



Afro-Futurism Study of selected Black Diasporic Novels

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Abstract

The paper examines Afrofuturism as a critical aesthetic and epistemological framework in Black diasporic fiction, and explores its connection to posthuman theory. It asserts that Afrofuturist novels reimagine and reconfigure dominant histories, subjective experiences, and futures via speculative thinking, racial memory and cultural trauma. In the context of posthumanism, the study brings into question the concept of the autonomous individual of the liberal humanist tradition, focusing instead on hybrid, decentralized, and technologically mediated ways of being. Afrofuturist texts do not simply place Black subjects in future scenarios, but rather constructs them as focal points within interrelated human, nonhuman, technological and cosmic relationships. In addition, the paper suggests that Afrofuturism is an anti-archive in the sense that it reinscribes histories of the margins in speculative time frames that are at odds with the historical erasures of pro-archive systems. Afrofuturist fiction challenges linear ideas of time and spaces through its engagement with identity politics, technological embodiment, and diasporic memory, revealing alternative ways of being that connect past, present, and future. The study concludes that Afrofuturism is a radical rethinking of the human in a digitally mediated world of ecological crisis and global racial capitalism.

Keywords: Afrofuturism; posthumanism; black diaspora; Afrofuturist fiction; identity politics; cultural memory;

Introduction

Afrofuturism has become a powerful cultural, aesthetic, and theoretical approach that to reimagine the future of the Black diasporic identity as a space of intersection between science fiction, history, mythology, and technological speculation. Afrofuturism emerged as an offshoot of the works of scholars like Kodwo Eshun (2003) and Alondra Nelson (2002), which repositions Black experiences with speculative notions of futurity, in order to question dominant Western conceptions of futurity.



Afrofuturism changes the way the future is conceived, not as a non-racial or non-memory or non-trauma or non-resistance space, but as a space fraught with tension and contestation. This approach has been especially relevant in literary studies for scrutinizing modern literary productions that challenge structures of oppression and envision other worlds. (Kodwo Eshun , 2003)

In this context, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) by Octavia Butler, and *The Fifth Season* (2015) by N.K. Jemisin, are both highly significant novels of black speculative fiction. Butler's near-future dystopian story is an America in which climate change and its effects have ripped through society, creating a society divided into the oppressed and the oppressors; Jemisin's is an America in which race and climate change have become intertwined, with oppression bearing a heavy burden on systems of environmental control and racial power. In both novels, Afrofuturist aesthetics are further developed through the incorporation of speculative world-building, as well as critical examinations of race, gender, survival and collective memory.

Posthumanism is one of the main conceptual foci of this study; it destabilizes the idea of the autonomous, rational subject that is part of the liberal humanist view. Subjectivity is not a stable entity, but rather dispersed within networks of technologies, ecology, and materiality, as many scholars such as Donna Haraway (1991), Rosi Braidotti (2013) and N. Katherine Hayles (1999) have suggested. Posthumanism is especially relevant to Afrofuturism in literature, in so far as it uncovers the histories of Black bodies' marginalized status on the edge of the “human.” Instead, Butler and Jemisin reconfigure the threshold by introducing characters that are able to survive outside of anthropocentric ways of being, into adaptive and hybrid ways of being. Consequently, these texts are not just predictions of the future of technologies but also a questioning of what constitutes the human in times of crisis.

Lauren Olamina's evolution of “Earthseed” is a posthuman ethic that is based on change, adaptation, and cosmic uncertainty in *Parable of the Sower*. Likewise, in the *Fifth Season*, the orogene identity challenges and destabilizes the idea of biological and social classifications and shows how power constructs and regulates what is deemed human. Together,



these stories consider Afrofuturism as a performative art as well as an epistemological critique, a change in the way of thinking about identity, agency and history. (Womack, 2013)

While a number of recent texts offer significant scholarship in Afrofuturism speculative fiction, there is a need to combine posthumanist theory with Afrofuturist literary analysis, but this needs to be done in a sustained, comparative approach. Previous research tends to focus on the cultural/ or aesthetic aspect of Afrofuturism and the technological perspective of posthumanism, largely in the Euro-American context, without paying attention to its racial histories. Such a separation ~~that~~ fails to allow for the fullness of contemporary black speculative fiction in its reconstruction of the human under ecological, systemic violence and historical erasure. (Yaszek, 2006)

Moreover, though both Parable of the Sower and The Fifth Season have been individually discussed in relation to dystopian fiction, environmental crisis or race theory, there is a lack of comparative research that takes into account the way they both express Afrofuturist posthumanism. This study seeks to fill this gap with an examination of the role of these speculative futures as ways of reconstructing identity and preserving culture in these texts.

Literature Review

Afrofuturism first came into use in the influential essay “Black to the Future” by cultural critic Mark Dery, which defined it as a “speculative fiction” that “tackles African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture.” Given the experience of Africans or African-Americans in the past, from slavery to displacement to technological modernity, Dery (1994) wondered why Black experiences seemed to have been pushed to the margins of mainstream science fiction. He defined Afrofuturism as: "Speculative fiction set in a twentieth century technoculture that deals with African-American themes and concerns"(Dery, 1994 p. 180).

Dery's formulation laid the groundwork for future scholarship, by focusing on paradoxes of black exclusion from futuristic visions, even though black communities have had such significant experiences of alienation and forced migration.



Alondra Nelson furthered the concept of Afrofuturism, extending its concept field into discussions about race, technology and identity in general. In Afrofuturism, Nelson (2002) contended that Afrofuturism presents a critical counter-narrative to the technologizing discourse which often leaves Black subjects out of the proverbial picture. Afrofuturism opens up the possibility for scholars to re-imagine how the African diasporic communities relate to technological modernity and to re-vision and question the notion of Blackness as outside of innovation and futurity, Nelson explained. Afrofuturism affords the opportunity of "visions of the future through the experience of African diasporic communities" (Nelson, 2002, p. 9). This formulation took the focus of genre classification away from an analytical framework of literature, music, visual culture and political thinking.

A crucial thought to the Afrofuturist studies is offered by Kodwo Eshun (2003) who highlighted the temporal aspects of Black imaginative speculation. Eshun argued that Afrofuturism is an approach to reclaiming "counter-histories of the future" (p. 289), a resistance to Western histories of progress. Eshun suggested that Afrofuturism is a way to resist the Western histories of progress by recovering "counter-histories of the future" (p. 289). Afrofuturist texts reveal how the history of the past and present inflects each other and how the future is created and reimagined through them. Eshun's contribution serves as a reminder of temporality in black diasporic fiction, an alternative history that intertwines past and future and is defined by the memory of ancestors.

Afrofuturism has been popularized more recently by artist Ytasha Womack's (2013) approachable and theoretically engaging essay on Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism is an "intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation" (2013, p. 9) according to Womack. Her writing highlights the fact that Afrofuturism is not strictly science fiction, and that it draws from the realms of fantasy and magical realism, African cosmologies, and historical revisionism. Afrofuturist narratives for Womack are not simply aesthetic expressions, but political projects that can help to liberate the past and imagine futures for black communities that are not limited by racism and colonialism.



In the field of literature, scholarship has turned to a renewed interest in the ways in which Afrofuturist aesthetics in the novel by Black diasporic writers interrogate identity, memory, and resistance. The criticism of Octavia Butler's fiction is in the middle of this cluster of criticism. It is suggested that Butler's novels are an assault on essentialist thinking about race and humanity, as speculative scenarios are created by time travel, genetic mutation and social collapse. In *Kindred* (1979), Butler breaks down the time barrier as a modern black woman is drawn back from her own time into confront the harsh realities of slavery, showing the continued presence of historical trauma in the present. In the same manner, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) visualizes dystopic futures of inequality and environmental crisis, and foregrounds the agency of Black women and communal survival.

The writings of another experimental writer, Samuel R. Delany, have also received critical attention, and his work is investigating sexuality, language, and social organization. In Lavender's (2011) words, Delany's fiction challenges the prevailing ideas about race and futurity by imagining complex worlds where marginalized identities are spaces of epistemological innovation. Delany's speculative imagination is a way of Afrofuturism to be both a critique and a reconstruction of an exclusionary system and a way to imagine other ways of being.

Afrofuturist scholarship has grown over the past few years to consider other Black diasporic experiences beyond the African American context. Scientific writing has taken an interest in authors like Nnedi Okorafor, N. K. Jemisin, and Tananarive Due for their use of African cosmologies, indigenous knowledge systems, and transnational identities in their speculative fiction. While there is ongoing discussion about the differences between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, these writers collectively interrogate Eurocentric assumptions that are entrenched in traditional science fiction in order to create narrative space in which black subjects are at the heart of the creation of future worlds.

Furthermore, Afrofuturism has been noted by Black feminist scholars as having an intersectional aspect to its narratives. Afrofuturism offers a lens for understanding the intersectionality of gender, race, class and sexuality in their representation of the possibilities of black life. These texts



challenge the patriarchy both in the dominant and the speculative culture by focusing on the experience of Black women. Afrofuturism is dedicated to inclusive futurities, futurities for social justice and collective liberation, and the works of Butler, Jemisin, and Due are all filled with the protagonists of color.

While there has been an increasing body of scholarship on Afrofuturism, research on particular Black diasporic novels is still fairly scarce. Much of the existing literature focuses on the individual writer or theoretical issues, instead of comparative studies of writers within different diasporic settings. Thus, there is a need for further research that explores black diasporic novelists' works in relation to the themes of displacement, cultural memory, technological imagination, and future making in Afrofuturist aesthetics.

The current research aims to fill this void by analyzing some novels of Black diaspora with Afrofuturism theory. It aims to reveal the narratives' critique of the longstanding impact of colonialism and racism as well as their expressions of transformative visions of Black life that are grounded in resilience, creativity, and liberation. Black diasporic novels play a large role in the understandings of identity formation and possibilities politics of the contemporary.

Aim of the Study

In this study, the focus will be on investigating the concept of Afrofuturism in the theoretical and literary context, exploring it in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season*. In particular, it has as its aim to:

1. Compare and contrast the way in which speculations about the future are built in each novel.
2. Find examples of representation of identity politics in terms of race, gender, and power.
3. Explore how cultural memory can be used to create Afrofuturist stories.
4. Analyse the use of posthumanist theory in postmodernising the notion of 'the human' in black speculative fiction.
5. Compare the methods of each author in critiquing socio-political structures of the day with dystopian and/or speculative elements.

The Questions of the Study:

The following research questions guide this study: first how can the novels be understood as examples of identity politics in a dystopian and/or speculative context, second how is culture remembered, remediated and/or disremembered in Afrofuturism, third in both novels, how is the concept of subjectivity represented, fourth how does the posthumanist theory help in understanding the representation of subjectivity in both novels ?

Value of the Study

The importance of this study is the interdisciplinary aspects of literary theory, cultural studies and posthumanist philosophy. First, it offers an interpretive context which connects Afrofuturism and posthumanism, which are typically studied in isolation. Second, it advances Black speculative fiction scholarship by providing a greater insight into Butler's and Jemisin's approach to reimagining race, identity and survival.

Furthermore, this research is also pedagogically relevant in the academic field where the teaching and learning of speculative fiction is becoming more and more common as a means to discuss aspects of the climate crisis, social injustice and technological change. The research positions Afrofuturism in posthumanist literature, thus broadening a critical approach that encourages the examination of literature from a perspective that critiques the anthropocentric and Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge.

Importantly, the study's cultural and political significance in the context of the imagination of other futures is useful for the study of literature, cultural theory and philosophy. While the race, and technology, aspects of Afrofuturism have been explored, there has been less attention to Butler and Jemisin in comparison in the context of the convergence of the posthuman subject and ecological futurity.

The limitations of the Study

This work is only a textual analysis of two novels used, namely *Parable of the Sower* and *The Fifth Season*. It does not, therefore, cover other works by Butler, Jemisin or other Afrofuturist writers that might help to develop more general theories. Moreover, it is literary and theoretical



knowledge which is emphasized rather than empirical or ethnographic facts.

Another drawback is that the use of posthumanist theory is as the dominant analytical framework. This offers the richness of the subjectivity and identity, but does not go so far as to give the sense of other interpretive readings, such as psychoanalytical, Marxist or simply historical readings. Also, the cultural memory is only analyzed in terms of being written in texts, not lived experiences of diasporas.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative method, which is based on textual and critical discourse analysis. This will be done mainly by using a close reading approach of the texts *Parable of the Sower* and *The Fifth Season*, which will involve analysis of the narrative structure, character development, the construction of the world and the construction of themes.

The concept, theory, and methodology of Afrofuturism (Eshun 2003, Nelson 2002, Womack 2013) and posthumanism (Haraway 1991, Braidotti 2013, Hayles 1999) have been combined. These frameworks are utilized to read the speculation of redefined notion of identity, temporality and cultural memory.

Comparative analysis, looking at the way both novels create dystopian futures and at the emancipatory visions of survival, transformation. Language, symbolism, imagery for the environment and socio-political structures in the texts are considered. Artifacts of literary criticism, cultural theory and philosophy are also included as secondary sources in order to support an interpretation of the work.

Analysis of Octavia Butler's novel, *The Parable of the Sower*.

Parable of the Sower (1993) by Octavia Butler is a key Afrofuturist book because it is a prolonged philosophical statement against the continued existence of liberal humanism in an ecological crisis and context of racial capitalism. This is not just a dystopian novel about a dystopian future, it's also a novel that challenges the ideology that enables this dystopian future. Specifically, Butler challenges the Enlightenment notion of the autonomous, rational subject and proposes an alternative, posthuman and Afrofuturist, idea of identity that is based on vulnerability, relationality,



and ongoing transformation. The transformation is not only a thematic one in so far as it is epistemological: The novel asserts that survival requires transcending the very individualism upon which modern life is constructed.

This argument is set forth in the Earthseed philosophy that Lauren Olamina represents, as a political action and a metaphysics. "All that you touch / You Change. / All that you Change / Changes you" (Butler, 1993, p. 3) This statement is not a poetic but an ontological one about the changing and changing nature of things. Butler suggests that subjectivity is never isolated but is rather created in a continuous process of interaction with material and social environments. This directly attacks the liberal humanist notion of the self-sovereignty of man. This position becomes even more radical because of Earthseed's theological belief that "God is Change" (Butler, 1993, p. 25), making the term 'transcendence' seem to be ill-defined. In this respect, Butler's story fits in with the posthumanist theory, specifically Rosi Braidotti's assertion that the subject is not a thing but a "relational assemblage".

The strongest anti-individualism message in the novel is from Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome. She will not fully distinguish between her own pain and the pain of others and is read as a lack of self-defence, but is redefined as a better ethical structure by Butler (1993, p. 10) as "I feel what I see others feeling". The argument within the text is that moral and political awareness can only be found in the embodied interconnection and not through detachment. In this role, if life was a choice between emotional detachment and self-interest, the latter was the one that was favored and remained the only way to survive the neoliberal subjectivity. Conversely, Lauren's embodied relationality argues for the need for an increased capacity for empathy over a decreased one in the process of surviving systemic collapse. (Gilroy, 1993)

Social collapse is also a major part of the novel used for advancing the argument. Communities like Robledo, a place that is not the community that was supposed to be, are shown as an experiment gone wrong with exclusionary security. They are destroyed, leaving behind the impracticability of a separate and secure identity in a world which is increasingly degraded by climate change and economic uncertainty. The



assertion that “We can't just pay attention to ourselves and the people we know” (82) by Lauren is a criticism of boundary-making, itself. Butler is arguing the unsustainability of the logic of separation, be it social, racial or national. What might seem safe is really a delayed collapse!

The significance of afrofuturism is that Butler does not abstract this critique in some general fashion, but places it in the context of the trajectory of Black communities in a history of racial capitalism. The novel's broken society is not a figment of the author's imagination, but a continuation of American history of slavery, segregation and dispossession. Afrofuturism is reshaping the dynamics of Blackness and futurity by challenging the implicit notion that Black subjects are only "then" or "now." Afrofuturism is changing the nature of Blackness and futurity by denying the assumption that Black subjects can only be then or now. Butler's novel thus contains a double argument: one of precarity as a systemic condition of racial capitalism; and another of the reconfiguration of futurity itself, a futurity that is speculative and black. (Womack, 2013)

Earthseed's cosmological horizon only bolsters this point to eschew any sense of limitation on earth. Lauren's statement “The Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars” (Butler, 1993, p. 85) is not an escape fantasy, but rather would seem to be a criticism of systems of oppression on Earth. Space, as a concept, breaks free from the historical determinism especially the exploitation geographies of a racialized space. Butler's point is that liberation is impossible in the same spatial/ political structures that have been responsible for the production of domination. But the cosmic vision is not naive vision; it is a vision that is subject to transformation, discipline and adaptation.

The novel also builds up an extended discussion of embodiment. In opposition to Cartesian dualism, Butler proposes to view the body as porous, vulnerable and environmentally embedded. Adopting N Katherine Hayles's posthuman approach, Lauren's hyperempathy can be seen as an actualization of a relational ontology that produces consciousness not as contained within the body, but as emerging out of it. This is a question of the humanist notion of the body as "my body." Rather than this the body is an ethical site, and sociality is instantly



marked on body as a sense. Butler's implied argument is that ethics are not ideas but experience in the outside world. (Hayles, 1999)

Gender and power is also mediated in the process of Lauren's survival strategy. The need to disguise herself as a male reveals the performative nature of gender as opposed to its solidity. By doing so, Butler is also challenging the Patriarchal system not just on its oppressive nature, but also on its structural maladaptiveness when things go wrong. The novel's leadership is not about domination, but about caring, adapting and being responsible for each other. The injunction by Lauren, "Embrace diversity. Unite—or be divided, robbed, ruled, killed" (Butler, 1993, p. 176) is not just a call to solidarity; it's an argument that diversity is an ecological, social and survival imperative.

This argument is reinforced by the journey narrative, which will embellish the process of going with a model of epistemology. Lauren's journey north is not just for safety, but also as a way to create knowledge in extreme environments. The road becomes a site where identity is continually being reworked as a result of loss, violence and encounter. This is in line with diasporic theories of mobility that are grounded in the premise that displacement creates new communities, not in its elimination. Butler's 'There is no end / To what a living world / Will demand of you' (Butler, 1993, p. 201) further emphasizes the concept of subjectivity as an unfinished process and one sensitive to the environment.

But at its heart, *Parable of the Sower* is a sound philosophical thesis: liberal humanism is not up to the task of comprehending a world in crisis due to ecological disaster, racial violence, and systemic instability. Afrofuturism is not only a vision of other futures, it is a thinking of the conditions for the possibility of futurity. The novel's posthuman relationality and black diasporic experience challenge the idea that one must survive against a backdrop of individualism to instill a sense of transformation and interdependence as the basic framework of life. In this respect Butler's writing is not only literary but also theoretical, in the sense that it can be seen as a reconstruction of the human being as a being in the process of perpetual change, vulnerability and collectivity, where future is always entangled with change. (Yaszek, 2006)



Analysis of The Fifth Season

The Fifth Season is a novel written by American author N.K. Jemisin. It is one of the most impactful Afrofuturist novels and posthuman speculative fiction of our time. The novel's disjointed narrative, geological analogies, systems of race-based oppression and ecological disaster ask a series of questions about the nature of identity, embodiment, memory, and power in a dystopian future. Jemisin brings speculative fiction into the realm of black diasporic epistemologies, making it a space for the coming together of historical trauma, cultural survival, and alternate futurities. The novel at once undermines the humanist idea of the sovereign subject, and makes the interdependence of bodies, environments, technologies and non-human agents salient. (Haraway, 2012).

Afrofuturism as Mark Dery (1994) characterizes it is “speculative fiction written about African-American themes and concerns in the framework of twentieth-century technoculture” (p. 180). Jemisin brings this into the world of geological and ecological futurity, rather than technoculture. Instead of showing futuristic progress due to modern technological advances in the west, *The Fifth Season* shows how the world is being survived because it has changed in such a way that it is becoming unstable. The Stillness—the continent over and over again plundered by earthquakes—is thus a metaphor for the instability of racialized modernity. The recurring “Fifth Seasons” refer to historical patterns of violence, colonial destruction and a legacy of trauma that are significant to the memory of the black diaspora. (Dery, 1994).

With the opening lines “Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we?” the novel opens at the end. (Jemisin, 2015, p. 1). This opening immediately breaks linear historical narratives and places apocalypse not as ‘when’ it might happen but as ‘when it is happening’ and how that is, and how it is not, affecting the world. In Afrofuturist discourse, apocalypse often carries the implication of being a lived reality of social and racial oppression. Speculative stories by Black women are “histories of counter-futures” (Eshun, 2003) envisaging futures denied by the dominant modernity of Western culture. The apocalyptic world of



Jemisin is thus an ecological world as well as a world of historical violence that is woven into the colonial and racial system.

Orogenes are people who can manipulate seismic energy and are oppressed, functioning as a good metaphor for “otherness” that is racialized. Orogenes are feared, controlled and dehumanized just like Black people who are marginalised by the dominant society during colonial and racist systems. In the case of Damaya, what she has experienced at the Fulcrum is not an institutionalized violence, but a social order that is disguised as such. She is educated to know that “an orogene is not a person, an orogene is a weapon” (Jemisin, 2015, p. 96). This is a reflection of the posthumanization of the body which is also racialized and becomes an instrument of state control. The individuality and humanity of the body is stripped away, and it is technologized and commodified.

The Fulcrum itself represents a disciplinary power that is reminiscent of colonial disciplinary measures and racial surveillance. The Guardians' power over orogenes is similar to the "biopolitical regulation" of Michel Foucault (1977), which sees bodies regulated by institutional structures through surveillance, normalization and punishment. Jemisin's speculative world reveals the making of categories of humanity and nonhumanity. Orogenes are both critical for the survival of societies and not recognised by people. This paradox is a reminder of the past of racial capitalism's exploitation of black labor.

Essun's "fragmentation" of her identity also emphasizes the posthuman themes of the story. In the story, she assumes three personas, Damaya, Syenite and Essun, all of which illustrate the subjectivity as a process of constructions and instability. The posthuman subject is not a unified and autonomous subject, but fluid, relational and decentralized, according to posthumanist theorists such as Rosi Braidotti and others. Essun represents this divided ontologies. Her identities aren't necessarily about continuity of self, but rather trauma, survival and institutional violence. The dissociative identity reflects the dislocated histories of diasporic communities forced to flee their homes in slavery and colonialism and through systematic oppression. (Braidotti, 2013)



Perhaps one of the most heart wrenching moments in the novel is when Essun finds out that her husband killed their son, Uche, because he was an orogene: “He killed Uche while I was away” (Jemisin, 2015, p. 15). This action is a product of fear and ideology that's been indoctrinated into oppressive systems. The child is destroyed and futurity is destroyed. Afrofuturist theory is that the future is fought over space because in racially-dominated societies, minorities are often denied the right to dream of surviving oppression. Uche's death, then, represents an individual and collective history of violence.

The symbolism in the novel is centred around the metaphor of geological instability. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, tectonic fractures and volcanic eruptions are not only natural events but also symbols of repressed historical trauma. The Earth is an active agent who reacts to the very use and violence that takes place upon her. “Jemisin writes, 'The world is what it is. Humanity is where it is' (Jemisin, 2015, p. 366). This statement denounces anthropocentric assumptions which are that it is the human being that stands above nature. But the novel is a statement of a posthuman world ecology in which humankind is part of interrelated material worlds.

This ecological entanglement is in line with Donna Haraway's (2016) notion of multispecies entanglement that challenges the notion of human exceptionality and highlights relationality. *The Fifth Season* is about the relationship between human and nature—between life and death. The earth is not an inert but a living force, that resists. This is a form of representation that undermines Enlightenment humanism, which is usually based on the rational human control and mastery over nature” (Haraway, 2016).

This posthuman character of Hoa further enhances the novel. Hoa is a stone eater in a liminal space between minerals and biology, challenging the boundaries and categories of what is human and what is nonhuman. His life points to other forms of ontologies other than western binaries. The novel calls into question the limits of humanity itself when Hoa says “We are not human” (Jemisin, 2015, p. 432). Stone eaters are expressions of posthuman transformation, and demonstrate a mutability of identity and a material hybridity.



In the same way, Syenite's understanding of the exploitation that is systemic comes when she muses, "They use us because they can't live without us" (Jemisin, 2015, p. 251). The economic rationality of racial capitalism is contained in this statement. The reason why orogenes are being exploited is because they have the power to sustain civilization, but are not socially included. This situation is echoed in past systems where Black labour was essential to the building of the empire while the human element was not recognised. Jemisin in this way turns speculative fiction into an avenue for critique on the historical and contemporary racial hierarchies.

Throughout the novel, memory is a key element of the Afrofuturist politics of the book. The elements of cultural memory are oral traditions, myths, comms, and survival lore. This is the stone knowledge that has been carried through generations which represents ancestral knowledge, despite catastrophe. This goes along with Black diasporic practices in which memory is one way of resisting the erasure of history. The black Atlantic's diasporic identity is formed through transnational survival, the memory of culture, and displacement as Paul Gilroy (1993) notes in *The Black Atlantic*. In Jemisin's story, she imagines how this might unfold, investigating speculative world-building through the process.

The narrative's second person perspective is also a very deep theoretical significance. The novel invites readers to take a detour that brings them into intimate contact with a marginalized subjectivity. The novel has readers take a turn in the form of a "you," to enter into intimate relation with a marginalized subjectivity, in relation to Essun. This narrative approach to distance the reader from the narrative and involves readers in the violence and survival contexts. The disjointed narration depicts a traumatic consciousness and at the same time, it is universalizing the experience of dispossession.

"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in" (Jemisin, 2015 p. 295) is another important quotation that Alabaster shares. This metaphor emphasizes a collective future, instead of individual success. Afrofuturism often looks to the future as a collective, inter-generational, as opposed to capitalist and



individualistic one. But Alabaster's philosophy is in opposition to this destructive, short-term logic that has ruined the Stillness.

The novel also challenges a family and social normativities. Essun's motherhood becomes politicized due to the sense of protection and vulnerability when one is a mother in oppressive systems. She desperately tries to find her daughter Nassun, in a search for Black futurity to be preserved in the face of systemic annihilation. Jemisin thus turns into a gesture of resistance and survival — of motherhood. (Vint, 2018)

Re-defining humanity is captured in the last line of the novel, “To be human is to make yourself more than you are” (Jemisin, 2015, p. 449). Jemisin, however, refutes the notion of biological identity, positing humanity as a process of becoming, transforming and adapting. This formulation is very much aligned with the Posthumanist theory which fails to acknowledge the essentialism of self. Human beings are not a fixed substance, but a process that is formed as a result of the environment, technology, memory and collective struggle.

Jemisin's work as a speculative fiction writer is revolutionary and much of it has been acknowledged by critics. Sherryl Vint (2018) states that Jemisin “reimagines apocalypse as a racialized embodiment and environmental justice” (p.112). Likewise, Isiah Lavender III (2011) argues that the Black speculative fiction challenges the hegemonic race and futurity narratives by foregrounding epistemologies that are marginalized. The Fifth Season is a prime example of this, with ecological disaster, Blackness and posthumans at its heart, pushing the speculative imagination.

Finally, *The Fifth Season* is not just another fantasy or science fiction novel but instead is a kind of Afrofuturism and posthumanism. Using the language of the ruptures – geological, identity, ecological, and collective memory – Jemisin envisions a speculative future in which she questions oppression and imagines other ways of being. The novel shows that a future without histories of violence, displacement and survival, is impossible. In making the voices of marginalized people the voice of speculative fiction and throwing out a challenge to the humanist's notion,



Jemisin transforms the genre into a space for political resistance, cultural memory, or transformative futurity. (Haraway, 2012).

It is still one of the biggest debates in the literary and cultural theory today that Posthumanism is linked with Afrofuturism. While posthumanist philosophy aims to deconstruct the Enlightenment conception of the autonomous and rational human subject, posthumanist philosophy in Europe is not sufficiently able to represent Black historical experience, many black theorists claim. The difficulty is that often the posthumanism assumes that all the subjects of history were equally human (and that they all have transcended it). But black history shows that black bodies were always denied the status of human in slavery, colonialism and the racially capitalist American society. It is not simply about posthumanism, however, as Afrofuturism is a radical reinvention of the concept through the prism of a racially embodied, diasporic and historical future. (Yaszek, 2006)

The Posthumanists in Europe like Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and N. Katherine Hayles, criticize the liberal humanism by challenging anthropocentrism, Cartesian dualism and the assumption of human exceptionalism. Examples of her notions are the “cyborg,” which rejects the binary opposition of human/machine and nature/technology and embraces hybrid and relational identities (Haraway, 1985), or the “speculative feminist,” which foregrounds the idea that feminist science and technology might be imagined as non-human entities (Haraway, 2012). Likewise, in a process of posthuman subjectivity, Braidotti (2013) suggests, it is not the individual, but rather the mutually intertwined ecological, technological and material systems that create it. However, such abstract theories tend to be developed in European philosophies that fail to take into account the ways in which race has historically been a determinant of access to humanity. This has led black scholars to doubt the possibility of posthumanism to represent the historically marginalized subjects of full humanity.

It is significant in the context of black studies and Afrofuturist discourse. To this end, as scholars like Kodwo Eshun have thoughtfully demonstrated, in the past Black identity has been seen as the very antithesis of the human, of modernity, by the state. As such, as Kodwo



Eshun has thoughtfully argued, over time black identity has been deemed what the state declared outside of the human, outside of modernity. This black body of slaves was made marketable, technological and dehumanized as a productive instrument of the racial capitalism. Thus, black life has always already been in a state of “posthumanity” brought on by violence and dehumanization. Afrofuturism is different from posthumanism in Europe, which conceives of the posthuman as a future theoretical construct; Afrofuturism recognizes posthumanity as more than just a theoretical construct, but rather a reflection of historical experiences of enslavement, displacement, surveillance, and racialized embodiment. The Afrofuturism is not an examination of what comes after the human, but rather who historically got to be human? (Yaszek, 2006)

In this context, Afrofuturism radically reworks posthuman theory through the lens of its philosophical assumptions, and makes them racial and political. Afrofuturist fiction does not just refer to hybrid tech – it also has historical – and cultural – connotations. Through the Black diasporic memory, ecological disaster and systems of oppression Octavia Butler and N. K. Jemisin reimagines posthuman identity. In *Parable of the Sower*, hyperempathy syndrome makes the body a place of collective vulnerability and relational consciousness as Lauren Olamina's body becomes the field for collective vulnerability. Lauren's condition is a dissolving of the self and other since she feels the pain of the other. Butler's quote “I feel what I see others feeling” (Butler, 1993, p. 12) describes a feeling that indicates a strong sense of empathy. This is a representation that is different from the Eurocentric posthuman fantasies about cybernetic enhancement and/or artificial intelligence. Not technological transcendence, but trauma, empathy, ecological collapse, and adaptive survival are a more fitting means of defining the posthumanism of Lauren.

Furthermore, Butler's philosophy of Earthseed builds up the human race without the concepts of mastery and domination. Central to the doctrine is the principle “God is Change”, (Butler, 1993, p. 25) which challenges any notion of fixed ontologies and its view of becoming. By calling into question the liberal humanist notions of stable identity and autonomous individuality, Butler criticizes them. But unlike abstract posthuman



philosophy, however, Butler situates transformation in the history of the black collective and experience of surviving. The "root among the stars" (Butler, 1993, p. 85) This vision represents Lauren has that is more than technology, it is the break free from histories of confinement and dehumanization in the world. Afrofuturism is a way to reconstruct history and call into question the notion of speculative futurity.

Likewise, *The Fifth Season* further develops and expands the discourse of posthumanism—with the embodiment of the orogenes—who are feared, exploited, and dehumanized. The orogenes are racialized beings who have the power to sustain civilization, but are not accepted as human beings. By explicitly stating that "an orogene is not a person" (Jemisin, 2015, p. 96), the narrative reduces these beings to mere weapons, exposing the institutional violence that strips them of their humanity. This statement reveals the power systems that create categories of humanity and 'otherness' by means of institutional violence. The orogene body serves as a metaphor for the historical treatment of Black bodies in the era of slavery and racial capitalism. In this way, Jemisin not only challenges humanism, but also the racial frameworks of definitions of "the human."

Moreover, Jemisin's disjointed story line and the use of the natural world to represent the human condition defy anthropocentric worldviews, which have been an integral part of European modernity. History's trauma and ecological violence is happening again and again in the instability of the Stillness. Human beings are no longer at the centre of life and their survival is no longer based on thinking of them as separate, but rather on understanding the relation of material and environmental systems. This view aligns with posthumanist ecology, but it's more because of the explicitness with which it deals with the histories of races and black futures. The apocalypse is embodied as Black in speculative fiction, and as environmental justice, (Sherryl Vint .2018)

Afrofuturism is not against the idea of posthumanism, however, it challenges human exceptionalism and technological modernity, whereas European posthumanism challenges the very idea of the human. Afrofuturism is concerned with human history's construction of humanity despite European posthumanism calling into question the very



notion of the human. Afrofuturist fiction thus extends and weaves together the posthumanist theory of Black diasporic memory, trauma, ecological crisis and speculative resistance. In the posthumanism of Butler and Jemisin, the posthuman is not just an abstract philosophical term, but a historical and political phenomenon of life-threatening precarity and extramundal exile, and the demand for re-imagining futurity. (Haraway, 2012).

Conclusion

Afrofuturist fiction is a posthumanist analysis of how it changes traditional notions of subjectivity, history and futurity in modern Black diasporic novels. These texts are not simply representations of "futures of technology," but rather speculative exercises that probe the past of slavery, colonialism, racial violence and displacement, and possibilities otherwise. In this way, Afrofuturism takes what it calls the novel, and, through this, robs the novel of its inheritance of oppressive ideas and reconsiders and reconfigures them.

The chosen works demonstrate the Afrofuturism's posthumanist attitude towards the Enlightenment model of the autonomous and rational subject. Identities in the fictional work of Octavia Butler are produced through adaptation, interdependency, and interactions between humans and non-humans, challenging fixed boundaries between human and non-human beings in her work, especially in *Parable of the Sower* and *Dawn*. In the same way, N.K. Jemisin's stories highlight alternative ways of living together—ways in which the ecology, geology, and community fighting for survival are part of human lives. These representations have the ability to push beyond the limits of either biology or culture in terms of the definition of a person and are also a reaction to the historic dehumanization suffered by black subjects.

Another key aspect of Afrofuturism writing emphasized by the study is the importance of memory and temporality in this artistic expression. The novels are not simply a "closed book" about historical trauma, but rather they make memory a dynamic entity that shapes future options. Afrofuturist timelines generate gaps in linear understanding of time, which allows for a space to be occupied by past and future histories. The temporal reorientation does not take away from the importance of trauma,



but rather shows how practices of remembering can be a source of resilience, critique and imaginative reconstruction.

Furthermore, the texts studied are questioning essentialist concepts of black identity, creating a dynamic, negotiated and contextualized concept of identity. Subjectivity is a result of technological innovation, environmental conditions, spiritual inheritance and communal relationships. This flexibility is significant, however, because it does not mean that there is loss of political agency. Instead, it posits the agency as something that is achieved in a network of human and non-human relations, and thus one that is based on collaboration, adaptation, and collective responsibility.

In sum, this work offers a valuable perspective on Afrofuturist fiction's significance for current literary scholarship by challenging and reframing the critical issues of race, technology, embodiment, and history. Speculative fiction can be used to not only analyse culture, but also to examine other social and ethical possibilities, as shown by writers like Octavia Butler and N.K. Jemisin. Further studies in the future can explore the Afrofuturist narratives and their role in continued discussions on posthumanism, environmental humanities, and Black studies more deeply, and as it pertains to new technological and ecological challenges.

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دراسة الافرو-مستقبلية في روايات مختارة لادب الشتات الافريقي

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مستخلص البحث:

تتناول هذه الدراسة الأفروفيوتشرية (Afrofuturism) بوصفها إطاراً جمالياً وإبستمولوجياً نقدياً داخل أدب الشتات الأسود، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على تقاطعاتها مع نظرية ما بعد الإنسانية (Posthumanism). وتذهب الدراسة إلى أن روايات الأفروفيوتشرية تعيد تشكيل السرديات المهيمنة حول التاريخ والذاتية والمستقبلية، من خلال مزج الخيال التأملي بالواقع المعيش للذاكرة المعرّقة بالعنصرية والتجربة الثقافية الصادمة. وبالاستناد إلى ما بعد الإنسانية، تتحدى الدراسة التصور الإنساني الليبرالي للذات المستقلة، وتبرز بدلاً من ذلك أشكالاً هجينة وموزعة ومُتوسّطة تكنولوجياً للوجود. في الكتابة الأفروفيوتشرية، لا يُعاد تموضع الذات السوداء داخل سرديات مستقبلية فحسب، بل يُعاد بناؤها كعقدة داخل شبكات من العلاقات الإنسانية وغير الإنسانية والتكنولوجية والكونية. كما تؤكد الدراسة أن الأفروفيوتشرية تعمل كأرشيف مضاد يقاوم محو التاريخ من خلال إعادة كتابة التواريخ المهمشة داخل زمنيّات تخييلية/افتراضية. ومن خلال انخراطها في سياسات الهوية، والتجسيد التكنولوجي، والذاكرة الشتاتية، تعمل هذه الكتابات على زعزعة الزمن الخطي وتقتراح أنماطاً بديلة للوجود تمحو الحدود بين الماضي والحاضر والمستقبل. وفي النهاية، تُظهر الدراسة أن الأفروفيوتشرية، عند قراءتها من منظور ما بعد الإنسانية، تقدم إعادة تفكير جذرية في معنى أن تكون إنساناً في عصر يتشكل بالرقمية والأزمة البيئية والرأسمالية العرقية العالمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأفروفيوتشرية؛ ما بعد الإنسانية؛ الشتات الأسود؛ الأدب التأملي؛ سياسات الهوية؛ الذاكرة الثقافية؛