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Humanism made to the measure of the world: the case of Africanfuturism

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Humanism Made to the Measure of the World: The Case of Africanfuturism

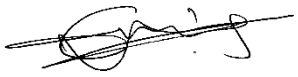
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A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Emmanuel Omoghene Ogwu Signature  Date: 20 April 2022

Abstract

This study examines the contribution of Africanfuturism in imagining a vision of the human in ways that challenge seventeenth-century European enlightenment ideas of the "specifically human". I argue that Africanfuturism's insistence on a humanity in constant creation can be traced to a posthuman sensibility and an attention to planetary entanglements. Since the rise of black internationalism in the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter, there has been a series of efforts and strategies not only to refute the European enlightenment ideas of the human but also to offer emancipatory modalities for the future of black humanity. While Afrofuturism contributes to this tradition, its African-American-centric framing relegates the aesthetic and thematic presence of Africa to the margins. As I demonstrate, Africanfuturism, as conceived by Nnedi Okorafor and demonstrated in her novels, *Binti* and *Lagoon*, is concerned with the question of planetary habitability in a way that does not privilege or prioritize the human over non-human forms of existence. The result is a planetary entanglement and relationality characterized by different forms of vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration in a manner that produces a relation of care and a reconfiguration of space, sexuality and belonging—for fellow human subjects and non-human subjects. Such a relationality is especially useful in societies characterized by the necropolitical as it offers an alternate black political configuration.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Pitfalls of Humanism	5
Chapter Two: Beyond the Specifically Human	21
Chapter Three: Ethics of the Stranger	36
Conclusion	51
References	53

Introduction

One of the results of the European enlightenment is the distinction and subsequent elevation of the human from the animal and from machines. What separated the human from the animal and the machine, it was argued, is the claim that humans possessed an interiority as subjects, and hence, were capable of self-representation. However, several black thinkers have demonstrated how the human rights articulated by the European humanistic bourgeoisie is fragmentary, biased and ultimately, racist. The presence and the body of the black slave reveal the pitfalls of such a humanism. In the body of the slave, it becomes obvious that the category of the human is an assignation that is not available to all. The slave is at once human (and/or infra-human), an animal and a machine that is put to work in the interest of capital. In interrogating the enlightenment apprehension of the human and of blackness, thinkers in the tradition of black internationalism (such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter) have articulated discourses that imagine an emancipatory black political future. My research will situate Africanfuturism within this tradition of black internationalism. While other studies have emphasized how the genre is invested in multiracial and multinational entanglements, my study will show how Africanfuturism demonstrates a planetary entanglement. The research will also investigate the extent to which Africanfuturism transcends the idea of the "specifically human" as expounded by European enlightenment ideas. This will widen the apprehension of the human from the earthly to the planetary. In doing so, I will demonstrate Africanfuturism's contribution to a black political future. This will be done by reading Nnedi Okorafor's novels, *Binti* (2019) and *Lagoon* (2016). By foregrounding African mythologies and cultures, Okorafor's narrative strategies, I will argue, demonstrate that at the heart of being human is the vulnerability that emerges from humanity's exposure to other existences and social relations – human and non-human. This apprehension of humanity is one that is—to borrow Césaire's words— "made to the measure of the world" and leads to solidarity and detachment with other forms of life, but never of indifference.

The kind of humanism that I gesture towards in this study is a planetary humanism, at the heart of which is a recognition of humans' entanglement with other non-human forms of existence, as evident in *Binti* and *Lagoon*. On this score, to be human is to be already inextricably entangled with other forms of existence. Such a humanism facilitates a movement away from enlightenment

notions of the human to a movement towards a humanism characterized by different forms of vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration in a manner that ushers a relation of care, selflessness and a reconfiguration of space, sexuality and belonging – for fellow human subjects and non-human subjects.

This study will be guided by four main theoretical approaches – Humanism, Posthumanism, Necropolitics and the All-World. At the heart of the seventeenth century European enlightenment was the emphasis on individual reason as opposed to following the dictates of religion. Part of the reasons for this was the understanding of human nature – since humans possess reason, they are capable of self-representation via language, have an intrinsic moral worth/dignity, are free moral agents capable of making decisions guided by reason, and must not be treated as mere means but rather as ends in themselves. All of these attributes (in various iterations) form what is known as enlightenment humanism. I will employ the humanist ideas of David Hume and Immanuel Kant (particularly in "Of National Characters" and "On National Characteristics" respectively) to show how such a humanist apprehension not only naturalizes differences among human populations but also organizes such differences in ways that lead to the subjugation and oppression of particular populations. This will be helpful in situating the critiques of such a humanism offered by W.E.B. Du Bois (in *The Souls of Black Folk*), Aimé Césaire (in *Discourse on Colonialism*), Frantz Fanon (in *Black Skins, White Masks*) and Sylvia Wynter ("Human Being as Noun? Or Being Human as Praxis? Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn: A Manifesto"). With the various critiques of enlightenment humanism, there have been different approaches to move beyond the boundaries of the human as articulated by the enlightenment. Posthumanism as a discursive term, argues that the human is only one of many other species and as such has no inherent right over animals, for example. In addition, emerging technologies have also contributed to transcending the idea of the human proposed by the European enlightenment. By drawing on Cary Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* and a collection of essays edited by Neil Badmington (*Posthumanism*), I will use the theory of posthumanism in reading Okorafor's representation of the human entanglements with other non-human forms of existence as well as human entanglements with technology. This will allow me to pursue the question of planetary habitability in a way that does not privilege or prioritize the human over non-human forms of existence.

As Achille Mbembe has argued in *Necropolitics*, within the discourse of sovereignty lies the capacity and will to determine bodies that matter and those that do not. Necropolitics is thus, the various forms of subjecting life to the power of death by rendering certain bodies as disposable. Beginning from slavery in its different iterations, black life is an embodiment of this kind of "death-in-life". The idea of Necropolitics will be useful for my project in two main ways. First, it will enable me to account for the regime of violence that regulated modernity's articulations of subjecthood and sovereignty to which the body of the slave is its shadow. Secondly, Necropolitics will enable me to problematize the politics of disposability that characterize the chronotopes in both novels which my research will analyze, thus, making legible the modalities Okorafor proposes for a black political future. If the future that Okorafor's texts envision is one of planetary entanglements, Édouard Glissant's theorization of the All-World will be useful in delineating the kinds of engagements/relations that ensue in such a future. The All-World, at once a signifier of creole culture, is a discursive category in constant motion. It is an attempt to carry out a kind of classification of human and non-human forms of existence without the epistemological/foundational certainties of anthropology, religion or biology. The idea of humanism that ensues is thus, one of the human-in-relation: a relation of care, solidarity and occasional detachment (but never of indifference) with/from other forms of existence. I will argue that the black political future imagined in Okorafor's texts is an instance of the All-World.

This research is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, titled "The Pitfalls of Humanism", I will trace the emergence of the tradition of black internationalism while focusing on its repudiation of enlightenment humanism in a bid to emancipate and reconstruct the humanity of black subjects. In doing so, I will situate Afrofuturism's contribution to this tradition by emphasizing Afrofuturism's imagination of multinational and multiracial forms of existence. The chapter will conclude with a critique of Afrofuturism, especially its African-American-centric framing.

In the second chapter— "Beyond the Specifically Human" —through a close reading of *Binti* and *Lagoon*, I will demonstrate Africanfuturism's attempts at transcending not only the idea of the "specifically human" but also widening the apprehension of the human from the earthly to the planetary. I will also expose the narrative strategies Okorafor employs in the two novels and how

their similarity to and difference from, Afrofuturism contributes to grounding the idea of the human to come in African mythologies and traditions.

The third chapter— "Ethics of the Stranger" —will be a continuation of the close reading of *Binti* and *Lagoon*, with special focus on the forms of political configurations that both novels present. I will argue that the black political future that Okorafor offers is one characterized by different forms of vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration in a manner that ushers a relation of care – for fellow human subjects and non-human subjects.

Chapter One: The Pitfalls of Humanism

In the tradition of black internationalism, several thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter, have sought to affirm, emancipate and reconstruct the humanity of the black body. This was in response to a European enlightenment discourse which denied the assignation of the category of the human to black individuals. These black thinkers, in interrogating the enlightenment apprehension of blackness and demonstrating a dissatisfaction with racist temporalities, have also articulated emancipatory modalities for the future. These modalities for the future have assumed a transnational character in a bid to imagine what a black humanity and politics would look like. In this chapter, I trace the emergence of the tradition of black internationalism while focusing on its repudiation of enlightenment humanism in a bid to emancipate and reconstruct the humanity of black subjects. In doing so, I situate Afrofuturism's contribution to this tradition by emphasizing Afrofuturism's imagination of multinational and multiracial forms of existence. The chapter concludes with a critique of Afrofuturism, especially its African-American-centric framing; an important factor that has led to the rise of Africanfuturism.

The European Enlightenment and Humanism

What is now known as the European enlightenment, which began in the seventeenth century, was not simply a break from the epistemological control of the Christian Church. As Michel Foucault points out, the enlightenment was an attitude: "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" (Foucault 39). If the enlightenment allows individuals to think for themselves, it meant that certain "foundational" beliefs could be questioned. One such belief relates to what it means to be human. It is worth noting that with the enlightenment attitude, several European thinkers took up the investigation of the humanistic thematic in a bid to rationally ascertain the boundaries of humanism. In doing so, these thinkers inquired if and how all the different races are human in the same way and the modalities of accounting for the apparent differences between the different races. As Foucault points out, the enlightenment idea of humanism has always leaned on various conceptual resources from religion, science or politics (44). A significant result, therefore, of the enlightenment attitude in relation to what it means to be human is the distinction and subsequent

elevation of the human from the animal and from machines. Having achieved this distinction (based on, it was argued, science as an objective study), the task for these thinkers was how to account for the differences between different races and by implication, what these differences would mean for relations between the races.

In his 1754 essay, "Of National Characters", David Hume writes:

> I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers among them, no arts, no sciences […] indeed, they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely that he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly (Hume 33).

What Hume's comments reveal is that the making of any civilization (with its arts and sciences) requires superior rational capacities and given that Europe has witnessed several civilizations and accomplishments, the white race (thought to be domiciled in Europe) must thus be superior to the black race of Africa. The black race, as a result of its lack of civilizations akin to that of Europe, must therefore, be inferior to the white race. Hume is willing to confer on the negroes the status of human, albeit a humanity that is of lower degree compared to that of Europeans. For Immanuel Kant, what separated the human from the animal and the machine, is the claim that humans possessed an interiority as subjects, and hence, were capable of self-representation. Such an interiority requires superior mental capacities. However, the "Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling […] So fundamental is the difference between these two races [the white and the black race] of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour. The religion of fetishes so widespread among them is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply into the trifling as appears to be possible to human nature" (Kant 55-56). Like Hume before him, Kant proceeds (in an alleged rational manner) to a conclusion on the mental capacities of negroes given the apparent physical characteristics and differences between the white and black races. Therefore, with the black race belonging (at best) to a different sub-genre of humanity, slavery and colonization, in their different iterations, become rationally legitimated.

In the Prologue to *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James raises a question which demonstrates a predicament faced by the Spanish in their occupation and colonization of the Caribbean: "Las

Casas, a Dominican priest with a conscience, travelled to Spain to plead for the abolition of native slavery. But without coercion of the natives how could the colony exist?" (James 4). The well-known Valladolid debate that took place in 1550-1551 between Ginés de Sepúlveda and Las Casas was concerned about the use of war on the Native Americans in the Spanish occupied territories as a way of "facilitating" their conversion to the Christian faith. For Sepulveda, the Spanish use of just war was justified because the Native Americans were barbarians, committed crimes against natural law, oppressed and killed the innocent among themselves and were infidels in need of salvation. On his part, Las Casas argued that although the Native Americans were at a different and backward stage of human development, they were no less rational. His argument appealed to an essential kind of unity among all genres of humankind. It is important to note that both Sepulveda and Las Casas based their arguments on "the Bible, the Church Fathers, and Spanish medieval as well as Renaissance thought and law" (Hernandez 99). The Valladolid debate demonstrates an intra-European contestation on the ontological status of the Native Americans. It is a debate that would lead to, among other developments, the importation of slaves from Africa – a gesture that "launched on the world the American slave-trade and slavery" (James 4). What this demonstrates is not only the implication of "priest and King" (as James puts it) in the slave trade, but also the discursive/ideological lens from which both the Native Americans and the African slaves were viewed. If the Native Americans and the African slaves belonged to a different genre of humanity, one that is different from that of Europeans, what are the consequences for the economic benefits of Spanish occupation, of affirming such a humanity? As James' question earlier on reveals, the continued existence of the colony required a form of coercion that asserts at best, the differential humanity of both Native Americans and African slaves. Such a differential humanity arises, as Sylvia Wynter has argued, from a genre-specific understanding of humanity.

Since race and racialization are at the heart of such a classification, it is important to consider the functioning of race. As Stuart Hall has argued, it is useful to consider race more like a language where meaning is relational and unfixed. The discursive aspect of race demonstrates that there are differences in the world (such as Du Bois' famous triad—colour, hair and bone). However, it is only when these differences have been organized in a language/discourse that the differences can be said to acquire meaning and become a factor in human culture and thus, regulate conduct. The organization of these differences occurs in religion, anthropology, biology and economics. As various black thinkers would argue, what these discourses offer is not the truth but the sanction of

a foundational epistemological guarantee. As such, race becomes naturalized, with the body becoming a text wherein social difference (of colour, hair and bone) can be read (Hall, "Race: The Floating Signifier").

The Rise of Black Internationalism

Ways of thinking about and studying race (theories of race) have tended to be either reductionist or essentialist. To take the reductionist case, for example, racial structures and relations have been explained in economic terms, where the economic structure and relations determine social structures and relations. Thus, if a "white" population controls the means of production and a "black" population provides labour, then the social structures and relations in such a society will be determined by such a relationship to the means of production. What such a way of thinking ignores is that the economic relations although necessary, are however, not sufficient in the creation of a racial structure in the social formation of a society. There are extra-economic conditions which, coupled with the economic relations, form and sustain a racial structure and relation. In addition to a particular class controlling the means of production, there are different social functions which can be appropriated by such a class with its own interest and power position in relation to the rest of the society. Such a class can then draw on other ideological discourses in the service of its interest such as dehistoricizing and naturalizing differences and fragments within its own and the other classes (Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance" 315). In doing so, it creates an identity out of difference and fragments, for itself and for the rest of society. Articulation is, therefore, the production of such an identity. Thus, racism articulates race, leading to the formation of new interpellative structures such as "white" and "black". To articulate therefore, is to create unities; the way things that are distinct "speak to each other" in a dialogic manner. In other terms, articulation is a metaphor that indicates the relations of linkage and effectivity between different levels of things (Hall, "Race, Articulation" 325).

One instance of articulation is what is commonly referred to as the "black experience". With several populations in Africa, the United States and the Caribbean interpellated as black, and with the constant social, political and economic exclusion of such populations brought about by the logic of European enlightenment and humanism, the black experience became the common historical experience of racism, exclusion and marginalization. As Du Bois expresses it,

> Between me and the other world there is an ever unasked question [...] *How does it feel to be a problem?* [...] the Negro is a sort of 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 (emphasis in original) (*The Souls of Black Folk* 2-3).

What Du Bois exposes is the fact that the black experience is made and not given. It is made from the interaction between white and black populations cadenced by the logic of capital and exploitation. Although the black experience emanates from the common experience of racism, exclusion and marginalization, it is important to note that such an experience varies from one geographical position to another. For example, the experience of plantation servitude in the Caribbean (characterized by collision of different cultural roots such as the African, European [Spanish and French] and Native American cultures) is different from the experience of apartheid in South Africa. Even within the Caribbean, the confrontations and hierarchization demonstrates that the black experience is not a monolithic or essential categorization. However, the attempt at seeing these different experiences of different populations in different geographical locations as making up the black experience is one that links (articulates) these differences. This articulation is not a mere linkage; it is directed at specific goals. For example, it is the articulation of the black experience that leads to the five Pan-African Congresses held between 1919 and 1945. These congresses would eventually adopt a more radical posture—the call for independence and political freedom for black populations in Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. In our contemporary time, thinkers such as Achille Mbembe have been involved in this kind of articulative gesture. In Mbembe's theorization of "the becoming black of the world", he points out how with capitalism's ever-expanding reach, vast populations of the earth are constantly being conscripted into the genre of humanity hitherto reserved for black people: "the systematic risks experienced specifically by Black slaves during early capitalism have now become the norm for, or at least the lot of, all of subaltern humanity. The emergence of new imperial practices is then tied to the tendency to universalize the Black condition" (Mbembe, *Critique* 4).

Another instance of articulation in the cultures of the black diaspora in the twentieth century is the idea of Africa as a political imaginary. In his pan-African reverie in *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois reflects:

> As I face Africa, I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie that I can feel better than I can explain? Africa is of course, my fatherland […] the badge of colour [is] relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa (639).

The experience of the violent capture and the Middle Passage in which hundreds of Africans were uprooted from the continent into the Caribbean and the United States becomes a link that connects blacks in the United States and the Caribbean to Africa. Blacks in these places came to see themselves as being in the diaspora, characterized by the affective and sentimental desire/longing for the homeland (Africa). Africa as a place is diverse and heterogeneous; it is composed of different ethnic groups, languages and cultures. However, as a political imaginary, these differences are linked together (articulated) to develop what is now known as pan-African solidarity. Seen in this way, the idea of diaspora is itself an articulative gesture attempting to strengthen pan-African solidarity. This again demonstrates not only the linkage, but also the effectivity of articulation.

Part of the consequences of the kind of articulation of the black condition/experience that I have been tracing, is the critique of the European enlightenment apprehension of what it means to be human. As Aimé Césaire notes, colonization led to the "thingification" of the black body at the very moment when the European petty bourgeoisie was advancing a humanist discourse: "at the very time when it most mouths the word, the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism—a humanism made to the measure of the world" (Césaire 73). In demonstrating how the human rights articulated by the European humanistic bourgeoisie is fragmentary, biased and ultimately, racist, Césaire explains how the outrage by European humanists over Hitler's crime represents an outrage over a crime (the extermination of a population that was thought to belong to a different genre of humanity) that was exclusively reserved for colonized peoples and not for Europeans (Césaire 41). In his psychoanalytic critique of colonization, Frantz Fanon reveals how

in the colonial condition, the gaze of the white colonialist perpetuates the objectification of the black subject. Immersed in the colonial temporality, the black subject must negotiate and insist on their humanity in the registers of a European humanism that hitherto denied a recognition of the genre of humanity that black subjects occupy. As Fanon observes, "for if equality among men is proclaimed in the name of intelligence and philosophy, it is also true that these concepts have been used to justify the extermination of man" (Fanon 12). Fanon exposes the weaknesses in the various strategies employed by educated black subjects in a bid to assert the humanity of black people. One of these strategies is the insistence of a black civilization in Africa's past. As Fanon points out, "The discovery that a black civilization existed in the fifteenth century does not earn me a certificate of humanity. Whether you like it or not, the past can in no way be my guide in the actual state of things" (Fanon 199-200). This is because in the colonial situation, there is the psychological and political anxiety in the black subject to prove its worth and merit (Fanon 185-86).

The work of Chilean biologists and philosophers, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, reveals the connection between perception and knowledge. For Maturana and Varela, what an organism sees with the eyes does not constitute the world, rather, it is the living organism that fabricates the world through the formation of an image of that world via the organism's internal neurological processing of information (Maturana and Varela 13). Sylvia Wynter draws on this idea in her meditation on cosmogony and counter-cosmogony (Wynter 23). For Wynter, the two dominant European apprehensions of Man do not demonstrate what the world is, but a fabrication of the world. This means that these apprehensions are cosmogonies. As V.Y. Mudimbe points out, cosmogonies reveal regional engagements with, and attempts at manipulating, the contradictions of human life in their iterations in local histories (Mudimbe 86). Thus, beginning from the Copernican revolution, Wynter shows how these innovations contributed to the postulation of Man by European renaissance intellectuals. In this humanist invention of Man_1, what separated the human from the animal and the machine was the claim that humans possessed an interiority as subjects, and hence, were capable of self-representation via language, history, the arts, political organization, etc. With this idea of Man_1, the Native Americans in the Spanish occupied territories did not quite fit into the category and hence, were not fully human. In other words, their humanity was still at a primitive stage, as evident in Las Casas' argument. However, Wynter goes on to trace a second apprehension of Man: Man_2. Man_2 contains aspects of Man_1, but to it is added the

nineteenth century neo-liberal economic capacity for consumption. Wynter shows how both Man_1 and Man_2 are particular cosmogonic gestures arising from particular temporalities, which with institutionally sanctioned rhetorical discourses, come to be "over-represented". For Wynter, over-representation is the way an idea that refers to a genre of humanity becomes applied to other genres of humanity (Wynter 6-7). The idea of genre, like its application in literature and music, suggests not only differentiation but also the forces and processes of privilege, centrality and marginality. In this way, the idea of Man-as-Human (the product of a particular epistemology which pretends to be a natural and independent entity) becomes the criterion for assigning humanity to non-European populations mediated by a juridical-economic colonial presence. Walter Mignolo argues that the problem with Man-as-Human is it enunciations of what it means to be human: "enunciations that are concocted and circulated by those who most convincingly (and powerfully) imagine the "right" or "noble" or "moral" characteristics of Human and in this project their *own* image-experience of the Human into the sphere of Universal Humanness" (emphasis in original) (Mignolo, "Sylvia Wynter" 108).

Wynter therefore, calls for a counter-cosmogony via an Autopoetic turn/overturn. This is important because of the predicament presented by the idea of Man-as-Human:

> To study "Man" or "Humanity" is therefore to study a narrativization that has been produced with the very instruments (or categories) that we study with. In short, it is precisely the practice of accepting the principles and rules of knowing that produces narratives that naturalize, for example, evolution and dysselection and thus biocentric Human origin stories (Mignolo, "Sylvia Wynter" 107).

Wynter sees in the lexical creativity of the Rastafari, a model for such an Autopoetic or self-generating turn/overturn particularly in "the *counter-cosmogony* that underlies the movement in whose logic, words are turned upside down—their use, for example, of the inverted term *downpression* to define the existential perspective of their *systemic oppression*, this given their largely jobless existence" (Wynter 23). The kind of counter-cosmogony that Wynter envisions is "not a claim for recognition within the hegemonic concept of Humanity but a claim for recognition that the imperial [racist, patriarchal, cis-heterosexual, neo-liberal] concept of Man / Human is no longer sustainable" (Mignolo, "Sylvia Wynter" 118-19). What Wynter thus offers is not a new definition or image of Man or Human. Hers is a call to move in a direction that is different from

the imperial idea of Man. I agree with Mignolo that Wynter's rehistorization is a call to begin with the question – what does it mean to be human? Wynter's engagement with this question demonstrates what Mignolo has termed border thinking and epistemic disobedience as it demonstrates a refusal to "accept the options that are available to you" (Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing").

Therefore, in response to a European enlightenment discourse represented in the works of Hume and Kant that denied the assignation of the human to black individuals, W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter, in interrogating the enlightenment apprehension of blackness and demonstrating a dissatisfaction with its racist temporalities, have also articulated emancipatory modalities for the future. These modalities for the future have assumed a transnational character in a bid to imagine what a black humanity and politics would look like. This articulation of "a humanism made to the measure of the world", as Césaire calls it, has taken on different forms such as liberation/decolonization movements, artistic and cultural expressions and educational initiatives. I now turn to one of the artistic and cultural forms that imagines and advances an alternative humanity for black bodies in an oppressive reality.

Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism, with its origins in the North American Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s, has been invested in the imagination of alternative and utopian worlds of the possible for black subjects. As Kodwo Eshun argues, Afrofuturism's origins demonstrate its separation from avant-garde European futurist movements as it sought to make legible the real conditions of existential alienation and dehumanization (Eshun 289). One of the first to attempt a definition of Afrofuturism is Mark Dery. As Dery defines it, "Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century techno-culture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future—might, for want of a better term, be called Afrofuturism" (Dery 180). Afrofuturism began with jazz as well as hip hop performers such as Sonny Blount (in the 1960s) and would eventually include the works of writers of science fiction and fantasy such as Octavia Butler (in the 1980s and 1990s). For artistes such as Sonny Blount (also known as Sun

Ra) and Octavia Butler, the arts, particularly music, poetry and fiction, provided an alternative form of expression in which to imagine a better humanity for black bodies.

In the music of Sun Ra, the transgressive assemblage contributes to the imagination of a better world for black subjects. For Sun Ra, the slave ships of the Middle Passage are an instance of alien abduction. This suggests that the African slaves already occupied the space of the non-human and gestures towards the entanglement of the human with the alien (Youngquist 9). It is important to note that Sun Ra's artistic intervention coincides with the space race between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. As Paul Youngquist observes, "[a]s a response to a world preoccupied with the space race and oblivious to racial injustice, Sun Ra's music announces not merely a demand for a better world but a program for building one" (Youngquist 2). Since aliens or extraterrestrials are associated with outer space, Sun Ra transforms this alien motif in a bid to teleport listeners of his music to a space and a time different from the contemporary chronotope from which a non-segregationist and just world can be imagined. In "Space Is the Place", a movie that traverses space and time, and incorporates alien visions, Sun Ra leads the viewer "to a point in time after the end of their world – and therefore after the movie they are watching, forcing them to reflect on life from a posthumous, or maybe posthuman, perspective" (Youngquist 211). In so doing, blackness, rather than being a crippling identity, becomes a transformative effect of the entanglement between humans and aliens and a way of inhabiting a more humane world.

In the case of Octavia Butler, what she does in *Kindred*, *Xenogenesis* and *Survivor*, for example, is to create an alternative community not burdened by race, gender and the nation. Benjamin Robertson has argued that history cannot be separated from the bodies that experience it. Thus, "the flesh interacts with the world around it by expressing itself through a complex series of modalities that includes nation, sexuality, species, community, race, and gender (among, no doubt, other things)" (Robertson 369). This reveals a connection between history (politics) and biology (the body). In Butler's works, there is the dialogic between the political and the visceral. In Butler's *Kindred,* for example, Dana's blackness and her ability to time travel open her flesh to stories and experiences of marginalization which are part of her American history. She experiences this history and its attendant political power/discrimination not in an abstracted manner but rather, as an embodied experience. One of her two birthdays that the novel records is July 4, 1976 – that this

coincides with the bicentennial of the mythical birthday of the United States reveals Butler's attempt "to underscore the importance of the relationship between personal and national history, in particular the relationship between the individual black body and a nation in the midst of celebrating the obfuscation of that body" (Robertson 371). In one of Dana's time travels, she experiences the beating of a slave who was found outside of his master's plantation: "I could literally smell his sweat, hear every ragged breath, every cry, every cut of the whip. I could see his body jerking, convulsing, straining against the rope as his screaming went on and on. My stomach heaved, and I had to force myself to stay where I was and keep quiet" (Butler 36). Dana's embodied experience of American plantation slavery as opposed to her husband's reading of the same history in texts, shows Butler moving away from thinking that America's history and politics are located outside of the body. Therefore, "In Butler's writing, science fiction cannot be considered apart from American history" (Robertson 364). Butler's *Xenogenesis* series poses the question of the human in ways that challenge enlightenment ideas of the human and gestures towards a new conception of humanity. In the human-Oankali fusion that occurs, a different form of the human emerges – one that is intricately connected to other forms of existence. In *Xenogenesis*, the post-apocalyptic and posthuman world brings about harmony among a genetically diverse population. This sci-fi nightmare and alien abduction can be likened, as Ytasha Womack has argued, to racism experienced by blacks and the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Womack 32). In the alternative communities Butler creates, "Even when they do not include extraterrestrials, the communities she creates are always hybrid, composed of individuals and families who share oddities across the range of more conventional phenotypic differences: African, European, Asian" (Kilgore and Samantrai 355).

While it is true that Afrofuturism holds the potential for galvanizing a black internationalism which attempts to articulate discursive cultural practices out of difference among several black populations, several authors like Nnedi Okorafor have argued that its African-American centric framing makes the presence of Africa ornamental aesthetically and thematically. This has led to calls for not merely a regional Afrofuturism on the continent, but an African-centered speculative fiction/science fiction genre. This led to the Nigerian-American, Nnedi Okorafor, coining the term, "Africanfuturism" in 2019.

Africanfuturism

Okorafor's neological gesture in her coining of the term, "Africanfuturism", is an attempt to break away from Afrofuturism as she is convinced that her works are wrongly read as Afrofuturist. For Okorafor:

> 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, mythology and point-of-view as it then branches into the Black Diaspora, and it does not privilege or center the West ("Africanfuturism Defined").

In her coining of the term, "Africanfuturism", Okorafor sought to foreground and blend African mythologies, cultures and cosmologies in their interaction with technology in a bid to imagine a form of black humanity and politics that is similar to Afrofuturism in its insistence on black potentials, creativity, contradictions and relationality, but different from Afrofuturism in its rootedness in African cultures and cosmologies from where it branches off to the black diaspora. Despite the points of convergence between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, by foregrounding African mythologies and cosmologies, Africanfuturism can be regarded as a continuation of earlier forms of genres of the fantastic and the surrealist. As Suzanne Césaire points out, the goal of surrealism is the systematic exploration and expression of what the human mind has come to regard as forbidden or an impassable barrier in thought and representation (Césaire 34-38). Surrealism thus, reveals an important function of the imagination, as Paul Ricoeur argues. For Ricoeur, just as metaphorical meanings emerge out of the movement beyond the constraints of the common/lexical values of words, so also the imagination is the ability to produce new kinds of assimilation not above conceptual differences but rather in spite of, and through such differences (Ricoeur 148-49). This kind of transgressivity is evident in the works of Amos Tutuola, such as *The Palmwine Drinkard*. The world of *The Palmwine Drinkard* is an undifferentiated ecosystem of interaction between not only the living and the dead, but also between humans and other forms of existence. As Emmanuel Obiechina has argued, Tutuola blends the folktale with realism to reveal a world where nature is not only humanized but also, the human is *a* genus of existence among other genera (Obiechina 93). V.Y. Mudimbe would agree with Okorafor's foregrounding

of African mythology and cosmologies in Africanfuturism. For Mudimbe, myths, fables and parables reveal regional engagements with, and attempts at manipulating, the contradictions of human life in their iterations in local histories (Mudimbe xviii). This is in consonance with metaphysical thinking in Africa where in the bid to come to terms with their existential realities, Africans have developed explanatory models that may appear to be at variance with what is today known as science. Thus, although a new term, Africanfuturism has antecedents in the African literary imaginary.

Nnedi Okorafor is a Nigerian-American writer of fantasy and science fiction. She has written both children and adult fiction which includes *Who Fears Death, The Book of Phoenix*, *Chicken in the Kitchen*, *Zahrah the Windseeker* and *The Shadow Speaker*. What characterizes her oeuvre is the blend of African mythologies and cultures with technology in the creation of future worlds. In her *Binti* series, the Africa-centred utopia envisioned is not a simplistically unified world of humans and non-humans. Okorafor challenges a narrow apprehension of place-based authenticity in favour of an intersected and internally diverse sense of the human. In the creation of the characters, Okorafor combines several African languages and cultures to form a beautifully crafted harmony, hence, Binti is a "master harmonizer" who is rooted in the African soil from which she branches as far as a different planet, such as Oomza University. Binti's journeys would lead her to realize that authenticity is not place-based and that her humanity is intricately entangled with not only other ethnic groups (like the Enyi Zinariya), but also with other forms of existence (such as the Meduse and Third Fish). In *Lagoon*, Okorafor draws on Nigerian myths and stories of benign oceanic creatures like Mami Wata to demonstrate the presence of interstellar creatures in the African imaginary. The arrival of extraterrestrials in Lagos sends the city into a creative chaos that leads not only to the rejuvenation of Lagos' aquatic life, but also to the re-negotiation of the politics of the city. In consonance with her Africanfuturism credo, the default of the story is Lagos, from where the story branches out to embrace Accra and Chicago. The foregrounding of Lagos is also a gesture that inserts the city into contemporary urban theory with Lagos as a site of possibilities, fluid and permeable forms of identity, an affective space, a site of the aesthetics of the superfluous and as a space of nightmares and the hauntological.

Although the following chapters will deeply examine what constitutes Okorafor's Africanfuturism, it is important at this point to briefly sketch the contours of Africanfuturism and how it relates to science fiction, particularly in African literature. In Okorafor's works (particularly the two works that I focus on in this research), there is the presence of what Harry Garuba terms the "animist unconscious". For Garuba, the mode of thought which characterizes animist cultures is the awareness that:

> objects are the physical and material manifestations of the gods and spirits. Instead of erecting graven images to symbolize the spiritual being, animist thought spiritualizes the object world, nature and its objects are endowed with a spiritual life both simultaneous and coterminous with their natural properties. The objects thus acquire a social and spiritual meaning within the culture far in excess of their natural properties and their use value (Garuba 267)

This enchantment of the world allows for a prepossessing of the future, the creation of a narrative universe characterized by transgressions and transpositions in a way that disturbs a linear apprehension of time (Garuba 271). This animist unconscious is present in both *Binti* and *Lagoon* as Okorafor employs speculative narrative strategies that transcend the idea of the "specifically human", while revealing a humanity in constant creation and as such, one that must be thought of in the future tense.

One of the tenets of Okorafor's Africanfuturism is the centering of African sites and sights. As my discussion of *Lagoon* will especially emphasize, the default of the story is Lagos, from where the story branches out to embrace Accra and Chicago. This foregrounding of Lagos is a gesture that inserts the city into global relations and contemporary urban theory with Lagos as a site of possibilities, fluid and permeable forms of identity, an affective space, a site of the aesthetics of the superfluous and as a space of nightmares and the hauntological. Thus, Okorafor's science fiction is one that has roots in local African (Nigerian) styles. In doing so, Okorafor not only inscribes black African women into science fiction, but also, realizes the complex articulations of the magical-technological, amphibian-human entanglements as well as the problematic of the human-citizen.

Africanfuturism articulates the idea of the human in constant creation and relation with other forms of existence. This idea of the human is different from that of the enlightenment autonomous

individual. The idea of the human that Okorafor envisions reflects the Southern African concept of *Ubuntu* – it is an understanding of the human in relation to other humans, nature as well as other forms of existence. In this apprehension of the human-in-relation, the common content of humanity is thus, vulnerability – the body that is exposed to suffering and degeneration as well as the body whose existence is constantly threatened by other existences and is thus, constantly striving for equilibrium. Therefore, to live is to accept vulnerability – "to live is always to live exposed, including to death" (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 176). Therefore, the form of the human to come that Okorafor envisions is one that is (sometimes, defenselessly) exposed to other existences and the relation that arises is one of care. Becoming-human-in-the-world would therefore not be a question of race, ethnicity, birth or origin. It would be a matter of journeying, movement and transfiguration. The condition of humanity is thus, that of the status of the passerby or the stranger. There is a two-fold relation with the passerby or stranger – solidarity and detachment – but never of indifference. This relationship, however, is not one of appropriation, hence, the different characters can also be detached. As a stranger or passerby, different individuals come to know that "it is only by moving away from a place that one is better able to name and inhabit it" (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 188).

In Africanfuturism's analogical mode of representation – the representation of a world that is presently unverifiable – the genre is sensitive to the socioeconomic issues in which many postcolonial literary texts are interested. For example, the event of the alien arrival in *Lagoon* signals a shift from Nigeria's petroculture which renders her waters uninhabitable for oceanic creatures, "to a utopian politics of the possible, an intricate imagination of what a postpetroleum Nigeria might look like" (Jue 175). In *Binti*, Okorafor displaces ideas of authenticity that are attached to place, ethnicity or gender. Outer space becomes a site that allows for the possibility of imagining individual authenticity in relation to the nation-state burdened by ethnic conflict, patriarchy and neoliberalism. Therefore, in Okorafor's resuscitation of animism, coupled with anthropo-machinic intellection, the question of the human is posed in planetary terms – how do we inhabit and equitably share the planet? Therefore, if humanity is in constant creation and if to be human is to be in relation with other forms of existence, then this kind of humanism that is inspired by African cosmologies is significant in our current global situation that is characterized by various regimes of separation, a rejuvenation of mythologies and mass morality as evidenced in the weaponization of identity and difference, as well as in the "planetarization of apartheid" (as

evident in camps for "illegal" migrants, detention centers, refugee towns, migrant integration towns, Islamophobia, Afrophobia, xenophobia, vaccine nationalism, etc.).

Like other genres of African literature concerned about Africa's place in the world, Africanfuturism locates African science fiction in relation to postcoloniality, neoliberalism and globalization. As Matthew Eatough posits, "if the fantastic provided a vehicle through which earlier writers were able to visualize the contradictions of structural adjustment, then the turn to science fiction entails an opening up of this fantastic – and the structural contradictions that go with it – onto the future" (Eatough 248). In both works that I discuss, the posthuman entanglement between human and non-human individuals allows for an epistemological awakening and the recognition of "that which is alien, unknowable, or unlocatable to the ideology of the contemporary world-system" (O'Connell 309). It is to these possibilities that I now turn in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: Beyond the Specifically Human

As I mentioned in chapter one, a significant result of the European enlightenment was not only the elevation of the human over animals and machines, but also the elevation of certain genres of humans above others. This attitude has not been confined to the epistemological plane but has been implemented in the political sphere, as the Black intellectual tradition makes visible. In this chapter, I discuss how *Binti* and *Lagoon* demonstrate the move beyond the enlightenment apprehension of the "specifically human". In doing so, I show how in societies characterized by the necropolitical, the planetary entanglement of humans, animals, spirits and extraterrestrials lead to a posthuman sensibility that destabilizes the enlightenment apprehension of human autonomy, sovereignty and purity – notions that have led to the subjecting of life to death.

In the imperial idea of sovereignty, the sovereign – the imperial nation or administration – is that which exercises complete freedom and control (ideas which are heavily masculine in their enunciations). Such powers extend to the tangible and the visceral in determining bodies worth living and those that can be put to death. Even in the often-celebrated idea of democracy:

> the ultimate expression of sovereignty is the production of general norms by a body (the demos) comprising free and equal individuals. These individuals are posited as full subjects capable of self-understanding, self-consciousness, and self-representation. Politics, therefore, is doubly defined as a project of autonomy and as the reaching of agreement within a collective through communication and recognition (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 67).

In this schema, the exercise of reason leads to the exercise of freedom, which thus constitutes individual autonomy (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 67). If in the imperial era, sovereignty rested on a particular individual, it is argued that in democratic societies, sovereignty lies in rational, free and autonomous subjects who together, and equally, constitute society. Therefore, sovereignty "is about society's capacity for self-creation with recourse to institutions inspired by specific social and imaginary significations" (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 68).

If sovereignty involves (whether by an imperial fiat, democratic laws or institutions) "the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 80), then there is a constant construction of the notion of an "other" who is at the same time, an enemy (of reason, of freedom and/or of the state). In this way, politics becomes

Necropolitics – various forms of subjecting life to the power of death by rendering certain bodies as disposable (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 92). Achille Mbembe's notion of Necropolitics is crucial in accounting for the regime of violence that regulated modernity's articulations of subjecthood and sovereignty to which the body of the slave is its shadow. Beginning from slavery in its different iterations, the black life is the "other"; an embodiment of this kind of "death-in-life":

> An unequal relationship is established along with the inequality of power over life. This power over the life of another takes the form of commerce: a person's humanity is dissolved to the point that the slave's life can be said to be possessed by the master. Because the slave's life is like a "thing", possessed by another person, slave existence appears as the perfect figure of a shadow (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 75).

Necropolitics is not limited to plantation slavery. It is also at the heart of the attitudes of separation and hostility directed at an "enemy" in our contemporary epoch. In this regime of separation, not only is capital deployed, but with it, technology and different forms of militarism (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 42). The result of this, as we see in different parts of the earth, is an anxiety of annihilation – the anxiety to get rid of bodies that are considered excess. Therefore, in the discussion of *Binti* and *Lagoon* below, the notion of Necropolitics will be important in problematizing the politics of disposability that characterize the chronotopes in both novels in a bid to move beyond the "specifically human" of the enlightenment with its attendant notion of sovereignty.

Given the problematic nature of the enlightenment ideas of the human and sovereignty, a hermeneutic that seeks to move beyond the pitfalls of the "specifically human" is posthumanism. The free, rational and autonomous subject (with its racist, sexist and heteronormative accent) is one that is "achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether" (Wolfe xv). In the enlightenment humanist discourse, embodiment is perceived as inferior to the mental and the rational. The fantasies of autonomy, rationality and freedom are all articulated in the grammar of disembodiment – the mind, capable of self-representation and distinct from animals, is what distinguishes and elevates humans from animals. As Cary Wolfe argues, posthumanism is a discursive term in which the human is only one of many other species and as such has no inherent right over animals, for example. In this sense, the "post" in

posthumanism is not merely a temporal marker. This is because posthumanism acknowledges the embodiment and embeddedness of the human animal in its biological world – a fact that precedes the enlightenment articulation of humanism. But posthumanism also names a specific historical moment in the decentering of the human. The imbrication of the human "in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points towards the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon" (Wolfe xv-xvi). In this entanglement between the human and animals and machines, the human body as well as the environment is both real and virtual. As I mentioned in chapter one in reference to Maturana and Varela, in perception, for example, the body constructs and differentiates the world (Maturana and Varela 13). Such a world is thus, virtual or prosthetic. The body is immersed in this prosthetic/virtual world. Therefore, there can be no talk of purity because all "we know (scientifically, theoretically) and say (linguistically or in other forms of semiotic notation) about the body takes place within some contingent, radically nonnatural (that is, constructed and technical) schema of knowledge. The language (or meaning, more strictly speaking) that describes is of a different phenomenal order from that which is described" (Wolfe xxv). A fundamental hallmark of the prostheticity/virtuality of the human is language.

In a poststructuralist understanding, language is a system of signs, where the signs are conventional and take their specific form not from what they mean but from the difference from other signs. Jacques Derrida takes this differential nature of the sign seriously. For Derrida, since meaning is a product of difference (the fact that "cat" is not "mat" or "dog"), it follows that meaning is always contaminated. This means that every word is hollowed out; contains "traces" of other words (Derrida 141). So, meaning in language is not only arrived at by the difference of a word (the sign) from other words, but also by the continuous deferral – via the play of traces – such that a word takes its meaning from other words that preceded it and from other words that will follow in the future. This continuous deferral of meaning not only reveals the entanglement of a word with other words, but also the entanglement of the human with other forms of existence. In the idiom of posthumanism, to think of the human is to acknowledge that the human is fundamentally prosthetic, a species "that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms

that are radically 'not-human' and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is" (Wolfe xxv). Therefore, to be human is to be already inextricably entangled with other forms of existence.

My employment of posthumanism as a discursive term is not merely to read Okorafor's representation of human entanglements with other non-human forms of existence as well as human entanglements with technology. Rather, as I demonstrate below, it is also to show how both *Binti* and *Lagoon* engender a different practice of thinking and reading (and by extension, living) in the face of the challenges of the thematic of enlightenment humanism. As the following discussion makes clear, if different societies are characterized by Necropolitics, then, an Africanfuturist sensibility is one that pursues the question of planetary habitability (given the entanglement of the human with animals and machines) in a way that does not privilege or prioritize the human over non-human forms of existence.

The Master Harmonizer: *Binti*

In Okorafor's *Binti* series (comprising Binti: Home, Binti: The Night Masquerade and Binti: Sacred Fire), the Africa-centred utopia envisioned is not a simplistically unified world of humans and non-humans. Okorafor's narrative strategies in *Binti* works against the purist apprehension of what it means to be human. Rather, what Okorafor presents is the degrees of proximity and distance that engender a planetary entanglement between humans and non-human species. The narrative moves and entangles different spaces and places – terrestrial habitation, outer space, the desert, within bodies of aquatic individuals. The narrative time also complicates the chronological understanding of time where events and persons move from a point of origin towards a telos. In *Binti*, there is an entanglement of the past, present and the future. In consonance with her Africanfuturist credo, *Binti* oscillates between different locations and planets while remaining rooted on the African soil. For example, the Himba people and culture recalls the Himba of Namibia; the Khoush are Arabs, the name of the Meduse that becomes a friend of Binti is Okwu – which means "word" in Igbo; the Enyi Zinariya (the old Africans) is a combination of Igbo and Hausa words – "Enyi" is the Igbo for friend and "Zinariya" is the Hausa word for gold. In *Binti*, Okorafor tells the story of a young girl, Binti, who makes an unprecedented journey of leaving her home to go study in another planet. In the course of her journey, she discovers and interacts with both human and non-human species. These interactions unearth different degrees of violence

arising out of contestations over which life is more important than the other. Binti eventually returns home but realizes that she must inhabit her home differently as a result of her journey.

The story begins on a note of anxiety. Sixteen-year-old Binti is about to depart not just her home, but also the planet:

> Now the weight of my entire life was pressing on my shoulders. 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. By the time they all realized what I'd done and where I was going, I'd have left the planet […] I was going to be a pariah (Okorafor, *Binti* 1)

Although part of Binti's anxiety is the fact that she had never been outside her city, Okorafor goes on to foreground the imagined security of Binti's home – the Root. The Root has sheltered six generations of Binti's forebears: "It was the oldest house in my village, maybe the oldest in the city. It was made of stone and concrete, cool in the night, hot in the day. And it was patched with solar planes and covered with bioluminescent plants that liked to stop glowing just before sunrise" (Okorafor, *Binti* 3). It is this security of the Root that has led to Binti's Himba people remaining in their ancestral place: "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" (Okorafor, *Binti* 3). Binti's journeys will lead her to realize that authenticity is not place-based – for example, she discovers that she can make *Otjize* far away on another planet. Binti's fixation to the Root and her anxieties about leaving it demonstrate a humanist apprehension of what it means to be human. For Binti and the Himba, to be human is to be monolithically connected to the Root. In an inventive gesture, Okorafor sets the Root as an additional character in the narrative in a way that it becomes a placeholder for the authentically human, with *Otjize* as its symbolic form. In this humanist apprehension, those outside the Root are the "other" of the human, hence, Binti's curiosity and suspicion of others such as the Meduse and the Khoush. The rest of the story mirrors a coming-of-age narrative and Binti narrates a great part of the story from a first-person perspective. In fact, Binti's coming-of-age is one in which she would fully realize what it means to be a "master harmonizer", where harmony is the realization of planetary entanglement (Okorafor, *Binti* 347).

In her several journeys, Binti must move beyond binaries. One strategy that Okorafor employs here is the reality of juju. In agreement with Joshua Yu Burnett, the chronotope in *Binti* is one "where juju is reality, reality is shifting, and the very basis of Western [enlightenment] rationalism has been undermined" (Burnett 134). Herein lies Okorafor's counterhegemonic strategy: if enlightenment rationality elevated science over African spiritualities like juju, the prominence of juju in *Binti* as an epistemological and technical tool functions as a legitimate form of world building. In doing so, hegemonic narratives that stymie African histories and futures are challenged. For example, it is the "god stone" or *edan* that Binti discovers in the desert that not only saves her from being killed en route Oomza Uni, but also serves as a communicative technology between Binti and the Meduse: "I think that's why this *edan* works for me! I found it. In the desert. A wild woman there once told me that it is a piece of old old technology; she called it a 'god stone'. I didn't believe her then, but I do now. I've had it for eight years, but it only worked for *me* now" (Okorafor, *Binti* 37). The *edan* is thus, a posthumanist strategy – speaking to the prosthetic nature of Africans (their imbrication with technology) as well as gesturing towards the entanglement of humans with non-human species.

A key challenge that confronts Binti in her journeys and their resultant transformations is the necropolitical. One instance of this is the subjugation of the Meduse by the Khoush: "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 war, we were just in the way" (Okorafor, *Binti* 243). Although the Meduse are a non-human species (jelly fish-like), the Khoush continue to exercise the power to kill against the Meduse. In a retaliatory attack, the Meduse seize the spaceship (Third Fish) that conveys Binti and other Khoush students to Oomza Uni:

> Everyone in the dining hall was dead. At least one hundred people. I had a feeling everyone on the ship was dead. The Meduse had burst into the hall and begun committing *moojh-ha ki-bira* before anyone knew what was happening. That's what the Khoush call it. We'd all been taught this Meduse form of killing in history class. The Khoush built the lessons into history, literature, and culture classes across several regions. Even my people were required to learn about it, despite the fact that it wasn't our fight (emphasis in original) (Okorafor, *Binti* 12)

The Khoush's dominance over the Meduse and the Himba is a demonstration of their imagined sovereignty; one that constitutes the necropolitical. It is important to note that although the necropolitical involves the construction of an "other" that is deemed the enemy, there is the need to be as close to the other as possible so as to kill the other. As Mbembe puts it, "To kill, one must get as close as possible to the body of the enemy. To detonate the bomb necessitates resolving the question of distance through the work of proximity and concealment" (*Necropolitics* 89). In this necropolitical situation, the logic of survival is such that "the horror experienced upon seeing death turns into the satisfaction that the dead person is another" (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 88). Here, violence is legitimated to the extent that it is meted out on the other. It is on this spaceship that Binti experiences othering at an intimate level. The Meduse see her as an "evil thing" (Okorafor, *Binti* 23). They make several attempts to appropriate and kill her. Violence, thus, becomes the nomos of the earth. However, in the inter-dependence between Okwu (one of the Meduse) and Binti, Okorafor gestures towards a kind of entanglement that displaces the necropolitical apprehension of sovereignty. Rather than anthropomorphize the Meduse, Okorafor saturates the narrative with jellyfish-like characteristics in her description of Okwu. Okorafor's posthuman strategy here is one that does not appropriate non-human individuals. Binti's *otjize* cures Okwu and his compatriots; the *edan* prevents the Meduse from attacking Binti. By the time Binti and the Meduse arrive at Oomza Uni, Binti has one of the tentacles of the Meduse on her hair. It is Binti's *okuoko* (tentacle) that enables her to communicate easily with the Meduse (demonstrating the prosthetic nature of language as well as a non-privileging of the human language as the narrative does not specify what actual language Binti and Okwu use in their communication) and stands as a sign that she is an ambassador of the Meduse when they arrive at Oomza Uni: "I hadn't told my family about my hair not being hair anymore, that it was now a series of alien tentacles resulting from the Meduse genetics being introduced to mine; that they had sensation and did other things I was still coming to understand. I could hide my *okuoko* with *otjize*, especially when I spoke with my family through my astrolabe where they couldn't see how my *okuoko* sometimes moved on their own" (Okorafor, *Binti* 128). That Binti still thinks of her *okuoko* in alien terms at this point of the narrative signals her hesitation in accepting her entanglement with non-human species: "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,

Binti 129). Although initiated in a necropolitical situation, Okorafor demonstrates how a posthumanist sensibility can emerge as in the Himba-Meduse entanglement of Binti.

Okorafor is most explicit about the kind of planetary entanglement that she envisions in the representation of Oomza Uni: "Just from standing in line and looking around, I saw people of many shapes, sizes, organisms, wavelengths, and tribes here. I saw no humans like me, though. And if I *had* seen a fellow Himba, it was doubtful that I'd see any with Meduse tentacles instead of hair. Being in this place of diversity and movement was overwhelming, but I felt at home, too" (Okorafor, *Binti* 117). The narrative uses a great deal of sensory details in order for Oomza Uni not just be an idea but also a "reality" for the reader. The multi-species and multi-ethnic population at Oomza Uni suggest the possibilities of a counterhegemonic, anti-enlightenment imaginary. The fact that Oomza Uni is on a different planet presents emancipatory possibilities (a reminder of Sun Ra's music). As Magali Armillas-Tiseyra puts it, "Space is still the place of speculative possibility: both a refuge from and means for thinking beyond the current global order" (276). However, Okorafor's is not a naïve optimism. Tribal hatred is present at Oomza Uni as evident in the animosity between Okwu and his Khoush professor (Okorafor, *Binti* 105). Binti realizes that Oomza Uni is not perfect: "It was the first time I'd received treatment similar to the way my people were treated on Earth by the Khoush. In a way, this set me at ease. People were people, everywhere. These professors were just like anyone else" (Okorafor, *Binti* 46). The necropolitical appears to have found its way to Oomza Uni in the form of academic research. The reason for the Meduse invasion of Oomza Uni was to retrieve the stinger of the Meduse chief. Upon retrieval, Binti observes: "I'll never forget the way the chief's body went from blue to clear the moment the stinger became a part of it again. Only a blue line remained at the point of demarcation where it had reattached – a scar that would always remind it of what human beings of Oomza Uni had done to it for the sake of research and academics" (Okorafor, *Binti* 52). Thus, in her representation of both the necropolitical and the posthumanist characters of Oomza Uni, Okorafor suggests that subjugation and oppression cannot be eliminated merely by a multi-species and multi-ethnic conglomeration – planetary entanglement must be accompanied by planetary relationality (a point I focus on in chapter three).

When Binti returns home to perform the customary ritual that would make her respectable in her Himba community, she is taken by her grandmother to the desert where she encounters the Enyi

Zinariya. “The Enyi Zinariya are old old Africans”, her grandmother tells her (Okorafor, *Binti* 182). She learns that her father is one of the Enyi Zinariya; a fact he had concealed from Binti and her siblings. This is because the Enyi Zinariya are seen as primitive and backward; a prejudice from which Binti finds difficult to rid herself (Okorafor, *Binti* 228). During her time with the Enyi Zinariya in the desert, she learns the secrets of mathematical meditation; a skill that would enable her to attain her status as master harmonizer (Okorafor, *Binti* 188-204). Binti’s initiation in the desert is an awakening of that which she already was. At the end of her time in the desert, Okorafor introduces another layer to Binti’s entanglement: “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. What was home? Where was home?” (Okorafor, *Binti* 204). In this Himba-Meduse-Enyi Zinariya entanglement, there is a “*prepossessing [of] the future*, as it were, by laying claim to what in the present is yet to be invented. It is on account of this ability to prepossess the future that continual re-enchantment becomes possible” (Garuba 271). This animist worldview demonstrates a posthumanist sensibility – the acknowledgment of the embodiment (which includes animal characteristics) of the human. In Binti’s questions – “What was home? Where was home?” – Okorafor destabilizes place-based notions of authenticity.

A final form of entanglement is that of Binti and New Fish, the child of Third Fish (the spaceship that had taken Binti to Oomza Uni for the first time). It is the body of New Fish that brings Binti back to life after the violent clash of the Meduse and the Khoush upon Binti’s arrival at what had been her home (I will return to this in detail in chapter three). Binti would come to realize that she is now inseparably part of New Fish: “Your body is partially me, she said. That’s how the deep Miri brought you back. And in turn, I am partially you” (Okorafor, *Binti* 325). Her blended identity goes as far as her DNA (Okorafor, *Binti* 347). At the end of the narrative, she asserts her new name and identity: “My name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib” (Okorafor, *Binti* 331). Binti becomes a multilingual and multi-species nomad whose identity constitutes an inventory of traces and as such she can communicate across geographical and species boundaries. It is important to note that the emphasis for Okorafor is not a mere inclusion, but relationality – a planetary relationality (again, the focus of the next chapter).

As I have shown so far, Binti’s coming-of-age, that is, the awakening in her of her humanity comes about through her journeys. As I mentioned in chapter one, Okorafor here suggests that being

human is a question of journeys and their attendant transfigurations. The condition of the human, therefore, is that of the passerby. Binti's journeys and transfigurations demonstrate that "it is only by moving away from a place that one is better able to name and inhabit it" (Mbembe, *Necropolitics* 188).

Offshore Humanism: *Lagoon*

In *Lagoon*, Okorafor crafts a narrative that weaves together the lives of sea creatures, extraterrestrials, humans, spirits and plants. *Lagoon* tells the story of extraterrestrials arriving in Lagos. It is an arrival that leads to chaos; a chaos that reveals the different social, economic and religious assumptions of life in the city. The presence of the extraterrestrials leads to a gradual reimagination of the politics of the city, one grounded in a different apprehension of what it means to be human in the face of entanglement of humans and non-human species. In telling the story, Okorafor employs a plurivocal perspective that moves from humans to animals and even mythical creatures of Nigerian folktale. Such a plurivocal narrative strategy is counter-hegemonic; moving away from a narrative structure that is considered correct. As Gibson Ncube notes:

> The narrative technique shapeshifts, as it were, moving from one mode to another and from one point of view to another. The multiplicity of characters, as well, is notable: the novel bubbles over with characters from diverse species, genders, classes, religions, and sexual identities. In a way, the storytelling extends well beyond what is comfortable, familiar, and discernible as a cohesive and unified narrative (76).

The narrative opens with the arrival of the swordfish in the crude oil-polluted waters of Lagos: "She slices through the water, imagining herself a deadly beam of black light. The current parts against her sleek, smooth skin. If any fish gets in her way, she will spear it and keep right on going. She is on a mission. She is angry. She will succeed, and then they will leave for good" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 3). The swordfish is angry with Nigeria's petro-culture that has led to the pollution of its aquatic environments. But Okorafor does more with the arrival of the swordfish. This arrival sets the stage for the subsequent arrival and entanglement of humans and extraterrestrials on the ocean. It is an entanglement that leads to a different apprehension of what it means to be human; what Paul Gilroy terms "offshore humanism" where "salty saturation communicates something of the way that being human is transformed when the solidity of territory is left behind. We are afforded

a glimpse of vulnerable, offshore humanity that might, in turn, yield an *offshore* humanism" (Gilroy 18). Thus, it is in the now-purified waters of Lagos—one "so clean that a cup of its salty-sweet goodness will heal the worst human illnesses and cause a hundred more illnesses not yet known to humankind" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 6)—that a planetary entanglement begins (an entanglement that includes animals, plants, extraterrestrials, and spirits). As Melody Jue points out, this "focus on the ocean coincides with a broad, interdisciplinary turn to the ocean as a site for rethinking critical methodologies and epistemological frameworks, expanding environmental imaginaries dominated by a focus on green forests and primarily terrestrial spaces" (176). The ocean becomes a space of survival and a space for imagining a future evolution. This is similar, as Jue points out, to a long genealogy of Afrofuturist speculations (Jue 177). But as *Lagoon* makes clear, Okorafor insists on her Africanfuturist credo by drawing on African myths and stories of oceanic creatures like Mami Wata to demonstrate how "Nigeria has always already been interstellar through its archive of myths and stories […] of interconnection with the stars" (Jue 184).

Since *Lagoon* takes place in Lagos, Okorafor inserts large chunks of untranslated Pidgin English conversations (she provides a Pidgin English glossary at the end of the novel). In consonance with her Africanfuturism credo, the default of the story is Lagos, from where the story branches out to embrace Accra and Chicago. The foregrounding of Lagos is also a gesture that inserts the city into global relations and contemporary urban theory with Lagos as a site of possibilities, fluid and permeable forms of identity, an affective space, a site of the aesthetics of the superfluous and as a space of nightmares and the hauntological. In doing so, Okorafor not only inscribes black African women into science fiction, but also, realizes the complex articulations of the magical-technological, amphibian-human entanglements as well as the problematic of the human-citizen.

The meeting of Adaora, Agu and Anthony occurs at the Lagos Bar Beach. This leisure site "was a perfect sample of Nigerian society. It was a place of mixing. The ocean mixed with the land, and the wealthy mixed with the poor" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 7). Okorafor introduces another layer of mixing at Bar Beach – a mixing with the extraterrestrials who have arrived in Lagos. Adaora is a marine biologist who is married to Chris, a rich businessman. What brings her to Bar Beach on the night of the entanglement is her fight with her husband in which she overpowered him. For Chris,

this meant that Adaora was a witch, and this sets Chris on the path of desiring a cure from Father Oke – the Christian Pentecostal pastor (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 34-36). Chris' desire to have Adaora under his control is an instance of the domestication of the necropolitical that characterize the Lagos of *Lagoon.* Adaora's overpowering of Chris stems from the apparently non-human features with which she was born: "I was born with webbed feet and hands […] And my legs were joined together by flesh" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 257). It is these features that make it possible for Adaora to breathe in water when the extraterrestrials "abduct" her (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 12). The second character entangled with the extraterrestrials is Agu, a Nigerian soldier. Like Adaora, Agu comes to Bar Beach because he is in a crisis. He had stood in defense of a girl who was going to be raped by his fellow soldiers (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 26). In addition, Agu has supernatural powers which bestow extraordinary strength, especially in the defense of vulnerable persons (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 173-76). Anthony, the Ghanaian musician, is the third in the trio who are "abducted" by the extraterrestrials. Anthony can hear and use the rhythm of the earth. As with Adaora and Agu, Anthony does so only in defense, as in the case when he defended his father's properties from his greedy uncles and aunts (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 164). It is interesting to note that the names of all three of them begin with the letter "A". What this may suggest is that the most basic (and in so doing, the most important) nature of the human is its imbrication with what are considered non-human characteristics. These characteristics enable their interaction with the extraterrestrials – the ultimate symbol of that which is non-human.

The ambassador of the extraterrestrials is Ayodele – a name given her by Adaora (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 16-18). Ayodele's appearance is telling: "By then it had become a naked dark-skinned African woman with long black braids" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 13). Ayodele looks like an African woman because, in consonance with Okorafor's Africanfuturism, the referent is always African. This will reoccur when other extraterrestrials populate the city of Lagos, dressed in traditional attires of different Nigerian ethnic groups (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 183). As Melody Jue notes: "Because *Lagoon* takes place in Africa rather than the Americas, it seems more plausible to see the aliens in *Lagoon* as benign and in the tradition of Mami Wata, rather than of abductors akin to European slave traders" (Jue 179). Okorafor also deploys Nigerian oceanic creatures like Mami Wata and Udide all through the narrative. This strategy not only situates the narrative firmly on the African mythological figures, but also serves to emphasize the entanglement of humans and spirits as a constituting factor in the creation and sustenance of the city. Ayodele's shape-shifting capacity is

offered by the extraterrestrials as a means of bringing about change for good in Lagos. In presenting Ayodele as a shape-shifter, Okorafor intends to shape-shift the Necropolitics of Nigeria. This is because "Ayodele's shapeshifting ability demands a questioning of the heteronormative status quo and imagines a future in which identities are liberated from the restrictions imposed by socially constructed ways of being" (Ncube 73). However, this very capacity inserts her into a Lagos characterized by the necropolitical.

Ayodele's body becomes the target of historical otherness and dehumanization that have plagued black women's bodies. As Nedine Moonsamy notes, Ayodele's "cyborg body is thus burdensome, turning her into something that is readily exploitable rather than empowered. It opens up the possibilities for violation by increasing rather than obviating the pre-existing violence that strips the black female body of its humanity" (Moonsamy 188). Moziz, an internet fraudster (known as 419 in Nigeria), sees in Ayodele's shape-shifting abilities, an opportunity to make money (particularly foreign currencies like the American dollar and the Euro – a gesture that exposes the preference of these foreign currencies to the Nigerian naira). The Pentecostal bishop, Father Oke, plans to use Ayodele to win more members to his church. For the Nigerian army, Ayodele constitutes a threat to "national security" and as such should be curtailed if not destroyed. It is important to note that Moziz, Father Oke and the soldiers are all men, concerned with appropriating and exploiting Ayodele in an attempt to exercise their sovereignty. This suggests why Okorafor "frames masculine violence itself as irrational, incurious, and reactionary, in contrast to a feminist practice of intimate objectivity that confronts aliens and the fantastic with curiosity, channeling magic to defend victims of patriarchal aggression" (Jue 181). Another manifestation of Necropolitics in the novel is the "soul-crushing" corruption of the Nigerian government that has led to loss of lives on most Nigerian motor ways due to their deplorable states. Employing an animist strategy, Okorafor uses the Bone Collector – a creature that feeds on the flesh of accident victims on the Lagos-Benin expressway – as a placeholder for the necropolitical situation in Nigeria: "First he would feel the vibrations, and then a vehicle would appear on the horizon. He'd scramble for the other side, wondering if it was finally time to be reborn. But he had always made it and gone on to experience the meaty bloody bounty of the new patch of forest" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 121). The necropolitical extends even to the domain of sexuality. The Black Nexus is "one of the only LGBT student organizations in Nigeria […] Though most of its members were out or semi-out, the group still only met secretly once a month, in the dead of night" (Okorafor, *Lagoon*

71). It is the presence of the extraterrestrials that allow the Black Nexus to come out in the open for the first time. If as Jenna Hanchey has noted, "Any desire that draws us beyond the boundaries of what the normative has sanctioned is queer" (121), therefore, both Ayodele's extraterrestrials and queer desires are "outside of the human realm of knowing" (Hanchey 123). Adaora, Agu, Anthony and Ayodele must confront the various necropolitical ways in which life is subjected to death in Lagos.

In Ayodele's first message to Nigerians which every Nigerian was able to watch, she announces that the extraterrestrials are "change". She announces that the extraterrestrials are not there to "rule, colonize, conquer, or take. We just want a home" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 218). The extraterrestrials' desire for a home can be read as a longing for humans to accept their posthuman nature; that which enlightenment humanism has classified as non-human but nevertheless forms an intrinsic part of what it means to be human. This is evident in the meaning of "Ayodele" – a Yoruba name which means "joy comes home". Ayodele's desire for a home contests enlightenment notions of purity as that which the human seeks to deny becomes part of the human. In her quest for a home, Ayodele experiences from humans varied responses. She notes: "In less than twenty-four hours, I have seen love, hate, greed, ambition, and obsession among you […] I have seen compassion, hope, sadness, insecurity, art, intelligence, ingenuity, corruption, curiosity, and violence. This is life. We love life" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 112). Ayodele will eventually experience violence as she is shot by one of the soldiers deployed to arrest her (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 134-42). This leads her to temporarily change into a monkey because she did not want to be a human being any longer (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 152). For Ayodele, all of the violence emerges because "Human beings have a hard time relating to that which does not resemble them. It's your greatest flaw" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 67). However, the rest of the narrative demonstrates how the arrival of the extraterrestrials and their entanglement with humans help humans realize that which is already "alien" in themselves – a gesture that leads to political and social transformations in Lagos (as I will discuss in detail in chapter three).

Therefore, like Binti whose journeys lead her to realize that authenticity is not place-based and that her humanity is intricately entangled with not only other ethnic groups (like the Enyi Zinariya), but also with other forms of existence (such as the Meduse and Third Fish), in *Lagoon*, the arrival and presence of Ayodele's extraterrestrials lead to an awakening of the entangled nature of what

it means to be human. Such an entanglement destabilizes the enlightenment apprehension of autonomy, sovereignty and purity. It is also an entanglement that leads to the beginnings of a different political configuration, to which I now turn in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Ethics of the Stranger

From the two preceding chapters, I have argued that a recognition of humans' entanglement with other non-human forms of existence, as evident in *Binti* and *Lagoon*, can facilitate a movement away from enlightenment notions of the human to a movement towards a humanism that is made to the measure of the world. In this chapter, I focus on the kind of relation that ensues from such a planetary entanglement as evident in *Binti* and *Lagoon*. I argue that the black political future that Okorafor offers is one characterized by different forms of vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration in a manner that ushers a relation of care, selflessness and a reconfiguration of space, sexuality and belonging – for fellow human subjects and non-human subjects.

As Edouard Glissant makes clear in *Poetics of Relation*, the arrival of African slaves in the "new world" set into motion a violent collision of different cultural roots. This collision out of African, European (Spanish and French) and Native American cultures would lead to an entangled rhizome of relation now known as creole culture. As Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Mohamed Khyar have argued, "Creoleness is the *interactional or transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history" (emphasis in original) (891). Creole culture is therefore, a relation of cultures; a relation that stems from an encounter with the Other; an Other that is not seen in terms of an atavistic identity (based on origins and territories), but rather as part of the multiplicity of differences that characterize any sense of unity. The source of this relation is in the different contacts and as such, it is "a product that in turn produces" (Glissant 160). Thus, creole culture is one of different genres of humanity-in-relation. If cultures offer the cosmogonic registers for thinking about what it means to be human (as Wynter has demonstrated and which I discuss in chapter one), what insights can be drawn from creole culture on the idea of the human?

An insight that can be drawn from creole culture is that to be human is not a question of origins or an autonomous thinking self. It is rather a matter of journeying and transfiguration. Such an apprehension ignores the question of a "pure stock". Here, the insights from Glissant's theorization of the All-World is indispensable. This involves a movement away from the two genres of Man that Wynter identifies. On this idea of the human-in-relation, the common content of humanity is vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration. As Mbembe puts it:

> But humanity as a whole delegates itself in the world and receives from the world confirmation of its own being as well as its fragility. And so the difference between the world of humans and the world of nonhumans is no longer an external one. In opposing itself to the world of nonhumans, humanity opposes itself. For, in the end, it is in the relationship that we maintain with the totality of the living world that the truth of who we are is made visible (180).

Glissant's idea of the All-World can be read as an attempt to carry out a kind of classification of human societies (foregrounding the Caribbean) without the epistemological/foundational certainties of anthropology, religion or biology. The All-World, at once a signifier of creole culture, is a discursive category in constant motion. In delineating the contours of the All-World, Glissant contrasts two kinds of identities: a root identity and a relation identity. A root identity claims foundation in a distant past, emphasizes filiation based on one's kind and claims legitimacy ensuing from a territory. A relation identity on the other hand, "is linked not to the creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures; […] does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps" (Glissant 144). In proposing a relation identity as an instance of the All-World, Glissant foregrounds identity as the capacity for variation. This relational identity evokes the southern African notion of Ubuntu which emphasizes an otherness-dependent subjectivity. As Michael Onyebuchi Eze points out: "The virtue of ubuntu is that we preserve the goodness and happiness of other persons because as they flourish, the gift of humanity they bear to us increases simultaneously. Ubuntu assimilates our differences as a resource for strength" (254).

If the Caribbean is an instance of the All-World, perhaps, it also offers an apprehension of the human to come, one that should be thought of in the future tense. This is because the idea of the All-World (like Ubuntu) is a utopia and as such requires constant creation. In the Caribbean, despite the interactional aggregate that make up creole culture, there are several confrontations and hierarchizations present:

> The present day Caribbean has forgotten about the commonly shared historical fact i.e. slavery, and they are mobilizing against the non-black people who have not shared the

> common colonial oppression. The Anglophone Caribbean has been facing a split between the brown few (elite) and the black many (masses), and this attitude is weakening the national identity. The ruling party, either African or non-African, has been often accused of ethnic cleansing (Dwivedi 14).

These sometimes-violent tensions within creole culture do not undercut the critique of the genres of humanity that Glissant offers. Rather, what these tensions reveal is the fact that any theorization/critique of the human must always be attentive to the workings of class, gender, sexuality, etc. If the ideas of Glissant are to be taken seriously what is needed is a continued creation of a politics of solidarity; one in which Africanfuturism can begin to offer the poetic and ideological directions. Glissant's All-World involves both the form of the human and politics of solidarity to come. Hence, it is one that is thought of in the future tense with concrete intellectual and political steps in the present. In this way, to think of the All-World is to adopt a posture that sees the present as proleptic, though unstable and tainted.

So far, I have presented Glissant's idea of the All-World as it pertains to the relation of different human cultures, with the Caribbean as an instance. If the central characteristic of the All-World is relation, then it is possible to extend this relation to include the relation of humans with all other non-human forms of existence (Glissant 27). On this score, the entanglement of humans and non-human individuals produces an identity whose defining characteristic is its capacity for variation. As Glissant underscores, it is not enough to have a thought of the other that emanates from the contact and entanglement. This is because "Thought of the other is the moral generosity disposing me to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not simple and straightforward, with only one truth – mine" (Glissant 154). In addition to a thought of the other, an "other of Thought" is required. If thought of the other leads to an acknowledgment of alterity, "the other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought, without renouncing its contribution. I change and I exchange" (Glissant 154). Hence, mere entanglement though necessary, is insufficient. The entanglement must lead to an epistemological/hermeneutical altering which in turn leads to a different political configuration. Here, politics refers to the ways societies are organized and the ensuing relationships. In this way, the All-World becomes a politics of relation among different human cultures as well as among human and non-human forms of existence. It will involve the organization of societies in a way

that relations of power, sexuality, gender, species and space, acknowledge and affirm the being and right to existence of every individual (human and non-human). What this understanding of the All-World produces is a poetics and politics of relation that does not aspire to a reduction of the other. It allows for the reconciliation of the hard lines inherent in politics: "Only by understanding that it is impossible to reduce anyone [human and non-human], no matter who, to a truth [they] would not have generated on [their] own. That is, within the opacity of [their] time and place" (Glissant 194). As I mentioned above, the (sometimes violent) tensions in creole culture point to the utopic nature of Glissant's idea of the All-World. Like other utopias, the All-World appears to be "nowhere" and at the same time, "everywhere". A crucial way to apprehend the All-World is via the idea of human perfectibility.

As expounded by British romantic poets like Percy Shelley, a change in mindset can bring about change in reality. Human thought and motivations are such that, with a rational and selfless attitude, human beings can imagine political and ethical configurations that foreground the common good of all in society. The very imagining of such an alternative configuration, is already the beginnings of the enactment of such an alternative. In the same vein, Glissant's imagining of the All-World, as well as Okorafor's imagining of alternative black political futures in *Binti* and *Lagoon*, point to a planetary relationality; one that comes into existence in the act of reading. As the following discussion demonstrates, both *Binti* and *Lagoon* present utopias similar to the All-World in their emphasis on a relationality between human and non-human populations; a planetary relationality that leads to an altering of epistemological/hermeneutical protocols which in turn, lead to the beginnings of a different political configuration. While the worlds that both texts imagine remains different from the actual world outside of the texts—thereby calling into question the effectiveness of these literary works—it is important to bear in mind that part of the mimetic function of literary texts is their ability to question the actual world while at the same time gesturing towards alternatives. On this score, the narrative assumes a (re)creational role, brought about by the narrative's technique (language, setting and characters), such that established values, as well as widely-held beliefs and foundational concepts, can be questioned and reimagined. Therefore, *Binti* and *Lagoon* (and by extension, Okorafor's Africanfuturism) offer an aesthetic critique of the actual world and an aesthetic imagination of a black political future; one characterized by different forms of vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration in a manner that ushers a relation of care – for fellow human subjects and non-human subjects.

Intimate Relationality: *Binti*

As I mentioned in chapter two, by the time Binti returns from Oomza Uni, she becomes a multilingual and multi-species nomad with traces that transcend geographical and species boundaries. She states: "My name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib" (Okorafor, *Binti* 331). It is in light of this that she becomes a stranger to her Himba people, and she is in turn, able to develop and advocate an ethics that accommodate the stranger. It is important to recall that Binti returns to her ancestral home (the Root) in order to perform the customary rituals of becoming a woman in the eyes of the Himba. She returns having been entangled with (and is actually friends with) Okwu (the Meduse). The fact that the transformed Binti returns to the Root with Okwu suggests Okorafor's narrative strategy of introducing and gesturing towards a new form of relation in the Root. It is an instance of movement towards the All-World where identity becomes the capacity for variation. This variation involves a rupture of the epistemological order of the Root. The arrival of the now-alien Binti "can be seen within the narrative as a sudden epistemological awakening and transformation within the populace itself that brings them together" (O'Connell 310). Such a rupture necessitates various degrees of violence and resistance from the masculinist and hegemonic sites of authority.

One of the epistemological ruptures that ensues with Binti's arrival is the movement towards the transcending of taboos concerned with women. An instance of this is Binti's experience of sexual pleasure: "There were no taboos or hesitations in the way. And when I pulled my lips from Mwinyi's, his arms still around me, I didn't look into his eyes […] He kissed me one more time and let go. I was leaning on my elbows on the mat, my body throbbing and my mind a swirl of so much, when he stood up" (Okorafor, *Binti* 276). It is Binti's entanglement with Mwinyi (one of the desert people, the Enyi Zinariya) that allows for such a relation. Another instance of Binti's transcending of taboos concerned with women is in her experience of the Night Masquerade. For the Himba, the Night Masquerade is supposed to be seen by men only. This prompts Binti's perturbation when she sees it for the first time: "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?'" (Okorafor, *Binti* 155). Okorafor does not naively present this as an instant reconfiguration of male-female relations

among the Himba. On this instance, the Masquerade calls Binti by name and says: "Girl. Small girl from big space" (Okorafor, *Binti* 155). The Masquerade's words attempt to ground and remind Binti of her place among the Himba: despite being from "big space" (a site where no one else in the community had been), Binti would remain not only a girl, but a "small" girl among the Himba. This is because of the patriarchal configuration of the Himba. However, in a rather oxymoronic gesture, Okorafor demonstrates how the very appearance of the Night Masquerade to Binti (a girl) is an announcement of Binti's admittance into the company of Himba heroes: "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, *Binti* 156). Although an unwilling heroine, Binti now not only has the ability to see, but indeed sees the Night Masquerade. An appearance that is meant to reduce Binti in the Himba patriarchal scale simultaneously inserts her into the class of heroes hitherto reserved for men.

The second time Binti sees the Night Masquerade, it is during the day; an unheard-of feature among the Himba. On this second apparition, Binti exposes the significance of such an apparition: "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" (Okorafor, *Binti* 245). If the apparition of the Night Masquerade signals revolution, at this point of the narrative, Binti interprets this as the death of her family. This time, the Masquerade's words to Binti are coded: "A bird who has flown off the earth and then returns to land is still on the land […] Remove your shoes and listen" (Okorafor, *Binti* 245). The Masquerade's words suggest that although Binti may think because she has gone off to Oomza Uni (and has become transformed) she is no longer subject to Himba patriarchal regulations, she is however, no more than a Himba girl who should be subservient (hence, the injunction to "listen"). As with the first apparition, Binti is left anxious at the words and appearance of the Night Masquerade for the second time. With the Masquerade's words on the second apparition, Okorafor exposes the patriarchal ignorance of the Himba: in emphasizing the stability of the land, the patriarchy ignores the truth that the bird that has flown off the earth does not return the same and hence, the bird's (Binti's) inhabitation of the land alters the land. Binti's peregrinations alter both her identity and ways of seeing the world and these alterations affect her relationship with the

Himba who claim stability. Thus, her presence and interaction with the land (and the Himba people) upsets the supposed fixity of the Himba culture and practices as she introduces different registers of being owing to her entanglement with other human and non-human individuals.

Thus, Okorafor gestures towards a reconfiguration of space and belonging: "The future world Okorafor envisages is one of radically altered (and alternate) geographies as well, with expanded and porous boundaries of relation that trouble strict identity categories and open new spaces for belonging" (Crowley 270). In such a reconfiguration of space and belonging, there is an accompanying demystification of the fetishes of male authority. Okorafor makes this obvious in the third apparition of the Night Masquerade to Binti. The Masquerade appears to Binti again during the day: "It stood on the dirt road that led to my home. The road I'd walked down when I'd left home in the dark of early morning. No smoke billowed from its head this time. In the silence, I could hear its drumbeat as it danced, kicking up dust as it shook its raffia hips and raised its long arms. I knew only one person who danced like that" (Okorafor, *Binti* 291-92). Binti realizes that the Night Masquerade is her childhood friend, Dele. This realization dissipates patriarchal authority over women as it finally reveals the meanings of the Masquerade's (Dele's) words to Binti: Dele feels threatened by a woman (Binti) who has gone to space and interacted with other forms of existence. It is crucial to reiterate that it is Binti's entanglement with other non-human forms of existence (which thus makes her a stranger to her Himba people), coupled with her journeying away from the Root, that makes it possible for her to experience and demystify patriarchal claims of superiority. Although the rest of the narrative does not offer a complete change of the configuration of the Himba community, it seems Okorafor suggests that Binti's experience and demystification of patriarchal domination is itself an indispensable step in the reconfiguration of space and belonging. This is a gesture towards imagining an altered and alternate politics of relation, one sensitive to the alien and the stranger.

In Okorafor's imagination of planetary relationality and its accompanying politics, the place of violence is crucial as well as the effects of such violence. The enmity between the Meduse and the Khoush continues on Himba soil with the arrival of Binti and Okwu. Hence, Binti attempts to broker peace and put an end to the age-old war. This, she attempts in adherence to her task as master harmonizer: "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, *Binti* 263). Binti summons the Himba Council (made up of mainly male elders and a few women) to an *Okuruwo*—an extraordinary meeting of the Council, convoked only by men at a time of crisis. At the meeting, Chief Kapika addresses Binti:

> Like a good Himba, you came home. But you brought the enemy of a people who sees us as less than they are. And when the Khoush came for it, they came for us, too. Now there is war in our homes and around our lands again. Instigated by the actions of one of our own, you. Your lineage here is dead and you've bonded with the savage other part of your bloodline… why shouldn't we simply run you out of Osemba? (Okorafor, *Binti* 262).

Chief Kapika with the others in the Council is convinced that it is Binti's entanglement with the Meduse and the Enyi Zinariya that is responsible for the invasion of the Himba by the Khoush. After reluctantly agreeing that the Himba would serve as intermediary in ensuring that the Khoush and the Meduse agree to end the war, a reconciliatory meeting is arranged. On the day of the arranged reconciliation, the Himba Council fails to show up. This leads Binti to realize "something very, very important. I knew that everything depended on that moment. I wasn't sure exactly how, but the destiny of my people was temporarily in my hands" (Okorafor, *Binti* 289). She goes on to "incite the deep culture of the Himba" to declare the war between the Khoush and the Meduse over (Okorafor, *Binti* 291). The truce fails as one of the Khoush soldiers shoots at the Meduse chief, leading to renewed fighting between the Khoush and the Meduse (Okorafor, *Binti* 292-94). In the ensuing fighting, Binti is seemingly killed. At this point in the narrative, the point of view shifts from Binti as the narrator to an omnipresent narrator whose perspective articulates the relations between the different species. One of these is that Okwu stays at the side of the fallen Binti even as the war raged on: "Okwu floated on Binti's other side, its tentacles touching her torn-up arm and pulling back, touching and pulling back. It could feel the battle happening above, but it stayed with Binti, allowing the others to know that the one who'd become family through war had been killed. They fought harder and angrier because Okwu stayed, because Okwu felt" (Okorafor, *Binti* 295).

Although Binti's intervention does not result in an instant end to the war, the "success" of her intervention lies in its establishment, even if temporarily, of a politics of relation. In bringing the Khoush and the Meduse together, with Mwinyi representing the Enyi Zinariya, Binti (representing the Himba) establishes a foundation for relation among these human and non-human species. In this expression of planetary relationality, the politics of gender is displaced as a woman (Binti) leads the convocation. Furthermore, in consonance with her Africanfuturism credo, Okorafor insists that the "deep Himba culture" is capable of bringing about this kind of planetary relationality: "Deep culture goes deeper than what it is, it goes deeper than culture, it crosses over" (Okorafor, *Binti* 264). Hence, Okorafor offers a glimpse of what a black political future can be. It is a politics that transcends a mere inclusion of different human cultures. The black political future that Okorafor imagines accommodates and bears a responsibility of care towards the stranger – human and non-human.

As I mentioned in chapter two, it is the body of New Fish that brings Binti back to life after she was killed in the Khoush-Meduse war (Okorafor, *Binti* 315). Upon her resuscitation and return to Oomza Uni, Binti is told by Dr Tuka of Oomza Uni that she has to have a child with Okwu "because Meduse DNA is strong. It bullies its way into all offspring" (Okorafor, *Binti* 347). As Binti wonders what this would mean, Dr Tuka adds: "So see it this way: You're paired with New Fish and Okwu, each of whom has a family. Your family is bigger than any Himba girl's ever was. And twice, you were supposed to die. And here you stand healthy and strong […] And strange. There is no person like you at this school" (Okorafor, *Binti* 349). Here, Okorafor demonstrates a relationality at an intimate level. Binti having a child with Okwu is an instance of Glissant's other of Thought: the child of Binti and Okwu would lead to a change of the way of thinking and relating among human and non-human individuals. The imagining of an offspring of human and non-human parents overturns the fixed and hierarchized notions of reproduction. Although the text does not represent the actualization of this fusion between Binti and Okwu (and there is, currently, no evidence of such in the actual world), what the novel suggests is an intimate relationality between human and non-human individuals.

Therefore, Okorafor imagines and creates in *Binti*, a planetary relationality that demystifies patriarchal oppression, creates a politics of relationality among different human and non-human individuals even at an intimate level.

Selfless Relationality: *Lagoon*

At the end of chapter two, I mentioned that the arrival and presence of Ayodele's extraterrestrials lead to an awakening in the humans of that which is already alien within them. But as Ayodele pointedly observes: "Human beings have a hard time relating to that which does not resemble them. It's your greatest flaw" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 67). Thus, in Ayodele's broadcast speech, each human subject saw different things in Ayodele and the arrival of the extraterrestrials: "All of them watched the footage, even Fisayo. After it finished, none of them said a word, yet in their minds, they saw plenty. Jacobs saw an end to living with parents who refused to accept him. His sister Fisayo saw all of Lagos in flames. Seven saw infinite possibilities and a people from outer space that could make the world embrace and love everyone. Rome saw the rise of Rome" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 75). In the rest of the narrative, Okorafor gestures towards the modalities for humans to relate with "that which does not resemble them".

Ayodele concludes her widely broadcast speech with a question: "So, what will you do?" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 113). It appears the inhabitants of Lagos responds to this question with violence and chaos. A great part of the narrative assumes this mood of chaos, uncertainty and violence as evident in the language and progression of the narrative. However, Okorafor demonstrates the creativity and rejuvenation of such a chaos. It is a chaos that displaces an oppressive neoliberal and patriarchal order to birth an order of relation. On the one hand, there is the destructive chaos: "In the street was a parade of Area Boys and a few Area Girls with machetes, sticks, and probably guns; looters, police and soldiers who'd deserted their duties, and several other kinds of riffraff" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 173). On the other hand, the chaos allows the LGBT group, Black Nexus to come out in the open for the first time. As Jacobs (a member of the group) reflects: "The Black Nexus had to be *crazy* to come out in a place so public. Yet they were so brave to do so. They'd been hiding for such a long time. Not so much out of shame, but out of a need to stay safe […] In his heart, he knew that if that alien was in the house, it was time. It was time for a change"

(Okorafor, *Lagoon* 92). The action of the Black Nexus is bold in a country and city that not only criminalizes homosexual relations but pushes such relations to the domain of the alien and unhuman. The members dress in ways that confuse the heterosexual and patriarchal registers of governmentality of bodies. Not only do they dress this way, Okorafor does well to emphasize the spirit with which they came out in public – a spirit of joy and freedom: "Royal wore red platform thigh boots, red spandex pants, and a tight pink T-shirt. He carried the boom box and was jumping about, shaking his backside for anyone who would watch. Royal would dance for his grandmother in the village, the man was so free" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 91). Such a public performance of an alternate genre of sexuality confuses the heterosexual crowd as evident in the response of some persons in seeing members of the Black Nexus: "A few had begun to grumble about '*adofuroo*', 'fags', and 'bottom power' […] Jacobs heard a guy ask. 'Are you man or woman?'" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 92). The narrative does not offer an acceptance of the Black Nexus group by the human inhabitants of Lagos; Jacobs is killed by one of his friends, Moziz, when they discover that Jacobs cross-dresses (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 186). While it may appear that the public performance of the Black Nexus does not offer any tangible gesture of acceptance, what Okorafor succeeds in doing is to bring the Black Nexus in the same space with heteronormativity. In doing so, the heteronormative space is re-negotiated, even if briefly. This renegotiation unsettles heteronormativity, hence, the confusion "Are you man or woman?" Okorafor foregrounds the fact that it is the arrival and presence of the extraterrestrials that allows for such a renegotiation of space and sexuality. As Jenna Hanchey notes, "The aliens can serve as tools to activate freedom dreams because queer/feminist desire is alien, in a sense. It opens what was previously unthinkable" (123). Given that the narrative is set in a future Lagos, a reader may wonder about the plausibility of such a renegotiation of space and sexuality. However, by "summoning up images of a hypothetical future, sci-fi narratives [such as *Lagoon*] project radical change into tomorrow, but they *also* bring that future into existence in the present moment of the reading act" (Eatough 253). Therefore, in bringing alternate sexualities into the same space, Okorafor imagines a relation of care in a way that allows for the flourishing of persons of different sexualities.

In the creative chaos that ensues with the arrival of Ayodele's extraterrestrials, Okorafor imagines an alternative relation among religious perspectives. When the Pentecostal pastor, Father Oke, first encounters Ayodele, he seeks to co-opt her into his Christian Pentecostal and fundamentalist

frame: “He had the gift of the gab. He could get through to *anyone*, even an extraterrestrial, such was the power of his faith […] His mission was clear; divine. ‘God, the Almighty, he is in control. Give yourself up to the Lord and any help you need to survive will be given to you. My church. My church is a *good* church. Come join my flock and we will be truly great’. He held his hands out to Ayodele” (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 47). Here, Okorafor shows the entanglement of religion with power (particularly, masculine power and violence) as for Father Oke, Ayodele’s joining his church would enable him to gain more members and thus, become more powerful. When a man slaps Father Oke, the reason for such a violence is explained: “Look am!’ A young man in the onlooking crowd said. ‘Na de idiot priest who go slap woman on YouTube! Na justice!’” (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 134). Father Oke is renowned for slapping women publicly on the pretext that they are witches. Given that Ayodele appears in the form of a woman, Father Oke desires to mete out violence on her body in the same way he does to female members of his church.; he intends to demonstrate that Ayodele is a witch who would be offered salvation in his church after undergoing his violent exorcisms. Father Oke’s violence on women in the name of religion is deconstructed in the beating of Father Oke, hence, demystifying the supposed divine power associated with religious ministers like Father Oke. Father Oke’s beating is a form of poetic justice for the beatings he has inflicted on female bodies in the name of offering salvation to them.

Okorafor goes further to bring Father Oke in intimate contact with alternate spirits which Father Oke had hitherto demonized. This, *Lagoon* does in Father Oke’s interaction with Mami Wata (the oceanic and mythical creature). In doing so, Okorafor also exposes Father Oke’s sexual desires: “He laughed, imagining her heavy breasts bouncing above him as he took her right there on the deserted beach. He was already soiled, why not soil himself more? Might as well get some pleasure from the night” (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 234). The attractive appearance of Mami Wata allows Father Oke to acknowledge his sexuality in a more confident and open manner. This is because, as the narrator points out: “He regularly bedded his house girls and paid them to keep quiet about it. They were sexy, docile, pliable, and certainly sweet. But this woman was something else. This woman was mysterious. And she reminded him of a woman he’d loved years ago” (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 233). Owing to the attractiveness of this mysterious woman (Mami Wata), Father Oke decides to follow her to the ocean. It is going with Mami Wata to the ocean that allows Father Oke to realize the illusion in which he has been living: “Many things happened to Father Oke at once. He felt his

heart break. Why had he slapped that woman so hard yesterday morning? Why had he slapped her at all? Twice in one night he had conversed with a woman who was not really a woman. The first had been from outer space. This second was from the earth's water. For the first time in his life, Father Oke truly realized that he lived in a glass palace, while others around him lived in a ghetto" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 235). Thus, Okorafor suggests that an alternative religious outlook (such as Mami Wata) is as attractive and full of life as that which Father Oke had privileged; that these seemingly different religious perspectives can be in relation. The condition for this kind of relation, *Lagoon* suggests, is letting go of the epistemological biases that comes with enlightenment humanism and its attendant religious outlook. Again, it is the arrival of the extraterrestrials via the ocean that ushers this kind of offshore humanism which leads to a relation of care among different religious perspectives.

Although Ayodele is the ambassador of the extraterrestrials, Okorafor offers a picture of other extraterrestrials. Her description of these extraterrestrials gestures towards a politics of relation: "Some of them were dressed in various types of traditional garb, some in military attire, some in police uniforms, others in Westernized civilian clothes. Most of them were African, a small few Asian, one white. All were completely dry, and Agu could smell roses and seaweed as they drifted past him. All of them could pass for Lagosians" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 116). It is the appearance, description, language, accent and attitude of the extraterrestrials that allow them to mingle effortlessly with the human inhabitants of Lagos. This speaks to Ayodele's comment earlier, that humans find it difficult to relate to that which does not resemble them. Okorafor's description of the extraterrestrials is a response to Ayodele's observation. But Okorafor goes further to offer a glimpse of how humans and extraterrestrials can enact a relation of care. When Moziz knocks down one of the extraterrestrials, Rain, Jacobs is moved to help Rain and, in the process, risking his life: "With all his might, he pulled her body from the softening asphalt and, ignoring the angry roar of a creature denied a meal, slung her over his shoulder and carried her to the car. Moziz was accelerating before Jacobs even shut the door" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 171). There is a similar relation of care when Chris helps one of the extraterrestrials, Oluwatosin, whose appearance is that of a white man: "Chris's body clenched. He'd wanted to drop the man-thing off the first chance he got and then speed away. He still didn't understand why he'd saved him. His actions were mad and he was endangering his children" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 180). In these episodes, amid the chaos

engulfing the city, Okorafor offers a black political future characterized by different forms of vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration in a manner that ushers a relation of care – for fellow human subjects and non-human subjects. This form of relation complicates the dichotomy between the human and the citizen as it emphasizes different degrees of transfiguration which in turn, elicits an attitude of care and relation.

As I mentioned in chapter two, Okorafor uses Bone Collector as a placeholder for the necropolitical situation in Nigeria. In an animist move, Okorafor shows how the selflessness of the extraterrestrials bring about a change in Nigeria's necropolitical outlook. One of the extraterrestrials, simply named as "the Nollywood woman", offers herself to Bone Collector in order to stop the incessant accidents on the Lagos-Benin expressway. The Nollywood woman negotiates with Bone Collector: "Collect my bones and then never collect again, […] I am everything and I am nothing. Take me and you will be free of your appetite" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 206-07). At this point in the narrative (as in other instances), Okorafor shifts the point of view of the narration to an unnamed eyewitness. This eyewitness subsequently reflects on the selfless act of the Nollywood woman: "Can you imagine? Never in my entire life had I witnessed such a selfless act. She was not from earth. Yet still. I thought of Nigeria's worst diseases – pervasive corruption and unsafe roads. The one who had spoken through my wife's phone was right. She and her people were indeed agents of change. I could feel the change in me then, while I knelt there. I'm sure I was not the only one, either" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 207). This appeasing of Bone Collector via self-sacrifice is Okorafor's imagination of the modality for moving beyond the necropolitical. The Nollywood woman (here representing the extraterrestrials) demonstrates that recognition and relation with all forms of existence can lead Nigeria out of Necropolitics into a politics of relation and care. The Nollywood woman also reveals that selflessness not only changes one's external reality, but also the inner life of individuals. This is similar to Ayodele's self-sacrifice in order to bring about change in the inner life of Nigerians. According to Ayodele, "You people need help on the outside but also within" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 268). Therefore, the appeasing of Bone Collector by the Nollywood woman "leads to a utopian politics of the possible, an intricate imagination of what a postpetroleum Nigeria might look like" (Jue 175).

At the end of *Lagoon*, the combined effort of Adaora, Anthony, Agu and Ayodele lead to the healing of Nigeria's ailing president (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 226). This healing mirrors a

cleansing/healing of the country as evident in the purification of Lagos' aquatic environments at the beginning of the story. After the president's healing, he makes a speech to the country; a speech that signals a shift and the beginnings of a new politics of relation:

> This shift is cause for celebration, not panic. I will say it again: celebration, not panic. There are others among us here in Lagos. They intend to stay. And I am happy about it. They have new technology; they have fresh ideas that we can combine with our own. Hold tight. We will be powerful again, o! People of Lagos, especially, look at your neighbor. See his race, tribe, or his alien blood. And call him brother. We have much work to do as a family (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 276).

Although *Lagoon* does not present concrete changes in Nigeria's politics, it however offers different descriptions of perspectival shifts among Nigerians in different parts of the country (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 279-87). Hence, the selfless acts of the extraterrestrials offer a shift in perspective of Nigerians; a shift that leads to the creation of a politics of relation and care for human and non-human others.

Therefore, in *Binti* and *Lagoon*, Okorafor offers a vision of planetary relationality based on vulnerability and care. In this vision of the All-World, there is a reconfiguration of space and sexuality, a demystification of patriarchal and religious heteronormativity as well as a movement towards selflessness as the constituting characteristic of a politics of care. It is important to reiterate that like Glissant's idea of the All-World, the futures that Okorafor imagines in *Binti* and *Lagoon* are utopic and as such, differ from the configurations in the actual world. However, in these texts, Okorafor foregrounds the imaginary and offers a praxis of human perfectibility; suggesting that if the reader can imagine such a change, it can indeed come true.

Conclusion

A sustained interest in this research has been the articulation of the idea of the human in a way that not only foregrounds the relationships (social and biological) between different groups of human beings, but also expands the scrutiny of the human from the earthly to the planetary in a way that includes human entanglement and relations with other non-human forms of existence. From seventeenth-century European enlightenment ideas, there is both a distinction and elevation of the human from animals and machines. However, the category of the human was not available to all genres of humanity. For some European enlightenment thinkers like David Hume, the negroes of Africa are at best, human in a lower degree compared to Europeans. In response to such a discourse, various black thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter have proposed a moving away from the European enlightenment idea of the human in a way that opens emancipatory modalities for the future of black humanity. While Afrofuturism is an instance of a discursive cultural practice with the potential for galvanizing a black internationalism, its American-centric framing renders the presence of Africa, marginal (aesthetically and thematically). Africanfuturism, as conceived by Nnedi Okorafor, blends African mythologies and cultures with technology in the creation of future worlds that transcend the idea of the "specifically human", while revealing a humanity in constant creation and as such, one that must be thought of in the future tense. As my reading and discussion of *Binti* and *Lagoon* have demonstrated, in societies characterized by the necropolitical, an Africanfuturist sensibility is one aware of the prosthetic nature of humans, and as such, pursues the question of planetary habitability in a way that does not privilege or prioritize the human over non-human forms of existence. Binti's journeys lead her to the realization that her humanity is intricately connected not only with other ethnic groups (like the Enyi Zinariya), but also with other forms of existence (such as the Meduse and Third Fish). Similarly, the arrival and presence of Ayodele's extraterrestrials in *Lagoon*, enable humans to realize that which is already "alien" in themselves. These iterations of planetary entanglement destabilize the enlightenment apprehension of autonomy, sovereignty, and purity. The result of this planetary entanglement is a planetary relationality characterized by different forms of vulnerability, journeying and transfiguration in a manner that produces a relation of care and a reconfiguration of space, sexuality and belonging – for fellow human subjects and non-human subjects. Such is the black political future that Okorafor imagines in *Binti* and *Lagoon*.

Africanfuturism as exemplified in *Binti* and *Lagoon*, imagines a politics anchored on planetary entanglement and relationality. The various characteristics of this politics that I have discussed in this study demand an increased dialogue between literary and moral theories. This is crucial because Africanfuturism (and Literature broadly) and moral philosophy offer the space for reflection on what it means to be human in the world as well as the range of perceptible and imperceptible dimensions of human actions. What kind of moral theory will emerge out of the dialogue between Africanfuturism and moral philosophy? What is the future of moral theory given the anthropo-machinic character of human intellection? What circuits of value does Africanfuturism travel and how does this affect the representation of Africa? Such broad and demanding questions will, however, have to be pursued in further research.

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