for a world where the full spectrum of Black womanhood is not merely accepted but wholly embraced and cherished.

Ultimately, this Manifesto emphasizes the importance of healing, both individually and collectively. It resists the erasure of such history and culture, reclaiming the heritage of such community and restoring the connections to ancestral wisdom. Moreover, one can argue that in the realm of Afrofuturistic womanist arts, spirituality, and community, Black women have emerged as visionary architects of spaces dedicated to healing and resilience. Through their creative expressions in literature, visual arts, music, and performance, they meld the historical narratives and lived experiences of Black women into vibrant tapestries of self-empowerment and collective upliftment. These Afrofuturistic creations invoke a future where Black women hold central roles, allowing them to transcend temporal boundaries and honour their rich cultural heritage.

- ***Embracing Spirituality***

Embracing spirituality within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto represents a profound acknowledgment of the significance of spirituality as a guiding force in shaping the narrative and experiences of Black women. This principle recognizes that spirituality is not merely a facet of identity but a transformative power that permeates every aspect of one's being. By centering spirituality in the Manifesto, Afrofuturist womanists affirm the importance of connecting with cultural and spiritual traditions, drawing strength from ancestral wisdom, and engaging in practices that foster a deeper understanding of the self and the collective.

At its core, embracing spirituality is an assertion of the sacredness inherent in Black women's experiences. It invites a reclaiming of spiritual narratives that may have been marginalized or distorted throughout history. Afrofuturist womanists are encouraged to explore and celebrate diverse spiritual practices within the African diaspora, recognizing the richness that arises from this pluralistic engagement. This principle is not prescriptive but invites an inclusive exploration of spiritual paths, emphasizing the autonomy of individuals in choosing practices that resonate with their unique journeys.

Moreover, embracing spirituality is a call to intertwine spirituality with the envisioning of Afrofuturist futures. It recognizes the role of the spiritual in shaping alternative realities and guiding the community toward transformative change. By grounding the Manifesto in the sacred, Afrofuturist womanists are empowered to weave spiritual elements into their narratives of technological innovation, cultural resurgence, and societal transformation. This interweaving is not a separation from the material or the tangible but an affirmation that spirituality is an integral part of the Afrofuturist womanist identity, influencing actions, aspirations, and the creation of inclusive and harmonious futures.

- ***Social Justice, Equity, and Activism***

This presented Manifesto calls for transformative change within societal systems and institutions. Furthermore, this suggested framework envisions a future where Black women are liberated from all forms of discrimination and violence. It refuses to accept the status quo of educational, political, and economic structures that have historically perpetuated inequality, exclusion, and marginalization. Instead, it dares to envision a future where Black women not only participate but thrive at the highest echelons of power and influence. It is a future where their voices resonate through the corridors of decision-making, where their perspectives are not only acknowledged but actively sought out, and where their myriad contributions to society, culture, and the world at large are not merely recognized but deeply valued. This vision extends beyond the individual to encompass a collective aspiration for a more equitable and just world, where systemic barriers are dismantled, where opportunities are genuinely accessible, and where the transformative power of Black women's leadership is celebrated as an essential force for positive change.

Embedded within the core tenets of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto is thus the profound commitment to social justice, equity, and activism, a principle that draws inspiration from Womanism's unwavering dedication to dismantling oppressive structures. This principle

serves as a call to action, urging Afrofuturist womanists to actively engage in transformative activism that challenges systemic oppressions and advocates for equity across all facets of life. social justice, equity, and activism within the Manifesto ground the movement in the foundational principles of Womanism, recognizing the interconnectedness of social justice and the empowerment of Black women. Afrofuturist Womanism boldly acknowledges that systemic oppressions persist and that meaningful change requires intentional, collective efforts to address root causes. In aligning with Womanism's commitment, this Manifesto positions social justice not as an isolated pursuit but as an intrinsic aspect of the broader Afrofuturist womanist vision.

This principle calls for more than mere recognition of injustices; it is a rallying cry for activism. Afrofuturist womanists are not passive observers but active agents in the fight against systemic inequalities. The presented Manifesto envisions a community that actively challenges discriminatory policies, biases, and structures that perpetuate inequity. Afrofuturist womanists become advocates for change, wielding their collective strength to dismantle barriers and pave the way for a future where all Black women can thrive. In the pursuit of equity, this transformative framework emphasizes a holistic approach, addressing disparities not only in access to resources but also in representation, education, healthcare, and more. Afrofuturist womanists recognize that achieving true equity requires a multifaceted and intersectional approach. The call to activism extends beyond individual experiences to advocate for systemic change that uplifts the entire Afrofuturist womanist community.

The vision of the future presented by this principle is one where social justice is woven into the fabric of society. Afrofuturist womanists actively contribute to shaping a world where equity is not an afterthought but a guiding principle. This vision extends beyond personal empowerment to create a society where systemic injustices are dismantled, providing a foundation for future generations of Black women to flourish without the burdens of historical oppression. In conclusion, the principle of social justice, equity, and activism within Afrofuturist Womanism is a resounding call for transformative action. By grounding the Manifesto in Womanism's commitment to social justice, Afrofuturist womanists embark on a collective journey of activism that envisions and actively contributes to a future where equity prevails, and the pursuit of justice becomes an integral part of the Afrofuturist womanist identity.

- *Technological Empowerment and Access*

Technology plays a crucial role in shaping the futures of Africans mainly African women in Africa and the diaspora. The demand for equitable access to technology can ensure that Black women are not left behind or further marginalized. An active engagement in the creation and development of technology is crucial, using it as a tool for empowerment, liberation, and community-building. Recognizing the power of collective action, this suggested Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto calls for and envisions a future where technology serves the needs and aspirations of all, promoting social justice and dismantling oppressive systems. This diasporic force builds coalitions with other marginalized groups, using technology and working together to dismantle intersecting systems of oppression. By fostering inclusive spaces, they uplift the voices of all who have been marginalized and create transformative change.

Furthermore, the presented Manifesto encourages the exploration of cutting-edge technologies to address pressing social issues. Whether it be artificial intelligence, biotechnology, or other emerging fields, Afrofuturist Womanism sees these advancements as potential catalysts for positive change. By directing technological innovation towards social justice and equity, this guideline envisions a future where Black women actively contribute to solutions that address systemic challenges and create more inclusive societies. In addressing digital divides, Afrofuturist Womanism advocates for initiatives that bridge technological gaps. This Manifesto thus recognizes that equitable access to technology is fundamental to empowerment. It calls for comprehensive strategies that ensure that Black women, regardless of socio-economic background, have the tools, skills, and opportunities to engage with and benefit from the digital age. Bridging these divides is not just a matter of access but a means of ensuring that technology becomes a democratizing force, empowering Black women to participate fully in the digital realm.

In envisioning Afrofuturist womanist futures, this Manifesto paints a picture where technology serves as a liberating force. This vision extends beyond conventional notions of progress to encompass the active empowerment of Black women through technology. In this future, technology is not a passive tool but an active partner in the journey towards liberation, providing platforms for expression, amplifying voices, and dismantling the barriers that have historically impeded the progress of Black women. Furthermore, technological Empowerment and Access within Afrofuturist Womanism is a forward-looking principle that positions technology as a vehicle for empowerment, innovation, and societal transformation. By actively engaging with and shaping the technological landscape, Afrofuturist womanists aim to create

futures where technology becomes a dynamic force that uplifts and empowers Black women, ensuring that the benefits of progress are accessible to all.

- ***Bodily Autonomy***

Bodily autonomy stands as a crucial pillar within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, articulating a fundamental principle that centers on the agency and sovereignty of Black women over their own bodies. This principle emerges from a recognition of historical struggles wherein the bodies of Black women have been subjected to various forms of oppression, exploitation, and control. Afrofuturist womanists assert the inherent right of every Black woman to have autonomy over her body, free from external interference or coercion. At its core, bodily autonomy is a bold affirmation of the self-determination and freedom of Black women in decisions related to their bodies. It rejects the historical and contemporary narratives that sought to deny them control over their reproductive choices, medical decisions, and personal boundaries. This principle empowers Afrofuturist womanists to envision and actively create futures where their bodies are respected, protected, and liberated from the constraints imposed by societal norms and systemic biases.

Moreover, such a principle extends beyond individual empowerment; it is intrinsically linked to broader socio-political movements. By emphasizing the autonomy of Black women over their bodies, this Manifesto aligns with the ongoing struggle for reproductive justice and gender equality. Afrofuturist womanists advocate for policies and societal structures that uphold and protect the bodily autonomy of every Black woman, recognizing that true liberation requires dismantling the systemic barriers that undermine this autonomy. In envisioning Afrofuturist futures, self-governance over their bodies becomes a catalyst for transformative change. It is a call for the creation of societies where Black women are not only free from bodily constraints but actively participate in shaping the norms and values that govern their bodies. This principle recognizes that true empowerment lies in the ability to make decisions about one's body without fear of judgment, coercion, or systemic injustice.

- ***Futuristic Utopias and Dystopias***

The principle of futuristic utopias and dystopias within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto invites a contemplation of the duality inherent in imagining both utopian and dystopian futures. This principle recognizes that within the complex tapestry of Afrofuturist womanist narratives, there exists a space for exploring the potential triumphs and challenges

that may shape the future. It encourages a nuanced approach that critically examines present actions, envisions potential futures, and inspires continuous growth and transformation.

Embracing the duality of utopian and dystopian imaginings, Afrofuturist Womanism acknowledges the importance of navigating the complexities of the present. This Manifesto calls for a critical examination of the consequences of current actions, understanding that the choices made today reverberate into the futures envisioned. By fostering a thoughtful engagement with the present, Afrofuturist womanists become architects of their own destinies, actively shaping the contours of the futures they seek to create. The exploration of potential futures is envisioned as a dynamic process that goes beyond simplistic notions of utopia or dystopia. Afrofuturist Womanism encourages a nuanced understanding of the challenges and triumphs that may unfold. This exploration is not limited to the fantastical; it is grounded in the lived experiences, aspirations, and agency of Afrofuturist womanists. The suggested Manifesto envisions futures that navigate challenges with resilience, celebrate triumphs with joy, and inspire continuous growth and transformation.

In the Afrofuturist Womanist narrative, utopias and dystopias are not fixed endpoints but rather fluid landscapes that respond to the collective actions of the community. By embracing this duality, the Manifesto recognizes that the journey towards the future is as significant as the destination. Afrofuturist womanists are called to be active participants in the shaping of their futures, understanding that the narratives they weave today influence the realities of tomorrow. Crucially, this principle encourages a forward-looking mindset that envisions Afrofuturist womanist worlds as dynamic and evolving. This presented framework thus inspires a continuous process of growth and transformation, emphasizing that the journey towards the future is marked by adaptability, learning, and the collective creativity of the community. In this vision, Afrofuturist womanists are not constrained by a fixed endpoint but are empowered to engage in an ongoing process of co-creating futures that reflect their aspirations and ideals.

- ***Final Reflections: Culminating the Afrofuturist Womanist Vision***

This suggested Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto is seen to call upon individuals, communities, and institutions to unite in their commitment to creating a more just, sustainable, and equitable world. By embracing principles of human dignity, social and environmental justice, inclusive democracy, education, resilient communities, and peaceful cooperation, individuals can collectively work towards a future that honours the needs and aspirations of all. This proposed Manifesto can therefore serve as a guide for action, inspiring individuals to forge

a path of positive change and build a better world for generations to come. By centering Afrofuturism and Womanism, a future where Black narratives are reclaimed, Black identities are celebrated, and the liberation realized is envisioned.

In a world that has historically marginalized and erased the experiences and contributions of Black women, it is crucial to envision and construct a narrative that celebrates their agency, power, and resilience. This proposed Manifesto thus seeks to outline the principles and aspirations of an Afrofuturist movement grounded in womanist values, affirming the diverse identities and narratives of Black women. By embracing imagination, cultural reclamation, and social justice, such a Manifesto strives to redefine the Black female identity in a way that honours their past, empowers their present, and shapes their future.

Concluding such a Manifesto, it is plausible to suggest that it underscores the principles of empowerment, equity, and justice for Black women and their communities, focusing on shared objectives and practical pathways for progress. The envisioned future prioritizes the utilization of ancestral wisdom to inform the present, the celebration of cultural diversity, and the active role of Black women in shaping innovative destinies. This guideline thus highlights the interconnectedness of struggles with other marginalized communities and emphasizes core tenets, including solidarity, decolonization, and systemic change.

Objective indicators of progress center on technology usage, holistic well-being, economic equity, and environmental justice, forming the basis for a society where Black women can thrive. Tools to achieve these objectives encompass education, knowledge sharing, artistic expression, and political engagement, all fostering personal and collective growth, ensuring that the voices and contributions of Black women are acknowledged. This Manifesto's mission revolves around commitments to community building, self-empowerment, and the pursuit of a brighter future. It retains its adaptability as a dynamic blueprint responsive to evolving needs and circumstances. In summary, the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto serves as a practical declaration of intent, offering an objective roadmap for the empowerment of Black women and their communities, with a focus on concrete actions to realize this vision.

## **IV.6. Conclusion**

Afrofuturism highlights the importance of Black women, who have often been marginalized in traditional science fiction. It empowers them to take control of their stories and

futures, emphasizing their voices, stories, and experiences as essential to the human narrative. Through Afrofuturist art and creative expressions, they imagine new possibilities and contribute to a more inclusive world. This chapter explores how Afrofuturism and Womanism unite to reshape the discourse on Black female identity. This partnership empowers Black women to transcend boundaries and embrace their roots in a futuristic context. Such collaboration is more than theory; it is a catalyst for transformative change, forging an inclusive, empowered future where Black women lead cultural resurgence and self-discovery. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the urgent need for integrating Afrofuturist Womanism into contemporary discourse. The call for an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto is clear, addressing a significant gap in existing frameworks. In a landscape where the narratives and voices of Black women are marginalized, the emergence of such a Manifesto is a timely imperative. This chapter has emphasized the importance of this Manifesto, given its absence, in amplifying the diverse experiences and perspectives of Black women within Afrofuturism and Womanism.



# **Chapter Five**

*A Journey to Finding Self: An Afrofuturist Womanist Reading to Binti Trilogy*

by Nnedi Okorafor

## Chapter Five

### **A Journey to Finding Self: An Afrofuturist Womanist Reading to *Binti* Trilogy by Nnedi Okorafor**

#### **V.1. Introduction**

The “whiteness” of the genre in terms of writing and publication is evident when one closely examines the history of science fiction. As a result, African American authors have been mostly kept out of the scene for a long time. The science fiction industry is still plagued by sexism and bigotry. As a result, more Black female protagonists are sought for by science fiction Black female authors. Through the novels *Binti* (2015), *Binti: Home* (2017), and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (2018), Nnedi Okorafor focuses on what it is like to be a Black woman in a technologically advanced and futuristic world. By subverting white conventions and customs, Okorafor's trilogy challenges the stereotype of the Black woman as the "Other" and dispels it.

In the vivid landscape of Afrofuturism, the *Binti trilogy* (2015-2018) illuminates the profound truth that Black women not only thrive but excel despite their uniqueness. This trilogy emerges as a radiant celebration, a glorious ode to the indomitable spirit of the strong Black womanist. The protagonist, a beacon of courage, strength, and intellect, embarks on a transformative journey of self-discovery in a mesmerizingly advanced world. With each step, she emerges as a breathtaking embodiment of womanist ideals, gracefully navigating the intricacies of this futuristic realm while forging her path towards authenticity and empowerment. Okorafor's *Binti* combines African heritage with technology in a way that seamlessly combines the past, present, and future. Hence, *Binti* serves as an open canvas and embodies a new era of African literature that envisions fresh, creative, and dynamic futures, all while presenting a perspective rooted in African culture.

#### **V.2. Nnedi Okorafor’s Afrofuturistic Imagination**

Nnedimma Nkemdili Okorafor, known as Nnedi Okorafor, was born in the United States on April 8, 1974, to parents who immigrated from Nigeria. Because of the Nigerian Civil War, Okorafor's parents had to leave Nigeria to study in America; this did not stop the Nigerian author from frequently traveling back to her own country. She attended

Homewood-Flossmoor High School, where she was well-known for her tennis and track prowess. She did exceptionally well in math and physics and, drawn to insects, chose to become an entomologist. She was diagnosed with scoliosis when she was thirteen years old, and the condition grew worse over time (Hibler & Luebering, 2023).

After undergoing spinal fusion surgery to align and fuse her spine, Okorafor had an uncommon complication that left her paraplegic from the waist down. On the periphery of a science fiction novel, she was working on, Okorafor started composing short tales. It was the first time she had ever written something artistically. Intensive physical therapy helped Okorafor regain her ability to walk that year, but she chose not to continue her sports career. On the advice of a close friend, she enrolled in a creative writing course that spring semester, and by the conclusion of the course, she had written her first novel (Hibler & Luebering, 2023).

Okorafor holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois, Chicago, and a master's in journalism from Michigan State. She earned her degree in 2001 at the Clarion Writers Workshop in Lansing, Michigan. She presently resides in Olympia Fields, Illinois, with her family. She is renowned for blending African traditions into fantastical realms and well-known characters in her fantasy and science fiction works for both children and adults. Her famous novels include *Zahrah the Windseeker* (2005), *Who Fears Death* (2010), *Akata Witch* (2011), and *Binti* (2015), which is widely regarded as her greatest to date and received the 2016 Nebula and Hugo Awards for Best Novella. Later on, she completed the Binti trilogy with the publication of *Binti: Home* (2017), and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (2018).

Whitted is mentioned in *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* by Anderson and Charles (2016) stating that Okorafor uses aspects of fantasy, magic realism, hard science fiction, and dystopian horror for a broad and varied readership in her speculative literature, resisting easy categorization. While Okorafor has acknowledged that labels may be quite limiting in terms of her writing, she appreciates the idea of Afrofuturism as a way of life for the tenacious female characters who frequently inhabit the fantastical Nigerian settings of her novels. The author claimed that several of Okorafor's works, such as *Who Fears Death*, *Akata Witch*, *The Go-Slow*, and *Spider the Artist*, stress the power of awakenings as the main characters come to the knowledge that there is wisdom and strength in diversity. However, despite (or maybe because of) the strained family ties and divisive neighbourhoods that surround them, these awakenings frequently take place. The relevance of the surrogate parents, siblings, and mentors that appear to replace conventional family groups in times of crisis, as well as the significance

of how family and community are portrayed in Okorafor's work, were among the questions that were often posed to her.

Okorafor asserts that since her parents were immigrants, and the rest of the family was still living in Nigeria, she was raised in a traditional, close-knit family. They nevertheless maintained close ties with their extended family in Nigeria. Every night, her mother, father, two elder sisters, and one younger brother would eat supper at the same table and her parents phoned Nigeria much more frequently to reach out to her uncles and aunts. Her father claims that his uncle was the person who raised him and lived with him for the majority of the time. Her mother talks of her upbringing with affection, both from her parents and from her aunts (Whitted, 2016).

Whitted (2016) further posits that Okorafor was educated about the African family structure and stated that in the African family structure, aunts and uncles are not usually related by blood. Being close to one's family is something usual and common among African families which is why most of Okorafor's works focus on the importance of the roots, family, traditions, and belonging. A person being raised by several people is both natural and advantageous. So, one may turn to that excellent uncle, for instance, if the father is a bully. Or if the mother passes away, the relationship with the grandmother ensures that someone will be there to catch you. When there is a problem, there are alternatives on how to solve it, and Okorafor's art reflects this fact naturally.

In Okorafor's talk with Whitted (2016), Okorafor mentions that her works were frequently compared to J.K. Rowling's works. Still, she never agreed with them, claiming that it was an attempt by Americans to simplify her writing to what they already knew while ignoring all the intricate details that made her stories separate and distinctive. She stated on the matter that:

The comparisons are understandable. However, I think these comparisons are often a reaction reviewers have to dealing with cultures they find are unfamiliar. By boiling my work down to what is familiar to them, they therefore don't have to discuss those many things that are not familiar to them. It's a cop-out. And they also miss a huge part of the story. I think American audiences could benefit from stepping out of themselves more often, out of what is familiar. Right now, I think too many Americans are very insular and when they do peek out at the rest of the world, they get overwhelmed. And because they are overwhelmed,

they stamp all those things outside of their narrow window of familiar as “foreign,” “bad,” “not fun,” “wrong,” and “difficult.” Then they retreat into their little cave where they can look at and play with those things that make them feel comfortable and secure. That’s not the way to live (p.211).

Moreover, it can be contended that Okorafor's work often explores themes of identity, hybridity, female empowerment, culture, and the intersection of technology and tradition. Drawing from her Nigerian heritage, she weaves African folklore, mythology, and cultural elements into her narratives, creating unique and vibrant worlds. Okorafor's works highlight the power of storytelling to explore complex themes such as cultural identity, social justice, environmentalism, and the resilience of marginalized communities. Her writings often bridge the realms of technology and magic, showcasing the fusion of tradition and innovation.

Her stories challenge traditional genre boundaries and offer fresh perspectives on speculative fiction. Aside from writing, Okorafor is also a professor of creative writing and literature. She has served as a guest lecturer and speaker at various institutions and events worldwide, sharing her insights on Afrofuturism, literature, and the importance of diverse voices in speculative fiction. She continues to inspire readers worldwide with her imaginative storytelling and thought-provoking narratives as she gives the readers a new and fresh perspective on a futuristic world in which everyone is equally accepted and celebrated.

Nnedi Okorafor is thus recognized as a prominent figure in the Afrofuturism movement. Her works embody the spirit of Afrofuturism through their exploration of African culture, futuristic settings, and themes of identity, Black womanhood, power, and social justice. Okorafor's Afrofuturist storytelling offers a unique viewpoint on science fiction by frequently including components of traditional African spirituality, folklore, and mythology. She draws inspiration from her Nigerian ancestry, including the diversity of African cultures into her stories while opposing the hegemonic Eurocentric viewpoints of popular science fiction and fantasy.

Okorafor challenges established genre norms in her works and investigates the points where magic, tradition, and technology converge. She develops rich, multifaceted worlds where cutting-edge technology coexists with antiquated customs and individuals must negotiate challenging cultural terrain. Okorafor's storytelling also highlights the resilience and agency of marginalized communities, particularly women and people of African descent. She reclaims

narratives by centering Black characters and amplifying their voices, providing a platform for underrepresented perspectives in speculative fiction.

Anderson and Charles (2016) refer to Whitted's exploration of Okorafor's Afrofuturistic journey. Okorafor affirmed:

I don't see speculative fiction or Afrofuturism as a "tool" when I'm writing. As I said, I'm not very interested in labels. I'm a subconscious writer. I write what comes to me, and often what comes to me comes from some unknown place or voice. So, the fact that I'm writing what is considered speculative fiction isn't really intentional. I see the world as a magical place and therefore that's how it comes out in my work. I am interested in looking into the future, usually that of Africa and that's why what I write is considered Afrofuturism... I don't write "constructions." I'm literal. I see animals as people, literally. It's not about metaphors or ideas; this is what I believe. When I look at pigeons in the streets of Chicago, I see communities. When I find an ant in my home, I take it outside and hope it rejoins its family. There are many types of people on this earth and most of them are not human. I've always been this way. When I was a kid, I migrated to reading books about nonhumans because the ones about humans didn't include me and I could relate more to the other types of people, real or mythical. These days, I've since learned that even when humans write about animals, however, they are often equally as racist and sexist, for their animals are indeed just representations of human beings (p.208-209).

Although Okorafor has elaborated several times that she dislikes labels, she believes that her works are Africanfuturist (AF) or fall under the Africanfuturism genre. As a result, the question of whether there is a distinction between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism or if they are simply two different names for the same genre must be addressed. Oku (2021) in her article *Africanfuturism and the Reframing of Gender in the Fiction of Nnedi Okorafor* addressed both terms claiming that the differences between the two genres can occasionally be minor, making it challenging to detect the distinctive threads, as several academics have also claimed.

Oku (2021) contends that *The Black Panther* movie most effectively demonstrates the link between Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism, illustrating how the dividing boundaries have been crossed. The concept of the movie spoke to African sensibilities by showcasing a blend of African customs and traditional history in a way that fostered "fictive kinship" between Africans

and African Americans, built not by DNA but by shared experience. Beyond African American audiences, the film mesmerized Black viewers all over the world and expanded Blackness on a worldwide scale. Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism both focus on the future while addressing problems with chronological time. The future depiction of an uncolonized Africa in *Black Panther*, which differs from the common preconceptions of a continent torn apart by conflict, bloodshed, illness, and starvation, won over Black viewers all over the world. By bending space and time, the film *Black Panther* was able to combine spirituality with both ancestral past and possible futures.

According to Oku (2021), Africanfuturism, like Afrofuturism, employs speculative thinking to raise difficult questions about Black futurity. Africanfuturism, while futuristic, also allows for a recasting of the story to reflect what it should be and a reimagining of the past. The Africanfuturism subgenre plays around with chronological time with ease, providing a fluidity: it may fast-forward into the future or fully reverse into the past. Climate change, nuclear radiation, and the inequities of global capitalism may all be defeated in an African science fiction narrative set after a catastrophe. To be clear, futuristic themes have always been found in African literature. The influence of futurism in African literature dates back to its creation and is a reflection of the continent's vibrant folkloric storytelling, which is rich in fantastical tales.

It can be argued that despite their fictive kinship linkages, AF and Afrofuturism differ in a few minor ways from one other in addition to the long-standing futuristic motifs in African literature. Some authors claim that works in the AF tradition must specifically be about Africa, Africans on the continent, or immigrants who were born in Africa and now settle in the diaspora. The author argues that AF must be based both geographically and culturally on the continent due to Africa's discursive absence from American science fiction, particularly regarding technology and social development.

Oku (2021) cites Steingo (2017), who coined the term "African Afro-futurist" to describe speculative fiction coming from Africa and suggests that rather than thinking about AF in the Americas and Africa as separate movements, it may be useful to establish a more inclusive Black Atlantic narrative. Using the label "Africanfuturism" provides the genre with a more specific African focus, even while Steingo's naming tackles the lives of people in both Africa and the diaspora. In a similar vein, Okorafor adds that although Afrofuturism is a subgenre of science fiction, it comes from a separate "ancestral bloodline." She acknowledges that the blood is Western SF, which is predominantly white and masculine. Other races are frequently

portrayed as the "Other" in western science fiction. One of the main points of departure, according to Okorafor, is the rejection of the white male and hegemonic nature of Western SF.

Oku (2021) also quotes Okorafor who asserts: "Africanfuturism is concerned about visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent...and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa." (p.78). However, one may argue that Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, hardly differ from one another as both movements offer rich and diverse perspectives on the future, identity, and the African community, contributing to a broader understanding of speculative fiction and cultural exploration. Both Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are effective strategies to reclaim personhood and notions of futurity. Seow (2022) quotes Okorafor who stated:

I am an Africanfuturist and an Africanjujuist. Africanfuturism is a sub-category of science fiction. Africanjujuism is a subcategory of fantasy. Africanjujuism is a subcategory that respectfully acknowledges the seamless blend of true existing African spiritualities and cosmologies with the imaginative.... Africanfuturism is similar to "Afrofuturism" in the way that Blacks on the continent and in the Black Diaspora are all connected by blood, spirit, history, and future. The difference is that Africanfuturism is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history ... and it does not privilege or center the West. (p.62).

Nasser (2021) discussed the TED Global 2017 conference held in Tanzania in which Okorafor discussed her novella *Binti*, explaining that her protagonist's journey and alteration symbolize one of the core ideas of Afrofuturism and offer a fresh perspective on the speculative/science fiction genre. She continues by stating that one of the primary themes of Afrofuturism, which is entirely distinct from science fiction, is the concept of leaving home in quest of identity and self-discovery. *Binti* is an example of an Afrofuturist work of art drawn on the real, the magical, and the fantastic worlds, through "the use of some form of magic, portals to another world or the past... self-aware and coming of age, supernatural beings or events..., [and] Time travel" (p.169). Okorafor has been regarded as one of the most innovative and creative Afrofuturist writers during the past ten years. The majority of her tales, which are frequently set in West Africa, employ a fantastical setting to examine important socioeconomic issues including racial and gender injustice and dehumanization. She is one of the non-conventional writers whose works have been successful because they have been influenced by African history and culture in strange, futuristic, and womanist ways.



Whitted (2016) argues that Okorafor did not recognize herself even in comic books, where readers may envision themselves as their favorite heroes, and in many universes since comic books are renowned to be mind-freeing. She further stated in her interview with Whitted that despite not having a conventional interest in comics, she has always enjoyed them. She has always enjoyed cartoons and became dependent on the Sunday comics in the newspaper as a child. Traditional comic books, on the other hand, never drew her in. She did not believe she was a part of their world. Even in comic bookstores, she did not feel comfortable. She would glance at the shop owners, customers, and the comic book covers before leaving without another word. Everybody was invariably male and white, or, in the case of the comic book covers, white guys were the intended audience. She did, however, start reading comics eight years ago that went beyond the usual superhero stories featuring white men. The comics that followed were realistic, had complex tales akin to novels, and included people other than superheroes. She became enthused and devoured books. She became interested in reading some of the more established superhero comics after reading these graphic novels. She continued reading books like *Wonder Woman*, *Watchman* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, and *The Dark Knight Rises* by Frank Miller.

Whitted (2016) posits that Okorafor started to recognize the potential for her own stories to evolve within this genre. She had always written with a lot of imagery and also created whole worlds. She began to have dreams in which her characters were actually literally seen by others. She created powerful, non-royal, African figures who appear like they are from the future of Africa. She understood that comics may provide a whole new level of visibility, especially in our current highly visual environment. She believed she had the potential to expand her present audience by connecting with a new one. Okorafor has a propensity to work beyond the boundaries of genre, much like many Afrofuturist writers and Butler before her. Fantasy, sci-fi, and magical surrealism have all been used to characterize her novels. Okorafor states: “There’s shamanism, there’s juju in it, there’s magic, genocide, female circumcision. It deals with issues of African men and women. I based my juju on actual Ebo traditional beliefs. It pulls on the fantastical too.” (Womack, 2013, p.113).

Womack (2013) argues that as a professor at Chicago State University and an immigrant from Nigeria, Okorafor creates outsider characters that walk a thin line between two civilizations. Additionally, her writings provide sharp criticisms of culture. Several African scholars criticized her for how she portrayed the contentious practice of female circumcision. She gave the title Dada to the main character in *Zahrah the Windseeker*, which means a child

born with naturally dreadlocked hair. She stated: “Before colonialism, that was very special. But after colonialism, it was considered evil.” (p.114). Thus, others even referred to Okorafor as a witch due to her egregious usage of the word. She stated: “My fourth book was titled *Akata Witch*. It’s a derogatory term for African Americans or American-born Nigerians. Akata means ‘bush animal.’ It’s not a very nice term. The book deals with those issues too.” (p.114).

In addition to her literary contributions, it can be argued that Okorafor has been actively involved in promoting diversity and inclusivity within the science fiction and fantasy genres. She has been vocal about the importance of representation and the need for more diverse voices and perspectives in storytelling. Overall, Okorafor's impact on speculative fiction, particularly in Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism, is significant. Her imaginative storytelling, cultural richness, and exploration of complex themes have made her a revered figure within the genre, and her works continue to captivate readers around the world. Okorafor employs both the Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism paradigms, which blend technological innovation and traditional Indigenous African methods of knowing, to bridge the gap between the normative understandings of European and African cultures. Science fiction has a powerful ability to spark our imaginations and help us imagine a new world. The primary action being set aboard a spacecraft feels appropriate in that it sets Blackness in a future in which technology use is commonplace, challenging us to go beyond society's predetermined and deterministic views of Blackness and being an African.

Seow (2022) contends that texts that explore Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism stress Black people's humanity while elevating them into aspirational figures. They advocate for inclusiveness and envision coloured people having successful futures. The acknowledgment and reinvention of repressive pasts, as well as a reflection on power and its influence on human consciousness, are at the heart of these works. In general, authors of Afrofuturism try to offer young people a voice. Stories like *Binti* are frequently told from the perspective of the Black character. Stories like *Binti*, which combine Western and African Indigenous wisdom, offer chances to comprehend different civilizations and discover how humanity is present in all of them. To comprehend *Binti*, it is crucial to consider how Africanfuturism, Afrofuturism, and science fiction interact.

Nnedi Okorafor's Afrofuturistic imagination represents a dynamic and transformative force within the world of speculative fiction. Her works challenge established narratives, empower marginalized voices, and weave together rich cultural tapestries that transcend conventional boundaries. Okorafor's narratives are not confined to the realms of fiction but

extend to serve as powerful reflections of contemporary society. They encourage readers to reimagine their perspectives, question preconceived notions, and confront societal norms. Her Afrofuturistic vision is a testament to the enduring capacity of literature to inspire change, spark dialogues, and illuminate new paths toward understanding and unity. As Okorafor's stories continue to captivate audiences and enrich the literary landscape, they stand as enduring testaments to the boundless potential of human creativity and the inexhaustible power of the Afrofuturist imagination.

### **V.3. A Synopsis of the Binti Trilogy (2015-2018)**

*The Binti series* (2015-2018) written by Nnedi Okorafor, is a compelling Afrofuturist series that follows the journey of its eponymous protagonist, Binti. Set in a future where space travel and interstellar relations are commonplace, the series explores themes of identity, womanhood, culture, colonization, and the quest for understanding. As the series unfolds, Binti grapples with her own cultural identity, confronts prejudice and stereotypes, forms unlikely alliances, and discovers hidden truths about herself and the universe. Her journey is one of personal growth, resilience, and the exploration of what it means to bridge the gap between different cultures and species.

One can argue that the series offers a unique blend of science fiction, cultural exploration, and social commentary. It challenges traditional notions of identity, highlights the importance of cultural heritage, and explores the complexities of intercultural understanding along with celebrating Black femininity. Through Okorafor's vivid and imaginative storytelling, readers are invited to embark on a journey of self-discovery, empathy, and the power of embracing diversity. With its thought-provoking themes, rich world-building, and compelling characters, the Binti series has garnered critical acclaim and a devoted fanbase. It offers a fresh perspective within the science fiction genre, infusing it with cultural richness, social relevance, and the boundless possibilities of the cosmos.

It can be asserted that Okorafor skillfully examines the numerous facets of ethnic identities and gender variances in this Afrofuturistic trilogy by using science fiction as a lens. How does oppression feel? What does it mean to oppress others? What does it mean to be both or to be trapped in the middle? Are the things we believe about ourselves or how we desire to be perceived responsible for who we think we are? All of these historical inquiries combined with the fact that Binti is a Black woman from a highly strict African community in a futuristic

setting who is eager to learn more about her true identity and the contribution she has made to the world as an African Black girl make for a compelling narrative. *The Binti series* is therefore a prime example of Afrofuturism in literature, as it skillfully weaves together elements of African culture, futuristic technology, and speculative themes. Afrofuturism envisions alternative futures and realities, often challenging the dominant narratives that marginalize African and African diasporic cultures. In the *Binti series*, Okorafor presents a vision of the future where people from diverse cultures and backgrounds can coexist, learn from each other, and find common ground.

Therefore, one may posit that one of the defining features of Afrofuturism is its emphasis on celebrating African cultural heritage which was well apparent and portrayed with excellence in the *Binti series*. Binti's Himba identity and traditions play a central role in shaping her character and worldview. The Himba people are a real ethnic group from Namibia, known for their unique customs, distinctive hairstyles, and close connection to their environment. Every aspect of Binti's appearance including the use of otjize (a traditional clay mixture) and even her hair, which is adorned with otjize and braided in the symbols of her family symbolizes her rootedness in her cultural identity, even as she ventures into the vastness of space. Central to Afrofuturism is the empowerment of marginalized communities and the celebration of individual agency. Binti's journey from a young, curious girl to a powerful and confident protagonist exemplifies this theme. Her unwavering pursuit of knowledge, her ability to embrace change without losing her cultural identity, and her role as a mediator between different groups demonstrate the strength and agency of Afrofuturist characters.

Additionally, Afrofuturism frequently involves reimagining the African diaspora in futuristic settings. In the *Binti series*, Binti's journey to Oomza University in space represents the African diaspora expanding beyond Earth. Her experiences as a young Himba woman navigating an alien environment mirror the experiences of many real-world diasporic communities. This exploration of the diaspora in space challenges conventional narratives about who gets to participate in interstellar exploration and showcases the resilience and adaptability of marginalized communities. Afrofuturism often explores the intersection of technology and African culture. In the *Binti series*, advanced technology (such as the *Meduse's* living spacecraft and the university's astrolabes) coexists with Himba cultural practices. This integration of futuristic technology with traditional African elements exemplifies how Afrofuturism envisions a future where diverse cultural traditions and technology can coexist and complement one

another. The series challenges all stereotypes about Africans being backward, illiterate, and alien to advanced technology.

Moreover, *The Binti series* embodies the essence of Afrofuturism by exploring themes of identity, cultural heritage, technology, and empowerment within a futuristic and imaginative setting. It showcases the richness and diversity of African cultures while presenting an optimistic vision of the future that embraces the collective strength of humanity. It urges readers to reevaluate any preconceived notions and assumptions, they may have had due to a predominantly White history. Thus, Binti is a free space and represents a new generation of future African literature that is creating fresh, imaginative, and colourful futures while providing the reader with a perspective that is mostly African. As a result, Okorafor can reevaluate her heritage in a multicultural setting, rethink the future, and honour cultural history.

Overall, Afrofuturism appears to be a potential subgenre of literature that African authors might employ to redefine the continent's identity. The Binti series demonstrates that this genre is no longer shallow or indistinguishable. Okorafor's Binti offers a liberating nexus of fantasy, technology, the future, and freedom. It combines African culture with cutting-edge technology to seamlessly meld the past, present, and future. To integrate the concept of an African origin with the transferring of culture and family values into a space-friendly future, Okorafor skillfully mixed traditional African artifacts related to mysticism with space travel and alien contact. Binti's efficacy as a brilliant scientist and her evolving capabilities to realize her full potential and change the fate of her people permeate the trilogy. Binti signals a generative Black futurity.

### **V.3.1. Binti (2015)**

In the luminous tapestry of speculative fiction, Okorafor's *Binti* (2015) emerges as a brilliant thread, weaving together elements of Afrofuturism, Womanism, and the cosmic unknown. Set against the backdrop of a distant future where interstellar travel is a reality, *Binti* (2015) invites readers on a transcendent journey that transcends the conventional boundaries of science fiction. The narrative unfolds as a testament to the richness of cultural heritage, as the titular character, Binti, grapples with the intricate interplay between tradition and the beckoning allure of the stars. Okorafor's prose skillfully navigates the complexities of identity, belonging, and the inexorable pull of the cosmos.

The story revolves around the journey of a Himba<sup>5</sup> woman named Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib (a minority group in South Africa). The narrative depicts the Himbas as strong techno-mathematical families of competent workers. They hold the view that they should maintain a connection to their ancestral homeland and stay inward. They also have this tradition that women should cover their bodies and hair with otjize, a mixture mostly made of “sweet-smelling red clay.” (p.11). Otjize is more than simply an item; it is an integral element of the Himba people's identity, culture, and way of life. Because their lands are akin to deserts, it also serves to shield them from the heat. All Himbas, like Binti, feel naked, disoriented, and homeless without it.

Rich culture and modern science are woven together in Binti's story as she is admitted to the elite Oomza University for her proficiency in mathematics. She uses her thoughts to execute abstract algorithms while she thinks about numbers and codes to enter a level of enhanced consciousness. She does this to assist her father in building astrolabes, which are devices that reveal a person's identity and perform other important tasks like surveying a large area or seeking up information and communicating with other races and non-human species. Binti is also a harmonizer with the capacity to utilize intelligence to create harmony, thus her analytical skills are beneficial in many ways. These Binti-related details demonstrate Okorafor's talent for fusing an Ancient traditional African group of people with their culture and beliefs and placing them in a future intergalactic setting to best represent what an Afrofuturistic planet with primarily Africans in the center could look like. Okorafor illustrates what an African utopia could be by fusing the traditional and the modern, placing Africans—primarily intelligent Black African women—at the center. Such displays showcase Okorafor's Afrofuturistic vision.

Considering that the Himba people have close connections to the land, they seldom ever leave their homelands, hence the narrative opens with Binti's tough decision to leave home. Despite the clear disdain for her university admittance shown by her family and friends, Binti goes further and leaves across the world. Even though the Himbas are known for their multiple talents and creativity, they nevertheless have an introverted focus: “We Himba don’t travel. We stay put. Our ancestral land is life; move away from it and you diminish. We even cover our bodies with it. Otjize is red land.” (p.12). Her delight upon being accepted to the institution stands in contrast to the immense anguish her family is experiencing. When Binti travels away

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<sup>5</sup> The Himba tribes are descendants of a group of Herero herders. They are rustic people who resist change and adhere to their traditions and cultural heritage, which is rich, unique, and immersed with meaning, significance, and harmony (Nasser, 2021).

from home, she is seen as an alien, as the other by her relatives and the people she meets later on.

In addition to being gazed at, she is also humiliated, disgraced, and ashamed of her differences. One may argue that Okorafor's illustrations could speak to many people who identify as different, whether in terms of race, gender, religion, or sex: "I was defying the most traditional part of myself for the first time in my entire life" (p.9). Her parents wanted her to marry, just like any other traditional African family, but Binti's goals and aspirations were far more than anything a marriage could possibly provide.

The Third Fish ship, which was traveling to the university, was where Binti eventually boarded. It mostly resembled a shrimp and was as alive as any living thing. It was not unexpected to her that she was the only Himba aboard the ship and the only member of her tribe to ever enroll at a university. The Khouch people are the other ethnic group and most likely the one with a claim to dominate. They are described as being pale with green eyes and wearing turbans and veils, one of them having their lips covered with their hands so pale that they appeared to have been unaffected by the sun. They typically treat them with care and with an air of entitlement. Many times, without permission, Khouch men and women touched Binti's hair, and they frequently did so in a derogatory way that was both intentional and deliberate. "I hear it smells like shit because it is shit... a khouch woman said about Binti's hair... these dirt bathers are a filthy people" (p.16).

When Khouch's customers came to buy his astrolabes, her father constantly acted aggressively and enraged. The famed Oomza University, whose human students and staff were all Khouch, had also garnered her mother's deep suspicion. She asserted that they desired Binti the genius for their gain as Binti's mother stated: "You go to the school, and you become its slave." (p.14). this was the first time that Binti felt a sense of otherness and alienation as she was far from her home and her people: "Here in the launch port, most were Khouch and a few other non-Himba. Here, I was an outsider; I was outside" (p.12).

The sixteen-year-old was frequently teased for how she dressed and often labeled as the other, but she was unable to change since her culture was an integral part of who she was. Since her dream was greater than all of their animosity, she made an effort to escape their looks. She disregarded the ship's requirement that she undergo a complete life scan only because she was a Himba. To be recognized she needed to adopt their habits by dressing and acting like them. One can tell that Okorafor is attempting to reenact and revive historical Black experiences in a

predominately white culture. The intention is to refute any beliefs that Black people are uneducated and regressive “To them, I was probably like one of the people who lived in caves ... who was so blackened by the sun that they looked like walking shadows” (p.18).

Even though she was away from home and far from her people, Binti managed to make some friends that she considered her new people: “...people who loved mathematics, inventing, studying.... The people on the ship weren’t Himba, but I soon understood that they were still my people. I stood up as a Himba, but our commonalities shined brighter” (p.22). Binti never lost sight of where she genuinely belonged, and her convictions guided and protected her, demonstrating the importance of accepting diversity as well as knowing who one is. In her narrative, Okorafor presumably creates controversy, tackles it, questions societal prejudices, and offers resolutions: tolerance via awareness, empathy, and comprehension.

Okorafor imagined what the world could look like if the previously marginalized culture gained dominance. She emphasized the value of culture and tradition in creating one's identity, as her heroine ably demonstrated. Binti, a Black woman in space, defied all preconceived notions about what it means to be a Black woman and redefined Black femininity. Binti is a Himba woman who is intelligent, capable, and brave “he didn’t want to show that I, Himba girl was more educated than he” (p.19). She uses the Otjize as a symbol to represent this sense of connection to her home and family because she is proud of who she is and where she comes from. The spacecraft is suddenly hijacked by an extraterrestrial species known as the Meduse. The ship is partially destroyed, killing everyone within, and Binti discovers herself surrounded by these floating jellyfish creatures “their domes' flesh thin as fine silk, their long tentacles spilling down to the floor like a series of gigantic ghostly noodles... They are decisive, clear and honorable” (p.25).

Her Edan, a stellated cube of obscure metal that bears enigmatic markings, saves her. She begins to develop a friendship with Okwu, a Meduse whom she speaks with via her Edan. Binti refers to him with the pronoun “it” which demonstrates Okorafor’s aim to defy the social constructions of gender. Binti's genetic heritage changes, making her half-Meduse and half-Himba. She learns that the Meduse have a dispute with the Khoush because they have taken the chief's stinger. The Meduse wish to reclaim their chief's stringer, and Binti considers serving as their envoy to the Khoush. In exchange for her Otjize, which was valuable to the Meduse because of its healing properties, Binti offered to see their leader, remembering what her father had taught her and how intelligent and talented of a harmonizer she was. Yet again, her heritage and culture save her.



Along with the Kouch, the Meduse also referred to her as illiterate and a girl who knew nothing in addition to calling her uncivilized: “Forgive it, it is a young, a girl .... You people are good at hiding, especially females like you” (p.63). Therefore, the people she encountered did not just despise her for her ancestry and culture; they also thought less of her because she was a woman, particularly a Black Himba woman. As a result of leaving home, the young girl felt embarrassed of herself, which ultimately contributed to her current situation. She believed she had dishonoured both her people and herself as a woman. Eventually, everyone involved reached an amicable agreement to return the chief's stringer to the Meduse, and Binti enrolled in school to demonstrate and upgrade her aptitude and ability. She is enthralled with Oomza once she is there, when compared to Earth, the location is small, occasionally quite sunny, and at times very gloomy. In an act of bravery and willingness to bring about peace, Binti began by informing the Oomza people about herself, her tribe, and her culture, as well as what had occurred aboard the ship.

Although she became well-known at the university as the dark-skinned marvel with the unusual hair, she was still not welcomed as one of them. Even though the Otjize Binti developed from the lands of Oomza was different from the one she produced from the lands of her home, it was still extremely useful to her and Okwu. She ultimately was persuaded to make amends with her parents and make an effort to get in touch with her family and her mother's response signals the conclusion of the first part of the trilogy.

As mentioned in the preceding overview, Binti embarks on a quest to explore a strange new world. By creating a non-stereotypical image of the African woman endowed with fantastic potential, Okorafor's portrayal of Binti's journey on a spaceship to the hundreds of light-years-away Oomza University planet intensifies the reader's response to the fantasy of a futuristic text. To challenge the inner exploration ideas of her tribe, which are described as obsessed with technological advancement and innovation but do not like to leave Earth and prefer to travel inward as opposed to outward, the Himba girl becomes a pioneer for space flight and exploration. No Himba has ever attended Oomza University which makes Binti the first of her people to do so (Nasser, 2021).

Nasser (2021) argues that even though Okorafor's novel is set in a brand-new fictitious universe, it nonetheless draws part of its coherence from the reader's familiarity with the actual world. This is seen at the beginning of the novel when Binti tells the reader in graphic detail about the beliefs of her people and states, " We Himba don't travel. We stay put. Our ancestral land is life; move away from it and you diminish" (p.12). This is also clearly demonstrated by

Binti's characteristic African attire, which is symbolized by the thick plaited hair with fresh sweet-smelling otjize, the long red skirt, the thin leather shoes, and the anklet around each ankle.

It is asserted that her hairdo, clothing, and jewelry are all particularly significant to the Himba and are a component of their customs and traditions. These cultural representations of the motherland display a non-Western, Afrocentric cosmology that echoes Womack's analysis of the aesthetics of Afrofuturism, which embraces non-Western ideas and Afrocentricity associated with Womanism, which honours the strong, capable, and fearless Black woman as well as Black heritage and culture.

Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* (2015) thus stands as a captivating exploration of identity, cultural resilience, and the transformative power of embracing the unknown. Through Binti's journey, Okorafor masterfully weaves a narrative that transcends the boundaries of traditional science fiction, infusing it with Afrofuturistic elements and a deeply rooted sense of Womanism. Binti's odyssey into the far reaches of space becomes a metaphor for the universal quest for self-discovery, challenging norms, and the continuous negotiation between tradition and innovation. Okorafor's prose not only propels readers into the cosmic expanse but also encourages reflection on the intricate threads that connect humanity, culture, and the boundless possibilities of the future.

### **V.3.2. Binti: Home (2017)**

In the celestial continuation of Okorafor's literary odyssey, *Binti: Home* (2017) propels readers once again into the boundless expanse of Afrofuturistic imagination. Building upon the foundations laid in its predecessor, this installment immerses one in a world where the cosmic and the cultural converge, challenging the very essence of what it means to belong. The narrative unfolds with a nuanced exploration of identity, family, and the inexorable ties that bind one to their roots. Okorafor's prose, infused with a unique blend of science fiction and cultural resonance, invites readers to traverse the luminous realms of the future while delving into the intricate layers of personal and communal history. *Binti: Home* becomes not merely a sequel but a profound chapter in the ongoing saga of self-discovery and the relentless pursuit of one's truest essence.

The second novella in Okorafor's trilogy, *Binti: Home* (2017), chronicles Binti's suffering while traveling to Oomza University in the Third Fish starship. She suffers from

PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, which is a mental illness brought on by the frightening Meduse attack on the starship. After a year at Oomza University, Binti chooses to leave and embark on a pilgrimage to seek reconciliation with herself after transforming into a hybrid of humans and Meduse. But because she abandoned her responsibility to succeed her father as a Master Harmonizer, her family members are dissatisfied. She brings Okwu with her, making him the first Muduse to arrive on Earth which makes the situation worse.

The adventure of Binti on her quest for self-discovery is continued in this second installment of the trilogy. This section provides a more in-depth analysis of Binti's growth, particularly in light of her family, belonging, and culture. This section will also deal with Okwu's quest for self-discovery, character development opportunities, and personal challenges. The identification and self-discovery themes, as well as the query of how others should be treated mainly the ones that are different, are the main topics that carry over from the first sequel in this series.

Okorafor (2017) provides an entire paragraph in the book's opening pages that likely reveals the concept for this sequel in its entirety. She writes:

I was in space. Infinite blackness. Weightless. Flying, falling, ascending, traveling through a planet's ring of brittle metallic dust. It pelted my skin, fine chips of stone. I opened my mouth a bit to breathe, the dust hitting my lips. Could I breathe? Living breath bloomed in my chest from within me and I felt my lungs expand, filling with it. I relaxed. "Who are you?" a voice asked. It spoke in the dialect of my family, and it came from everywhere. "Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib, that is my name," I said. Pause. I waited. "There's more," the voice said. "That's all," I said, irritated. "That's my name." "No." The flash of anger that spurted through me was a surprise. Then it was welcome. I knew my own name (p.100).

This part of the trilogy demonstrates the author's purpose that Binti had not yet reached her full potential and ability. She never lost sight of her identity as a Himba Black woman, a mathematician, and a master harmonizer, but she still had to overcome numerous challenges and hurdles that would significantly contribute to her identity growth and path of self-discovery. Binti is also facing this sort of anger, and it happened more often than she desired. She is known to be a calm person; therefore, these feelings were strange to her. She even mentions her

people's descriptions of such feelings stating: "Back home, the priestesses of the Seven might even have called this level of anger unclean." (p.100).

Most of the time, it was her culture and memory of her home and people that kept her safe and feeling comfortable. More often it was her otjize that kept her calm, other times it was her edan, and occasionally it was her mathematical abilities and treeing. This demonstrates Okorafor's talent and ability to use and celebrate cultural aspects and tokens, yet far from any sense of superficiality. Being a member of a tribe with a deep cultural heritage and taking pride in who she is gives Binti strength, and her origins help to distance the readers from any type of shallow emotions. The narrative raises issues concerning maintaining cultural traditions while advancing, working with others, and adapting. In this book, the issue of whether it is possible to detach oneself from one's home, culture, and ancestry while yet feeling a strong connection to and respect for it is prominently addressed.

Binti felt a strong need to go home to her people with the hopes that these feelings of anger that were unlike her disappear. Binti stated: "I'm unclean because I left home, I thought. If I go home and complete my pilgrimage, I will be cleansed. The Seven will forgive me and I'll be free of this toxic anger." (p.108). It was also extremely difficult for her to become friends with Okwu who, together with his people, highjacked the ship, killed the majority of her friends, and caused her suffering, nightmares, and rage. Yet, Okwu was the only one who stood out with her, and supported her through her journey, and therefore, to her he was family even when sometimes she could not even stare at him.

Even after spending much time at Oomza, and well known as the hero who saved the planet from a war between two races, she was still othered and not accepted. On her way home, people still treated her as low class, dirty, and unworthy:

I had to squeeze past two furry individuals, and they protested when my otjize rubbed off on their furry feet and one of my okuoko brushed one in the furry face. Sorry, I said, in response to their growls. We've heard about you, one said in gruff Meduse. You're a hero, but we didn't know you were so . . . soily. It's not soil, its— I sighed and smiled and just said, Thank you." (Okorafor, 2017, p.112).

Binti also experienced this when Heru's family—the parents of the child who was killed on the ship by the Meduse—got in touch with Binti to inquire about their son's passing. They would press her to recollect the incident and provide them with specifics regarding their son's

death without showing any compassion or empathy. After all, she was a Himba Black woman and hence she was beneath them. Even humans felt so estranged from her on some occasions:

I passed a few people in the hallway to the sleeping rooms. It felt strange to be among so many humans again. Too quiet. I clutched my silky shawl closer to my body, feeling people's eyes on my okuoko and my otjize-covered skin, especially my arms, neck, and face. Even among the many races at Oomza Uni, it had been a long time since I'd felt so alien" (Okorafor, 2017, p.121).

Additionally, Okorafor continues to highlight the fact that the Himba people were not used to traveling or going anywhere. They were inward and not outward people as Binti stated: "Here, everyone was everything at least to my still fresh eyes...I had been at Oomza Uni for only one of those years now, having spent the previous all on Earth among my self-isolating Himba tribe in the town of Osemba. I barely even knew the Khoush city of Kokure, though it was only thirty miles from my home" (p.116). Moreover, Oomza University was indeed an achievement and a great honour for Binti, as she was the first in her family and her people to be accepted into such an elite institution, however, it did not come without controversy.

Binti finally arrived home as a proud Himba yet hybrid woman. She was not who she was when she left as now, she is part human and part Meduse. Okorafor therefore highlights the fact that Binti is still a proud Himba woman, yet she also wants a chance to learn and become more than who she was. In this part of the story, Binti faces the dilemma of not wanting to lose who she was as a Himba woman, but she starts to learn that she is not losing who she is, she is just becoming more than who she was. This theme is all over the trilogy and continues even in the third book where she faces even more hardship and evolution.

All this change and growth whether intentionally or unintentionally does not change the fact that she is and will always be a proud Himba woman, mathematician, and harmonizer. Each book of the trilogy mainly the "Home" sequel focuses on Binti becoming more than she ever expected to be. Her perception of herself as a Himba woman who would eventually succeed her father changed the instant she was accepted into Oomza. She did not change as a Himba; rather, she added to who she was and developed into something greater than she could have ever dreamed.

Such occurrences merely serve to highlight Okorafor's intelligence and talent. In the majority of science fiction novels, the protagonist must somewhat let go of certain aspects of who they are to grow or perhaps fully separate themselves from their former selves to become

the hero. Binti, however, builds on who she already is to become the hero. She does not compromise her identity, which is founded on her people's customs, traditions, and legacy. Instead, she has a strong attachment to them. They fill her with pleasure, hope, and tranquility. Nevertheless, she adjusts to the changes and difficulties she encounters, embraces them with full openness and grace, and grows beyond her wildest expectations on her voyage of self-discovery. Okorafor (2017) illustrated such concepts through Binti as she stated:

The two hours we waited allowed me to shake off my landing weakness. I wore my finest red long stiff wrapper and silky orange top, my edan and astrolabe nestled deep in the front pocket of my top. I'd also put all my metal anklets back on. I did a bit of my favorite traditional dance before my room's mirror to make sure I'd put them on well. The fresh otjize I'd rubbed on every part of my body felt like assuring hands. I'd even rolled three of Okwu's okuoko with otjize; this would please my family, even if it annoyed the Khoush people. To Meduse, touching those hanging long tentacles was like touching a human's long hair, it wasn't all that intimate, but Okwu wouldn't let just anyone touch them. But it let me (p.127).

Binti was still attempting to discover her true self. She was a humble Himba woman who had spent her life preparing for marriage and helping her father with his work until, without her realizing it, she unintentionally turned half Himba and half Meduse: "For a moment, I was two people—a Himba girl who knew her history very very well and a Himba girl who'd left Earth and become part Meduse in space. The dissonance left me breathless" (p.129). The story's hybridity was expertly underlined by Okorafor (2017). Every time, her attention was on the ways that helped Binti develop as a person. Her people never accepted who she has become as for them she only brought shame and disgrace to her family:

See Papa! You were supposed to take over the shop, so he could sit down and be proud. We're all very happy to see you, Binti. But you should be ashamed of yourself. Your selfishness nearly got you killed!... And... and even if you die, the world will move on. Who are you? You're not famous... You'll always be alone if you don't stop this and come home, my oldest sister added. Her voice wasn't as loud as Vera's, but it was much harder... you befriended the enemy of humanity... You are so ugly now, Binti, she said... You don't even sound the same. You are polluted. Almost eighteen years old. What man will marry you?

What kind of children will you have now? Your friend Dele doesn't even want to see you!... “Maybe you shouldn't have comeback (p.143-144)

Instead of being silent, Binti chose to speak up for herself and reject all the charges merely because she was pursuing her aspirations and attempting to be the person she believed she was meant to be. Even Dele, her closest friend, described her as too complex and difficult to grasp, which is why nobody attempts to approach her, not even her own family. However, one may argue that Okorafor is attempting to illustrate in this section of the narrative that occasionally the unusual and the excessively complicated should be accepted and appreciated. As she performed something that none of her people, particularly Himba women, had ever dared to do, Binti's bravery in the narrative is effectively depicted.

Instead of reaching safety, Binti encounters the Night Masquerade, a being that is meant to only be seen by males: “Only men and boys were said to even have the ability to see the Night Masquerade and only those who were heroes of Himba families got to see it. No one ever spoke of what happened after seeing it. I'd never considered it. I'd never needed to.” (p.156). Binti then meets with The Desert People also known as the Enyi Zinariya. They were characterized as "old African people" with certain peculiar talents, such as the capacity to communicate by moving their hands in frenzied motions. This was their talent, a blend of the magical and technological. Binti had a prejudice against such people believing they were savages, uncivilized dark people of the sand, yet Binti's grandmother was part of these people which gives Binti the chance to discover even more about herself and her hybrid self.

The edan, which is described as the “god stone” by the Desert People drastically altered Binti's life. In times of stress, it was her source of solace, and often, it was what kept her sane. However, it was also her study tool since it was more than just a good luck charm, as she had originally believed: “In many of those stories, a curious person would find a secret or magical object that would change her or his life. I'd always wanted that to happen to me. And now I was sure this was it.” (p.169). Additionally, Binti's grandmother also notices the edan referring to it as “a piece of time from before our time. An ancient work of art and use. It's old, but old doesn't always mean less advanced.” (p.172).

After journeying with the Enyi Zinariya, Binti felt ashamed that she did not know her true self as she should have. She barely knew these people even though she was one of them as her father and grandmother were. She stated: “I've been planets away and learned about and met people from other worlds. It's wrong that I don't even know of my own... my own people.”

(p.182). Even though Binti's relatives were highly intelligent and talented, her grandmother made it quite evident that they were also very inward-looking. According to her, contrary to what the Himbas and everyone else believed, they have technology that puts others to shame, and they had it for ages.

Furthermore, Binti eventually gains the Enyi Zinariya ability, allowing her to converse across great distances. Her body has become awakened by the extraterrestrial technology. Binti also discovers that the terrible aspect of her rage was simply the Meduse part of her, which she finally learns to manage, rather than a sign that she was unclean or dishonoured. Due to the significant difficulties and experiences she had, Binti believed she was meant for growth and transformation. as she stated: “Suddenly, I felt cold. Very very cold. With dismay. Deep down, I knew. From the moment my grandmother told me about the Zinariya, I'd known, really. Change was constant. Change was my destiny. Growth” (p.194). In her absence, the Khoush pursue Okwu, which is viewed as a warning of an impending conflict between the Khoush and Muduse on Himba territory.

Although the heroine still felt great pride in her Himba heritage, she was also open to change and progress, which is what made her so unique and distinctive. Now, Binti is not only a Himba woman and a Meduse, but she is also a Desert woman, an Enyi Zinariya. She stated in the final pages of the novel: “I was Himba, a master harmonizer. Then I was also Meduse, anger vibrating in my okuoko. Now I was also Enyi Zinariya, of the Desert People gifted with alien technology. I was worlds” (p.20). Okorafor's storytelling proficiency is evident as the protagonist, Binti, undergoes a personal journey that reflects broader explorations of humanity's intricate relationship with its cultural heritage. The novel's conclusion leaves readers with a deep appreciation for the seamless incorporation of speculative elements into themes deeply rooted in cultural contexts. In an impartial assessment, *Binti: Home* (2017) emerges as a testament to Okorafor's narrative finesse, providing a literary landscape for contemplation on universal concepts of self-discovery and belonging while bridging the realms of tradition and the speculative.

### **V.3.3. Binti: The Night Masquerade (2018)**

In Okorafor's *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (2018), the final installment of the Binti trilogy, readers are immersed in a narrative that skillfully merges speculative fiction with an exploration of cultural intricacies. Against the backdrop of an Afrofuturistic universe, the novel



picks up the threads of Binti's odyssey, offering a nuanced continuation of her cosmic journey. As the protagonist grapples with the consequences of her choices and the unfolding cosmic forces, Okorafor presents an intricate tapestry that examines themes of identity, tradition, and the profound impacts of interstellar encounters.

In the third and final book of Okorafor's trilogy, Binti learns through the use of her exceptional advanced abilities that she gained by being an Enyi Zinariya that the Khoush are attacking her house and her companion Okwu. To assist Okwu and her family, she returns home with the aid of Mwinyi, a member of the Enyi Zinariya tribe. Binti discovers that her companion Okwu and her family may also be dead. She also finds out that the Root, the home she grew up in and which not only served as her home but also served as a symbol of a portion of her culture and identity, has been reduced to ashes.

Binti encountered the Night Masquerade on multiple occasions throughout her travels; the creature was still unknown to her and appeared to be both mysterious and terrifying. She was the first woman to view the Night Masquerade, and it represented a significant change and advancement: "Only men were supposed to see the Night Masquerade and it was believed its appearance signified the approach of a big change; whether it brought change with its presence or change came afterward was never clear. The Night Masquerade was the personification of revolution. Its presence marked heroism" (p.245). Such occurrences demonstrated that Binti's process of identity development and transformation was still ongoing. She was developing as a woman, a Himba, a Meduse, an Enyi Zinariya, and now the first woman of her people to ever see the Night Masquerade.

Binti stated at one point "When elephants fight, the grass suffers." (p.244), In referring to the dominating races and their otherness toward the Himba people, Okorafor uses this metaphor admirably. In contrast to the grass, which represents the Himbas, the elephants represent the Khoush and the Meduse. "When Elephants Fight" is an entire chapter in the tale that Okorafor devoted to highlighting the impact of racism and otherness in either creating or annihilating entire societies. Despite having no association with the Himbas, the battle was nonetheless fought on their territory and caused harm to their population. Before Binti behaved with such tenacity and bravery, the majority of the Himbas were left destitute and unable to stop it: "Because there are Meduse ships in the lake, and if we don't do something immediately, we'll be the grass crushed beneath the feet of two fighting elephants." (p.252).

Binti sought assistance from her people to put an end to the war. She pleaded with the tribal elders to assist her in negotiating a ceasefire with the Khoush and the Meduse in exchange for their adherence to the agreement. Because she is a Himba woman who abandoned her people and her culture—traditionally, a Himba woman who ran away from home was useless, especially one who saw the Night Masquerade—her people regarded her with resentment and distrust. However, Binti defended herself and her identity by stating:

I was not leaving my family, my people, or my culture. I wanted to add to it all. I was born to go to that school and when I got there, even after everything that happened, that became even clearer. I fit right into Oomza Uni.... But I had to come home, too. I need it all, you, school, space. I wanted to go on my pilgrimage to align myself. . . but it wasn't my path ...Okwu is my friend. . yes, fine, my partner. So, I also wanted to show it my home. I guess I wanted to open things up here, too. Harmonize the Khoush, Meduse, and Himba...and now the Enyi Zinariya, too...This is why I called this gathering. There's been terror and death and destruction, but I want to pull harmony out of that now. We can. (Okorafor, 2018, p.263).

After securing a promise from her people that they will help her in her quest for peace, Binti is deceived by the Himba village leaders as she attempts to broker a settlement between the Khoush and the Meduse to end the conflict. She finds herself alone in such a battle for peace, yet Binti being the womanist hero that she is, fights with her life to save her homeland, and her people and also restore peace between the Khoush and Meduse:

With each step I took through my hometown, I wondered what I was walking toward, purposely bringing myself closer to. I'd needed to reconnect with my family after I'd left the way I did and with all that went on to happen, but realistically, it was my own insecurities that brought me running home so soon. When the Meduse anger had come forth, I'd immediately assumed something was wrong with me instead of realizing that it was simply a new change to which I had to adjust. I'd thought something was wrong with me because my family thought something was wrong with me. And now my childish actions had brought death and war. What had I started? Whatever it was, I had to finish it. (Okorafor, 2018, p.281-282).

To draw attention to the idea that change and growth can occur with a cost but are not always undesirable changes, Okorafor places a lot of emphasis on Binti's decisions and actions during her journey. Binti is aware that what she went through was essential for her to understand who she was and learn more about who she had become. She was pleased and proud to be a Himba woman, but it was not all she was supposed to be. Her path of development, transformation, and self-discovery as a Black woman in space is the ideal illustration of the Afrofuturistic elements that Okorafor brought out to the highest standard.

Binti does eventually succeed in putting an end to the conflict between the Khoush and the Meduse on Himba territory, yet the cost this time was her life. Mwinyi and Okwu, her friends and now her only family, plan to carry her to the Saturnian rings as it was Binti's wish before she passed away: "I think we should take her into space... Mwinyi told Okwu... That's where she belongs. Not here." (p.297). However, things take an interesting turn when Binti is escorted to New Fish (the newborn of The Third Fish, the ship that transferred Binti when she first came to Oomza Uni). It came as a surprise to the readers when Binti was resurrected, and she came back healthy, safe, and sound because of the New Fish DNA.

This type of hybridization demonstrates Okorafor's aim to show that change is constant, that Binti was intended for development and evolution, and that her identity is still evolving beyond what she could ever imagine. Binti is a Himba woman, a harmonizer, a Meduse, an Enyi Zinariya, and now a New Fish: "Binti was change, she was revolution, she was heroism. She was more Night Masquerade than anyone had ever been." (p.306). Binti felt that she was becoming who she was truly intended to be since she is now much more than she ever imagined she would be:

Who are you...a voice asked. It spoke in the dialect of my family, and it came from everywhere...Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib, that is my name, I blurted before I let myself think too hard about what was happening. No, I said, my name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib (Okorafor, 2018, p.331).

The Night Masquerade's mystery is subsequently revealed by Binti. It was a secret society of men that used the costume of the Night Masquerade to emphasize their culture's spiritual side. Dele belonged to this male-only, covert society. To survive and adapt, growth and change were both unavoidable, as Binti knew. She was not particularly surprised or alarmed by

discovering such information about a creature that she had always assumed had been part of her culture for a long time and was revered as something great and sacred.

To advance her studies and improve her talents, Binti returns to Oomza University. Okwu and Mwinyi are also received with open arms. She believes that the university is her home, where she feels comfortable and more like herself. It was the place where she genuinely belonged. Her path to self-discovery was far from complete, and she still had a lot to learn. Binti is reunited with her dear companions after the narrative as they enjoy the entrancing waterfalls. After all she had been through, Binti was relieved to be able to recover before setting out on her next journey. While she felt thrilled to be achieving her destiny by becoming greater than she had ever imagined, she was unsure of what she should anticipate, yet she was hopeful and excited for what was to come.

Binti's encounters with the night masquerade become a poignant lens through which identity is deeply contemplated. The ensuing consequences of these encounters add layers of complexity to the protagonist's journey, offering a rich exploration of the dynamic interplay between personal identity, cultural heritage, and the vast expanse of the ever-expanding cosmos. This section serves as a metaphorical juncture where Okorafor delves into the intricacies of Binti's internal and external worlds, intertwining the cosmic and the cultural in a thought-provoking manner.

*Binti: The Night Masquerade* (2018) underscores Okorafor's prowess in crafting a narrative that goes beyond the boundaries of conventional storytelling. The author adeptly weaves together elements of Afrofuturism, cultural richness, and character development. Binti's journey becomes a microcosm reflecting broader themes of self-discovery, resilience, and the negotiation between tradition and the unknown. The night masquerade, as a narrative device, symbolizes not only the mystical aspects of the universe but also catalyzes the protagonist's introspection, prompting readers to reflect on the intricacies of their own identities in the face of cosmic forces.

#### **V.4. The Traditional and The Futuristic: Okorafor's Depiction of Himba Myths in a Futuristic Context**

The traditional and futuristic elements in *The Binti series* (2015-2018) intertwine to create a narrative that explores the complexities of cultural identity, the challenges of

adaptation, and the importance of finding a middle ground between tradition and progress. Through Binti's journey, Okorafor highlights the resilience, resourcefulness, and beauty of cultural heritage, while also celebrating the potential for growth and exploration in a rapidly changing world. Moreover, Okorafor's depiction of Himba myths in a futuristic context in the Binti series showcases the blending of traditional elements with futuristic themes. By incorporating traditional Himba myths and cultural practices into a futuristic setting, Okorafor creates a unique narrative that highlights the significance of cultural heritage and the resilience of traditions.

It is plausible to assert that Okorafor's portrayal of Himba myths and cultural practices in a futuristic context emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage and its impact on identity. Binti's connection to her Himba roots and the incorporation of Himba myths into the story showcase the enduring power of cultural traditions and their ability to shape personal and collective identities, even in a technologically advanced world. Binti takes pride in her Himba heritage and traditions, valuing the knowledge passed down through generations. Her cultural identity gives her a sense of belonging and informs her worldview. Despite facing pressure to conform to societal expectations, Binti remains resilient in her commitment to preserving and honouring her cultural heritage.

The trilogy also delivers a sense of bridging the past and the future. The incorporation of traditional Himba myths and beliefs in a futuristic context creates a certain connection between the past and the future. It highlights the continuity and adaptability of cultural practices, showing that traditions can evolve and thrive even as societies progress technologically. By intertwining Himba myths and traditions with futuristic themes, Okorafor thus emphasizes the resilience of cultural heritage in the face of change. The inclusion of these elements reflects the capacity of cultural traditions to adapt and survive, even in challenging and rapidly evolving environments. Moreover, Okorafor's depiction of Himba myths serves as a reminder of the importance of cultural preservation and the role of storytelling in passing down traditions across generations. It highlights the value of preserving cultural heritage and honouring the wisdom embedded within traditional narratives, even in the face of societal change.

Himba myths and cultural practices in the series often carry symbolic meanings that resonate beyond their immediate narrative context. These myths and symbols add depth to the story, providing layers of interpretation and connecting characters and events to broader themes of spirituality, transformation, and the interplay between tradition and progress. Thus, Okorafor's incorporation of Himba myths in a futuristic setting allows for a reimagining of

traditional narratives and beliefs. By situating these myths within a technologically advanced world, the author explores the resilience and adaptability of cultural traditions. These reimagining prompts readers to consider how traditional stories and practices can continue to resonate and evolve in changing times.

Additionally, the inclusion of Himba myths in the Binti series underscores the belief that traditional myths carry wisdom and teachings that remain relevant across time and space. These myths often convey deeper truths and insights about the human condition, spirituality, and the interconnectedness of all things. Okorafor's portrayal honours the power of storytelling and the role of myths in guiding and inspiring individuals and communities. Her depiction of Himba myths in a futuristic context also invites cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. It exposes readers to a cultural perspective that may be unfamiliar, fostering curiosity and appreciation for diverse cultural traditions.

The juxtaposition of Himba myths and futuristic technology invites contemplation on the relationship between tradition and progress. Binti's navigation of these contrasting elements encourages readers to reflect on how cultural heritage can coexist with modern advancements, and how individuals can find harmony in embracing both traditional values and contemporary innovations. Okorafor's portrayal of Himba myths in a futuristic context contributes to the representation of African cultures and challenges Western-centric narratives in speculative fiction. By showcasing the relevance and richness of Himba culture within a technologically advanced society, Okorafor empowers readers with a broader perspective on the diversity and complexity of African cultures.

Through the incorporation of Himba myths in a futuristic context, Okorafor celebrates the enduring power of cultural traditions, encourages dialogue between different cultures, and challenges the notion that tradition and modernity are mutually exclusive. Her narrative prompts readers to reflect on their cultural heritage and consider how traditional knowledge and beliefs can inform and enrich contemporary contexts. In other words, Okorafor's incorporation of Himba myths in a futuristic context in *The Binti series* celebrates the richness of African cultures and emphasizes their enduring relevance. It highlights the ability of cultural traditions to persist and thrive, even as societies evolve technologically. By bridging the traditional and the futuristic, Okorafor creates a narrative that encourages readers to value and embrace their cultural heritage while engaging with the possibilities of the future.

Yet, it can be argued that Okorafor also celebrates cultural differences in the trilogy. As Binti ventures into the wider universe and encounters different cultures and species, she must navigate the challenges of cultural differences and biases. Her interactions with the Meduse, the Khoush, and other characters highlight the complexities of understanding and accepting diverse cultural perspectives. Binti's experiences underscore the importance of empathy, open-mindedness, and mutual respect when engaging with unfamiliar cultures. Throughout her journey, Binti undergoes personal growth and transformation, which impacts her relationship with her cultural identity. She learns to adapt and integrate new experiences and knowledge into her understanding of herself and her heritage. Binti's evolving relationship with her culture reflects the dynamic nature of cultural identity and the potential for growth and expansion while staying rooted in tradition.

Through Binti's experiences, the series celebrates the richness of cultural diversity and challenges the notion that a singular cultural identity must be sacrificed in the face of external influences. It highlights the significance of cultural heritage as a source of strength, resilience, and interconnectedness. Therefore, *The Binti series* serves as a reminder of the importance of honouring and preserving one's cultural identity while embracing the potential for growth and understanding that comes with engaging with other cultures along with an acceptance of modernity.

Nasser (2021) argues that to reimagine the African identity that has been overlooked in the canon of Western science/speculative fiction, Okorafor draws on Himba culture. Binti is therefore incredibly respectful of the protagonist's African wisdom, which repositions Africa in futurist fiction and provides a lens through which to envisage Black power. The author quotes Binti who stated: "I come from a family of Bitolus; my father is a master harmonizer... We Bitolus know true deep mathematics and we can control their current, we know systems." (p.171).

Nasser (2021) further asserts that when Binti decides to leave her homeland, she takes three key items with her: her edan, a mysterious and ancient artifact; her astrolabe, a multipurpose device that also stores all information about a person, including potential futures; the oil clay she wears on her skin, known as otjize; and, most importantly, her culture and her home. In the past, Islamic astronomers' best and most significant analog computer was the astrolabe. This is most likely to affect how Okorafor portrays Binti, her main character. On the one hand, the author suggests that making the astrolabe the story's focal point of technology confirms the Islamic world's exclusion from Western representations of scientific history and

suggests the past is still present, if only in name. On the other hand, Okorafor portrays the Himba civilization as the creators of modern technology for communication that originated in the ancient Islamic world rather than in Western Greek and Roman sciences. In other words, the astrolabe's representation of the past provides fresh information for the present and the future.

Okorafor shifts from past to future allusions by mentioning the spaceship she uses to get to Oomza University. One of the most remarkable biological inventions Binti has ever read about, this spaceship is characterized as a spectacular example of living technology, an organic ship built of plant-like fibers to resist space. The work is identified as an African-inspired futuristic work by the imaginative portrayal of this living spacecraft, where Black people had not before been imagined to exist. In her portrayal, Okorafor highlights the ability of Black people to create new worlds, subverts the common perception of the Black identity, and takes control of the imaginative framework.

Binti utilizes "treeing" (a mathematical technique employed by her ancestors) to communicate with the aliens, enabling her to send forth blue beams that have been augmented by her edan, an antiquated metal device that she has brought with her from her home planet. When Binti needs to unwind, Okorafor has her use the magical power of treeing as a form of psychological meditation and as a representation of her people's wisdom and supremacy. In this way, Okorafor ties Binti's scientific prowess and celebrated heritage together, demonstrating how little there is to distinguish between the development of mathematics and the pervasiveness of ancient tales that give Africa its distinctive character.

Building upon Nasser's perspective, one can further argue that Binti reflects on how nobody in her family wanted her to attend Oomza University during the Meduse wave of destruction. Even Dele, her best friend, opposed her going. She remembers a joke Dele said at that same moment. He assured her that even if she boards the ship and encounters the Meduse, they will not be aware of her presence. Then he continued to chuckle. She can only continue if she ignores his ridiculous joke. An important comprehension tool for the African experience is the irony in the passage above. Ironically, Dele's quip alludes to the forced marginalization of the Himba particularly Himba women throughout colonialism when they are solely viewed as exotic crutches without agency. Yet, Womack's interpretation of Afrofuturism as a free, literal, and figurative world for women to define themselves, to express a deeper identity, and, as a result, to use this freedom to redefine the Black or African identity in whatever form their



imagination permits, is revisited by portraying Binti as a self-assured and determined girl in the context of Afrofuturism.

Nasser (2021) further claims that when discussing Binti's source material, the Himba stories, Okorafor draws the reader's attention to the word "edan," which carries an antiquated current. The edan is described in the story as "an ancient tool that no one knows what it is, or whether it is .it is simply known as a work of art "edan was a general name for a device too old for anyone to know it functions, so old that they were now just art" (p.17). But as the narrative progresses, it enigmatically shields her from the Meduse invasions. Binti trembles with dread as she approaches the Meduse and begs the mysterious metal—whose purpose as a weapon she is unsure of—to shield her. As a result, the protagonist is guided by this instrument, which also serves as a portrayal of mythical Africa.

This metal object not only provides Binti with protection but also functions as a translator later in the novel, enabling her to communicate with the Meduse. Binti's exceptional understanding of science, facilitated by the spiritual tool "edan", envisions a future where stereotypes of a primitive Africa are challenged while maintaining a sense of tribal African beauty. Womack's (2013) concept of "The African Cosmos," which acknowledges the significance of ancient knowledge, blurs the lines of conventional identification and encourages self-definition and identity, mirrors the environment depicted in the novel. Through the integration of the past (Himba tradition), the present, and the future (the innovative use of "astrolabe" and "edan" as technical instruments in space flight), the narrative promotes racial uplift and illustrates the potential of African people. In essence, the exploration of the past through traditions, faith, and mythology secures a place for Africa in the future.

Nasser (2021) contends that Okorafor's continued use of antiquated artifacts combined with technological empowerment produces what Daniel Kreiss refers to as a "mythic consciousness" of authorized racial identity, which would allow Blacks to recreate and invent technologies and build utopian societies on alien landscapes. This is seen in Okorafor's illustration of the otjize, a different item from African culture. Women cover themselves from head to toe with a paste made from the Himba crimson dirt. For the Himba people, it is both a cosmetic and a health improvement. When Binti misses home, she applies the crimson substance over her body and hair.

Binti describes the significance of otjize stating that "the weight of my hair on my shoulders was assuring my hair was heavy with otjize, and this was good luck and the strength

of my people, even if my people were far far away” (Okorafor, 2015, p.20). Binti's close ties to her native country, which stand in for her identity, are indicated by the red colour of the clay, which is a representation of the earth's red hue. The Meduse revere Binti and want to consume this potent paste later in the narrative when they grasp the importance of the otjize in treating their tentacles, which shrink when exposed to Binti's edan. She stated that giving it to them would be like removing her soul, therefore she declined to give them her red clay. Okorafor demonstrates through the usage of otjize that African culture can be recreated with cutting-edge technology to establish Black power, identity, self-worth, and the capacity to communicate with others.

Additionally, one may argue that by the time Binti enrolls at Oomza University, the plot has still not been fully resolved. Her journey into space, where she leaves her comfortable surroundings and enters a strange realm, is just the beginning of her battle to make her mark in the universe. The first chance she has to create a link between herself and the other is, however, due to her African origin. Thus, the journey of Binti is seen as an opportunity where she is free to feel strong. Afrofuturism appears to be a viable genre of literature that African authors might utilize to rethink the identity of Africa in particular. This genre is no longer bland or superficial, as evidenced by *The Binti series*. Okorafor's Binti offers an inspiring nexus of emancipation, the future, technology, and creativity. It combines African heritage with technology in a way that seamlessly combines the past, present, and future. Okorafor skillfully fused traditional African items associated with mysticism with space travel and extraterrestrial encounters to bridge the idea of an African origin with the transference of culture and family values into a space-friendly future.

## **V.5. Merging Technology and Magic: The Devine Binti in Space**

Exploring the cosmic tapestry of Nnedi Okorafor's literary universe, one delves into a realm where the boundaries between technology and magic blur. Okorafor's Afrofuturistic narratives offer a unique lens through which the intricate fusion of the mystical and the technological can be contemplated. Her works beckon readers to embark on journeys that transcend the conventional, transcending the limitations of earthly existence as they venture into the cosmos. Here, technology and magic harmonize, weaving a narrative tapestry that invites a reevaluation of the conventional distinctions that frame the understanding of reality and imagination.

There is a certain hybridity in the way that Nnedi Okorafor addresses themes of technology and magic. Okorafor, who uses aspects of both magic and science, participates in this phenomenon by occasionally fusing or interweaving them. Dijkstra (2014) quotes Lisa Yaszek who argues:

Contemporary Afrofuturists ... update the classic character of the black genius by connecting that character to both Eurowestern science and African or Afrodiasporic 'magic...[B]y telling tales that merge Eurowestern and African ways of knowing the world, Afrofuturists prove SF luminary Arthur C. Clarke's famous claim that 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic (p.16).

Moreover, Okorafor has often explored the merging of technology and magic in her works, blending elements of science fiction and fantasy to create unique and imaginative narratives. She has expressed a fascination with the intersection of the two and the possibilities it offers for storytelling. She stated:

Especially in African culture. To be African is to merge technology and magic. That's a bold statement to make and I can imagine certain groups of African people rising like angry snakes against such a blanketing statement but so be it. In my experience as an African, the mystical and the mundane have always coexisted. It's expressed within the explanation of things, in ways of doing things, and the reasons for doing things. That's just life. So, add the fact that technology is a part of African life, too, and you get a natural merging. I'm not doing anything in my fiction that doesn't exist already. I got the idea from my experiences of being an African, from being amongst Africans, and being IN Africa (quoted in Anderson & Charles, 2016, p. 209)

In many of her works such as *Who Fears Death* (2010), the *Akata Witch series* (2011), and the *Binti series* (2015-2018), she often explores worlds where advanced technology and traditional magical systems coexist. She explores how these different systems interact, intersect, and influence each other, often challenging the boundaries between science and mysticism. For Okorafor, the merging of technology and magic allows her to explore complex themes and concepts. It enables her to delve into questions about the nature of power, the impact of technology on society, and the relationship between humans and their environment. She often

uses these elements to address social and cultural issues, drawing from her own experiences and Nigerian heritage.

One can argue that by merging technology and magic, Okorafor creates narratives that offer unique perspectives on the possibilities and consequences of their coexistence. She challenges the conventional dichotomy between science and magic, showing that they can complement and enhance each other rather than being mutually exclusive. Through her writings, Nnedi Okorafor demonstrates the potential for storytelling to transcend traditional genre boundaries and provides a platform for exploring the complex and interconnected nature of the human experience. In *The Binti series*, the merging of technology and magic plays a significant role in shaping the narrative and exploring the themes of cultural identity, interstellar travel, and the power of knowledge.

In the trilogy, *Binti*, the main character, comes from a traditional Himba community on Earth. As a member of the Himba people, she values her cultural heritage, including the rituals and practices that have been passed down through generations. At the same time, she is deeply curious about and skilled in mathematics and science, which sets her apart from her community. Binti's exceptional aptitude for mathematics and her encounter with advanced alien technology thus challenge the boundaries of her cultural traditions. Okorafor uses the concept of merging technology and magic to explore the idea that being African involves embracing both traditional cultural practices and technological advancements.

Readers can establish parallels between the mystical and the technological through the utilization of numerous African cultural elements, innovative technology, and mathematical prowess. Every time technology is employed in the narrative, one is left with a sense of the mysterious and miraculous. The treeing Binti does and the numbers that float about her, the edan that hovers and shines on different moments of tension, and the many communication devices and techniques that various people in the novel utilize all convey the impression that the technological and magical are closely related:

They were manipulating a virtual platform like the ones astrolabes could project! One that only the Enyi Zinariya could see and access. I felt a sting of shame as I realized why I hadn't understood something so obvious...Once the zinariya was in those who drank it, the nanoids were passed on to offspring through their DNA (Okorafor, 2018, p.184).

Furthermore, it can be argued that the series offers a distinct viewpoint on African identity and refutes generalizations about the continent. It dispels the myths that Africans are

primitive, technologically unable, and uncivilized. Throughout the entire series, Okorafor highlights how Binti had lived in a highly technologically sophisticated setting before embarking on her voyage to Oomza. The Himbas, who are recognized as people of honour and advanced technology, are the first thing the readers learn about. They are renowned for being expert harmonizers, as well as for building astrolabes and having exceptional mathematical skills. Binti's father is the ideal illustration of how expertise in mathematics is required even for the production of astrolabes.

One can assert that the astrolabes, in particular, are therefore a fascinating example of the merging of technology and magic. Along the story, these advanced devices enable Binti to manipulate and understand the fabric of the universe itself, using mathematical equations and ancient practices handed down through her culture. These devices allow her to communicate with the Meduse, connect with ancestral knowledge, and navigate complex interstellar phenomena. The astrolabes become a powerful tool for Binti, connecting her with both her cultural heritage and the vast knowledge of the universe. Binti's ability to understand and utilize the astrolabes along with her harmonizing abilities reflect her ability to bridge different worlds and perspectives.

Another device that combines the technical and the mystical is the edan. It is a mysterious stone that has long been unknown and is occasionally referred to as the God Stone. Binti learns its enormous secrets as she travels. Binti recognizes the edan's immense cultural and spiritual value, but she also learns that it contains significant technological riddles that will help her grow much more than she has before. This demonstrates Okorafor's skill in masterfully fusing traditional African culture with cutting-edge technology and ancient, sacred mythology. Contrary to popular belief, the author emphasizes that it is possible to combine the cultural and technological aspects without compromising either in favour of the other.

Binti's journey to Oomza University, a prestigious intergalactic institution, introduces her further to cutting-edge technology, such as the Meduse's organic spaceships and the advanced mathematics behind the harmonizers. She becomes a mediator between the Meduse and the human world, relying on her mathematical skills and the power of her indigenous cultural heritage. Through her journey, Binti learns to integrate her traditional knowledge and practices with the technological advancements and magical elements she encounters. In this way, the series exemplifies the idea that African identity is not limited to a singular definition or confined to traditional notions of culture. Instead, it portrays African identity as dynamic and

adaptable, encompassing a wide range of experiences, including the integration of technology and magic.

A great deal is revealed about the idea of fusing the mystical, cultural, and technological in the second book of the trilogy, *Binti (Home)*. The several characters Binti encounters who are significantly more technologically sophisticated are highlighted in many portions of the novel by Okorafor. The Himbas are not the only people with advanced technology and mathematical skills, in contrast to what Binti had believed her whole life. The Desert people are renowned for their technology, and at one point, Binti's grandmother even mentions how inferior the Himbas' technology is to theirs to the point that it puts it to shame. Binti's grandmother stated:

You Himba are so inward-looking, cocooned around that pink lake, growing your technology from knowledge harvested from deep within your genius, you girls and women dig up your red clay and hide beneath it. You're an interesting people who have been on those lands for generations. But you're a young people. The Enyi Zinariya are old old Africans. And contrary to what you all believe, we have technology that puts yours to shame, and we've had it for centuries...The Zinariya came to us in the desert. They were a golden people, who glinted in the sun. They were solar and had landed in Earth's desert to rest and refuel on their way to Oomza Uni...Yes. We 'Desert People' knew of Oomza Uni before other people on Earth even had mobile phones (Okorafor, 2017, p.182-183).

The Seven, who are thought to be ancient gods, are prominently used in the narrative and link spirituality and magic to technology. Binti claims that the Seven intended for her to be the clever and gifted mathematician and harmonizer that she is, who has immersed herself in a path of self-discovery to achieve further development and advancement. Binti holds steadfast convictions regarding both treeing and the Seven. Both encourage her to be calm as possible while dealing with difficult situations. Moreover, if it was not her edan or the Seven that calmed her down in moments of anger and need, it was usually her mathematical equations and treeing that did, as Binti stated: "I was treeing, but now I felt her fully. My entire body was alight. If | had not been treeing, what would have been left of my sanity?" (Okorafor, 2017, p.200). Thus, by merging technology and magic, Okorafor challenges the notion that these concepts are mutually exclusive and instead shows how they can intertwine to create unique possibilities for understanding and growth. It reinforces the idea that embracing multiple ways of knowing can lead to innovative solutions and a deeper understanding of the universe.

Thus, through the trilogy, Okorafor presents an Afrofuturist vision that challenges stereotypes and offers a reimagination of African culture. It emphasizes the idea that being African is a complex and multifaceted experience, embracing the richness of cultural heritage while actively engaging with the possibilities of the future, including the merging of technology and magic. In other words, the blending of technology and magic in the trilogy reflects the rich cultural heritage and diverse belief systems found across the African continent. It showcases Africa's ability to embrace both ancient traditions and modern innovations, highlighting the complexities and richness of African culture. Womack (2013) quotes Nelson who stated: "Afrofuturism is a space for women to feel empowered because it's a way to critique the ways people associate with science and technology. I think technology inherently opens the space for women to be central figures in that." (p.109).

The incorporation of technology in the series is depicted through advanced devices, spaceships, and futuristic universities like Oomza University. These technological aspects represent the progress and innovation taking place in Binti's world. On the other hand, magic is present in the form of rituals, ancestral connections, and mystical abilities possessed by certain characters. This magical dimension highlights the spiritual and mystical elements deeply rooted in African cultures. Thus, it can be asserted that the merging of technology and magic serves as a metaphor for embracing a holistic worldview that transcends binary divisions. It challenges the idea that technology and tradition, science, and spirituality, are mutually exclusive. Instead, it suggests that Africa, like any other culture, possesses a rich tapestry of knowledge and practices that can coexist and interact harmoniously. By presenting a fantastical Africa where technology and magic merge, the trilogy celebrates the diversity, complexity, and creativity of African cultures. It offers readers a unique perspective that challenges Western-centric narratives and provides a platform to imagine an Africa that embraces both technological advancements and the magical essence of its traditions.

One can further argue that the merging of technology and the fantastic along with the Divine elements in *The Binti series* is a central aspect of the narrative. The story incorporates fantastical and divine elements that transcend the boundaries of ordinary reality. Binti encounters mystical rituals, ancestral connections, and characters with extraordinary abilities. These elements introduce a sense of magic, spirituality, and wonder into the story. The merging of technology and the fantastic or divine creates a rich and layered narrative. It challenges the dichotomy between the rational and the supernatural, the mundane and the extraordinary. By blending these elements, the series suggests that there are aspects of the universe and human

experience that cannot be fully explained or understood by technology alone. It recognizes the importance of embracing mystery, spirituality, and the limits of human knowledge.

Binti's journey into space and her encounters with the Meduse, the khoush, and the Desert People along with other cultures further emphasize the merging of technology and the divine. As she navigates the vastness of space, Binti experiences transformative moments of connection and understanding that transcend the limitations of scientific knowledge. These experiences blur the boundaries between the human and the Divine, challenging conventional notions of what is possible. Moreover, the merging of technology and the fantastic or Divine in the Binti series serves to create a sense of awe, mystery, and exploration. It invites readers to contemplate the possibilities that lie beyond our current understanding and the role of both science and spirituality in shaping our perception of the universe. It encourages a holistic view that recognizes the interconnectedness of technological advancements and the transcendent aspects of human existence.

## **V.6. A Womanist Reading of Binti**

Binti can be seen as a representation of Womanism in the Binti series. She represents a reimagined future for the Black female beyond the stereotypes of an underachieving, hypersexualized, and unintelligent “Other”. The character embodies womanist ideals through her strength, resilience, and navigation of multiple layers of identity. Throughout the series, Binti engaged in a variety of womanist behaviours as she sought to understand herself. She served as an example of what a young, coloured woman may do and be when she is in charge of her future. The characteristics of the ideal womanist, as defined by Alice Walker (1983), are carrying one's ancestry and customs with pride to a foreign world without feeling embarrassed of who one is and striving to discover one's true self and rebuild one's identity on one's terms: “the weight of my hair on my shoulders was assuring my hair was heavy with otjize, and this was good luck and the strength of my people, even if my people were far far away” (Okorafor, 2015, p.20).

The womanist protagonist of Afrofuturist literature lays the way for a day when young readers of these books are inspired to grow up to be the courageous, fearless leaders of the future by interacting with stories that explore these possibilities. The protagonist of the Binti series honours and carries such values with dignity. Her journey was neither straightforward



nor linear since she occasionally experienced frightful visions in which she lost everything she had ever cared for or been devoted to. She initially lost her family, her friends, and her sense of self as a Himba woman and as a member of her community. Her passions and desires, however, were too great to be restrained. She was curious about her identity as a scientist, a woman, and a talented mathematician and harmonizer. She never gave up hope that one day her family and her community would recognize her for who she truly is.

Throughout the entire series, Binti engages in a variety of womanist behaviours. To start with, one could say that she defies conventional standards and redefines Black womanhood. Binti challenges societal expectations placed on her as a woman and as a member of the Himba community. She defies traditional gender roles by pursuing her passion for knowledge and embarking on a journey of self-discovery. By doing so, she challenges the limitations imposed by her community and asserts her agency and autonomy. She went to Oomza University despite all prejudice and against all her surrounding's wishes and desires.

Binti contested preconceived notions about women, particularly Black women. Binti's acts were highly uncommon and unconventional coming from a conservative old tribe that, despite being technologically sophisticated, strongly valued tradition and conventions. Binti pursued her aspirations for education and intellectual advancement. She pursued her ambitions with a great deal of compassion, empathy, and peace. As a woman, she was expected, like her sisters had before her, to marry and uphold the pride of her family. For such people, being married is the greatest accomplishment a woman can attain, and this viewpoint is still prevalent in society even today. Binti therefore broke convention, established her own rules, and attempted to live on her terms while still being proud of her roots and traditions, which is what a womanist is all about.

Okorafor (2015) discusses certain key womanist challenges, particularly the empowerment of African women. As a result, a Black woman who is actively involved in the development of a new, futuristic civilization is put at the center of attention. Binti is the first Black female and Himba student at Oomza University. The Himba, despite their obsession with technology and invention, would rather stay on Earth "They prefer to explore the universe by traveling inward, as opposed to outward" (p. 9). Binti, however, defies the expectations of others and rejects the societal conventions that are forced on Himba women: "I was defying the most traditional part of myself for the first time in my entire life. I was leaving in the dead of night, and they had no clue. My nine siblings, all older than me except for my younger sister and brother, would never see this coming. My parents would never imagine I'd do such a thing in a million years" (p. 1).

Moreover, the growth of Binti's voice has given her the self-assurance to be independent and in charge of her future. Djedjai and Benabed in their article *The Strong Binti in Nnedi Okorafor's African American Science Fiction* (2020) mentioned bell hooks who stated: "In a black segregated society, there is very little written about Black female intellectuals. When most Black folks think about 'great minds' they most conjure up male images" (p.301). Binti, however, is portrayed by Okorafor as the first Himba woman to enroll in the most renowned institution in the galaxy which challenges all conventional thoughts.

Djedjai and Benabed (2020) argue that in Binti's opinion, she is qualified to enroll at this institution because of her background in mathematics. She demonstrates that she is a powerful example of a Black woman via her journey of empowerment. Okorafor asserts that gender and ethnicity are not barriers to academic success for Black women. Two presumptions are defied by Binti, the first being that even though her people are adept at creating astrolabes, the Khoush view them as less progressed since she is Himba. It is not difficult to be a successful mathematician and to enroll in Oomza University despite the simplistic perception of her tribe: "He had no idea what a 'computative apparatus' was, but he didn't want to show that I, a poor Himba girl, was more educated than he. Not in front of all these people." (Okorafor, 2015, p.8).

Djedjai and Benabed (2020) further assert that the second premise is that she is a woman living in a male-dominated world. The authors state that according to Hooks, talking about the situation of Black women helps to "awaken a critical consciousness" (p.301). Therefore, Black women ought to be liberated from the "Other" label imposed by both race and gender. Binti demonstrates that a Black woman is capable of being successful under challenging circumstances. Binti is portrayed by Okorafor as a tenacious fighter who seeks to promote unity among the many ethnicities. The talent of "harmonization" is shown as being unique to this female figure.

Embracing cultural heritage and celebrating it despite the skepticism of others is what Binti is well distinguished for. Binti's journey involves navigating the tension between her cultural heritage and her desire for personal growth and exploration. She deeply values her Himba identity, practices her ancestral traditions, and carries her cultural knowledge with pride. Binti's commitment to her heritage reflects a womanist perspective that acknowledges the importance of cultural roots and celebrates the strength derived from them. As well shown in all three of the trilogy's sections, Binti was never ashamed of who she was, even if she frequently felt 'Othered' and estranged due to such culture. She joyfully strolled across a foreign cosmos coated in Otjize and wearing the attire of her people:

Congratulations, he said to me in his parched voice, holding out my astrolabe. I frowned at him, confused. What for? You are the pride of your people, child, he said, looking me in the eye. Then he smiled broadly and patted my shoulder. He'd just seen my entire life. He knew of my admission into Oomza Uni. Oh. My eyes pricked with tears. Thank you, sir. (Okorafor, 2015, p.5).

One might also contend that the protagonist serves as an example of an intersectional identity in the series. Binti's identity is shaped not only by her gender but also by her race, culture, and experiences as a woman of colour. The series explores the complexities of her intersectional identity and how it informs her experiences and interactions with others. Binti's character embodies the womanist belief that identities are multi-dimensional and that social justice must consider the intersections of race, gender, and other aspects of identity. It also emphasizes the fact that contrary to what history has demonstrated, the African identity, particularly that of Black women, may be reconstructed to encompass things that are unimaginable to most people: "Who are you? a voice asked. It spoke in the dialect of my family, and it came from everywhere. Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib, that is my name. I blurted before I let myself think too hard about what was happening. No, I said. My name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib." (Okorafor, 2018, p. 330-331).

Additionally, it might be argued that Womanism is well-known for empowering other women. As a result, Binti develops deep relationships with other women throughout the series and aids them in achieving their own goals and problems. She forms close relationships with characters like her mother, Haifa, Pr. Okpala, and the Desert People, especially her grandmother, through imparting knowledge and collaborating to achieve shared objectives. The womanist ideal of empowering other women and emphasizing the value of unity and group power, regardless of race or colour, is demonstrated through Binti's deeds.

It can be asserted that another form of womanist actions is self-definition and self-care. Binti's journey is an exploration of self-discovery and self-definition. She navigates her path, making choices that align with her values and aspirations. Along the way, she also recognizes the significance of self-care and sets boundaries to protect her well-being. This focus on self-definition and self-care aligns with womanist principles of valuing personal growth, self-worth, and self-determination. In times of stress, she also turns to her aptitude for mathematics and treeing to help her relax, proving that women like Binti are wiser and more brilliant than any stereotype has ever suggested.

Yet, one can argue that Binti's Womanism is well highlighted when Binti meets the Night Masquerade. Throughout the story, the readers realize that no other woman has ever met the Night Masquerade, a creature that is supposed to be seen only by men as Binti stated:

May the Seven protect me...I am not supposed to be seeing this...no girl or woman was. And even though I never had up until this point, I knew exactly who that was standing in my brother's garden in the dark, looking right at me, pointing a long sticklike finger at me. I shrieked, ran to my bed, and stared at my disassembled edan...What do I do, what do I do? What's happening? What do I do?... Only men and boys were said to even have the ability to see the Night Masquerade and only those who were heroes of Himba families got to see it. No one ever spoke of what happened after seeing it. I'd never considered it. I'd never needed to (Okorafor, 2017, p.155-156).

Moreover, not only was she the first woman to see the Night Masquerade, but she saw it multiple times and in broad daylight, which was very unusual and indicated that change and revolution were coming and so was growth.

Binti's Womanism is well showcased and captured in various parts of the third novella of the series as she repeatedly demonstrates her heroism and femininity. In the novella, Okorafor not only highlighted Binti's heroism and courage as a Himba woman but also highlighted her relationship with her friends, her people, and her love for Mwinyi. Okorafor was able to convey the idea that being a womanist is not only about being a hero but also about loving, caring, and compassionate. One might also assert that Okorafor devoted this section of the series to Black women who defy stereotypes and question all standards. As Okorafor (2015) stated: "Dedicated to those who aren't supposed to see the Night Masquerade but see it anyway. May you have the courage to answer the Call to Adventure." (p.1). Therefore, the womanist hero is celebrated and honoured on various occasions throughout the story.

Binti accepted her duty with elegance and acted as though she held the fate of her people in her hands: "I wasn't sure exactly how, but the destiny of my people was temporarily in my hands... I'm not crazy... I said, addressing all. I faced King Goldie as I spoke... I'm not small. I'm not foolish." (Okorafor, 2018, p.289). She proudly affirmed her womanist behaviours in opposition to the majority of people who believed she was unworthy and unable. Even Dele, a member of the elders and the next chief is a man who could not do what Binti, a seventeen-year-old Himba woman could and would do.

Binti even managed to call upon what is referred to as “the deep culture of the Himba”, which serves as a kind of spiritual support for Binti as she works to end the conflict between the Khoush and Meduse. None of her clan was able to do it, not even the elders:

I incite the deep culture of the Himba...I looked intensely at both King Goldie and the Meduse chief...Neither of you know of it and that is okay. The Himba Council members were to do this, but I think they're afraid. I think they're hiding. I'm not. And I'm a collective within myself, so I can... I was doing it; I was speaking the words to power. I was uttering deep culture (Okorafor, 2018, p.290).

Even Mwinyi asserted Binti's Womanism by stating: “But Binti was more than a harmonizer, I realized. There is no word for her yet. I knew she'd do something amazing. Binti did what she was born to do. Even the most ancient of my clan could not have done what she did, been what she was, carried it as she did, and understand, my people are old and advanced.” (Okorafor, 2018, p.305). Binti and Mwinyi's relationship exemplified the womanist concept that sexes are not comparable competitors because they encourage one another along the way and work to ensure that each person achieves their potential. This notion, which is one of the key characteristics that set Womanism apart from Feminism, is well conveyed by Okorafor and illustrated with excellence in the narrative.

In these ways, Binti embodies womanist ideals throughout her journey in the Binti series. Her character challenges societal expectations, celebrates her cultural heritage, acknowledges the intersectionality of her identity, uplifts other women, and embraces self-definition and self-care. By doing so, Binti offers a representation of Womanism and contributes to the broader narrative of women of color empowerment. Moreover, Binti embodies strength, resilience, and empowerment as a Black woman navigating her path and defying societal expectations. She challenges cultural norms, pursues her passion for knowledge, and asserts her agency and autonomy. Additionally, her connections with other women emphasize solidarity and support, reflecting the womanist principles of uplifting and empowering other women

## **V.7. Community-Building and the Essence of Belonging in Nnedi Okorafor's World**

Binti's sense of belonging, community, friendship, and the search for a place where she feels truly at home are prominent themes in the Binti series. Throughout her journey, Binti grapples

with her identity, navigating between different cultures and finding her place in the universe. In the weeks leading up to her covert departure from home to enroll at Oomza University, teenage Binti describes her friends and family's less-than-pleasant reactions to the news of her admission. It soon becomes apparent that Binti does not feel nearly as at home at home as she had believed she did. Binti can learn that belonging is more complicated than simply remaining at home and carrying out her family's plans for her future. Instead, Binti understands that by finding companions who share her interests and encourage her aspirations, she can establish a feeling of belonging for herself everywhere.

Binti has a strong bond with her homeland and the Himba culture she was raised in. She finds meaning and solace in her culture's hygiene and beauty practice of covering one's body and hair with otjize paste, which is reddish brown, and helps a user stay clean without regular access to water for bathing. She is incredibly proud of her father, who creates prized astrolabes (communication devices that hold a person's history and future). Regardless of how deep her cultural ties are, though, Binti starts to feel alienated when she finds that she has been accepted to Oomza Uni, a prominent institution in a different galaxy where no Himba has ever been admitted.

Inevitably, Binti's family and close friends fail to embrace her acceptance well. It is incomprehensible that Binti would choose to leave her home to pursue a higher education because it is not customary or even culturally acceptable for Himba to do so—especially if by all accounts she is talented and set to take over her father's astrolabe studio in the future. The story suggests it can be tough to keep solid ties when one's friends and family are not supportive, especially considering that even Binti's best friend Dele laughs at her when she communicates the news of her acceptance and later refuses to even see her or talk to her, yet when he does, he calls her too complex to be around. In certain ways, Binti suggests that while cultural ties are very significant, friendships cannot be solely based on them. Rather, friends must support one another's goals and aspirations, even when they are at odds with their culture.

Binti makes several close friends very quickly after she and her future classmates can connect over their shared interests in math and science, even though her journey to the spaceship that will take her to Oomza Uni and her first day onboard is filled with incidents of racism and prejudice. Through these developing friendships, Binti may begin to imagine what life would be like at Oomza University. She realizes that even while she may not be able to resolve her family's problems right away, she will still be a member of a vibrant academic community

where everyone is valued for their academic accomplishments and encouraged, regardless of appearance or place of origin.

In other words, Binti is confident that the friendships she forges at Oomza University will be more lasting and significant for her than the ones she left behind (at least while she is a student). Despite having different cultural backgrounds, Binti and her classmates will still be able to connect over a shared love of mathematical formulas, scientific advancements, and modern technology. Binti stated: “People who loved mathematics, inventing, studying.... The people on the ship weren’t Himba, but I soon understood that they were still my people. I stood up as a Himba, but our commonalities shined brighter” (Okorafor, 2015, p.22)

Following the Meduse's takeover of the ship (during which they kill everyone but Binti and the pilot), Binti starts to realize that friendship does not have to be based on just one or the other; it can also be based on genuine respect for people's cultures and academic pursuits. Binti develops a tenuous bond with a young Meduse named Okwu during her brief time aboard the ship with the Meduse. Binti learns through their conversations that Okwu is similar to her in that it is a young, independent creature. While Okwu seizes on the recently found healing abilities of Binti's otjize—a mark of respect for Binti's whole culture—Binti learns about the Meduse and grows to understand how noble they are. In this way, their relationship develops as they learn to respect each other's vastly different cultures and as they spend more time together as Oomza Uni classmates and later on Binti even considers it as part of her family.

In the brief accounts of Binti and Okwu's first few months at Oomza University, Okorafor argues that particularly because both people have such vastly dissimilar cultural backgrounds—and backgrounds that are so dissimilar from any of their other classmates—they are able to form a sense of camaraderie with each other that is more difficult to do with other students at school. Most significantly, Okwu is the one who ultimately encourages Binti to contact and reestablish relations with her family. Through this, Binti promotes friendship as a strong force that may make a person feel at home in a foreign setting as well as a strong connection between a person's past, present, and future.

Moreover, one can argue that Binti's initial struggle lies in the conflict between her deep connection to her Himba community and her desire to pursue knowledge and explore beyond her cultural boundaries. This tension highlights the importance of belonging and the complexities of identity. As she ventures out into the wider universe, Binti seeks to find a sense of belonging that encompasses both her Himba roots and her expanding horizons. While Binti

leaves her community to pursue her dreams, she still values her connection to her family and the Himba people. Her interactions with her family, especially her relationship with her father and grandmother, showcase the significance of community support and the influence of familial bonds on one's sense of belonging.

Binti's encounters with different cultures and species, such as the Meduse and the Desert People, demonstrate the potential for building bridges and forming connections across boundaries. These interactions challenge her preconceived notions, encourage empathy, and contribute to her evolving understanding of herself and others. Through these cross-cultural connections, Binti finds pockets of acceptance and friendship. Furthermore, Binti forms meaningful connections and friendships with various characters throughout the series. Her relationships with Okwu, Mwinyi, and the Desert People are based on mutual respect, understanding, and support. These friendships provide her with a sense of belonging, a support system, and companionship during her challenging journey.

As Binti navigates through unfamiliar environments, she seeks to create spaces where she feels at home. She transforms her living quarters on Oomza University's spaceship to reflect her Himba heritage, establishing a physical representation of her identity and belonging. This act serves as a reminder of the importance of creating one's own sense of home, even in unfamiliar surroundings. Binti's quest for belonging also involves personal growth and self-acceptance. She undergoes transformative experiences that challenge her preconceived notions and expand her understanding of herself and the world. Her journey is a process of discovering who she is and where she truly belongs, as she navigates diverse environments and encounters.

Through Binti's experiences, the series explores the themes of belonging, community, and friendship. It underscores the significance of cultural roots, familial connections, and meaningful relationships in shaping one's sense of self and finding a place of belonging in a diverse and ever-expanding universe. The theme of belonging in the Binti series explores the universal human need for connection, understanding, and a place to call home. It delves into questions of cultural identity, personal growth, and the search for acceptance and community. Through Binti's experiences, readers are invited to reflect on their own sense of belonging, the impact of community and relationships, and the complexities of navigating multiple identities in a diverse and ever-changing world. Binti eventually comes to terms with her hybrid nature, ultimately embracing all aspects of herself. This journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance contributes to her sense of belonging.



## **V.8. Hybridity and Transformation in Binti's Posthuman Journey**

In the remarkable narrative landscape of Nnedi Okorafor's Binti series, the concept of hybridity takes center stage, leading the protagonist on an extraordinary posthuman journey. This journey is not merely one of physical transformation but a voyage into the heart of identity, culture, and self-discovery. Okorafor's narrative explores how Binti, a young woman of extraordinary abilities, navigates the complex terrain of hybridity, where the boundaries of the human and non-human, the familiar and the foreign, and the known and the uncharted intermingle. Through her experiences, we are invited to examine the transformative power of hybridity and its role in reshaping perceptions of self and society. This chapter delves into the intricacies of Binti's posthuman journey, offering a profound exploration of identity, change, and the dynamic interplay between human and non-human elements.

In her science fiction, Okorafor investigates the boundaries of body alterations arising from genetic and cultural admixture with non-human people, which can lead to exceptional mutations, hybridization, and overt differences from human society. In Binti, the idea of hybridity or hybridism essentially serves as a recurring motif. The trilogy aims to show how probable posthuman hybridization caused by induced genetic mutations and biotechnological linkages affects human subjectivities and ultimately causes them to become alienated from their fictitious anthropocentric human cultures. The narrative examines the potential effects of alien technology on human essentialism and the potential for the emergence of posthuman "Others," which would not only alter anthropocentric societies and ideologies but also pose a direct threat to the current humanist world order.

It can be argued that hybridization is regarded as the mating or cross-fertilization of two or more species, the blending of two or more diverse cultures or traditions, the heterogeneous composition of dissimilar parts, such as those found in genetic DNA and RNA strands, or the technological parts of various components carrying out the same function. In several ontologies and philosophies, particularly postmodern, multicultural, and postcolonial ones, the word "hybrids(ism/idity)" is used. "Hybridism" refers to the interwoven, relational, and symbiotic relationships between humans and nonhumans in posthumanist critique. Posthumanist criticism recognizes hybridism as a significant variation of "posthuman subjectivity" because it suggests a broader recognition of life beyond the bounds of essentialist humanism by incorporating and giving significance to non-human components as well as human components into a unified transformed entity.

Aishat Ize & Nasir Umar (2022) assert that it has been challenging to define subjectivity, which in humanist terminology frequently refers to the perception of "selfhood" that is related to the fundamental being or the perceived reality of distinct personal experiences and knowledge. In the humanities, the word is typically restricted to human states of consciousness with the underlying notion that subjective mental experiences are only available to rational creatures, which implied that humans were the only species to be distinguished from other nonhuman beings. This is due to the fact that Western philosophy has believed for millennia that only humans possess reason and agency. However, due to current concerns with identity politics and scientific findings of intellect and agency outside the scope of human consciousness, the term "subjectivity" is sometimes surrounded by debate (Aishat Ize & Nasir Umar, 2022).

Aishat Ize & Nasir Umar (2022) further posit that posthuman subjectivity also refers to any self, which is not just restricted to the human but may also be non-human, inhuman, or hybrids of all categories. Posthuman subjectivity frequently exists in 'beyond human' states because it can fluidly 'become' or embody various perspectives or identities as opposed to being limited by specific identifications like race, species, and biology. In addition to incorporating and embodying various modes of being across species, technological, and virtual lines, posthuman subjectivity also experiences the world from a variety of diverse perspectives, which helps reveal a wealth of knowledge about various realities and their intersections.

In science fiction, the term "Alien" typically refers to an "Other"; someone or something that does not belong, either to a homogenous group, a community, or in SF, to our planet Earth, where it is frequently an extraterrestrial being that is typically depicted as having features and abilities that are different from those of humanity. These others are treated as aliens because of some distinguishing characteristics that set them apart from typical anthropocentric traits like race, skin colour, species, culture, physical abilities as well as various socioeconomic factors. People who share characteristics with groups who are already beyond the norm for humans are seen as hybrids and are consequently tainted since they have unacceptably close relationships with the "others." They are compelled to participate in the same discriminating and alienating experiences already encountered by other non-human aliens after becoming othered themselves and losing their previously privileged status. They also have to put up with new kinds of discriminating behaviours from their supposedly 'pure' human relatives.

It can be contended that the ensuing posthuman beings, like most hybrids, exhibit a posthuman sensibility and subjectivity that separates them in several ways from their parent

origins. These posthuman creatures are created via the hybridization of genetic, technological, and cultural forms of being. In Okorafor's narrative, posthuman characters are given physical and cultural enhancements to perform and make connections that would be previously inconceivable or even unimaginable by criteria used by modern humans. As a result, the DNA of the posthuman characters in *Binti* represents a biological discourse in which subjectivities are established and redefined in a process of transmutation and hybridization that is continually alterable.

In the series, it can be contended that *Binti's* character can be viewed as a representation of the hybrid posthuman self. *Binti* embodies a unique intersection of multiple identities and experiences, which contributes to her complex and layered sense of self. She navigates the tension between honouring her cultural heritage and embracing new experiences and knowledge. Her journey involves reconciling her identities and finding a balance between her Himba roots and the expanding horizons of her intellectual and interstellar exploration. In other words, *Binti* and the concept of hybridity are intricately linked throughout the series. The concept of hybridity refers to the blending or mixing of different elements, often resulting in the emergence of something new and unique. *Binti* embodies this idea of hybridity through her experiences, identities, and the connections she forms with various cultures and species.

Moreover, one can claim that *Binti's* hybridity is multifaceted. She carries her Himba cultural heritage with her, rooted in the traditions, values, and practices of her community. Her cultural identity as a Himba girl shapes her worldview, beliefs, and relationships. Thus, *Binti's* physical appearance alone highlights her hybrid nature. However, her encounters with the Meduse result in physical transformations that further emphasize her hybrid identity. These physical changes serve as a tangible representation of the merging of different elements within her. Moreover, *Binti's* journey takes her beyond her cultural boundaries and exposes her to diverse cultures, species, and ways of life. She interacts with other alien species, such as the Khoush, and the Desert People each with their own distinct traditions and perspectives. These encounters challenge and expand *Binti's* understanding of the universe and her place within it.

Okorafor often illustrated such themes in the series. Seow (2022) mentions Joy James (2013) who suggested in her discussion around Fanon's Black cyborg that Blacks must be prepared to give up their humanity to prosper. To put it another way, success requires a willingness to give up a life that, on the scale of human growth, is already precarious: a life of constant becoming. Okorafor (2015) reimagines even this, by making the Meduse's integration of their DNA with *Binti's* push her further along the evolutionary scale to become more than a

marginalized human. Binti is changed physically by the Meduse to be more powerful and able to converse with both humans and the Meduse. Like Fanon's Black cyborg, she is no longer an ordinary individual and is instead a bridge for future peace.

Furthermore, Binti changes externally as well as her hair that was plaited into elaborate designs and codes that represented her bloodline "I wanted to tell him that there was a code, that the pattern spoke my family's bloodline, culture, and history. That my father had designed the code and my mother and aunts had shown me how to braid it into my hair" (Okorafor, 2015, p.23) also changed into tentacles just like the Meduse with pure okuoko "The okuoko were a soft transparent blue with darker blue dots at their tips. They grew out of my head as if they'd been doing that all my life, so natural looking that I couldn't say they were ugly ... I could no longer braid them into my family's code pattern" (Okorafor, 2015, p.87). This form of hybridism changed Binti's life forever, as her identity. She became part Himba and part Meduse celebrating both cultures.

Seow (2022) argues that as the first human to speak with the Meduse on behalf of the Oomza University officials, Binti's hybridity creates a cultural bridge between humans and alien species. She can now see and understand both sides. The capacity for critical thinking includes the capacity for understanding another person's perspective. Many contend that to establish unity, we must comprehend the perspective and historical context of the racialized other. Binti's natural ability to harmonize aids in her development into an improved human. As a result of Binti's supernatural transformation, the rebel thinker becomes a cyborg who is now biological, mechanical, and divine. Even in the face of challenges, Binti develops as a Black thinker and leader and moves beyond the confines of being merely human or less than human.

The acceptance of other races and cultures, such as the Khoush, which were unfamiliar to the Himbas, is another example of hybridism. However, Binti's open-mindedness made her realize that it was necessary to embrace others and adapt to diverse conditions. With all the varied creatures and races, especially the Khoush, that were foreign to her and her people, Binti felt astonished and impressed. Binti stated: "Here, everyone was everything. I was seventeen years old, and I had been at Oomza Uni for only one of those years now, having spent the previous all on Earth among my self-isolating Himba tribe in the town of Osemba. I barely even knew the Khoush city of Kokure, though it was only thirty miles from my home." (Okorafor, 2017, p.117). Such a form of hybridism challenged and blurred boundaries of racism and indulged Binti in a journey of growth and other's acceptance: "For a moment, I was two

people—a Himba girl who knew her history very very well and a Himba girl who'd left Earth and become part Meduse in space. The dissonance left me breathless.” (Okorafor, 2017, p.129).

Binti's hybrid self is also reflected in her intellectual pursuits. She possesses a natural aptitude for mathematics and the technology of the Meduse, which sets her apart from others in her community. Her academic interests and pursuits at Oomza University further shape her identity as a scholar and explorer. Therefore, Binti's hybridity allows her to bridge gaps between cultures and species. Her ability to communicate with the Meduse and foster understanding demonstrates the potential for connection and empathy across differences. Therefore, Binti carries her Himba heritage and traditions with her, rooted in a rich cultural identity. Simultaneously, her passion for knowledge and her journey to Oomza University exposed her to diverse perspectives, knowledge systems, and ways of life. This blending of cultural influences and intellectual pursuits contributes to her hybrid self.

The second part of the trilogy, *Binti: Home* highlights another form of hybridism as Binti encounters the Enyi Zinariya, also known as the Desert People. Binti discovers that her father's mother was a Desert woman. They were different from the Himba people in various aspects including physical appearance. These people did not cover themselves in Otjize which was unusual to Binti. Instead of astrolabes, the Desert People used certain movements and patterns to communicate even when they were miles away. Such abilities were given to them via another technologically advanced race called the Gold people or the Zinariya, an ancient yet very technologically advanced civilization.

These skills were given the name Zinariya in honour of these individuals; the living organism was created specifically for their blood and was ingested by each clan member. Their minds could easily accommodate biological nanoids that are extremely small. It was like having an astrolabe in their neural system once they were inside of them. They could even detect it and eat, hear, smell, see, and feel it. Binti awakens her Enyi Zinariya form and now is officially one of them. She becomes mixed with this alien technology and becomes more than she already was. Such changes were alien to Binti, and even after all these transformations and hybridism, she was still proud of being a Himba: “I am Himba, I said to myself between the splitting and splitting fractals of equations, my most soothing pattern. | am Himba, even if my hair has become okuoko because of my actions and even if I have Enyi Zinariya blood. Even if my DNA is alien.” (Okorafor, 2017, p.184).

Binti became more than she ever thought she would become. She is a Himba woman, a master harmonizer, a meduse, and an Enyi Zinariya of the Desert people gifted with alien technology. She was worlds and destined for change and growth: “Suddenly, I felt cold. Very very cold. With dismay. Deep down, I knew. From the moment my grandmother told me about the Zinariya, I'd known, really. Change was constant. Change was my destiny. Growth.” (Okorafor, 2017, p.194). Moreover, Binti’s hybridism was all about the synthesis and creation of new identities. She assesses her agency and asserts her path challenging societal expectations and stereotypes. She embraced diversity and unity all while growing and adapting to constant change.

Hybridism was also featured on several occasions in the third novella of the series, *The Night Masquerade*. Yet the main form of hybridism was when Binti united with New Fish when it resurrected her after she was shot to death. New Fish is described as a watery jellyfish that almost looked like a Meduse ship that carried Binti to the Saturn rings to honour her final wish. New Fish had a sort of a chamber that was loaded with plants that produced gazes for it to breathe when in space as well as bacteria, good viruses, and other microorganisms. These microbes went on to populate every part of Binti’s body and resurrected her.

Binti therefore was loaded with New Fish DNA (Miri 12). She was more Miri 12 than human. It blended with Binti’s genes and repaired her, regrew her arms and legs, and pulled her back. She was still who she was before, yet she became more. The New Fish also absorbed some parts of Binti and now they were united and linked forever: “Your body is partially me, New Fish said. That's how the deep Miri brought you back. And in turn, I am partially you.” (Okorafor, 2018, p.325). Binti further stated:

I wanted to scream and laugh; I had become something more again. This time, I was so changed that I could fly through space without dying. I could live in open space. I moved through Saturn’s ring of brittle metallic dust...Who are you? a voice asked. It spoke in the dialect of my family, and it came from everywhere. Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib, that is my name. I blurted before I let myself think too hard about what was happening. No, I said. My name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib. (Okorafor, 2018, p. 330-331).

In a broader context, Binti's hybrid self can be seen as representative of both the posthuman and human experience. As individuals, many of us carry multiple identities, shaped

by our cultural backgrounds, personal interests, and interactions with diverse communities. Binti's journey of self-discovery as a hybrid self invites readers to reflect on their own experiences of hybridity and the potential for growth, understanding, and connection that comes with embracing the diverse aspects of one's self. Moreover, Binti's hybridity goes beyond her individual experiences and subjectivity. It symbolizes the potential for connection and collaboration across boundaries. Her ability to bridge gaps and foster understanding between different cultures and species highlights the transformative power of hybridity in creating meaningful relationships and promoting empathy.

Seow (2022) stated: “The representation of a hybridized Binti as an amalgam of technology and biological enhancements questions the present, reconstructs the marginalized human as more, and offers a possible new future” (p.63). Therefore, technological and scientific advancements that go beyond humankind disrupt traditional Black presumptions, especially for Black women. It might also be viewed as a means of preventing effacement and overcoming the anti-Black and exclusionary oppressive structures that negatively impact the social connections of young Black women and Black youth in general.

the *Binti series* by Nnedi Okorafor unveils a rich tapestry of themes, with hybridity and transformation at its core. Binti's posthuman journey transcends conventional boundaries, offering readers a compelling exploration of identity, self-discovery, and the complex relationship between humanity and the non-human. Through Binti's experiences, we witness the transformative power of embracing hybridity as a means of evolving, adapting, and challenging existing norms. This narrative encourages us to reconsider our preconceptions about identity, diversity, and the potential for coexistence in an ever-evolving world. In doing so, Okorafor's work serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of embracing change and celebrating the diversity that makes our world so uniquely vibrant. The series stands as a testament to the enduring capacity of storytelling to inspire and provoke thought, opening new horizons of understanding and appreciation for the intricacies of the human experience.

## **V.9. The Experience of Alienation and Otherness in the Heroine**

Nnedi Okorafor's literary works have been celebrated for their remarkable ability to delve into the complex terrain of human experience, particularly the themes of alienation and Otherness. Okorafor, a gifted storyteller and visionary, takes her readers on journeys that transcend the boundaries of the ordinary, inviting them to explore the intricacies of identity,

belonging, and the sense of being an outsider. Through her writing, she offers a lens through which to examine the profound impact of alienation and Otherness, whether it is in the context of cultural diversity, gender dynamics, or the confrontation of the unfamiliar. In this exploration, we embark on a literary journey through Okorafor's narratives to unravel the profound implications of these themes on the human psyche, while shedding light on the rich tapestry of experiences that make her storytelling so compelling.

The dominant culture can claim superiority over others they consider to be less progressed by using simplistic representations of societies that are significantly different from their own. These depictions frequently reduce cultures other than the dominant one to nothing more than a basic foil for putting the dominant one to the test. This kind of over-simplification of oppressed and disadvantaged societies and individuals is referred to as "Othering". Furthermore, the feature or state of being different is characterized as Otherness. The Other is a person who is viewed by the group as not belonging, as being fundamentally different in some manner. The concept is easily discernible in African Americans' history and experiences. These people have been pushed to the margins and treated as inferior citizens who do not belong.

Otherness refers to the process of perceiving and treating someone as fundamentally different or alien from oneself or the dominant group. Othering, on the other hand, is the act of creating and reinforcing this distinction, often resulting in marginalization, stereotypes, and discrimination. Staszak (2008) in his article *Other/Otherness* elaborated on the concept and defined it as:

Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us," the Self) constructs one or many dominated outgroups ("Them," the Other) by stigmatizing differences real or imagined presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. The creation of otherness (also called othering) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us. The out-group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in-group and of its lack of identity. This lack is based upon stereotypes that are obviously simplistic and largely stigmatizing. The in-group constructs one or more others, setting itself apart and giving itself an identity. Otherness and identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin. The Other only exists relative to the Self, and vice versa. The difference among the members of each group is underestimated when the difference between the members of one group and the other is overestimated.



Such a bias improves the coherence and the singularity of each group, stabilizing identity, and otherness, and facilitating stereotyping (p.2).

Staszak (2008) gave more explanation to the concept and the act by arguing that the Other is a member of a dominated out-group, whose identity is considered lacking and who may be subject to discrimination by the in-group. Othering on the other hand is transforming a difference into otherness so as to create an in-group and an out-group. Otherness therefore is a characteristic of the Other. The In-group is defined as a group to which the speaker, the person spoken of, etc. belongs, and the Out-group as a group to which the speaker, person spoken of, etc. does not belong. The author mentions Gayatri Spivak who contends that controlled out-groups are Others precisely because they are bound by the rules and practices of the dominating in-group and because they lack the authority to establish their standards and speak for themselves. By speaking up and succeeding in conferring upon themselves a positive, autonomous identity as well as in demanding discursive legitimacy and a policy to establish norms, out-groups eventually construct and devalue their out-groups and cease to be Others when they can escape the oppression imposed upon them by ingroups.

Moreover, after a firm understanding of the concept, one can argue that in the Binti series, the character of Binti represents the "Other" in various contexts, which gives rise to the act of Otherness and Othering. Binti, as a member of the Himba people, is often seen as different from the dominant culture and is subjected to various forms of Otherness throughout her journey. Binti's physical appearance, cultural practices, and beliefs set her apart from the societies and individuals she encounters. She is often viewed as exotic or strange due to her Himba heritage, and her distinctive otjize clay and braided hair are objects of curiosity for others. This physical Otherness contributes to the perception of Binti as different and creates a sense of separation from the dominant culture. These distinctions make her a target for curiosity, exoticization, and sometimes even disdain or fear from those who do not understand or appreciate her heritage.

Throughout her journey, Binti experiences various forms of Othering and alienation. She faces prejudice and discrimination based on her cultural background, with others making assumptions or generalizations about her abilities, intelligence, and worth. Binti's interactions with individuals who hold these biases showcase the harmful consequences of such concepts, as they perpetuate stereotypes and limit understanding and empathy. After reaching the space station, Binti highlights her sense of feeling "Other" than the dominant majority "the Khoush" by expressly saying "I was an outsider, I was outside" (Okorafor, 2015, p. 13).

Before Binti ever enters the ship, Okorafor has already made a point about how pervasive marginalization and cultural supremacy are in this made-up world. Writing for a real oppressed group and dramatizing the racially patriarchal practice of Othering in this hypothetical future, Okorafor proves that this vision is not a paradise in which the existing problems of oppression and cultural hegemony have been vanquished by the grace of time alone. The Himba, however, are not merely useless or unappreciated individuals this time; they are highly bright artisans with a wide range of abilities. They developed astrolabes, which allow all races to speak and comprehend one another and without which they would be lost, and are master harmonizers, creating peace with their knowledge.

However, the series also presents a nuanced exploration of Otherness. Binti's encounters with the Meduse, for example, initially position them as the Other. They are depicted as a violent and incomprehensible species, evoking fear and mistrust. However, as Binti seeks to understand them and communicates with them, she challenges this othering and develops empathy and connection. Thus, the series highlights the importance of breaking down barriers and challenging the dichotomy of "us" versus "them." Through Binti's journey, readers are invited to question their own biases and recognize the humanity and complexity of those perceived as different.

It may be argued that Binti encountered Otherness even among her people. Following her return from Oomza, as half Himba and half Meduse, she realized that the people who were meant to accept and welcome her were embarrassed by her, were disappointed in her, and were furious with her. Okorafor also emphasized the possibility of feeling alienated and alone even from one's people when on the path to self-discovery and establishing oneself and identity. Binti was unsure about her genuine place in the world, her true family, and her true home.

Even after her heroic actions that saved many people, she was still being Othered: "We've heard about you... one said in gruff Meduse... You're a hero, but we didn't know you were so . . . soily." (Okorafor, 2017, p.112). Binti further stated at one point: "Even among the many races at Oomza Uni, it had been a long time since I'd felt so alien." (Okorafor, 2017, p.121). However, as she adventures, she discovers that these contrasts are what give each individual and every race their beauty. She discovers that her greatest pride and delight will always be who she is being a Himba, a woman, a master harmonizer, a Meduse, and also an Enyi Zinariya.

Even Binti engages in the act of Othering at several points in the narrative. She was unable to recognize people for who they truly were due to her prejudices towards them. Being a Himba woman, she only ever acted by the values she had been taught and brought up with. She began by excluding the Khoush because she saw them as arrogant and distinctive people with whom she could never become friends. She then turned to face the Meduse, whom she perceived to be the adversary and regarded them as distinct as well. Finally, there was the Enyi Zinariya, or the Desert people, whom she saw as savage and uncivilized: “I felt a sting of shame as I realized why I hadn't understood something so obvious. My own prejudice. I had been raised to view the Desert People, the Enyi Zinariya, as primitive, savage people plagued by a genetic neurological disorder. So that’s what I saw.” (Okorafor, 2017, p.184), which she eventually realizes it was far from the reality.

*The Night Masquerade* (the third part of the novel) also focuses on the theme of Otherness. When the war occurred, the Himbas suffered the consequences even though they had nothing to do with it: “The Khoush had always seen my people as expendable, tools to use, toy with, and discard, useful animals until we weren't useful anymore. During the war, we were just in the way.” (Okorafor, 2018, p.243). they were the grass that suffered due to the wars between elephants. Binti was Othered even after coming home and being among her people: “Here, people stared from doorways, windows, and even came out of their homes to look at me, the one who'd abandoned her people, or Okwu, a violent Meduse, or Mwinyi, a savage desert person.” (Okorafor, 2018, p.258). Despite all the difficulties she encountered and her bravery, she was still viewed as the one who had abandoned her home. However, Binti gradually comes to see that being Othered allowed her to grow, develop her voice, and discover her identity. The several instances of otherness that she encountered inspired her to go beyond what she and everyone else had anticipated.

The series ultimately prompts readers to reflect on their own tendencies toward other individuals or cultures and challenges them to move beyond these divisive tendencies. It emphasizes the importance of empathy, open-mindedness, and embracing diversity as a means to break down the barriers of othering and foster a more inclusive and compassionate society. Overall, the act of Othering in the Binti series is portrayed as a harmful practice that perpetuates stereotypes, divisions, and misunderstandings. Through Binti's journey, the series offers a critique of such practices and advocates for empathy, understanding, and the recognition of shared humanity.

Seow (2022) argues that not dissimilar from her ancestors, Binti used her customs and principles to help others as well as herself. She became well-liked, and her sense of Otherness started to fade. In conclusion, despite all the presumptions made about Binti as a Himba and a coloured woman, she managed to forge a path for herself at a location far from her birthplace. She won their trust and saved their lives despite being different and stigmatized as other, while simultaneously preserving her cultural identity. Through Binti, Okorafor seeks to eliminate the myth of maladjusted racialized others from the consciousness of racialized readers whose participatory engagement has been ingrained and historicized to observe mainly the destruction of the racialized subject. The dark other is redeemed in Binti by emphasizing the racialized other as a symbol of power and hope.

Therefore, it can be contended that Okorafor's storytelling offers a unique prism through which to contemplate the human experience in all its diversity. Her characters grapple with the complexities of identity, often finding themselves on the margins of society or thrust into unfamiliar worlds, whether through supernatural encounters or encounters with technology. This thematic exploration resonates deeply with readers, as it mirrors the universal experience of feeling like an outsider, grappling with the unknown, and ultimately, finding strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

Nnedi Okorafor's literature transcends the ordinary, inviting readers to engage with questions of culture, diversity, and what it means to be different. Her narratives are both a reflection of the world we live in and a glimpse into the speculative and fantastical. They serve as a reminder of the power of storytelling to illuminate the nuances of the human experience, and the ability to embrace otherness as a source of strength. Through her work, Okorafor encourages readers to celebrate our differences, confront the unfamiliar, and find their own paths to self-discovery and empowerment. In doing so, she not only enriches the world of literature but also expands our understanding of what it means to be human in a complex and ever-changing world.

## **V.10. Redefining Norms: Confronting Stereotypes in Binti**

In *The Binti series* (2015-2018), one of the significant themes is the challenge of stereotypes and prejudice. Through the character of Binti, Okorafor presents a narrative that defies societal expectations and confronts stereotypes. Binti is a young Himba girl who defies the norms of her community by leaving her home to pursue education at Oomza University. As

a member of the Himba people, she faces cultural expectations and assumptions about her role and place in society. However, Binti challenges these stereotypes by following her own aspirations and defying the limitations imposed upon her.

Throughout her journey, Binti encounters various forms of prejudice and discrimination. The Meduse, for example, are initially portrayed as violent and mindless aliens, perpetuating the stereotype of a dangerous other. However, as Binti engages with them and seeks to understand their culture, she challenges this prejudice and develops empathy and understanding. Even more so, Binti merges with the Meduse race, and Okwu becomes her family. Despite misconceptions, Binti was able to shift her own viewpoint via such friendships and was taught to accept people and embrace change gracefully.

It can be contended that Binti's interactions with other characters also highlight the stereotypes and biases they hold. Some individuals view her as inferior or exoticize her due to her cultural background. However, Binti's actions and achievements defy these assumptions and showcase her intelligence, strength, and resilience. Her character challenges the narrow-mindedness and preconceived notions of those around her. Additionally, the series explores the themes of cultural diversity and the need to overcome stereotypes through communication and understanding. As Binti interacts with different cultures and species, she learns to appreciate their complexities and the importance of seeking common ground. This process challenges the biases and stereotypes she may have held and encourages the reader to do the same.

By portraying Binti as a strong and capable protagonist, the narrative challenges gender stereotypes and empowers readers to question societal expectations placed on individuals based on their gender. Binti defies the idea that women should conform to prescribed roles and instead showcases the potential for women to excel in fields traditionally dominated by men. Binti enrolls in Oomza University, a famous institution that the Himbas have only ever dreamed of but never really attended, becoming the first Himba woman to do so. She also is the first woman to ever see the Night Masquerade as the creature is known to be only seen by men. She is the first woman to call upon “deep culture”, a very spiritual phenomenon that is usually summoned only by the elders of the tribe. She is the first woman to embrace her hybrid self, becoming a woman who’s part Himba, part Meduse, part Enyi Zinariya, and part New Fish. She was forever to be remembered as THE first.

Binti also breaks free of Black female stereotypes that are assigned to individuals and which designate the way one should behave within society. Like her sister, Binti's family

anticipates that she will settle down and get married. The revolt and escape of Binti point to nonconformity, which can cause a person to exist outside of societal norms and can lead to feelings of social isolation and Otherness. Overall, the Binti series presents a powerful narrative that challenges stereotypes and prejudice. Through the character of Binti, the series encourages readers to question societal norms, confront biases, and embrace the richness of diversity. It serves as a reminder of the importance of empathy, understanding, and breaking down barriers that limit individual potential. The series further highlights the fact that what is the norm for some, is rather meaningless for others and may not mean as much, and therefore it leaves one wondering: what is the norm?

## **V.11. Beyond Conventions: Binti Trilogy's Symbolic Celebration of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto**

In the realm of speculative fiction, the convergence of Afrofuturism and Womanism gives rise to the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto—a proposed framework advocating liberation and empowerment for Black women. This Manifesto transcends temporal and spatial confines, echoing the resilience of Afrofuturism and the unique experiences celebrated by Womanism. The exploration begins by examining the resonance of these principles within the *Binti Trilogy*. The narrative, set against cosmic expanses, serves as a manifestation of the Manifesto's ideals, offering a literary journey that celebrates agency, healing, intersectional solidarity, imagination, technological empowerment, and the diverse identities of Black women.

In the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, a foundational principle is the emphasis on reclaiming narratives, granting agency to Black women to actively participate in shaping their stories and influencing the collective narrative of their communities. In the *Binti Trilogy*, the protagonist, Binti, embarks on a transformative journey that mirrors this principle. As a member of the Himba people, Binti defies societal expectations by leaving her home to pursue knowledge and self-discovery at the prestigious Oomza University in a distant galaxy. Her narrative empowerment is evident in her willingness to challenge traditional norms and forge her path, transcending the constraints imposed by her cultural background.

Binti's journey is not only a physical voyage into space but a profound exploration of identity and self-determination. As she navigates the challenges of interstellar travel, she confronts and challenges societal expectations, particularly those related to gender roles and

cultural traditions. The act of leaving her homeland and pursuing knowledge symbolizes a rejection of the predetermined narrative for Himba women, demonstrating the transformative power of individual agency in crafting one's own story. Throughout the trilogy, Binti's encounters with alien species, technological wonders, and cosmic mysteries contribute to her evolving narrative. She becomes a bridge between cultures and a catalyst for change. In shaping her narrative, Binti actively engages with her surroundings, utilizing her unique skills and perspectives to influence the events unfolding around her. Her narrative empowerment is not only about personal liberation but also about becoming an influential force in reshaping the broader narrative of the universe she inhabits.

Moreover, Binti's journey is a microcosm of the broader Afrofuturist womanist narrative. By reclaiming her narrative, challenging societal expectations, and actively shaping her own story, Binti becomes a beacon of inspiration for Black women seeking empowerment and agency. Her experiences contribute to the evolving discourse of Afrofuturist Womanism, highlighting the transformative potential of storytelling as a means of empowerment, liberation, and collective change. Through Binti's narrative, Nnedi Okorafor weaves a tapestry that aligns with the principles outlined in the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, demonstrating the profound impact of narrative empowerment on individual and collective destinies.

The Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto places a significant emphasis on healing from historical trauma, acknowledging the deep scars inflicted upon Black communities, mainly Black women over time. In the *Binti Trilogy*, the titular character undergoes a transformative process of healing from the historical trauma embedded in her cultural and familial heritage. Binti's journey into the vastness of space becomes a metaphorical exploration of her history, and her encounters with alien cultures force her to confront the complexities of her identity. Through these experiences, Binti engages in a process of healing, addressing the wounds of the past to pave the way for a more liberated future.

As Binti's transformative journey mirrors the principles outlined in the suggested Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, the narrative seamlessly transitions from her exploration of personal and communal healing to a profound examination of the strength derived from embracing spirituality, community, and cultural fusion. In the Manifesto, spirituality is recognized as a source of strength and connection to ancestral wisdom. In the trilogy, Binti's spiritual journey is a central aspect of her character development. Her connection to the otjize, a significant cultural and spiritual symbol of the Himba people, becomes a guiding force in her self-discovery. The exploration of spirituality becomes a means through which Binti navigates

the challenges of her interstellar odyssey, contributing to her healing and fostering a deeper understanding of her place in the universe.

Resilience is also a key theme in the proposed Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, emphasizing the collective strength that arises from supportive communities. Binti's encounters with diverse communities—from the Oomza University to the alien Meduse along with the Enyi Zinariya and other galactic creatures—highlight the importance of unity in overcoming adversity. The alliances she forms and the friendships she forges become pillars of support, contributing to her resilience in the face of numerous challenges. Binti's ability to build connections and find solidarity in unexpected places reflects the Manifesto's call for community support as an essential component of healing and resilience.

Furthermore, Binti's journey transcends mere physical travel; it represents a cultural and spiritual odyssey. As she encounters different civilizations and perspectives, Binti engages in a process of cultural fusion. This fusion of her Himba heritage with the diverse influences of the interstellar community contributes to her transformative growth. The Manifesto's emphasis on healing and resilience is echoed in Binti's ability to adapt, learn, and grow from her experiences. By embracing the richness of her cultural identity and finding common ground with others, Binti exemplifies the Manifesto's vision of healing through cultural exchange and resilience through the strength derived from embracing one's roots.

In the intricate tapestry of Binti's interstellar odyssey, the theme of intersectional solidarity emerges as a guiding force, echoing the principles articulated in the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. Binti's narrative is a testament to the interconnectedness of struggles, transcending planetary and cultural boundaries to form alliances with diverse species. This cosmic solidarity becomes a cornerstone of her transformative journey, reflecting the Manifesto's emphasis on unity among marginalized groups and women. Binti's encounters with different species highlight the challenges of navigating a universe steeped in diversity, mirroring the complexities of intersectionality within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. As she forges connections with beings vastly different from herself, the narrative underscores the transformative potential of understanding and embracing diverse perspectives. The unity that emerges from these connections stands as a powerful symbol of collective strength, echoing the Manifesto's call for solidarity among marginalized communities.

Moreover, Binti's role as a mediator and bridge-builder embodies the principles of intersectional solidarity advocated in the Manifesto. Despite facing prejudices and



misunderstandings, she navigates the complexities of cultural differences, fostering unity among disparate groups. Her journey becomes a metaphor for the transformative power of intersectionality, illustrating how collaboration and mutual understanding can overcome deep-rooted biases.

When transitioning from the theme of intersectional solidarity to the exploration of imagination and Afrofuturism in both the Manifesto and the *Binti Trilogy*, it is crucial to recognize the seamless interplay between these concepts. In the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, imagination is heralded as a potent force for envisioning transformative futures, aligning with the central tenets of Afrofuturism that celebrate the fusion of technology, culture, and speculative fiction. This transition underscores a shift from collective solidarity to the individual's imaginative agency in reshaping narratives, a theme deeply embedded in the core of Binti's interstellar odyssey.

The Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto posits that imagination is not merely an abstract exercise but a catalytic force for tangible change. Drawing from Afrofuturist traditions, it challenges conventional notions of time, space, and possibility, precisely mirroring the trajectory of Binti's narrative. In the *Binti Trilogy*, Okorafor intricately weaves together elements of technology, cultural traditions, and speculative fiction to create a rich Afrofuturistic landscape. Binti's imaginative journey stands as a testament to the transformative power of Afrofuturism, where the boundaries between the technological and the mystical blur.

Binti's story unfolds in a futuristic setting where the possibilities are as limitless as the cosmos. Being a Black woman, her journey, marked by encounters with advanced technology and ancient rituals, embodies the Afrofuturist ethos of merging the traditional with the futuristic. Imagination becomes the bridge that connects these seemingly disparate elements, allowing Binti to navigate and shape her destiny in a universe teeming with possibilities. This convergence of technology and tradition, rooted in imagination, echoes the Manifesto's call for envisioning alternative realities. Furthermore, the trilogy serves as a canvas for the imaginative reinterpretation of Black women's roles in speculative fiction. By placing Binti at the forefront of technological innovation, scientific discovery, and artistic expression, the narrative challenges existing norms and celebrates the agency of Black women in shaping alternative realities. Imagination, in this context, becomes a tool for empowerment and a means to reshape narratives that have historically marginalized Black women's contributions.

The exploration of imagination and Afrofuturism in both the Manifesto and the *Binti Trilogy* reveals a symbiotic relationship. The Manifesto's emphasis on the transformative power of imagination finds a resonant echo in Binti's narrative, where Afrofuturism becomes the vehicle for envisioning alternative futures for Black women and Black communities. This thematic transition underscores the significance of individual agency in reshaping narratives, demonstrating how imagination becomes a dynamic force for change in the Afrofuturist Womanist paradigm.

The shift from delving into imagination and Afrofuturism to the discussion of agency and liberation reveals a deep interconnection between individual empowerment and the broader storyline of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. The Manifesto advocates for agency as a foundational principle, calling for the dismantling of oppressive systems that constrain Black women. This transition echoes in the trilogy, where Okorafor paints a vivid portrait of agency through the protagonist Binti's quest for knowledge, self-discovery, and the dismantling of societal norms.

In the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, agency is presented as a key element in the liberation struggle. It underscores the importance of Black women actively participating in shaping their destinies and dismantling structures that historically perpetuated inequality. This call for agency aligns seamlessly with Binti's journey, where her relentless pursuit of knowledge becomes a catalyst for personal empowerment and a means to challenge societal expectations. Binti's decision to leave her Himba community for the prestigious Oomza University exemplifies her exercise of agency, breaking away from traditional norms to pursue her aspirations.

*The Binti Trilogy* thus becomes a canvas for the exploration of agency and liberation as Binti's choices reverberate beyond her personal narrative. Her decision to mediate between warring species and challenge ingrained prejudices embodies the Manifesto's call for dismantling oppressive systems. Binti's agency extends beyond individual empowerment to becoming a transformative force that contributes to larger societal changes. The trilogy, through Binti's experiences, underscores the interconnectedness of personal agency and collective liberation, illustrating that one person's choices can catalyze broader social transformations.

Moreover, the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto emphasizes the significance of autonomy in the pursuit of liberation. This theme is mirrored in Binti's character, who, despite facing numerous challenges, retains agency over her decisions. Whether navigating conflicts

between species, defying societal expectations, or challenging established norms, Binti's journey encapsulates the essence of individual agency as a tool for personal and collective liberation. Her story becomes emblematic of the Manifesto's vision, where Black women actively shape their destinies, contributing to a future free from oppressive structures.

The theme of agency and liberation serves as a natural progression in both the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto and the *Binti Trilogy*. The Manifesto's call for active participation and dismantling oppressive systems resonates with Binti's narrative, where her pursuit of knowledge, defiance of societal norms, and mediation between species become acts of agency contributing to personal and collective liberation. This thematic transition underscores the transformative potential of individual choices within the Afrofuturist Womanist paradigm, highlighting the integral role of agency in the broader discourse of empowerment and freedom.

Moving from the exploration of agency and liberation to the theme of technological empowerment, the narrative focal point centers on the substantial role of technology within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. This adjustment in focus highlights a crucial facet of empowerment, investigating the realm of technological interfaces and their potential to redefine societal structures and individual capabilities objectively. The Manifesto's emphasis on equitable access to technology aligns with Binti's journey, where she becomes a conduit for the innovative and transformative power of the edan, a technologically advanced device. The edan serves as a symbol of empowerment, offering Binti unprecedented opportunities to navigate complex challenges. Her mastery of this technology becomes synonymous with reclaiming control over her destiny and reshaping her narrative within the larger Afrofuturist framework.

Binti's engagement with the edan extends beyond mere technological interaction; it becomes a metaphorical representation of how technology can empower Black women within the Afrofuturist narrative. Through the symbiotic relationship with this advanced device, Binti not only transcends physical barriers but also challenges traditional notions of power and agency. This narrative dynamic aligns seamlessly with the Manifesto's call for active engagement with technology, positioning it as a catalyst for individual and collective empowerment.

Moreover, Binti's narrative introduces a nuanced perspective on the ethical use of technology, reflecting the Manifesto's call for technology to serve the needs and aspirations of all. Binti's choices and actions underscore the importance of responsible technological

engagement, using it as a tool for empowerment, liberation, and community-building. The narrative intricately weaves together the potential pitfalls and transformative possibilities of technology, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the Afrofuturist Womanist vision. In essence, the exploration of technological empowerment within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto finds resonance in Binti's narrative. As she navigates the intricate landscape of advanced technology, the Manifesto's principles come to life, illustrating how equitable access and active engagement with technology can be integral components in the pursuit of empowerment, liberation, and social justice for Black women.

Transitioning from the theme of technological empowerment to the exploration of celebrating diversity and intersectionality, the narrative pivots toward an essential aspect of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. This shift directs attention to the multifaceted identities of Black women, emphasizing the rejection of monolithic narratives and the celebration of their rich and diverse experiences. In this new thematic exploration, Binti's character serves as a compelling embodiment of the Manifesto's principles, offering a nuanced portrayal of the intersectionality inherent in her identity. Binti's character in the trilogy stands at the crossroads of diverse cultural and societal elements. As a Himba woman, she brings forth the cultural richness of her heritage, anchoring her identity in a specific African tradition. This cultural specificity becomes a vital lens through which the Manifesto's celebration of diversity is actualized. Binti's journey, both personal and spatial, becomes a narrative space where her unique identity unfolds, challenging singular narratives and embracing the complexities inherent in Black women's experiences.

The rejection of monolithic narratives is powerfully echoed in Binti's role as a harmonizer. Her ability to mediate between different species and cultures signifies not only her agency but also the broader theme of celebrating diversity. Binti becomes a symbol of harmony, navigating the complexities of interstellar relationships and challenging preconceived notions. In doing so, the trilogy aligns with the Manifesto's objective of dismantling singular narratives, presenting instead a tapestry of identities woven together in a celebration of differences.

Binti's evolution as a spacefaring adventurer further amplifies the Manifesto's call to celebrate intersectionality. As she ventures into the cosmic expanse, her identity becomes layered with the nuances of her experiences, struggles, and triumphs. The Manifesto's emphasis on rejecting simplistic categorizations finds resonance in Binti's multidimensional character, illustrating the richness that arises when intersectionality is acknowledged and celebrated. In this thematic transition, the *Binti trilogy* becomes a narrative canvas, painting a vivid picture of

diversity and intersectionality that aligns seamlessly with the principles outlined in the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. This exploration of celebrating diversity and intersectionality through the lens of Binti's character enriches the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto's narrative, offering a nuanced and dynamic perspective on the multifaceted identities of Black women.

From exploring the celebration of diversity and intersectionality, the narrative smoothly pivots toward emphasizing the significance of community building within the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto. This thematic pivot accentuates the Manifesto's emphasis on solidarity, collective empowerment, and the transformative potential of communities. As the exploration unfolds, Binti's interactions with diverse communities become a central narrative thread, exemplifying the transformative power of unity across cultural and planetary borders. In delving into the theme of community building, the narrative explores how Binti's journey intersects with various communities, illuminating the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto's call for solidarity. Binti's initial connection with the Himba community establishes the foundation for her character's cultural identity, emphasizing the importance of grounding oneself in a community's shared values and traditions. This forms a crucial starting point for the Manifesto's vision of collective empowerment rooted in cultural heritage.

As the narrative progresses, Binti's encounters extend beyond her Himba community to encompass interactions with diverse alien species. These cross-cultural connections become a narrative testament to the transformative power of community, transcending planetary borders. The Manifesto's call for unity finds resonance as Binti navigates the challenges of interstellar relationships, highlighting the potential for shared understanding and collaboration across cultural differences. Furthermore, Binti's role as a mediator and harmonizer within these communities aligns with the Manifesto's emphasis on collective empowerment. Her ability to bridge gaps and forge connections underscores the transformative potential of communities working together. Binti becomes a beacon of unity, embodying the Manifesto's principles and demonstrating how collective strength can overcome barriers, whether they be cultural, planetary, or cosmic.

The exploration of community building within the *Binti trilogy*, therefore, becomes a narrative canvas reflecting the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto's vision of solidarity and collective empowerment. Binti's interactions with diverse communities serve as a dynamic illustration of the transformative power that arises when individuals join forces, fostering unity and understanding. In essence, the thematic transition from celebrating diversity to community building enriches the narrative, offering a nuanced perspective on the interconnectedness of

communities and the potential for collective empowerment within the Afrofuturist Womanist framework.

Additionally, within the context of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, the pursuit of education and knowledge emerges as a foundational thread, weaving through the collective narrative of Black women's empowerment and liberation. This resonates profoundly with Okorafor's *Binti Trilogy*, where the titular character embarks on a transformative journey fueled by a relentless pursuit of knowledge. Binti's insatiable curiosity and intellectual prowess become catalysts for her personal growth and empowerment. The Manifesto's call for educational empowerment aligns seamlessly with Binti's quest to expand her understanding of the universe, bridging traditional Himba knowledge with cutting-edge technology. Through the trilogy, education becomes a vessel for self-discovery, cultural exploration, and a means to challenge societal norms. The convergence of these narratives underscores the transformative potential of education within Afrofuturist Womanism, emphasizing its role not only as a tool for personal advancement but as a gateway to dismantling oppressive systems and shaping a future where Black women stand at the forefront of innovation and wisdom.

Furthermore, The Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, with its visionary lens, celebrates the concept of hybrid women as pioneers of a new era, transcending traditional boundaries and classifications. This resonates profoundly with Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti Trilogy*, where the character Binti embodies the essence of a hybrid woman. Binti's identity seamlessly blends her Himba heritage with the transformative elements of advanced technology and intergalactic travel. In the Afrofuturist Womanist framework, hybrid women navigate the complexities of their heritage as sources of strength, resilience, and innovation. Similarly, Binti's character navigates the interplay between tradition and innovation, embracing the richness of her cultural background while propelling herself into uncharted territories of the cosmos. The convergence of these narratives underscores the Manifesto's celebration of hybridity, portraying it not as a mere juxtaposition of elements but as a powerful force that reshapes the narrative possibilities for Black women in a rapidly changing world. The *Binti Trilogy* becomes a testament to the Afrofuturist Womanist vision, where hybrid women are the vanguards of progress, redefining what it means to be a woman in the future and embodying the transformative potential of embracing diverse dimensions of identity.

Moreover, the proposed Manifesto also underscores the importance of bodily autonomy, reproductive justice, and dismantling oppressive systems that control and devalue Black women's bodies. This resonates with key themes in the *Binti Trilogy*, where the narrative

intricately explores these principles. Binti's transformative journey, marked by her integration with the edan, serves as a poignant reflection of her agency over her own body. The edan becomes a powerful symbol of defiance against societal norms, challenging established structures and ideologies surrounding women's bodies.

Binti's profound transformation throughout the trilogy indeed serves as a powerful testament to her autonomy and resilience in the face of cultural stereotypes. The integration of Meduse traits, the enyi zinariya, and the third fish components into her body represents a departure from the established norms of her Himba culture. Traditionally, such alterations would be perceived as a deviation from cultural expectations, potentially viewed with skepticism or even rejection. However, Binti's journey challenges these stereotypes, turning her body into a canvas that defies the limitations of societal norms. Instead of succumbing to the restrictive cultural viewpoints surrounding bodily integrity, Binti embraces her metamorphosis as a symbol of empowerment and self-determination. The incorporation of Meduse's traits, particularly, symbolizes her willingness to transcend the boundaries of cultural differences and engage in a profound exchange of knowledge and identity.

Binti's hybrid identity, far from reinforcing stereotypes, becomes a beacon of cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Her unique combination of Meduse, enyi zinariya, and third fish elements stands as a living embodiment of the rich diversity inherent in Afrofuturism and Womanism. It challenges the notion that cultural identity must adhere strictly to predefined categories, encouraging a more inclusive perspective that values the multiplicity of experiences and identities. In this way, Binti's body becomes a narrative of defiance against stereotypes, redefining cultural exchange through her autonomy and the intentional embrace of a multifaceted identity. The trilogy invites readers to reflect on the transformative power of embracing one's autonomy over their body and choices, transcending cultural expectations to forge new narratives that celebrate the richness of diversity.

In intertwining the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto with the narrative tapestry of the *Binti Trilogy*, a profound synergy emerges, enriching our comprehension of the shared principles and themes. Okorafor's trilogy becomes a literary vessel that breathes life into the Manifesto's proposed principles, providing a vivid and tangible manifestation of the Afrofuturist Womanist vision. This symbiosis transcends a mere juxtaposition, delving into a harmonious convergence that amplifies the resonance of both the Manifesto and the trilogy.

This literary marriage between the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto and the *Binti Trilogy* underscores the transformative potential of speculative fiction. It not only reflects the interconnectedness of these narratives but also magnifies their collective impact on the discourse surrounding Black women's empowerment, liberation, and agency. As the principles of the Manifesto are woven into the fabric of the Binti narrative, a compelling and cohesive exploration of Afrofuturism and Womanism emerges, inviting readers to contemplate the possibilities of a future shaped by the intersection of these powerful ideologies.

The synthesis of the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto and the *Binti Trilogy* reveals a convergence of ideologies and a testament to the transformative power of speculative fiction. Nnedi Okorafor's storytelling becomes a vessel through which the Manifesto's principles are vividly portrayed, inviting readers to traverse Afrofuturism and Womanism. This exploration concludes by recognizing the Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto and *Binti Trilogy* as significant contributions to envisioning a future where Black women thrive. This literary journey serves as a compass guiding us toward a liberated and equitable future, where narratives are reclaimed, healing is embraced, and agency becomes a beacon for transformative change. The Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto, interwoven with the tapestry of Binti's cosmic odyssey, resonates as a testament to the power of storytelling, imagination, and collective empowerment in reshaping the narratives of Black women and inspiring a future where their voices resound across the galaxies.

## **V.12. Towards Finding Self: Reimagining Black Futures and Black Womanhood**

In the rich tapestry of Afrofuturistic literature, the narratives of Black futures and Black womanhood emerge as powerful threads, interwoven to create a vibrant and transformative landscape. These stories invite readers to embark on journeys that traverse the boundaries of time, space, and societal norms, ultimately leading to a profound exploration of identity and self-discovery. This genre of literature serves as a platform for reimagining what it means to be Black and female in a world where history, culture, and technology intersect in novel and unexpected ways. Through a variety of speculative settings and characters, Afrofuturism encourages readers to question and redefine traditional notions of Blackness and womanhood. It is within this literary realm that we encounter characters who grapple with their unique identities, confront systemic challenges, and harness the power of the human spirit to envision



a future that is both celebratory and liberating. This exploration embarks on a journey through the realms of Black creativity, resilience, and self-affirmation, drawing upon the legacy of the past while charting new frontiers for Black women of the future.

The existence of a Black genius in the future shows that Black people will survive as successful and generative citizens. The relevance of the Black genius in the writings of the early Afrofuturists, who emphasized genius as a necessary quality of the Black hero, is highlighted by Yaszek (2015). In Yaszek's view, the only Black person who can achieve is the superhuman, moreover, academic excellence is located within a racist history. According to the author, Afrofuturists view such brilliance as the natural inheritance of all Afrodiasporic people. Okorafor undermines the white imagination that Blacks do not have a link with technoculture by normalizing the capacity for excellence and unleashing the imagination for endless possibilities. Okorafor makes Binti's technoscientific ability a central part of the story as well as of her identity.

In the trilogy, the journey to self-discovery is a central theme that unfolds through the experiences and growth of the protagonist Binti. Binti's journey is characterized by her exploration of the universe, encounters with diverse cultures, and the transformative power of education. At the beginning of the series, Binti is a young Himba girl deeply connected to her cultural roots and traditions. She possesses a natural talent for mathematics and astutely understands the unique technology of the Meduse, an alien species. However, her desire for knowledge and intellectual fulfillment clashes with the expectations placed upon her by her family and community. Binti feels torn between the familiar world she knows and the exciting opportunities awaiting her at Oomza University.

Binti leaves her home with a desire to learn more about the world and herself. Even though her parents forbade her from attending Oomza University since no Himba girl dared to even conceive of doing so, Binti persisted in going despite everyone else's wishes. The main theme of each book in the trilogy is Binti growing beyond her expectations. She was convinced that as soon as she got admitted to the institution, she would develop and change. Binti contested the notion that, as a typical Himba woman, her only options were marriage and running her father's business.

Moreover, Binti's journey highlights the transformative power of education and the importance of open-mindedness. As she interacts with different beings and encounters diverse perspectives, she begins to question the limited worldview she grew up with. Through her

experiences, she learns the value of empathy, understanding, and embracing the unknown. Moreover, the series explores and focuses on the themes of personal growth and resilience. Binti faces numerous physical and emotional challenges, but she learns to adapt, persevere, and find strength within herself. Her journey is a testament to the power of determination and self-belief in the face of adversity.

In other words, one can assert that leaving her home and embarking on the journey to Oomza University symbolizes Binti's initial step towards self-discovery. By choosing to pursue her passion for knowledge and embracing the unknown, she challenges societal expectations and ventures into uncharted territories. Throughout her travels, Binti encounters various cultures, species, and conflicts. These encounters force her to question her own prejudices, expand her worldview, and redefine her sense of self. She discovers that her identity is not fixed, but rather a fluid construct that can evolve through new experiences and understanding. Binti's realization that she did not need to fundamentally change who she was but be open to other ways of seeing and interpreting the world was a significant turning point in her growth.

Binti's interactions with the Meduse, in particular, play a crucial role in her self-discovery. Initially, the Meduse are perceived as an enemy, but Binti takes the initiative to communicate and understand them. In doing so, she recognizes the complexity and diversity within the Meduse culture. This encounter challenges her preconceived notions and helps her shed the biases she had inherited. Eventually, Binti becomes part Meduse and Okwu part of her family. Despite all of the prejudice Binti had towards the Meduse, Binti finally learns to embrace different people and adjust to the changes that come with them in order to develop and thrive. Binti's identity is irrevocably altered by becoming part of Meduse.

Education also plays a significant role in Binti's journey of self-discovery. At Oomza University, she learns from a diverse array of teachers and classmates, gaining knowledge and perspectives beyond what she had ever imagined. This education not only enhances her academic prowess but also broadens her understanding of the universe and her place within it. Everyone at the institution was anything and everything, which inspired Binti to explore herself and her environment without being frightened of change and development: "The way people on Oomza Uni were so diverse and everyone handled that as if it were normal continued to surprise me. It was so unlike Earth, where wars were fought over and because of differences and most couldn't relate to anyone unless they were similar." (Okorafor, 2018, p.279).

As Binti navigates through conflicts and confronts life-threatening situations, she develops resilience and discovers hidden strengths within herself. These challenges push her to examine her fears, overcome them, and tap into her inner courage. Ultimately, Binti's journey to self-discovery is a process of reconciling different aspects of her identity and finding a sense of balance. She learns to appreciate her cultural heritage while embracing new ideas and experiences. Binti's growth is marked by her ability to bridge gaps, foster understanding, and adapt to the ever-changing universe around her.

The difficulties she encountered on Third Fish, the horror she felt when her companions died, her friendship with the enemy, her confrontation with the Khoush, and her arrival in Oomza, where everything was different, all played a significant role in Binti's development as a person. She thought she would go back to being herself when she got home, but instead, she experienced further change and development. She succeeded in putting an end to a conflict that had mostly ruined her homeland and her people and rose to fame. Her life was irrevocably altered by the Otherness and many hybridizations she encountered. Even though it was challenging most of the time and difficult to understand, Binti was able to embrace this transition and embrace her complex identity after realizing that identity is changeable rather than fixed.

All the changes Binti faced and embraced did not occur at the cost of her previous self as a Himba woman and a harmonizer. She did not sacrifice who she was before but rather evolved to be more. Unlike other science fiction genres, Afrofuturism offers a fresh perspective on identity as fluid, flexible, and multifaceted. In other words, throughout the series, Binti's identity development is a dynamic and multidimensional process. She learns to navigate different cultural contexts, embraces her uniqueness, and becomes a bridge between cultures. Her journey exemplifies the themes of empowerment, self-discovery, and the importance of embracing one's heritage in the context of Afrofuturism.

Seow (2022) mentions Kodwo Eshun, a writer and director, who asserts that science fiction has never been preoccupied with the future but rather with the engineering feedback between its idealized future and its actualization. Afrofuturism, in Eshun's opinion, is the best approach to rethink Black futures. In Binti, Okorafor used a similar technique to engrave the Black presence in the future, indicating that Black cultures control technology and that Black people continue to exist and thrive. This activity challenges the idea of the "digital divide," which is frequently understood to refer to technological disparities between Blacks and Whites.

Seow (2022) further argues that in the fictional universe of *Binti*, Black people, and Black women in particular prosper in technologically advanced futures that are not exclusively populated by members of the dominant race. With the potential to grow stronger and better, Black people are engaged in technologically advanced atmospheres. In *Binti*, Okorafor depicts a society in which young people's interactions with technology are important, and Black femininity is shown in the context of their interactions with family and community, which has enormous implications for Womanism. Additionally, *Binti*'s speculative technologies create conflict between the variety of knowledge found in different African civilizations and the homogenization of those cultures in the Eurocentric imagination. According to *Binti*, African cultures offer a diverse range of information and experiences that are important from a non-Eurocentric standpoint.

Overall, the story offers a thought-provoking exploration of self-discovery, cultural identity, and personal growth. Through *Binti*'s journey, readers are invited to reflect on their own identities, the boundaries they navigate, and the potential for growth and transformation that comes from embracing new experiences and perspectives. *The Binti series*, through its portrayal of *Binti*'s journey, offers readers a powerful exploration of self-discovery, cultural identity, womanhood, and personal growth. It invites readers to reflect on their own journeys, the importance of embracing new experiences, and the transformative power of understanding and accepting oneself.

### **V.13. Conclusion**

*Binti*, a teenage Black woman, embarks on a quest for self-discovery and identity free from prejudice and stereotypes. This story offers a lens to examine change, resistance, Otherness, hybridity, and advocacy in the portrayal of young Black girls facing marginalization. Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism enable innovative and intersectional perspectives on the intersections of race, gender, science, technology, and Black women's rights. These genres promote new and empowering narratives for Black girls, challenging traditional stereotypes and creating inclusive and aspirational storylines that defy racial and sexist conventions. Okorafor's stories prompt a reevaluation of the present and envision a future where Black individuals prosper in a technologically advanced society, emphasizing the importance of a world that values their unique humanity and the humanity of all. Through the *Binti series* (2015-2018), she encourages us to closely examine cultural differences and challenge systemic institutions

that prioritize the few over the many. Notably, the series reimagines the young Black female as intelligent and deserving, breaking stereotypes and offering examples of their potential success in even the most demanding, alien, and technologically advanced fields.

# **General Conclusion**

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The notion of progress and change has long been a driving force in human societies, urging one to constantly reevaluate the status quo and strive for a better future. Some argue that if something is not broken, there is no need to fix it, but this perspective is challenged when contemplating the evolution of Black bodies in the times to come. Instead, the call is for a forward-looking approach that combines critical reflection and imaginative thinking to navigate the complex path ahead. This approach recognizes that simply maintaining the existing order may not be sufficient, especially when considering the experiences and aspirations of Black individuals. To remain stagnant is likened to drifting aimlessly in an endless void without a solid foundation. It is a call to action, urging one to engage in thoughtful reflection and envision alternative modes of existence that are more in tune with the changing world.

Crucially, imagination emerges as a central theme in this context. It is seen as the gateway to innovation and transformation, inviting one to explore the speculative and even prophetic realms of possibility. Imagination challenges one to take the elements one knows and reshape them into new forms that align with future needs and aspirations. In essence, this perspective underscores the idea that progress and adaptation require an active and imaginative mindset. It prompts one to break free from the confines of the familiar and embrace the uncharted territory of the future, where change and innovation are not only encouraged but essential for growth and evolution.

Speculation, the act of contemplating possibilities beyond the present, is therefore a remarkable human faculty that invites one to hold ideas and tangible elements in a delicate balance. It is the fertile ground where creativity and innovation germinate, and it plays a pivotal role in envisioning the future. This capacity for speculation is not merely an abstract exercise but a profound exploration of what lies ahead, especially when one considers the futures of Black communities. Envisioning Black futures is an act of transcendence, a journey that propels one beyond the boundaries of the known into realms of uncharted potential. To embark on such a journey, however, is to acknowledge the need for a solid foundation. It raises fundamental questions about accessibility and navigation in these new territories. How does one traverse these uncharted spaces? Is it a matter of walking, flying, or perhaps stepping through portals guarded by encrypted biosensor locks? Equally important, what awaits on the other side, and how does one engage with the primary interface of this new reality?

Irrespective of the mode of arrival in these uncharted territories, one undeniable truth persists—the indispensable synergy of critical thinking and boundless imagination. It is this synergy that empowers one to not only envision but also build the pathways to these new realities. Critical thought lends one the discernment to navigate the complexities of change, while imagination offers the wings to soar into unimagined realms of possibility. In essence, the act of speculation is not merely an exercise in abstraction but a profound endeavor that merges the wisdom of the present with the audacity of the future. It is an invitation to ponder the uncharted, to explore the potentialities that await, and to forge the path forward with the tools of critical inquiry and boundless creativity.

In the vast realm of human thought and foresight, a shared dream emerges, one that transcends the boundaries of time and encompasses the aspirations of countless individuals. It is a dream that resonates deeply with those who have long been marginalized and silenced—the dream of empowering racial minorities and amplifying diverse voices in the grand tapestry of long-term thinking and foresight. This dream, at its core, is a testament to the enduring human spirit's quest for justice, equality, and inclusion. It embodies the belief that the narratives of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the underrepresented are not only valid but essential in shaping the visions of our collective future. It is a dream that envisions a world where every voice, regardless of its historical suppression, can resound with clarity and impact. This is what makes speculative fiction a particularly valuable instrument and a tool to explore a future that liberates constricted lives and explores new egalitarian realities for marginalized groups.

To embark on this journey towards a future where all voices are heard and valued, one must first acknowledge the historical inequities that have shrouded the perspectives of racial minorities and diverse communities. It is a journey that necessitates a departure from the conventions of the past, where the voices of the few often drowned out the chorus of the many. As we venture into this uncharted territory, we are guided by a commitment to dismantling the barriers that have perpetuated inequality and injustice. It is a commitment that recognizes the transformative power of long-term thinking, where foresight becomes a tool for not only envisioning a more inclusive future but actively shaping it.

Afrofuturism, as a movement that is based on speculation and imagination, is seen as the umbrella that encapsulates all of these concepts and concerns. Afrofuturism, a term originally coined by Mark Dery in 1994, stands as a remarkable cultural and artistic movement that transcends traditional boundaries and genres. At its core, Afrofuturism is a celebration of the speculative and imaginative capacities of African and African American communities. It



provides a creative space where these communities can explore a wide array of concepts and concerns, giving voice to their unique perspectives and aspirations.

This movement is often characterized by its engagement with speculative fiction, which serves as a powerful vehicle for examining African American themes and addressing their distinct concerns. Within the context of twentieth-century techno-culture, Afrofuturism brings forth narratives that envision alternative futures where the intersections of technology, culture, and identity take center stage. It is a genre that defies convention, offering a lens through which African American experiences can be refracted into innovative and thought-provoking narratives. One of the hallmark features of Afrofuturism is its appropriation of images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future. In doing so, it not only challenges existing stereotypes and representations of African Americans but also reclaims the discourse surrounding technology and progress. Afrofuturist works often depict a world where Black individuals wield technology as a tool for empowerment, self-expression, and cultural revival. It is a vision of the future where African and African American signification takes center stage, unapologetically asserting its presence in the ever-evolving landscape of techno-culture.

Afrofuturism, as both a genre and framework of analysis, invites us to explore the rich tapestry of ideas, dreams, and critiques that emerge from the confluence of African and African American cultures with speculative fiction and technology. It reminds us that imagination knows no bounds and that, through storytelling and creative expression, one can envision futures that are both deeply rooted in one's heritage and boldly innovative. In this way, Afrofuturism serves as an inspirational and transformative force, reshaping narratives and possibilities for African American communities and beyond. The movement, as a visionary and imaginative movement, is rooted in the idea of exploring new possibilities and reshaping narratives. Emerging in the latter half of the 20th century, it is often associated with the work of scholars and artists such as Octavia Butler, Sun Ra, Samuel R. Delany, and Nnedi Okorafor. At its core, Afrofuturism invites African Americans to reimagine their place in the world and envision futures where they thrive, evolve, and assert their presence. It is a response to a history marred by slavery, racism, and systemic oppression.

Afrofuturism, as a visionary and boundary-pushing movement, occupies a significant space in the realm of identity reconstruction for African Americans, with a particular emphasis on the foregrounding of the Black female identity. This movement offers a dynamic and multifaceted avenue for reshaping the narratives surrounding African American identity and experience, placing Black women at the forefront of this transformative endeavor. This forward-

looking perspective becomes a potent tool for reclaiming the voices, subjectivity, and humanity of African diasporic communities, including the vital role of Black women.

At the core of this thesis is an analysis of how Afrofuturism provides a dynamic and empowering approach to reclaiming the African American identity, mainly that of Black females. By amplifying the voices and experiences of Black women, it not only confronts the challenges and prejudices they face but also envisions a future where these women play a central and unapologetic role in shaping their destinies. This movement becomes a means of self-expression, resistance, and cultural resurgence, allowing Black women to rewrite their narratives and assert their presence within a society that has often marginalized them. Through Afrofuturism, the process of identity reconstruction takes center stage, offering a transformative journey of self-discovery and empowerment for African Americans and Black women in particular.

In this way, Afrofuturism becomes a vehicle for empowerment, enabling Black women to navigate the complex intersections of race, gender, and identity. It invites them to step into roles as visionaries, storytellers, and creators of their narratives, challenging the historical erasure and silencing of their voices. Afrofuturism is a celebration of resilience, an exploration of possibilities, and a testament to the enduring power of imagination in shaping the identity and destiny of African Americans, with Black women as its luminous vanguards. Within the realm of Afrofuturism, Black women find a unique space to assert their identities. They challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes by stepping into roles as visionaries, creators, and protagonists of their narratives.

This study also focuses on the intersection of Afrofuturism and Womanism representing a powerful and transformative space within which Black women have emerged as the vanguards of identity reconstruction and reclamation. While Afrofuturism offers a visionary platform to envision the future and redefine the narratives of African Americans, Womanism adds another layer of resistance and resilience specifically focused on Black women. This intersection is not merely a confluence of two movements; it is a dynamic force that challenges and transcends the limitations imposed on Black women's identities by historical stereotypes and systemic oppression. In this exploration, we delve into the profound impact of Afrofuturism and Womanism as complementary movements, shedding light on how they empower Black women to resist, reclaim, and reimagine their identities in a world that has often marginalized and silenced them.

Such an intersection between Afrofuturism and Womanism goes beyond the sum of its parts. It represents a dynamic and holistic approach to identity reconstruction for Black women. In this space, Black women are not passive recipients of narratives but active authors of their stories. They resist the stereotypes that have historically confined them to narrow roles and reimagine their identities in a world where they are powerful, multi-dimensional, and unapologetic. One key aspect of this intersection is the celebration of diversity within Black womanhood. It acknowledges that Black women's experiences and identities are not monolithic. Afrofuturism and Womanism create room for a multitude of voices, including womanist scholars, Afrofuturist artists, and everyday Black women, to engage in a dialogue that expands the boundaries of identity. It invites discussions on issues such as sexuality, spirituality, mental health, and more, ensuring that no aspect of Black women's lives remains silenced or overlooked.

The convergence of Afrofuturism and Womanism provides a forward-thinking trajectory for Black women aiming to reclaim, resist, and reshape their identities. It empowers them to imagine worlds where they are not constrained by the limitations of history or societal expectations. It celebrates their agency, creativity, and resilience in the face of systemic challenges. As we navigate the complex terrain of identity, Afrofuturism and Womanism become guiding stars. They remind us that Black women are not bound by the narratives of the past but are the architects of their futures. Through speculative fiction, art, activism, and communal bonds, Black women are crafting a new narrative—one that celebrates their strength, acknowledges their struggles, and envisions a world where their voices are heard, valued, and central.

In embracing this intersection, Black women find not only a space for resistance but also a canvas for transformation. It is a journey into uncharted territories, where the imagination knows no bounds, and the future holds the promise of liberation and self-discovery. Moreover, in the convergence of Afrofuturism and Womanism, a critical need emerges for an Afrofuturist womanist Manifesto—a suggested guide that articulates the principles, aspirations, and visions of this intersectional movement. Such a Manifesto would serve as a roadmap for Black women and their allies, offering a framework to navigate the complexities of identity reconstruction, resistance, and empowerment.

One of the central aims of this thesis involves suggesting an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto as it is a crucial step towards formalizing the intersection of these two movements. It would provide a foundation for Black women to assert their identities, resist oppression, and

shape the narratives of their futures. It would be a testament to the power of imagination, resilience, and collective action—a testament that Black women are not waiting for the future; they are actively creating it. This significance stems from the fact that an Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto represents a groundbreaking and unprecedented endeavor. It marks the first concerted effort to formally unite Afrofuturism and Womanism, two influential movements that have individually reshaped discourse surrounding identity, race, gender, and the future.

Prior to this proposed Manifesto, these two movements had operated largely in parallel, each addressing critical issues faced by Black communities but from somewhat distinct perspectives. The absence of a document explicitly merging these ideologies meant that the full potential of their collective power remained untapped. By creating this Manifesto, Black women would be forging new territory, forging a path for future generations, and sending a resounding message that their voices and visions deserve recognition, not just in their respective movements but within the broader cultural and societal landscape. The proposed Afrofuturist Womanist Manifesto and Nnedi Okorafor's works, particularly her celebrated *Binti Trilogy* (2015-2018) intersect at the crossroads of identity reclamation and empowerment for Black women.

Nnedi Okorafor's prominent role in Afrofuturism highlights the transformative potential of this movement in reshaping identities, especially for Black women. Afrofuturism offers a unique and expansive canvas where Black females can boldly address the daunting challenges, they face in a world riddled with colourism, racism, and sexism. It serves as an empowering realm where the intricate facets of their identity can be fearlessly explored and celebrated, while simultaneously dismantling the entrenched norms that have historically stifled their growth and self-expression. Okorafor, as an exemplar in the field of speculative fiction, employs her creative narratives to construct alternative worlds where Black women occupy central and dynamic roles. These narratives delve into themes of power, agency, and resilience, placing Black women at the forefront of the narrative and allowing them to navigate and confront the multifaceted forms of discrimination that intersect in their lives. Through Afrofuturism, Black women find a powerful platform to confront and challenge the oppressive forces of a society that seeks to limit their potential, offering them a visionary space to envision and shape their destinies.

In Okorafor's *Binti trilogy*, the case study of this research, one explores a vivid embodiment of the proposed Manifesto's principles in action. The trilogy's protagonist, Binti, is a young Black woman who defies societal norms and expectations to pursue her dreams of

interstellar education. Through her journey, Okorafor explores themes of identity, agency, and resilience. Binti's character showcases the power of imagination and determination in the face of adversity, reflecting the suggested Manifesto's call for Black women to actively create their futures, embrace their differences, thrive in alien worlds, and reconstruct any controlling images and stereotypes that previously marginalized them.

Okorafor's masterful use of the Afrofuturist platform to amplify the voices, needs, and aspirations of Black women, as exemplified in her *Binti trilogy* showcases the transformative potential of speculative fiction. In *Binti*, we encounter a remarkable protagonist who embodies the essence of a strong womanist within a futuristic context. Binti, a young and resilient Himba woman, serves as a powerful representation of the strength and agency of Black women. She defies societal expectations and leaves her close-knit community to pursue her dreams of interstellar education. This act of self-assertion and self-articulation aligns perfectly with womanist principles that celebrate the indomitable spirit of Black women.

One of the most striking aspects of Okorafor's storytelling is her ability to seamlessly merge spirituality, magic, and technology within the narrative. This blending of elements represents the essence of Afrofuturism, where traditional and modern coexist, and ancestral heritage is celebrated. Binti's journey is not just a physical one into the stars; it is also a spiritual and cultural odyssey. Her connection to her heritage, symbolized by the sacred otjize, and her interaction with the mysterious Meduse species create a rich tapestry of identity and belonging. Afrofuturism, as reflected in *Binti*, allows for the exploration of complex themes while celebrating the resilience and multifaceted identities of Black women. It envisions a future where Black women are not confined by the limitations of the past but are empowered to shape their destinies, merging tradition with innovation. Through the lens of Afrofuturism, Okorafor's work becomes a testament to the enduring legacy of Black womanhood, where spirituality, culture, and technology coalesce to create a new narrative of strength and self-discovery.

In addition, Okorafor's trilogy stands as a shining example of Afrofuturism's capacity to amplify the voices of Black women, celebrate their rich heritage, and envision futures where their agency and resilience take center stage. It is a story of self-determination, cultural pride, and the limitless possibilities of imagination—an embodiment of the Afrofuturist womanist Manifesto's vision for Black women in speculative fiction.

Furthermore, this thesis is an exploration of the potential realities that could exist in future scenarios where Black individuals, mainly Black women, not only exist but also flourish

and hold positions of influence and authority. It involves a deep and imaginative inquiry into what these futures might look like and how they could be shaped by the agency and empowerment of Black communities. At its core, this exploration is an acknowledgment of the historical and systemic challenges that Black people have faced, including oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. It recognizes that these obstacles have hindered the full realization of Black potential and have often stifled the opportunities for Black individuals to thrive in various spheres of life.

This concept of an inclusively Black future envisions a future in which the diverse perspectives and experiences within the Black community are not only acknowledged but actively embraced. It transcends any singular narrative and instead invites a multitude of voices and viewpoints to participate in shaping what lies ahead. First and foremost, it recognizes that the Black community is not monolithic; it is rich and multifaceted, encompassing a spectrum of identities, including Black intellectuals, womanists, Afrofuturists, and more. Each of these identities brings a unique lens through which to view and engage with the future.

In the realm of Afrofuturistic inquiry, questions emerge that challenge the boundaries of our current reality and beckon us to envision alternative futures. Among these inquiries, fundamental questions stand as pivotal points of departure, each laden with profound implications: What if Blackness were the dominant force in the world? How might Black women lead the way into a more equitable and just future? Can Blackness attain and assert power separate from colonial means of the past? How can the intersection of Afrofuturism and Womanism serve as a form of reconstruction of the Black female's identity? These questions serve as the cornerstones of a speculative exploration that transcends the confines of our present circumstances. They invite us to navigate the complex intersections of power, identity, and justice within the context of a speculative future.

Ultimately, an inclusively Black future invites all Black perspectives to come together, engage in meaningful discourse, and collectively envision a future that reflects the richness and complexity of their identities. It is a future where no voice is silenced, and every perspective is a valued piece of the puzzle as society navigates the uncharted territories of what lies ahead. In other words, an inclusively Black future, as envisioned within the realms of Afrofuturism and Womanism, transcends the boundaries of singular narratives and invites a tapestry of Black perspectives to converge. It is a future where the diverse experiences, histories, and identities of Black individuals are not only acknowledged but celebrated. This inclusivity beckons Black

voices from various walks of life—Black men, Black women, womanists, Afrofuturists, and countless others—to come together in a harmonious chorus of discourse.

With Afrofuturism as an umbrella, various concepts such as Transhumanism (the fusion of humans and technology), Posthumanism (exploring the evolution beyond the limitations of humanity), Astro-Blackness (engaging with outer space and cosmic themes within the Black narrative), technology and its impact on society, are explored. By broadly constructing this vision of an inclusively Black future, it ensures that no perspective is excluded or marginalized. It acknowledges that the future is a complex tapestry woven from a multitude of threads, each contributing to the overall narrative. This approach fosters a sense of unity within diversity, where the Black community's strength lies in its ability to draw from a wealth of experiences and ideas.

In this endeavor, we embark on a journey beyond the constraints of our known reality, guided by the conviction that imagination is a catalyst for transformative change. The terrain we traverse is one where conventional paradigms are challenged, where possibilities expand, and where established norms are reevaluated. Our exploration is rooted in the belief that speculative thought is a vital instrument for envisioning a world that moves beyond existing boundaries and paradigms. It challenges us to contemplate futures where equity, justice, and inclusivity are not theoretical constructs but living realities. Within the landscape of speculation, we navigate intricate intellectual and emotional terrain, fostering dialogue, reflection, and a reexamination of our collective aspirations.

As we ponder these "what if" scenarios and "how might" possibilities, we embark on a journey of discovery, expanding our understanding and broadening our horizons. These questions, framed within the context of a speculative future, propel us into an exploration of the unknown. They serve as catalysts for a deeper understanding of the potential for transformation and evolution. Together, we embark on a journey into the speculative—a realm where the boundaries of imagination are limitless, and where the future is an open canvas waiting to be painted.

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## Résumé

L'Afrofuturisme, enraciné au XIXe siècle, examine et redéfinit de manière critique les identités Africaines et Afro-américaines à travers des récits futuristes, en mettant l'accent sur les perspectives Afrocentriques. Il défie les stéréotypes, célèbre la diversité et imagine des futurs où les femmes noires redéfinissent activement leurs identités et leurs avenir. Cette recherche explore la nature multifacette de l'identité et son processus de déconstruction avec un accent majeur sur les femmes noires. L'étude se concentre également sur le Womanisme, un terme inventé par Alice Walker qui met en évidence les expériences, les luttes et la résilience uniques des femmes noires. L'examen combiné de l'Afrofuturisme et du Womanisme est significatif, étant donné que les études précédentes se sont concentrées sur chaque mouvement individuellement, laissant leur intersection largement inexplorée. Au cœur de cette recherche se trouve la proposition d'un Manifeste Afrofuturiste Womaniste, qui se distingue comme une découverte significative en raison de son approche innovante pour combler cette lacune académique actuelle. Ce cadre catalyse l'autodécouverte et l'émancipation au sein de l'Afrofuturisme et du Womanisme, facilitant une croissance transformative. L'essence de ce Manifeste trouve sa transcendance et sa célébration dans le récit captivant de *la trilogie Binti* (2015-2018) acclamée de Nnedi Okorafor. Le récit se déploie non seulement comme une fusion splendide de science-fiction et de richesse culturelle Africaine, mais aussi comme une odyssée profonde dans les domaines de l'identité féminine noire. Au cœur de la tapisserie Afrofuturiste méticuleusement tissée par Okorafor et scrutée à travers une lentille multidisciplinaire, cette étude déploie une méthodologie diversifiée intégrant des approches descriptives, analytiques et quantitatives ainsi qu'une analyse du discours pour explorer la complexité de la reconstruction de l'identité. Elle retrace le parcours de la protagoniste à travers l'interaction cosmique entre tradition, modernité et exploration de soi. Cette thèse embarque sur le voyage de Binti, un esprit jeune Himba résonnant avec des échos womanistes, naviguant une expédition transformative entremêlant le paradoxe de la sagesse ancestrale et de l'illumination futuriste exemplifiant les principes articulés dans le Manifeste proposé.

*Mots-clés* : l'identité de la femme noire, Intersectionnalité, Womanisme, Afrofuturisme, Manifeste Afrofuturiste Womaniste.

## المخلص

تعنى المستقبلية الإفريقية (AFROFUTURISM) ، التي تعود إلى القرن التاسع عشر ، بالهويات الإفريقية والأمريكية وتعيد تشكيلها من خلال الروايات المستقبلية، مع التأكيد على المنظور الأفريقي المركزي. فهي تتحدى الصور النمطية، وتحث بالتنوع، وتخيل المستقبل القوي حيث تعيد النساء السود تعريف هوياتهن بكل حيوية. يستكشف هذا البحث الطبيعة متعددة الأوجه للهوية وعملية التفكير مع التركيز بشكل كبير على الإناث السود. تركز الدراسة بشكل أكبر على الحركة النسوية للنساء السود (WOMANISM) وهو مصطلح صاغته أليس ووكر (ALICE WALKER) يؤكد على التجارب الفريدة للمرأة ذات البشرة الداكنة ونضالاتها ومرونتها. تعد الدراسة المشتركة للكتابة الإفريقية والنسوية أمرًا مهمًا، نظرًا لأن الدراسات السابقة ركزت على كل حركة بمنأى عن الأخرى، تاركة تقاطعها دون استكشاف إلى حد كبير. يكمن جوهر هذا البحث في اقتراح بيان للنسوية المستقبلية الإفريقية، والذي يبرز كنتيجة مهمة مستحقة في نهجها المبتكر لمعالجة الفجوة العلمية الحالية. يبحث هذا الإطار على اكتشاف الذات والتمكين ضمن أفق أفريقي نسوي، مما يسهل التطور التحويلي. يجد جوهر هذا البيان التعالي والاحتفال في ثلاثية بينتي المشهورة لنيدي أوكورافور (2015-2018). لا تتكشف الحكاية فقط على أنها اندماج رائع للخيال العلمي والثراء الثقافي الأفريقي، ولكن أيضًا كمرحلة عميقة في عوالم الهوية الأنثوية السوداء. ضمن النسيج الأفروفورتني المنسوج بدقة من قبل أوكورافور (OKORAFOR) والمنظور إليه من خلال عدسة متعددة التخصصات، تستخدم هذه الدراسة منهجية متعددة الأوجه، تدمج المناهج الوصفية والتحليلية والكمية مع تحليل الخطاب للتعلم في العملية المعقدة لإعادة بناء الهوية، وتتبع رحلة بطلة القصة من خلال التفاعل الكوني للتقاليد والحداثة واكتشاف الذات. تنطلق هذه الأطروحة من رحلة بينتي، فتاة الهيمبا الشابة التي يتردد صداها مع أصدااء الحركة النسوية، وتبحر في رحلة استكشافية تحويلية تربط بين مفارقة حكمة الأسلاف والتنوير المستقبلي، مما يجسد المبادئ الموضحة في البيان المقترح.

*الكلمات المفتاحية:* هوية الأنثى السوداء، التقاطع الحركة النسوية، المستقبلية الإفريقية، بيان الحركة النسوية المستقبلية الإفريقية.

