



*Essay*

## Pan-Africanfuturism: A Reconciliation of Black/African Pasts, Presents, and Futures

Omotoyosi E. Odukomaiya, PhD

[odukomaiya@hope.edu](mailto:odukomaiya@hope.edu)

Assistant Professor of English

Department of English

Hope College

### *Abstract*

In this essay, I explore Africanfuturism as a conceptual framework, providing context for its coinage by the Nigerian American Science Fiction writer, Nnedi Okorafor. I chart earlier iterations of Africanfuturism by examining the characteristics of Africanfuturist works. Also, briefly examining Afrofuturism, a different genre of Science Fiction, I elaborate on tensions that have existed between African Americans and Africans, and identify this as one of the major reasons for Okorafor's coinage of Africanfuturism. However, I challenge Okorafor's definition by engaging in a textual and cultural analysis of Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*, which represents Africa in a way that aids our understanding of the concept of Africanfuturism. I conclude by introducing a new genre, Pan-Africanfuturism, and explore why it is a better category for *Wild Seed*.

### *Keywords*

Africanfuturism, Pan-Africanfuturism, Nnedi Okorafor, *Wild Seed*

---

*Siyabonana: The Journal of Africana Studies*, Volume 2, Number 1, Winter 2024

Copyright © The Author(s) 2024

For the colonist, the Negro was neither an Angolan nor a Nigerian,  
for he simply spoke of the Negro.

~ Frantz Fanon

## Africanfuturism: Theoretical Overview and Contexts

Following the emergence of Afrofuturism, a term that Nnedi Okorafor has adopted for over fourteen years, African authors and artists have globally embraced the term. Afrofuturism became an aesthetic movement for Africans living on the continent. Sarah Williams, in “The African Fashion Movement and Afrofuturism in Celebrating Identity,” recognizes the role Afrofuturism plays in the contemporary African fashion industry. Similarly, Amy Frearson, in the article, “Afrofuturism is Creating a Different Narrative for Africa, say Creatives,” identifies the role Marvel’s *Black Panther* film played in drawing Africans to the genre by transcending literature in its manifestation on the continent. African architects, fashion designers, and filmmakers became thrilled with the possibilities that Afrofuturism offered. Others, like Temi Otedola, a fashion designer, remained cynical about such opportunities as she laments, in William’s article, “how is it that we are often the innovators of popular culture trends but left behind in the monetization of such trends? I can slowly see Black entrepreneurs and creatives taking hold of our own ideas.” Like Otedola, Nnedi Okorafor struggled with this concept. In the digital anthology, *Africanfuturism*, published in 2019, Okorafor writes, “for a while I tried to embrace the term (Afrofuturism) which is why I used it in my TedTalk, but over a year ago, I realized that was not working. So here goes I am an Africanfuturist.” Although she calls herself an Afrofuturist in the TedTalk, Okorafor unequivocally identifies as a Nigerian American and not an African American. This distinction is highly significant because it must have led to her coinage. According to Okorafor, Africanfuturism is a subcategory of Science Fiction that examines what visions of the future look like for Africans on the African continent. Employing African cultures and thought systems; it incorporates an optimistic sense of possibilities for African futures. In an interview with Yvonne Mbanefo, convener of the 2020 Igbo Conference, Okorafor subtly insinuates that her desire to coin the term “Africanfuturism” arose from contemptuous

attitudes of critics who disparaged her work conceivably because she is not African American. In this sense, she is not a descendant of enslaved people. The author and critic notes:

I was told multiple times that Afrofuturism is ours..... and this was by African Americans, as in those who were the descendants of stolen Africans in the United States. They told me this many times and I remember that.... It's ours! it's ours! it's ours! And then there was the implication that the stories of other people are kind of tacked on or are secondary. So, I heard that and then I said, that's cool, keep it ("Africanfuturism: Disrupting Science Fiction" 4:42).

This exclusion of Okorafor's work by critics seems to stem from a rift between Africans and African Americans. Authors, such as Chimamanda Adichie and Ya Gyasi, have explored, in their creative works, what it means to be African in a hyper-racialized country like the United States. Critics from various disciplines who have examined relationships between Africans and African Americans confirm that there is, indeed, a "social distance" between both groups (Iheduru 1). In her study, Iheduru contends that this perceived distance between Africans and African Americans is a consequence of the divide and conquer tactics of colonialists on the continent and enslavers in the new world. The Psychology doctoral scholar notes that, "Africans and African Americans remain separated by myths, misperceptions, and negative stereotypes" irrespective of their shared ancestry (Iheduru 1). Undoubtedly, some of these misconceptions, especially in the United States, have their roots in the institution of enslavement. Nonetheless, Hollywood is notoriously known to thrive on constructions and stereotypical representations, and has continued to perpetuate the notion of Africa as primitive and Africans as "jungle bunnies" and "heathen[s] and savage[s]" (Traore 244). Similarly, Africans on the continent have been exposed to, as Amaize states, "negative images of guns, drugs, and violence in African American communities," and these images have influenced how "African immigrants perceive African Americans." Consequently, first-generation immigrants (e.g., Adichie) and second-generation immigrants (such as Okorafor) are likely to have been raised with the notion that race should not inhibit upward mobility. As a result, these Americans of African descent tend to reject the racial status that African Americans occupy in the United States. This rejection is what causes a disconnection between Africans and

African Americans, says Iheduru (1). Also, misconceptions arising from the idea that all ancestors of Africans were responsible for the enslavement of the ancestors of African Americans contribute to these tensions.

Therefore, I contend that limiting the description of who could be an Afrofuturist writer solely to those with enslaved ancestry may be unnecessarily narrow, as is Okorafor's description of an Africanfuturist author as one who is Black African, thus excluding even non-Black North Africans. Not only do these parameters rely on misinterpretations, but they also cause further divisions, and fan the flames of distrust and distance that already exists between Africans and African Americans. In the ensuing section, I examine both genres, Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism, to ascertain specific differences and possible points of convergence.

### Africanfuturism or Afrofuturism: What's the Difference?

Okorafor notes that there are visible distinctions between her works and Afrofuturist narratives. According to the Nebula award-winning author, Africanfuturism is a subcategory of Science Fiction that centers the needs, aspirations, and visions of the future of Africans by employing science and technology, African cultures, histories, and mythologies. For Okorafor, the focus of Africanfuturism is solely African, particularly Black African, not African Diasporan nor African American. Africanfuturist stories should be set in Africa or be about Africans from a known country in Africa either set on earth or outer space, and must be written by Africans. In fact, one of the aims of Africanfuturism is to eliminate the romanticizing of Africa in the same way the film, *Black Panther*, does with its creation of a non-existent African country called Wakanda. It is also worth noting that Okorafor's definition of Africanfuturism centers on nationality and not so much on the residence of the author, a point I address later in this article. The author has painstakingly admonished her critics, readers, and booksellers when she writes Africanfuturism—not Afrofuturism or African-futurism.<sup>1</sup> While Okorafor rejects Afrofuturism as a label that defines her work, some critics persist and refer to her as an Afrofuturist writer. For instance, Moira Marquis, in their article published in 2020, tags *Lagoon* by Okorafor, a novel set in

---

<sup>1</sup> Nnedi Okorafor notes that the term should be spelt as one word, not hyphenated, nor should the "F" after Africa be capitalized. According to the author, doing any of these changes affects the meaning and begins a different debate.

Lagos, Nigeria, as an Afrofuturist novel. This unrelenting mislabeling of her works demonstrates that critics prefer, as Okorafor states, “centering one word/lens/one country/one point of view/one culture” on all Black people. Okorafor vehemently argues against all attempts at exploring African experiences through a Western lens in a way that could potentially narrow Blackness.

The differences between both genres are based on the fact that Africans and African Americans are geospatially, politically, and culturally different. In her attempt to distinguish between both genres, Okorafor looks to Coogler’s *Black Panther* as she exemplifies that Afrofuturism will be “Wakanda building its first outpost in Oakland California, and Africanfuturism will be Wakanda building its outpost in a neighboring African country.” Other African critics have reiterated Okorafor’s concern that Afrofuturism has nothing to do with Africans living in Africa. Mohale Mashigo, in her anecdotal Introduction to the short stories, *Intruders*, emphasizes that Afrofuturism hides “in the shadows, waiting for the right moment to shout pick me.... it’s some misguided marketing weirdo just wanting to connect with the cool kids” (x). Another author, Wole Talabi, equally attempts to distinguish Africanfuturism from Afrofuturism. Talabi, an engineer and a self-defined Africanfuturist author, affirms that while assuming Africanfuturism is a subcategory of Afrofuturism, it is its own term, and should be treated as such, i.e., it must be read through the lens of African traditions and epistemologies. Yet, Kodwo Eshun, who embraces the term Afrofuturism, but focuses his definition on the continent, defines Afrofuturism as a project that seeks to challenge the image of Africa as a place of dystopia. In his article, published in 2003, Kodwo submits that Afrofuturism is a “chronopolitical interventionist.... program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afro-diasporic projections” (301).

Definitions of Afrofuturism are notably varied as there have been an emergence of numerous iterations of the concept. According to Mark Dery, a white scholar who coined the term in 1994, Afrofuturism is a subcategory of speculative fiction that captures themes pertinent to African Americans within the “context of twentieth century technoculture” (180). The underlying premise of Dery’s coinage is that Western Science Fiction describes the historical positionality of African Americans who were literal aliens, abducted and taken from their homeland to a strange land. However, it is worth noting that Western Science Fiction denigrated African Americans, and did not imagine futures for them. Alondra Nelson, an African

American cultural critic, was also instrumental in establishing Dery's coinage. In her Introduction to the special edition of *Social Text*, a collection of essays published in 2002, Nelson affirms that most of the works included in the edition were written by academics who were a part of "an online community called Afrofuturism," a group she founded in 1998 (9).

In 2013, Yatasha Womack, a renowned Afrofuturist critic, specifies that Afrofuturism is a cultural and aesthetic movement that transcends literature by combining "elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity and magical realism with non-western beliefs" (9). Reaffirming this stance, Marijana Mikic contends that Afrofuturism should not only confront the past, but it must critically examine the limits of "scientific discoveries" and scientific practices (35). Acuff Boyd argues that Afrofuturism is a "futuristic philosophy" and a "conceptual framework" that can be incorporated into educational curricula in a way that empowers African American students and reinforces Black existence (13-14). Boyd contends that it is necessary to disentangle, or at least shift focus, from an anthropological/historical approach to one that incorporates pasts into visions of the future—i.e., employing precolonial histories to chart alternate Black futures. On the other hand, Espinoza Garrido asserts that Afrofuturism must "engage with futurities rather than futures" (320). Lisa Yaszek, in her article also published in 2013, argues that the genre we now know as Afrofuturism has a long history that began in the 1850s—long before Mark Dery coined the term. According to Yaszek, "the development of Afrofuturism in the United States happened from about 1850-1960" (3). During this period, "respected mainstream writers" experimented with the Science Fiction genre, including whites and Blacks (Yaszek 3). Yaszek identifies Charles Chesnut's "The Goopherd Grapevine," published in 1887, as the first Afrofuturist text of the period (3). It should be emphasized that Yaszek employs an anachronistic definition of Afrofuturism since the term was coined in 1993. Yaszek categorizes other versions of Afrofuturism into two other parts—i.e., Afrofuturism in the United States from the 1960s to the present and Global Afrofuturism from the 1980s to the present (9). Like Yaszek, other critics have categorized Afrofuturism into three parts: the first being Afrofuturism 1.0; the second, Afrofuturism 2.0; and the third, Afrofuturism on Web 3.0 (Reynaldo Anderson, Charles Jones, and Jabari Asim ix). More recently, Isaiah Lavender suggests that Afrofuturism is "a concept that sees the interconnections between science, technology, and race across centuries, continents, and cultures" (3).

The constant reconfiguration of the genre and its definition reinforces the notion that Blackness cannot be interpreted through a singular lens.

From the various iterations of Afrofuturism highlighted above, it is abundantly evident that the focus is on African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. Other than Kodwo and Lavender, most definitions have centered the experiences of the African Diaspora -which relatively excludes Africans on the continent or first-generation African immigrants in America. Dike Okoro reiterates this notion, stating that Afrofuturism leaves no room for “postcolonial experiences in Africa or the myths that exist in indigenous African narratives” (3). Sophia Samatar makes a comparable argument affirming “the idea that Afrofuturism is American -that is African American—derives from the etymological history: Mark Dery, an American critic, coined the term in his 1993 essay, ‘Black to the Future,’ and defined it as “African American speculative fiction” (175). Tegan Bristow also notes in the introductory statements of her article that “Afrofuturism has very little to do with being or living in Africa and everything to do with early explorations of cyberculture in the West” (25). Eva Pirker and Judith Rahn also caution against the “US centeredness” of Afrofuturism stating that it must be challenged due to the rising diverse stories of Black people globally (284). Pirker and Rahn indicate that just like other scholars have suggested, “Afrofuturist” discourses from the African continent have long existed, and that these histories must be documented as critics define the genre. Implicitly, they argue that because Black people are scattered all over the globe; therefore, the Afrofuturist genre must expand to recognize the diversity of Blackness.

James Hodapp expresses similar sentiments in his article published in 2021. Hodapp posits that Blackness, and by extension Afrofuturism, “is seriously conflated with being African American” (4). This critic notes that all revisions of Afrofuturism seemingly include African narratives, but do so superficially. To support this claim, Hodapp notes that definitions of Afrofuturism have been given mostly by Americans. This critic goes further to state that Afrofuturism 2.0 “claims to be Pan-Africanist yet demonstrates a familiarity with no particular African cultures” (Hodapp 2). Essentially, Hodapp asserts that Afrofuturism “displaces Africa” in its attempt to be inclusive of African narratives (4). Hodapp’s argument begs the question: what does it really mean to be Black? Put another way, does the definition of Blackness include all people who have dark skin, or does it include only certain people who come from a certain geographical location? Surprisingly, Reynaldo Anderson and Charles Jones deny, in

the Introduction of their text *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*, the accusations that Afrofuturism excludes Africa stating that the accusation is misplaced “due to the fact that Africa and its diaspora are connected via cyber-culture” (ix). Interestingly, there are only two essays out of their twelve essays that attempt to center African narratives.

Like Hodapp, some scholars have recognized tensions in the way critics have largely defined Afrofuturism. In identifying the role Post-Colonial Science Fiction plays in enabling agency for all previously colonized subjects, Malisa Kurtz asks “can connections be forged between different global visions of SF, or does such a subgenre necessarily revert to a form of cultural relativism?” (38). Kurtz’s query interrogates the culture of US Exceptionalism that regards Blackness in the West as representative for all Black people, including those outside the United States. However, Adam Robert, a writer at *The Guardian*, who observed the emergence of Africanfuturism, states that “what’s happening today is a shift in focus: a Black African rather than African American Sci-fi phenomenon.”

Nonetheless, critics have noticed similarities between both genres. Gemma Field, in her article, “‘We Have Come to Refuel your Future:’ Asphalt Afrofuturism and African Futurities,” suggests that Afrofuturism could be a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing Okorafor's creative works. Okorafor, herself, in the Introduction to *Africanfuturism: An Anthology* by Wole Talabi, admits that there are, indeed, similarities between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism “in the way that Blacks on the continent and in the Black diaspora are all connected by blood spirit and future.” While numerous African Science Fiction authors have expressed discontentment that Afrofuturist imaginings of Africa tend to depict Africans merely as props, including sometimes replicating the colonial tropes of Western Science Fiction; Mashigo denounces such Afrofuturist visions as she is opposed to artists and writers who use Africa “as a costume or a stage to play out our ideas” (xi). While Afrofuturist visions are highly significant since they present alternate realities where African Americans are not a marginalized group, these visions have tendencies of erasing experiences of Africans living on the continent who also have different experiences of white oppression and marginalization. Metaphorically alluding to a South African song called “Ayashis Amateki”—a song about a shoe that does not fit—Moshigo declares that Afrofuturism cannot, and does not, describe the works of African Science Fiction authors (xiv).



Hope Wabuke, a Ugandan American poet, asserts that contestations about Afrofuturism by many African Science Fiction authors are largely because Afrofuturism was coined by a white man. Wabuke writes, “As is common with the white Western imagination, Dery’s conception of Blackness could only imagine a ‘one down’ relationship to whiteness – a Blackness that begins with 1619 and is marked solely by the ensuing 400 years of violation by whiteness.” In other words, Wabuke contends that Dery’s definition is limited in its scope as it defines Blackness within the context of American enslavement, consequently, overlooking other experiences of oppression across different geographical contexts. For this reason, Wabuke rejects Afrofuturism. In her assessment of Africanfuturism, Wabuke argues that Okorafor completely disentangles African narratives from the “othering of white gaze and the defacto colonial mindset” that is present in Afrofuturism. Likewise, Päivi Väättä<sup>2</sup> notes that Africanfuturist narratives completely decolonize Science Fiction in that these stories exclude the West and/or other Western cultures while Afrofuturism is reliant on notions of white gaze. Although it is plausible to think that the experiences of Africans on the continent do not overtly include Western/white oppression, the reality is that Euro-American structures remained in place after colonization ended. In the 1960’s, when many African nations gained independence, elite Africans/African military rulers parroted their white colonizers and sustained colonial structures. Consequently, decades after colonialism ended, neocolonialist structures were developed because of corrupt practices of African politicians and Euro-American monetary organizations (such as The International Monetary Fund and World Bank). To this day, they continue to perpetuate white oppression in ways that may not be as blatant as it is in America. In other words, white oppression is not merely an African American problem; it is a Black problem: a problem that affects all people of African descent anywhere in the world.

Like other critics, Onyekachu Wambu recognizes tensions between the Diaspora and the African continent, describing these tensions as a question of legitimacy. In his observation, Wambu notes that despite sharing a similar ancestry, both African Americans and Africans fail to acknowledge their brotherhood, which

---

<sup>2</sup> For more, see Päivi Väättä, “Afro-Versus Africanfuturism in Nnedi Okorafor’s ‘The Magical Negro’ and ‘Mother of Invention,’” *Vector* 289 (2019) available at <https://vector-bsfa.com/2019/10/13/afro-versus-african-futurism-in-nnedi-okorafors-the-magical-negro-and-mother-of-invention/>.

began with the Pan-Africanist movements in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The lack of recognition of shared African heritage, ultimately, impacts how each group envisions their futures when both groups play significant roles in defining Black futures. Both genres, Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism, complement one another, as they seem to be in dialogue. The consensus is that Africanfuturist narratives should, ultimately, seek to incorporate African Diasporans and their stories in a way that makes them rooted and grounded in African cultures and histories. The question then is this: how might both genres dialogue with each other? Jessica Fitzpatrick, who recognizes the marginalization of African narratives in Afrofuturism, does seem to provide answers to this question. FitzPatrick theorizes about how there must be a negotiating space that provides room for all shades, forms, and types of Black experiences in the Science Fiction genre—what she calls “a space of third contact” (76). In her article, “Twenty-First Century Afrofuturist Aliens: Shifting to the Space of Third Contact,” Fitzpatrick surmises that by following the footsteps of W.E. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Kwame Nkrumah, Afrofuturism must give room “for Trans-African Afrofuturism...explorable by third contact” (76). Adopting Haywood Ferrera’s taxonomy of *second contact*, FitzPatrick locates a space wherein African and African American Science Fictional narratives can co-exist. In other words, the author situates a space where Pan-Africanism brings together and uplifts all people of African descent. In a like manner, Sheree Renee Thomas, in the Introduction to the text, *The Black Speculative Arts Movement: Black Futurity, Arts+Designs*, calls for a “Black speculative arts movement... that begins to center Africa, Africans, and their descendants throughout the diaspora” (x). Similarly, Reynoldo Anderson, Executive Director and co-founder of the Black Speculative Arts Movement and Associate Professor of Africana Studies at Temple University, asserts that Afrofuturist artists in their adoption of artificial intelligence must “search for ethics toward a pluriverse world order.” According to Anderson, a “pluriversal approach” or an “African centered” futurist approach “does not promote ethnocentrism....(it) recognizes the regional differences of different cultures around the globe.” In a similar vein, Goyal cautions against essentialist categorizations—a feature that characterized earlier pan-Africanist efforts—emphasizing “cultural hybridity over racial solidarity” as a bridge that can connect both groups (242). Goyal underscores the need to prioritize “circulation, exchange and intersection” to avoid essentializing Blackness (243). This thought foreshadows an appreciation for diversity that exists among people of African descent. Charles

Masquelier, whose essay articulates a term he calls “Pluriversal intersectionality,” argues for a “co-formation approach” which enables multiple others to become cognizant that what unites them—“what they have in common is difference” (619). Masquelier reiterates Reynold’s argument that a pluriversal approach provides an avenue for such engagements. Masquelier proposes that relationality, further categorized into horizontal and vertical forms, illustrates the interconnectedness of oppressive systems. An application of pluriversal intersectionality to the experiences of Africans on the continent and African Americans makes the struggles that both groups encounter relatively similar. In other words, a pluriversal intersectional approach refocuses attention from identity politics/division to the “the common denominator,” i.e., the oppressive power structures marginalizing Africans globally (Masquelier 620). Masquelier argues that pluriversal intersectionality offers the potential for marginalized people to rethink and reimagine identity and difference.

In a Q/A session with Masiyaleti Mbewe, a Zambian “queerfuturist,” Michelle Johnson, in “Imagining a Better Place,” asks the acclaimed artist about the potential of an inclusive/intersectional Pan-Africanfuturist genre. Mbewe contends that Pan-African futurism can encourage a “sort of solidarity with Black people around the world and it [Pan-African futurism] further recognizes the disparities with our lived experiences” (21). Mbewe reaffirms that she had to unpack and reconcile “the myriad of complicated feelings” she had with Afrofuturism (21). For Mbewe, Pan-African futurism acknowledges the “underlying political implications” of both Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism, and allows for a rooted inclusion of all Black experiences (21). I, too, argue for a Pan-Africanfuturist genre that allows for the nuanced experiences of Black people around the world; a genre that will enable Black people, including Afro-Latinos, Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Asians and all first-generation immigrant Africans who live in the Diaspora and so on, to envision futures for themselves.

Pan-Africanfuturism is that utopic third space that FitzPatrick argues for because the African/Black experience cannot be flattened to narrow categories of origins or ancestries. Okorafor's previous endeavor to articulate the uniqueness of her writing style during her embrace of Afrofuturism underscores the diversity of Black experiences. In the article she wrote in 2009, Okorafor defines organic fantasy as “the power to make something familiar strange” (278). The author contemplates that organic fantasy utilizes science-fictional metaphors to portray certain political issues prevalent in Africa. Okorafor claims that organic fantasy estranges and calls attention

to these issues, forcing us to think about them in a different way. Okorafor also notes that her complex African experiences as a child born to Nigerian immigrants and living in America influences how she writes her Afrofuturist stories. Her essay gives readers a deeper understanding of her life and her works. The argument she makes for her distinct style of writing in this article is, perhaps, more constructive. It is on this basis that I build my argument for a Pan-Africanfuturist genre that brings together all forms of Black experiences, what I term *Blacknesses*, in a way that connects all Black people back to the continent.

Consequently, I attempt to complicate understandings of Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism in order to arrive at a point where both terms can be reconciled. As Traore articulates, nothing has been done to bring both groups to the reality of a shared ancestry and heritage. It is my intention that this article will demonstrate how inextricably linked the lives of both groups are despite inherent differences in cultures, histories, and experiences. However, it is important to examine the history of Africanfuturism, loosely referred to as African Science Fiction, to demonstrate the existing diversity in the genre. As a newly coined genre, Africanfuturism is yet to gain the attention it deserves. Admittedly, alternatives to the concept existed before Okorafor's coinage.

In 2013, Mark Bould, a renowned Science Fiction critic, predicted the emergence of African Science Fiction acknowledging "if African SF has not arrived, it is certainly approaching fast" (7). In 2013, Pamela Sunstrum utilizes the term African futurism, unlike Okorafor's coinage, which is one word, while some other critics have employed the terms Afri-futurism and African Afrofuturism<sup>3</sup> in theorizing the same ideas Okorafor examines. As Okorafor does, Sunstrum also distinguishes between African futurism and Afrofuturism, asserting that the major concerns of African futurism include "...locating an African sensibility" that pertains to "postcolonialism, neocolonialism, transglobal identities" (114). Clearly, much work has already been done in setting the scene for the genre even before Okorafor's coinage. Peter J. Maurits reports that the proliferation of African Science Fiction in 2007 led critics to ask the question: "is African science fiction (ASF) a new, old, local or alien cultural form" (1)? Implied here is the notion that African science fiction is an old genre

---

<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoue, in the essay "Gender and Sexuality in African Futurism," identifies some of the various iterations and/or concepts prior to Okorafor's coinage in 2019.

previously called by a different name. Dike Okoro claims that Africanfuturism “is identifiable in works of fiction by first-generation African fiction writers...but was never recognized” (4-5). Dike Okoro argues that Daniel Fagunwa, Amos Tutola, and Cyprian Ekwensi are some of the “forebears” of Africanfuturism (6). To support this claim, Dike and Adejunmobi allude to Suvin’s concept of cognitive estrangement. From an African Worldview, some of the issues Fagunwa and Tutola examine in their works follow logical principles that are rational. Lisa Dowdwall confirms that Magical Realism depicts more succinctly the realities of West African traditions than realist texts since they capture “the seen and unseen, rational and mysterious dimensions of (post) colonial experience” (4). Some critics have credited the emergence of African Science Fiction to Postcolonial Studies, and Masood Raja et al., who identify connections between Science Fiction and Post-Colonial Studies, write “both these fields are concerned with questions of temporality, space and existence” (9). In her article, published in 2016, Moradewun Adejunmobi suggests that Post-Colonial Fiction precedes African Science Fiction by emphasizing that Post-Colonial Science Fiction provides suggestive pathways for reading African Science Fiction” (266). Adejunmobi asserts that long before the release of *District 9* in 2009, a South African Science Fiction movie, African literary texts had discernable Science Fiction traits. She cites as an example of Africanfuturism, Amos Tutola’s *Palmwine Drinkard* (1952). Taiwo Osinubi, in his examination of two futuristic African Science Fiction films, cites Bekolo’s film—*Les Saignantes* (2005)—as one of the first African films that “deploys Science Fiction (SF) iconography to estrange circulating stories about African economic and political cultures” (256). In his bibliographic article, “African Science Fiction 101,” Mark Bould notes that though there are “African” Science Fiction texts from as early as the period before World War II, but these texts were primarily written by white South Africans. Similarly, Maurits, who explores the “historical reasons for African science fiction’s emergence,” declares, without providing specific titles and authors, that “there were about 10 ASF publications between 1900 and 1950” (2-3). Bould, though affirming that such narratives (recounted by White South Africans) are disputedly African, posits that the first Science Fiction (first encounters) text written by a Black African on the continent is Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* because it does “science-fictional things” on the basis that it gives an account of “first contact but from the other side” (13). In addition to *Things Fall Apart*, Bould categorizes “Nigerian Buchi Emecheta’s *The Rape of Shavi* (1983), Kojo Laing’s *Woman of the*

*Aeroplanes* (1988), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), Ahmadou Kourouma's *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote* (1998)" as Science Fiction novels that explore Africa as "irreal" (13). Responding to the question "why African Science Fiction did not emerge at the same time mainstream Science Fiction did," Maurits admits that lack of interest in publishing for Black readership and colonization were some of the reasons why it took so long for the genre to emerge. The question that remains unanswered is: why, despite all that has been done by critics and authors alike to expand the genre, does Africanfuturism still lack "scholarly attention," as Mathew Omelsky points out? (34).

Many critics have argued that Africanfuturism, or African Science Fiction, has a long history. For instance, Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué identifies earlier iterations of Okorafor's coinage in their introductory article. Mougoué identifies the concept in four ways, namely: "Okorafor's Africanfuturism," "African Futurism," "Afri-futurism," and "African Afro-Futurism" (1-2). Interestingly, Mougoué implies that African Futurism is a hybrid genre that can be further categorized as continental Africanfuturism and Diasporic Africanfuturism. Borrowing feminist lingo, Mougoué takes cognizance of the positionality (i.e., situatedness and specific locations) of Diasporic Africanfuturist authors such as Nnedi Okorafor (Nigerian-American); Tade Thompson (Nigerian-British); Suyi Okungbowa (Nigerian residing in Canada); Namwali Serpell (Zambian American); and continental Africanfuturist authors living on the continent such as Dilman Dila (Ugandan); Jonathan Dotse (Ghanian); Aliyu Rafeeat (Nigerian); Chumo Nwokolo (Nigerian); and Mazi Nwonu (Nigerian). Similarly, Okoro emphasizes noticeable differences in the works of "authors born to African parents in the West and those writing in the continent... in that they address futurist themes in different ways that explore African myth, society, and culture" (14). Also, Mashigo emphatically argues that the needs of Africans residing on the continent, especially when it comes to "imagining futures," are overtly different (xi). While we can understand the distinction between both categories, such classifications may become problematic in the long run because of the tendency for an explosion of the genre based on the numerous possibilities of identities and positionalities. Undoubtedly, Africanfuturist authors publish in Africa and experience, on a day-to-day basis, the realities of living in Africa. Yet, they have less visibility than those in the Diaspora. While Diasporan Africanfuturist writers have lived many years in the

Diaspora and occupy more privileged positions, they portray Africa from a distance. For instance, some critics have expressed how Okorafor is successful because of how accessible her works are in the western world. However, Unlike Pirker and Judith Rahn notes the ways the positionality of Diasporic Science and Speculative Fiction writers like Okorafor, Tade Thompson, and Tomi Adeyemi may present them with opportunities (accessibility) that others on the continent lack. For Okorafor, who coined Africanfuturism, a term that excludes some people, it can be said that she, like some African American artists and writers, uses Africa as a backdrop for her fantastical and sometimes dystopian stories.

However, an important point to mention is that the differences between continental and Diasporic authors are not specific to Africanfuturist authors alone. Within the broader African literature genre, there are Diasporic writers such as Adichie who have more visibility than continental authors like Abubakar Adam Ibrahim, a continental realist author. Rather than engage with problematic labels, we must come to terms with how Blackness is never defined by a singular attribute. Moshigo acknowledges that the continent is diverse and, therefore, colonialism has left different legacies and distinctive marks on each African country. This, in turn, will influence the way African countries envision futures for themselves; as an example, there will be distinct visions of the future for South Africa as there would be for Nigeria. Matthew Eatough, at the 2022 NeMLA Conference, hints at some of these differences as he argues that there are varieties of Africanfuturism, what he labels “two cultures of Africanfuturism.” In his conference presentation, the Sci-fi critic distinguishes between “Nigerian fiction/Lagos-Diasporic circuit” and the “South African Fiction/Cape School.”

Given that Okorafor has never resided in Nigeria, or any other country in Africa, I question her exclusionary definition of Africanfuturist literature as one that is primarily written by Black Africans. Okorafor might be projecting her own experience of racism in America onto her “Africanfuturist” narratives. This is not necessarily problematic, but it may make her complicit in the accusations against Afrofuturist authors who use Africa as a backdrop, as she does in some of her stories. In addition, I challenge Okorafor’s unequivocal definition of Africanfuturism because it denies African Americans and Afro-Carribeans their ancestral roots—their historical connections to the continent of Africa. While definitions of Afrofuturism similarly exclude African experiences, or project Africa as a monolithic continent, as is the case

in *Black Panther*, I contend that there should be room for a utopic space where one experience of Blackness is not privileged over another.

Clearly, both terms are defined based on a writer's origin, and my agenda is to show why this is problematic. Okorafor notes that though Africanfuturism is rooted in African histories and cultures, it branches out into the African Diaspora. This assertion situates the notion that the African Diaspora exists in a liminal state with no ties to any specific continent. It is understandable that Black stories should be told by Black voices, but completely dismissing non-Black Africans, African Americans, or white authors living on the continent can be just as problematic as the critics insisting that Afrofuturist literature should be solely written by descendants of enslaved Africans. Africanfuturist stories written by these groups of people have the potential of offering nuances to our understanding of Africanfuturism. Philip Ray, a white scholar who employs an autoethnographic approach in understanding Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, posits that as long as a white person does not engage with these genres from a colonizer's positionality, and they do not approach the genres by employing "positivist approaches to knowledge gathering," white authors and non-Black Africans should NOT be completely excluded from the genre<sup>4</sup> (163). Evidently, Okorafor's exclusion of non-Black authors is directly rooted in her aversion to *District 9*, a Science Fiction film written by Neill Blomkamp, a white South African.

### **Pan-Africanfuturism: Reconciling Black Futurisms**

Drawing from Masiyaleti Mbewe's comments on the significance of a new genre that takes cognizance of the shared struggles and cultural affinities of all Black people across the globe, I intend to complicate definitions and understandings of Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism in order to demonstrate where and how both genres fall short; particularly, establishing why the focus of both genres might be inadequate at best, or, inadvertently problematic, at worst. Globalization and migration have affected how Black people define their identities, and it is incredibly significant to

---

<sup>4</sup> A great example of a Sci-Fi is *Poisedon's Children*, a book trilogy written by Alastair Reynolds, a white British author. *Blue Remembered Earth*, a book in the trilogy, imagines a future world where Africa is a superpower in technoscience and manages to eliminate world poverty and disease with their technological and economic power.



grapple with these issues in futurist imaginings. In what follows, I will examine *Wild Seed*, written by Octavia Butler, as a great example of a Pan-Africanfuturist text.

Categorized as an Afrofuturist novel, Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed* is a Science Fiction novel that is set in 17<sup>th</sup> century Africa and America. *Wild Seed* tells the story of two immortal Africans who manifest in human body as Doro and Anyanwu. While Doro is a spirit, Anyanwu is an immortal woman who perfected the art of healing herself. When Doro meets Anyanwu, he senses that she is different. Her unique essence, which Doro describes as unusual, attracts him to her. In search for humans with unique powers to populate his seed colony, Doro convinces Anyanwu to travel with him to North America, where he breeds supernatural humans. While in America, Anyanwu dictates the terms of her enslavement in the hopes that Doro will give her superhuman children that outlive her. As Doro's enslaved African, Anyanwu resists oppressive forces in America. She has the powers to change her body whenever she chooses, such as to an animal, to hide her essence from her enslaver, and into a white man to avoid racial discrimination. Likewise, Doro's spirit takes on the bodies of different white men as he executes his genetic breeding experiment.

*Wild Seed* begins in the distant past, specifically 1690, and runs through to 1840. Butler goes far back in time not only to revise history, but she also empowers her woman protagonist, Anyanwu. While Anyanwu began as an enslaved woman in 17<sup>th</sup> century present-day Nigeria, she does not remain docile; in fact, she resists her captor at every opportunity she gets. Anyanwu negotiates the terms of her enslavement since she only decides to go with Doro to breed children that will outlive her. Essentially, Octavia Butler provides, in *Wild Seed*, a powerful and subversive image of Black womanhood. Anyanwu resists Doro both in Africa and in America. Before Doro invades her village, Anyanwu had already encountered discrimination. Therefore, she relies on her shapeshifting powers, changing form to a man, to prevent abuse from other men.

What Octavia Butler does in *Wild Seed* complicates our understanding of both Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism. Her protagonists, Anyanwu and Doro, are both described as African, situated in different historical moments across continents. Butler effectively describes her fictional Nigerian setting as she gives specific landmarks. In a way, she does become a literary cartographer in her description. We see specific mention of Orumili (later renamed by colonialists as Niger River), Benin and Onitsha; these towns existed during, and, perhaps, before the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She

sets the scene for a West African town as we see her protagonist eat delicacies peculiar to these towns such as pounded yam, kola nut, palm wine, smoked fish, and cocoyams. While in Africa, her male characters wear deerskin to cover their loins. Butler does not romanticize Africa in any way. Butler successfully depicts Anyanwu's African home as she portrays the complexities associated with most African communities during this period. For instance, she demonstrates the individual cultures, customs, and traditions peculiar to the Ibos, distinguishing them from the Benin people. In her narration, women trade while men farm; the religious practices are also evident in the world she creates. Likewise, she humanizes the African communities in the sense that she does not absolve them of hate. Her fictional African communities and peoples are capable of love just as they are capable of perpetuating hate and discrimination. As a human trait, these African people fear what they do not know and what is overtly different. For instance, although Anyanwu is an Ibo woman, people in her community fear her not because she hurt anyone, but because she is immortal—as a result, she is labeled a witch. Butler's imagery of West Africa does not seem speculative or imaginative. It is almost as if she lived the life and was there in 17<sup>th</sup> century precolonial West Africa. In fact, Sandra Govan praises Butler's defiant casting of an indigenous African woman at a time when Science Fiction writers followed the usual practice which "required" the absence of Black characters, particularly Black women. Govan says of *Wild Seed*; "Butler's innovation comes with setting and character; it comes with movement of Black characters through time, coupled to travel through Africa and to locales central to the African diaspora. Science fiction had seldom evoked an authentic African setting or employed non-stereotypical Blacks as characters" (83). Ebony Gibson reiterates Govan stating that *Wild Seed* was the "earliest in publication to be connected to African worldviews by critics," which, in and of itself, is a subversive act (176). Similarly, Steven McClain argues that Butler's imaginings in *Wild Seed* are particularly subversive because she decolonizes prior narratives of Africa. By perpetuating colonialist undertones for her characters, she "deconstructs the authority

of colonialism” (McClain 24).<sup>5</sup> Sarah Wood also argues that Butler employs African spirituality by casting it as science to interrogate and challenge patriarchal “white authored Christianity” in a way that liberates Black womanhood (87). Madhu Dubey confirms that *Wild Seed*, which was disregarded for a long time, was perceived by many critics to be the “most puzzling novel of slavery” primarily because, as I argue, it is a subversive narrative which employs “transhistorical allegory of gender oppression” (351). However, Govan claims that Butler’s “sketches of seventeenth century” Africa may be influenced by Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Ayi Kwei Armah’s *2000 Seasons* particularly because Butler envisions the wealth and vibrancy of African civilization (84). Though, in her interview with Larry McCaffery, Octavia Butler firmly attributes the inspiration for her depiction of Nigerian cultures to the research she conducted at a Los Angeles public library, specifically citing a book, *The Ibo Word List*, along with other ethnographic materials she found (McCaffery 66). In this interview, Butler admits that she was shocked to see the complexity of Ibo culture, noting that she initially thought the Ibo people were “one people with one language,” only to realize that there were “many dialects” of the Ibo language (McCaffery 66). When queried about her characterization of Anyanwu, Butler submits she was influenced by a folkloric Ibo character named Atagbusi that she found “in a book called the *King in Everyman* by Richard N. Henderson” (McCaffery 66). Though often characterized as a mythic figure, Ibo historians argue that Atagbusi “lived during the middle or latter part of the 19th century” (Henderson 233). Like Anyanwu, Atagbusi was purported to be a shapeshifter who would often transform into a buffalo, supposedly the “totem of her lineage,” as she also allegedly prevented epidemics (Henderson 233). Hellen Henderson notes that Atagbusi was popularly known to have been one of the town leaders “who represented the interests of Onitsha people in negotiations with early missionaries and traders” (233). These attestations demonstrate how well-versed Butler is in African history, enabling her to recreate the

---

<sup>5</sup> In the article, “Decolonizing the Novum, Queering the Cyborg in Octavia Butler’s *Wild Seed*,” Stephen McClain argues against Darko Suvin’s dogmatic definition of science fiction, primarily because this definition dismisses African cultures and spiritualities as mythical and fantastical, consequently neglecting the scientific relevance of African cultures. According to this critic, Suvin would mischaracterize Anyanwu as a sorceress, when she is, in fact, a scientist. In an interview with Randel Kenan, Butler, herself, confirms that *Wild Seed* should be read as science fiction as it is more science fictional than her earlier text, *Kindred*, as Anyanwu is a medical/herbal scientist.

Ibo culture excellently. Yet, Madhu Dubey maintains that these histories and cultures are fantastical tales “involving immortal witches” (352).

While Butler is popularly acknowledged as an Afrofuturist writer, her artistic contribution in *Wild Seed* epitomizes the essence of Africanfuturism according to Okorafor’s conceptualization. Okorafor argues that Africanfuturist literature must be rooted in Africa and then branch out into the Diaspora. Sandra Govan notes that *Wild Seed* can be described as “extrapolative fiction” because she makes historical inferences in creating her unique African society (“Homage” 79). Butler’s character is taken from her African home to the new world where she becomes an enslaved woman. Butler’s characterization of Anyanwu and Doro enables her to connect the past, present, and future in a way that readers can envision the trajectory of the lives of African Americans. Sarah Wood emphasizes that *Wild Seed* “geographically” charts the movement of stolen Africans and the African Diaspora from “Africa through the Middle Passage and the Americas” (90). Anyanwu characterizes the past, but she serves as a “conduit between Africa and America” in such a way that her colony becomes a mini-Africa in America (Wood 93). Cassandra Jones similarly notes that Anyanwu gains a strong awareness of the importance of preserving histories of “Africans and African Americans through her own experience living as a white man” (Butler 714).

Anyanwu embodies a living ancestor whose sole purpose in America is to remind stolen Africans about their past; she is a griot, reminding enslaved Africans about their homeland, Africa. At Doro’s request, Anyanwu *condescends* to give her children English names—Ruth, Stephen and Peter—but, she also preserves their Ibo heritage naming them Nweke, Ifeyinwa, and Chukwuka respectively. Both names (English and Ibo) represent the dual identities her children have, especially with the African names representing memories of home. In her colony, she calls her children by their Ibo names and speaks Ibo “as though she had never left home,” even though they all speak English and Dutch (Butler 161). Her colony, which she calls home, has various interior decorations reminiscent of home: “earthen pots, variations of which she had once sold in the marketplace of her homeland, and stout handsome baskets” (Butler 150). Evoking memories of her homeland, Anyanwu “never sanded the floor” in her colony (Butler 150). Sandra Grayson and Cassandra Jones agree that Africa operates as a repository of memories in *Wild Seed*. Jones, who examines the liberatory role of history in Butler’s *Kindred* and *Wild Seed*, iterates that Butler’s

Patternist Series interrogates “tensions between history and memory” (699). According to Jones, history is significantly different from memory; while “history is static,” memory is dynamic (700). Essentially, history, when remembered, has the potential of liberating a people from oppressive presents. In other words, Anyanwu’s presence in the United States symbolizes memories of a forgotten past, what Jones calls *lieu de mémoire* (701). Anyanwu, who bears no European name until she adopts one at the end of the novel, represents Butler’s attempt to root enslaved Africans in indigenous African cultures despite imperialist attempts at erasure. Frances White echoes that the African past/memories of African Americans has been transformed by “the middle passage, sharecropping, industrialization, urbanization” (73). Grayson contends, more so, for an individualized society—that is America. Anyanwu’s colony symbolizes a conceptualization of a “society that recognizes all nations and people connected to a global community” (4). According to Grayson, endurance of these African cultures in the face of persistent erasure demonstrates their influence as “active agents” (4). These memories served to protect enslaved Africans and African Americans in the face of dehumanizing racism that continues to this day. As an embodiment of communal memory, Anyanwu rights “historical wrongs” by resisting erasure, says Jones (702). Across space and time, Anyanwu’s name, soul, body, and culture all remain despite her movement across continents from New York to Louisiana. Only for a moment does Anyanwu forget who she is, which could be interpreted as an intentional narrative strategic move by Butler. Anyanwu changes form into a white man and encounters a telepathic enslaved African, Mgbada, who criticizes Anyanwu saying, “Does that white skin cover your eyes too” (Butler 225). Here, Butler indicates how quickly Anyanwu forgets who she is: an African. In her white skin, Anyanwu regrettably states, “I had been white for too long,” quickly confirming that she had normalized enslavement, as she sees chained enslaved Africans walk past her, but was inattentive to such a sight (Butler 226). In this moment, Mgbada’s statement serves as a crucial reminder to Anyanwu of her African roots; yet, another instance that demonstrates how memory can serve as a mode of resistance against erasure, what Jones rightly terms *lieu de mémoire*.

More importantly, Butler’s narrative establishes how European imperialism destroyed numerous towns, cultures, and decimated people. Butler’s protagonist recounts that enslavers had “undone in a few hours the works of a thousand years” (Butler 3). Africans who had not been enslaved or “herded away” were slaughtered

(Butler 3). The opening narrative in *Wild Seed* frames an African society that had been desiccated and littered with the bones of adults and children. Entire towns were pillaged so much that Doro finds it hard to enslave people. Butler effectively portrays the destructive consequences of European invasion in precolonial Africa, but she also establishes how Transatlantic Slavery was perpetuated through her narration of varying forms of enslavement that already existed in many African towns in the 17th century. For instance, the author situates ethnic group differences and wars that engendered societal stratification in precolonial Africa. Anyanwu, who became enslaved in the New World, hesitantly describes her complicity in the perpetuation of enslavement in her town. When Doro asks her about her origin, she says ineptly, “we were Ado and Idu, subject to Benin before crossing. Then, we fought with Benin and crossed the river to Onitsha to become free people, our own masters” (Butler 9). Doro curiously probes what happened to the Oze people, occupants of Onitsha (a land conquered by Anyanwu’s people), and she responds “some ran away. Others became our slaves....It is better to become a master than to be a slave” (Butler 9). Butler’s narrator equates enslavers with ethnic groups at war, thus showing the root of Transatlantic Slavery. Butler’s narrator recounts “Some had been born slaves .....kidnapped from their villages.....Some had been sold for witchcraft or for other crimes of which they were usually not guilty,” while others were made slaves after war conquests (Butler 73). It is ironic that Doro, an enslaver himself, accuses Anyanwu’s people of forcing the Oze people into servitude. In casting Doro as a figure of Transatlantic Slavery, Butler enables readers to understand the fundamental differences between servitude in Africa and enslavement in the New World. Through this dialogue, Butler makes it particularly clear that precolonial Africa thrived on a different type of slave economy. The treatment of enslaved Africans in the New World was based on racial difference; however, on the continent, it was predicated on ethnic differences that was not necessarily as dehumanizing as American racial enslavement. I contend that this is Butler’s approach at dousing tensions between Africans and African Americans as she attempts to build bridges that connect both groups. Butler shows how nuanced the history of servitude and enslavement in Africa is, consequently addressing misconceptions about the role of Africans in enslavement.

However, Aisha Mathews argues that Butler’s narrative strategy emphasizes the role “standard whiteness” played in the success of Transatlantic Slavery in the Americas (642). Because whiteness is “established as the norm,” Africans internalize

“a position of inferiority” which makes it possible for Doro to enslave fellow Africans, says Mathews (642). This critic bases their argument on Doro, as well as Anyanwu, to take the forms of White men when they arrive in Louisiana. Adwoa Afful, whose research explores the significance of a new narrative that identifies the experiences of African women migrating from Africa to the Americas, employs *Wild Seed* as a paradigm that reformulates previous accounts of “middle passage epistemologies” (94). Afful’s premise, which supports the argument of this essay, is that *Wild Seed* provides an analytical framework that takes account of “Black African migrant and gendered racial identity formations within North America” which enables a “myriad of origins” that coexist (95). The experiences of Africans in the New World and those in Africa during the Slave Trade Era (precolonial Africa), as well as those during and after the colonial and postcolonial era, are interdependent. Afful further argues that Butler’s characterization of Anyanwu opens avenues where Black women, whether American, Diasporan or African, can share affinities that were previously non-existent. Essentially, Afful makes the case for diverse interpretations of Anyanwu’s predisposition to travel as Doro’s enslaved African. In other words, she interrogates migration, abduction, forced, self-exile, voluntary, as intersecting avenues that can foreground oppressive forces at play including patriarchal, capitalist, and neocolonial institutions that thrive on divisive tactics of racial and gendered divisions. Cross-examining the effects of European imperialism in pre-colonial Africa, Afful notes that Butler’s African towns are marked by constant migration in a way that renders Africa as a Diasporic site even before transatlantic enslavement commenced on a grand scale (99). In this way, Butler “generatively expands” Middle Passage Epistemologies, argues Afful, in such a way that links the processes of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, colonialism “...and voluntary and forced migration” (98). While Afful focuses on extending Middle Passage Epistemologies to include different forms of oppression, such as colonialism, I consider her inclusion of contemporary gendered oppression existing in Africa to be an overreach, as this mildly undermines the horrors encountered by stolen Africans during the Slave Trade Era. Equating the experience of US enslavement with gendered oppression in Africa is an overblown distortion.

Butler’s writing captures what many African writers have failed to achieve in their narratives, and what Achille Mbembe calls, in “African Atrocity, American Humanity: Slavery and Its Transnational Afterlives” by Yogita Goyal, “the great unspoken subject,” that is enslavement (50). Goyal also notes that many African

authors have no memory of enslavement because it was called a different name—*colonialism*, what the critic terms “a continuing transnational afterlife” (50). Similarly, Nonki Motahane *et al* add that though many African authors choose to overlook the historical events of enslavement in Africa and America, but choose “instead to focus on (post) colonialisms,” doing so denies critical engagement that can necessitate a full understanding of “the intersections of slavery and colonialism” (20). Nonetheless, Motahane et al., applaud Ya Gyasi, a Ghanaian American, whose novel, *Homegoing*, recounts histories of enslavement in a manner comparable to what Octavia Butler does, albeit employing a realist mode. As with Butler’s novel, *Homegoing*, presents an “important example of this emerging memory of slavery in the African psyche” (Motahane et al., 20). Similarly, Goyal cites Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Anowa* and *Dilemma of a Ghost* as texts that centralize and put into dialogue the effects of enslavement and colonization from a gendered perspective. Intertextual readings of such texts—written by authors from completely different backgrounds and Afrocentric experiences—will provide a deeper understanding of interlocking systems of colonialism and enslavement in a way that both groups, Africans and African Americans, can finally begin to empathize with one another. Clearly, historical accounts of enslavement and colonization written by women of African descent can show and establish intricacies that characterized these institutions in a way no male author has done.

## Conclusion

In Butler’s narrative, we see intersections of Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism, which then renders both terms inadequate in describing what Butler does. It is for this reason I suggest that *Wild Seed* can best be understood under the category of *Pan-Africanfuturism* precisely because it can traverse the hazy distinctions between Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism. *Wild Seed* is a perfect blend of both genres, consequently, making it an ideal example of a Pan-Africanfuturist text. In this important work, Butler reclaims African histories, cultures, and traditions, thus undoing the legacies of imperialism. Butler reclaims African cultural legacies through her characterization of Anyanwu. It is important to understand that the plot of *Wild Seed*, which tells the story of two immortal gods, relies heavily on an African cultural ethos. It is only through the immortal nature of both Anyanwu and Doro that readers can appreciate the revisionist work that Butler does.



The implications are significant for writers considering the adoption of Pan-Africanfuturism, aiming to explore the migration, whether coerced or voluntary, of Africans across the Atlantic to the Diaspora within a futuristic, speculative, and/or Science Fictional context. The continent of Africa is not a monolith; therefore, this means there already exists diverse experiences. In other words, there should be room for African American, Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latino, and Afro-Asian narratives that demonstrate the rich diversity of African Science Fictional narratives. As has been discussed earlier, relationships between Africans on the continent and those whose ancestors were enslaved have been turbulent. On the one hand, African Americans have sought to repress connections to Africa primarily because of the negative stereotypes used to describe the continent by imperialists (colonizers and enslavers). As Frances White suggests, severing ties with their pasts/African origins “allows a racist subtext” that only continues to haunt Africans globally (74). On the other hand, Africans on the continent also have a distorted idea of African Americans and their culture. For both groups to forge ahead to fulfilling futures, they must confront the past—the positive and negative—and pick gems from the past they must project into the future. Consequently, it becomes significant that in imagining Black futures, Black people, despite individual nationalities, experiences, origins, and cultures, must unite on a common ground—their shared African ancestry; the very aspect that racists have continued to use to subjugate all Black people.

## Works Cited

- Adejunmobi, Moradewun. "Introduction: African Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 3 (2016), pp. 265-272.
- Afful, Adwoa. "Wild Seed: Africa and Its Many Diasporas." *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2016), pp. 557-73,  
doi:10.1080/02560046.2016.1240963.
- Amaize, Ohimai. "The 'Social Distance' between Africa and African Americans." JSTOR Daily. Accessed Apr. 18 2023, [www.daily.jstor.org/the-social-distance-between-africa-and-african-americans/](http://www.daily.jstor.org/the-social-distance-between-africa-and-african-americans/).
- Anderson, Reynaldo, and Charles E. Jones. Introduction. *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Afro-Blackness*. Lexington Books, 2016.
- Anderson, Reynaldo. "Afrofuturism and Democracy: The Age of Disorder and the Coming Pluriverse." *Refraction*, August 9, 2022,  
<https://www.refractionfestival.com/editorial/afrofuturism-and-democracy-the-age-of-disorder>.
- Bould, Mark. "African Science Fiction 101." *SFRA Review*, 311 (2015).
- Bould, Mark. "Africa SF: Introduction." *Paradoxa: Africa SF*, edited by Mark Bould, Paradoxa Vashon Island, 2013, pp. 7-15.
- Boyd Acuff, Joni. "Afrofuturism: Reimagining Art Curricula for Black Existence." *Art Education*, vol. 73, no. 3 (May 2020), pp. 13-21, doi:10.1080/00043125.2020.1717910.
- Bristow, Tegan. "We Want the Funk: What Is Afrofuturism to the Situation of Digital Arts in Africa?" *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, vol. 10, no. 1 (April 2012), pp. 25-32, doi:10.1386/tear.10.1.25\_1.

Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose."

*In Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, edited by Mark Dery, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 179-222.

Dowdall, Lisa, "The Utopian Fantastic in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*." *Paradoxa: Africa SF*, edited by Mark Bould, Paradoxa Vashon Island, 2013, p. 175.

Dubey, Madhu. "Octavia Butler's Novels of Enslavement." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2013), pp. 345-63, doi:10.1215/00295132-2345786.

Eatough, Matthew. "African Science Fiction, West and South." *Adversity and Creativity: African Literature, Film, Media and Public Discourse*. Edited by African Literature Association, May 18-21, 2022.

Eshun, Kodwo. "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism." *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2003), pp. 287-302, doi:10.1353/ncr.2003.0021.

Espinoza Garrido, Felipe. "Reframing the Post-Apocalypse in Black British Film: The Dystopian Afrofuturism of *Welcome II the Terrordome* and *Shank*." *Critical Studies in Media Communicatio*, vol. 37, no. 4 (October 2020), pp. 310-323, doi:10.1080/15295036.2020.1820537.

Field, Gemma. "We Have Come to Refuel Your Future': Asphalt Afrofuturism and African Futurities." *Vector*. September 22, 2019, <https://vector-bsfa.com/2019/09/22/we-have-come-to-refuel-your-future-asphalt-afrofuturism-and-african-futurities/> .

FitzPatrick, Jessica. "Twenty-First Century Afrofuturist Aliens: Shifting to the Space of Third Contact." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, vol. 61, no. 1-2 (2020), pp. 69-90.

Gibson, Ebony. "Endless Love : The Evolution of Healers in Octavia Butler's Patternist Series."

*New Criticism and Pedagogical Directions for Contemporary Black Women Writers*,  
edited by LaToya Jefferson-James, Lexington Books, 2022, pp. 163-180.

Govan, Sandra Y. "Connections, Links, and Extended Networks: Patterns in Octavia Butler's Science Fiction." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1984), pp. 82-87, doi:10.2307/2904132.

Govan, Sandra Y. "Homage to Tradition: Octavia Butler Renovates the Historical Novel." *MELUS: The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, vol. 13, no. 1-2 (1986), pp. 79-96, doi:10.2307/467226.

Goyal, Yogita. "African Atrocity, American Humanity: Slavery and Its Transnational Afterlives." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2014), pp. 48-71, doi:10.2979/reseafrilite.45.3.48.

Goyal, Yogita. "Towards an African Atlantic: Ama Ata Aidoo's Diasporic Theater." *Atlantic Studies: Literary, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 3 (September 2010), pp. 241-61, doi:10.1080/14788810.2010.495199.

Grayson, Sandra M. *Visions of the Third Millennium: Black Science Fiction Novelists Write the Future*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003.

Henderson, Helen Kreider. "Onitsha Women: The Traditional Context for Political Power." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 810, no. 1 (1997), pp. 215-243.

Hodapp, James. "Fashioning Africanfuturism: African Comics, Afrofuturism, and Nnedi Okorafor's Shuri." *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics*, vol. 13, no. 4 (August 2022), pp. 606-19, doi:10.1080/21504857.2021.1965637.

IgboConference. "Africanfuturism : Disrupting Science Fiction - Nnedi Okorafor with

- Yvonne Mbanefo - Igbo Conference.” YouTube, June 18, 2020, video,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTOSalzZQ9Y&t=289s>.
- Iheduru, Adaobi C. *Examining the Social Distance Between Africans and African Americans: The Role of Internalized Racism*. 2012. Wright State University, PhD dissertation.
- Johnson, Michelle. “Imagining a Better Place.” *World Literature Today*, vol. 96, no. 1 (January 2022), pp. 20–23, doi:10.1353/wlt.2022.0012.
- Jones, Cassandra L. “Memory and Resistance: Doro’s Empire, Mary’s Rebellion, and Anyanwu as Lieu de Mémoire in Octavia E. Butler’s *Mind of My Mind* and *Wild Seed*.” *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 47, no. 5–8 (July 2018), pp. 698–718, doi:10.1080/00497878.2018.1518618.
- Kenan, Randall. “An Interview with Octavia E. Butler.” *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1991), pp. 495–504.
- Kurtz, Malisa. “Science Fictional Assemblages: SF and Postcolonialism?” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 26, no. 1 (January 2015), pp. 37–57.
- Lavender, Isiah. *Afrofuturism Rising: the Literary Prehistory of a Movement*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2019.
- Mashigo, Mohale. *Intruders: Short Stories*. South Africa: Pan Macmillan, 2018.
- Masquelier, Charles. “Pluriversal Intersectionality, Critique and Utopia.” *Sociological Review*, vol. 70, no. 3 (May 2022), pp. 616–31, doi:10.1177/00380261221079115.
- Matthews, Aisha. “Gender, Ontology, and the Power of the Patriarchy: A Postmodern Feminist Analysis of Octavia Butler’s *Wild Seed* and Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.” *Women’s Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 47, no. 5–8 (July 2018), pp. 637–56, doi:10.1080/00497878.2018.1492403.

- Maurits, Peter. "On the Emergence of African Science Fiction." *The Evolution of African Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Edited by Francesca T Barbini, Luna Press Publishing, 2018, pp. 1-28.
- McCaffery, Larry, et al. "An Interview with Octavia Butler." *Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers*. University of Illinois Press, 1990, pp. 55-70
- McClain, Steven K. "Decolonizing the Novum, Queering the Cyborg in Octavia E. Butler's Wild Seed." *Foundation*, vol. 50, no. 139 (2021), pp. 24-33.
- Mikić, Marijana. "Satirical Afrofuturism, Race, and Emotion in George S. Schuyler's Black No More." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2022), pp. 25-50.
- Motahane, Nonki, Oliver Nyambi, and Rodwell Makombe. "Rooting Routes to Trans-Atlantic African Identities: The Metaphor of Female Descendancy in Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing." *African Identities*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2021), pp. 17-30, doi:10.1080/14725843.2020.1788505.
- Mougoué, Jacqueline-Bethel. "Gender and Sexuality in African Futurism." *Feminist Africa*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2021), pp. 1-10.
- Nelson, Alondra. "Introduction: Future Texts." *Social Text*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2002), pp. 1-15, [muse.jhu.edu/article/31931](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/31931).
- Okorafor, Nnedi (@Nnedi). "Again, please don't call my scifi works afrofuturism. They're not. It's africanfuturism. I say this often, but many are reeeeeeeally attached to centering one word/one lens/one country/one point-of-view/one culture on ALL of us. #Reductive. Do better." Twitter, December 20, 2021, 9:28am, <https://twitter.com/Nnedi/status/1472952110245371911>.

- Okorafor, Nnedi. "Africanfuturism Defined." in *Africanfuturism: An Anthology*, edited by Wole Talabi, Brittle Paper, 2020.
- Okorafor, Nnedi. "Organic Fantasy." *African Identities*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2009), pp. 275-86, doi:10.1080/14725840902808967.
- Okoro, Dike. "Futuristic Themes and Science Fiction in Modern African Literature." *Futurism and the African Imagination: Literature and Other Arts*, edited by Dike Okoro, *Routledge Studies in African Philosophy*, London, England: Routledge, 2022, pp. 3-16.
- Osinubi, Taiwo Adetunji. "Cognition's Warp: African Films on Near-Future Risk." *African Identities*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2009), pp. 255-74, doi:10.1080/14725840902808934.
- Pirker, Eva Ulrike, and Judith Rahm. "Afrofuturist Trajectories across Time, Space and Media." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 37, no. 4 (October 2020), pp. 283-97, doi:10.1080/15295036.2020.1820542.
- Raja, Masood A., and Swaralipi Nandi. "Introduction." *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction*, edited by Masood Ashraf Raja, Jason Ellis, and Swaralipi Nandi. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011, pp. 5-14.
- Ray, Philip. "Toward Supportive Political Action: An Autoethnographic Approach to Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism." *Standpoints: Black Feminist Knowledges*, edited by Andrea N. Baldwin, Ashley V. Reichelmann, and Anthony Kwame Harrison, Virginia Tech Publishing, 2019, pp. 163-187, <https://doi.org/10.21061/standpoints>.
- Robert, Adam. "From Black Panther to Tade Thompson: Why Afrofuturism is Taking Over Sci-Fi." *The Guardian*. July 26, 2019, [theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/26/tade-thompson-afrofuturism-black-panther-sci-fi-sf-african-fiction](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/26/tade-thompson-afrofuturism-black-panther-sci-fi-sf-african-fiction).

- Samatar, Sofia. "Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2017), pp. 175-91, doi:10.2979/reseafritlite.48.4.12.
- Sheree Renee Thomas, Anderson, Reynaldo, et al. *The Black Speculative Arts Movement: Black Futurity, Art+design*. Lexington Books, 2019.
- Sunstrum, Pamela Phatssimo. "Afro-mythology and African Futurism: The Politics of Imagining and Methodologies for Contemporary Creative Research Practices." *Paradoxa: Africa SF*, edited by Mark Bould, Paradoxa Vashon Island, 2013, pp. 113-129.
- Talabi, Wole. Introduction. *Africanfuturism: An Anthology*, edited by Wole Talabi, Brittle Paper, 2020.
- Traore, Rosemary Lukens. "African Students in America: Reconstructing New Meanings of 'African American' in Urban Education." *Intercultural Education*, vol. 14, no. 3 (September 2003), p. 243.
- Wabuke, Hope. "Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, and the Language of Black Speculative Literature." *Los Angeles Review of Books*. August 27, 2020.  
[www//lareviewofbooks.org/article/afrofuturism-africanfuturism-and-the-language-of-black-speculative-literature/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/afrofuturism-africanfuturism-and-the-language-of-black-speculative-literature/).
- Wambu, Onyekachi. "Afrofuturism - Envisaging the Africa that We Want." *NewAfrican*. February 6, 2023, <https://newafricanmagazine.com/29032/>.
- White, E. Frances. "Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African American Nationalism." *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 73-97, doi:10.1353/jowh.2010.0246.



- Williams, Sarah. "The African Fashion Movement and Afrofuturism in Celebrating Identity." *The SAASUM Review*, [saasumreview.wordpress.com/2018/04/08/the-african-fashion-movement-and-afrofuturism-in-celebrating-identity/](https://saasumreview.wordpress.com/2018/04/08/the-african-fashion-movement-and-afrofuturism-in-celebrating-identity/). Accessed 14, Feb. 2024.
- Womack, Ytasha. *Afrofuturism : The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. First edition. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013.
- Wood, Sarah. "Subversion through Inclusion: Octavia Butler's Interrogation of Religion in Xenogenesis and Wild Seed." *FEMSPEC: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Journal Dedicated to Critical and Creative Work in the Realms of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Magical Realism, Surrealism, Myth, Folklore, and Other Supernatural Genres*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2005), pp. 87-99.
- Yaszek, Lisa. "Race in Science Fiction: The Case of Afrofuturism." *A Virtual Introduction to Science Fiction*, 180 (2013), pp. 1-11.