Afrofuturism: A Critical study of Butler's *Kindred* and Okoroafor's *Who Fears Death*

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TITLE PAGE

Afrofuturism: A Critical study of Butler's *Kindred* and Okoroafor's *Who Fears Death*

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APPROVAL PAGE

This project report has been read and approved as having met the requirement for the award of Master of Arts Degree in English and Literary Studies obtained from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

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CERTIFICATION

Nwabueze, Chidimma, a postgraduate student of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka with the registration number PG/MA/16/80741 has satisfactorily completed the requirement for the award of Master's Degree in English and Literary Studies. This work is original and has not been submitted in part or in full for any degree in this or any other institution.

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DEDICATION

To all lovers of literature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My appreciation goes to my family especially my mother, Felicia Nwabueze and my brother, Cally Nwabueze, I couldn't wish for a better family. To Peter Elofusim, for your support and kindness, I wouldn't trade you for silver or gold. I will never forget Uchenna Oyali, your immense motivation is much appreciated. To Chukwunonso Arinze, friend and brother, daalu. Not forgetting Amu Nnadi, friend and kindred spirit.

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To God almighty and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, on whose feet I lay all my trophies.

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ABSTRACT

Afrofuturism is a counter-future saddled with three goals—to rewrite history, critique society and reclaim the future. This paper illustrates that Butler's *Kindred* and Okoroafor's *Who Fears Death* distinctively captures the Afrofuturist view of the past, present and future seen through the black lens. It does so by examining comparatively how the plot, thematic preoccupations and characters in the novel explicatively portray the manifestations of Afrofuturism through rewriting, recreating and reclaiming. It clearly exposes the falsehood in history that casts black people in a negative light, critiques the discrimination they experience and creates a Futurist narrative where racial prejudice will be exterminated. It also engages in the reversal of racial and gender stereotypes. The study shows the double prejudice experienced by black females caused by the intersection of racial and gender discrimination. It aligns with the vision of Afrofuturism to create a future that changes orientations, seeks for freedom for all, and the creation of a society where race and gender do not have a stronghold.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Contemporary African writers and Afrodiasporic writers have found ways to counteract stereotypical identities given to the black race through reclaiming history, critiquing the present and reimagining a future viewed through the black lens. The black race, from time immemorial, has been saddled with labels and stereotypes that picture her as unintelligent, irrational and backward. Alexander G. Weheliye has decried the preconceived notion where black subjects have been deemed as a "radical obverse of enlightened and rational man, which has led to the formation of various black discourses that will appropriate this category" (26). Stereotypes and prejudices have been created to see whiteness as the "norm" while the black race is viewed as the "other". The appropriation of this category and the reversal of the stereotypes have been undertaken by black Afrofuturist writers. This mode of narrative is made up of discourses which is a movement away from mainstream notion of history and race where the black race is viewed as docile, backward, antithetical to a progressive society and has no meaningful contribution to the future of the world.

The term, Afrofuturism, was coined in 1994 by Mark Dery when he stated thus: "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture----and more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future---- might, for want of a better term, be called "Afrofuturism" (180). Now, this concept has also been incorporated by African writers to address issues that concern the black race as well as black women. The goal of the genre is for black people to gain autonomy over their own story

which has been destroyed by the writers of history. As Gilbert Muller states: "black artistic truth reveals essentially a failure in the underlying structures of white Western civilization and a proposal to set right those destructive social and political forces in nature" (qtd.in Tali 67) **.** This is a branch of speculative fiction which is different from science fiction as we know it even though some writers incorporate elements of science fiction. It is usually filled with traditions of Africa and sees the world through a black lens. Ishmael Reed, a speculative fiction writer, has used the word "necromancy*"* to describe this project which he has defined as "using the past to explain the present and to prophesize about the future" (qtd.in Nelson 7). African-American Afrofuturists seek a connection to an African perspective and thereby reclaim African cultures (Womack 91).

Afrofuturists make frequent use of African cultural expressions and historical leanings in their works in order to highlight their cultural importance. They achieve this by employing Afrofuturist tropes that include science fiction, neo-slave narratives, African mythology, magical realism, fantastical tales etc. Nalo Hopkinson has seen the use of reimagined world by black writers as an escapist mechanism which she says is the first step to creating a new reality. For her, speculative fiction is performing that act already as opposed to old traditional folk, fairy and epic tales. She sums it up by saying that the focus is always on "making the impossible possible" (98). Lisa Yaszek has also noted that the interest of the genre in alternate history has made it unsurprising that authors who have been most closely associated with literary Afrofuturism have been fabulists such as Ishmael Reed and Amiri Baraka and science fiction authors such as Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler (299). In line with building new truths, speculative fiction has been used to change the narratives with a focus on Afrocentrism which states "what was", "what is" and "what will be" for the black race. Alondra Nelson posits that the vision of the

elimination of race and gender is the "founding foundation of the digital age that presupposes this genre" (1).

Similarly, Frantz Fanon tasks black writers with the goal of turning over a new leaf, working out new concepts and creating a "new man "(316). The new concept Fanon proposes comes in the form of Afrofuturism which its mode of representation exists in arts, music, films and in literature and this study will focus on its literary representation. This study examines the concept of Afrofuturism and how it has been explored in *Kindred* by Octavia Butler and *Who Fears Death* by Nnedi Okoroafor. It hopes to explore how history has been reclaimed and the future reimagined in the texts through a comparative study of the texts and how the characters, plot, themes and settings have been used to portray an Afrofuturist display of race, power and gender where we see the main characters, Onyesonwu in *Who Fears Death* and Dana in *Kindred*, who are female characters breaking the stereotypical identity given to the black race and black women. Historically, black women have suffered marginalization, oppression and misrepresentation on a higher scale than white women to this day. For black women, there is an intersection of racial and gender marginalization bringing about a double oppression in their lives. Dana, an African-American Slave, builds new truth about the African slave woman that has been portrayed in some narratives as docile as well as Onyesonwu who fights against the stereotype created for the female gender. This analysis will be achieved through a close reading of the two texts. This research illustrates that Butler's *Kindred* and Okoroafor's *Who Fears Death* distinctively captures the Afrofuturist views of the past, present and future where issues of power, race and gender are viewed through the black lens.

This study consists of five chapters. This chapter, which is the first chapter, will be dedicated to the introduction of the topic and what the study hopes to achieve, the second chapter

will be a review of related literature on what scholars have said about Afrofuturism in literature and the research that has been carried out in the primary texts, *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death*. The third chapter which comprises of the conceptual framework and research methodology will focus on defining the concept, what it entails as well as stating the method of research for this study. The fourth chapter will house the main analysis of the study which will include an interpretive analysis of the primary texts in relation to the topic. The final chapter will be a summary of the study and the final conclusion.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

No study, known to me, has carried out a comparative analysis of the elements of Afrofuturism in *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death*. Critical reflections on *Kindred* have mostly titled towards the area of racism and neo-slave narrative while a previous research on *Who Fears Death* scratched the surface level of the elements of Afrofuturism but does not go deep enough. Rather, the research focused largely on gender stereotypes and female genital mutilation. Therefore, this study hopes to undertake a comparative approach to the Afrofuturist leanings of *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death* and it plans to achieve this by going deeper to explore the Afrofuturist elements in the texts.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

New ways of viewing history, critiquing the present situation of the black race and pushing for a great future is the vision of Afrofuturism and since a comparative study of Afrofuturism in the texts has not been carried out, my purpose in this study include:

- To explore comparatively the Afrofuturist views of the past, present and future as represented in the texts.

- To examine comparatively what constitutes Afrofuturism and how the elements have been explored in the texts in addressing the issues of race, power and gender.
- To carry out a proper explication of the texts under study with the aim of showing how the plot, themes and characters have intersected to shape the black futuristic vision of reclaiming autonomy over their story, recreating society and reimagining the future.
- To show distinctively how Afrofuturism grants voices to black women who have been under represented in literature as well as stereotyped to be playing subordinate role to men.
- To present how Afrofuturism engages in the reversal of racial and gender stereotypes.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Counter narrative has always been the goal for most black writers and Afrofuturism has been created to take it a notch higher. Ron Eglash has noted that it is not enough to reverse the stereotypes and it is for this reason that we see the turn to Afrofuturism which will attempt to forge a new identity that puts "black cultural origins in categories of the artificial as much as in those of the natural (59). Blacks have been viewed as a powerless and regressive race that has no place in history and the future and this concept has been created to argue against the notion. It has been used by many scholars in arts, literature and music to reclaim history and create a reimagined future for black people so that generations yet unborn will not succumb to the identity construct given to the black race in a white dominated world. This study also explores how Afrofuturism pushes for equality for everyone irrespective of race and gender. It is this level of commitment that the narratives that exist in *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death* has explored and this has made this research useful as it hopes to bring to the limelight the black futuristic narrative inherent in the texts through a comparative study.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to a comparative study of the two texts, *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death*, and how the elements of Afrofuturism have manifested in them.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 A Review of Related Literature on Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is a concept that is all encompassing for the black race in the fight to reclaim history, recreate society and to reimagine a great future. This has been explored by many scholars in arts, music and literature. It focuses on the past, present and future of black people. It has received abundant critical attention from scholars, authors and philosophers alike. Yaszek has noted that Afrofuturist authors such as W.E.B Du Bois and George Schuyler have written stories that revolve around the ability of Afrodiasporic blacks to carve out a good place for themselves in both Western and global future ("Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future" 55). The kind of society that has been proposed will be a society where the world is viewed through a black lens instead of the "whitewashed" society that has removed all traces of the footprints of blacks in history.

Timothy Leary has argued that the great advancement that has been achieved in technology has motivated the arrays of social identities that are not subject to the creation of society where one and one's achievement is determined by their gender and race. Leary further states that the advancement of different things in technology will make human identity solely determined by the style of the individual, choice and capabilities as against race and gender (qtd.in Nelson 2). What this simply means is the eradication of race and gender, two of the major identity constructs that marginalizes individuals and this is the goal of Afrofuturism. Nelson sees the prediction of Leary which drives the futuristic genre as a "Social Science Fiction" devoid of specific end but with limited assumptions that offers a new set of humans devoid of past human experiences (2). However, Andrew Ross has proclaimed his reservations

as he notes that what Leary is advocating which is “radical humanism” would either by the factor of choice or circumstance of spirals of incidents, only free a minority of humans. As every set of human have their own social realities (qtd.in Nelson 3). Nelson, on the other hand, views what Leary is advocating as the “discourse of disembodiment” which she says is a very important motivation for theories that bother on identity in the digital age (3).

Reclaiming history, critiquing the present and prophesizing about the future is the bane of Afrofuturism. Some of these ideas have been explored in some literary texts like *Mumbo Jumbo*. Reclaiming history which is one of the goals of Afrofuturism has been explored in *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Reed which Nelson has stated that it shows a powerful history of the blacks. Nelson views the novel as a literary text that offers a “fertile ground” for this discussion as the novel, according to her, shows a contest between the “Jes Grew” , the “carriers of African diasporic culture”, and the people referred to as “Atonists”, supporters of the Western civilization” which represents the mythology of world history. The conflict in the novel centres on the effort to stop the cultural virus “Jes Grew”. In the novel, “Jes grew” refers to African diasporic cultures that evolve around forms of gesture, music, dance, visual culture, epistemology, and language, crossing geography and generations by moving from one carrier to another hence threatening the knowledge monopoly of the West. Nelson further states that understanding the past and reclaiming history through rewriting will birth the future. She sees this idea in what Papa LaBas optimistically predicts, “we will make our own future text. A future generation of young artists will accomplish this” (6-7). The reclaiming of history in this genre doesn’t mean one has to be stuck with the past, rather it advocates autonomy over ones’ story as a path way for future progress. Nelson sees this relation in the character of LaBas who she states makes the prediction of a future that is filled with African traditions and that is why he doesn’t

despair at the destruction of the text rather, he puts his faith in the next generation which he believes will work hard to successfully create a text that can "codify" the past, present and future of black culture as opposed to one created by the Western image that is detached from the past of the black race or one which alienates black people. La Bas rather wants a distillation of African diasporic experience that has its foundation in the past but not weighed down by it (8).

Similarly, Kim Myungsung has argued that when Reed mentions "Booker T. Washington's Grapevine Telegraph" in *Mumbo Jumbo,* he uses the allusion to juxtapose the pandemic spread of the African-origin virus, Jes Grew, with the communication networks of antebellum African American communities (77). Myungsung has noted that Washington, in his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, describes the grapevine telegraph as a long-distance oral information system that "kept [African Americans] informed of events". This device is necessary since the whites took exclusive control of major means of information transmission, the "person to person" knowledge transmission which are mostly mutterings become particularly important for black people who rely on it to be warned about events like "Yankee invasions" (77).

Some scholars have also viewed Afrofuturism as a genre that partakes in counter narrative which is another goal of Afrofuturism. Scholars like Shelley Ingram placed *Mumbo Jumbo* in the tradition of folklore anthropology. He addresses the novel as a "black ethnographic metafiction" that uncouples the narratives of the colonialists which "offers an opportunity to begin unpacking the colonialist narratives" (183). *Black No More* by Schuyler also falls under this category where light skin portrays an unfulfilled wish for African Americans or an obstacle that must be overcome as well as symbolizes what has already taken a substantial part of their cultural identity (Myungsung 47). These notions of history and race that place black people in the passive and docile role which Afrofuturism tends to shake up especially during the time of

slavery have been undertaken in many novels. One of these novels according to Kali is *Blake* where characters take part in armed resistance to overthrow white supremacy (70).

The critique of the present situation of black people where racism is still rift is another goal of Afrofuturism in which the novel, *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* by John Williams has undertaken. The story in the novel which is subtitled, "A Novel of Some Probability" has been noted by Kali as being probable as he states that the book may serve the "dual purpose" goal of warning whites of what may be imminent if the oppression of the blacks continues as well as warning black people of the dangers inherent in rebellion which they have to weigh before making any step to rebel. Kali notes that "it is the accumulation of past deeds that is the trigger, and therein lies the foundation of absurdity of the novel" (84). This is also the goal of Sutton Grigg's book, *Imperium in Imperio* which Jerry Bryant has described as the alternate history aspect of the book which is a creation of a visionary world in which Bernard Belgrave is revealed as anguished and fanatical who has a violent plan that can ignite an apocalypse which the book's narrator sees as an evil decision that will destroy white society which he notes that black rage which causes white violence can cause a holocaust against white people (qtd.in Kali 74). Kal notes that the authorial decision in the book to withhold judgment and to force the reader into a "moral quandary" is common to all of the near-future black militant novels. He notes that Griggs's work serves as an excellent model for future work (74).

Furthermore, Schuyler's *Black No More* is a satirical novel in the genre of Afrofuturism where a "social problem" is usually identified and a product is created as a remedy. In the novel, one of the characters turns almost all black people into white people hoping that one day; his whiteness will become an abnormality and lead to the creation of a "raceless" world (Nelson 12). Myungsung, however, has stated that the novel has received insufficient critical attention but in

spite of it, scholars have seen it as the "earliest full-fledged work of Afrofuturism". The use of transracial machine shows the educational uplift of ethnic minorities. The transhuman universe in the novel imbibes the traditional meanings of "intelligence, education, and survival with strong racialized meanings" (32-33).

The Creation of a reimagined future is the goal behind Grigg's book, *Imperium in Imperio*. Gloria T. Hull has noted that the book even though it is "artistically flawed" can be considered as a work of "socialist realism" because it "presents a secret, elaborately-organized black which is steadily transforming American society" (qtd.in Kali 74). A hopeful dream for a different future for black people is also the goal of Ellison's *Invisible Man.* Yaszek has seen the text as demonstrating the need for all Americans including black Americans to resist the "whitewashed social, political, and economic futures." His novel, according to Yaszek, is not an Afrofuturist text per se but a "literary clarion call" for an Afrofuturist imaginary that was not full-fledged during the time of the novel's publication. She notes that *Invisible Man* by Ellison creates a possibility of a relationship between technology, race and art. The protagonist in the novel rewires the relations between past, present, art and technology by creating a space outside linear time and by doing so, he has become the "figurehead for a hopeful new Afrofuture" ("Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" 297-299). She states further that the protagonist in Ellison's book has taken control of history and denies those whitewashed histories of the future predicated on the erasure of black subjectivity. He learns this lesson from one of the characters, Brother Tarp, who becomes a kind of spokesperson for Afrofuturity. As a young man in the south, Tarp refuses to give up his possessions to a white man; later, he refuses to accept the sentence of life imprisonment he receives for doing so, and, after nineteen years of patient waiting, he finds his opportunity and escapes to the north. He tells the invisible man that he said

no to a man who wanted to take something from him; that's what it costs him for saying no and the debt which is not fully paid will never be paid in their terms. He even kept saying "no" until he breaks the chain and left (Yaszek "Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man" 387).

Myungsung portrays Edward Augustus Johnson's *Light Ahead for the Negro* as a "modernized variation of proto-Afrofuturistic practice" as the novel appropriates science fiction's device of time travel to build a post-racial future in which the nation's reformation gradually reaches to an eventual racial equality and mutual respect. She notes that the novel's imagined future examines the social and political validity of Washington's ideas on racial reformation and its idealistic outcomes. Johnson, according to Myungsung, envisions the future of racial reconciliation through the novel's white liberal, Gilbert. But whereas African Americans are absent from Johnson's ideal United States, the novel describes a "raceless" future (21).

Furthermore, Yaskek notes that DuBois' "The Comet" falls under this genre. The story is about the comet that passes through the earth's atmosphere, releases a poisonous gas and seems to have killed everyone except one black man who is down in a bank vault at the time. Eventually, the protagonist meets up with a white woman who describes herself as a photographer and a feminist. At first, the two heroes see each other as aliens – and literally that's how DuBois writes about it, as being "alien in blood and culture". But they quickly overcome their differences and decide they are going to create a new race together. Sadly, this plan doesn't work out. So, it seems that DuBois is saying that the only way that race relations in America will ever be fixed is through a catastrophe that wipes out black and white people alike ("Race in Science Fiction; the Case of Afrofuturism" 6-7).

Schuyler's *Black Empire* imagines an alternate present where Afrodiasporic people pool their scientific, military, artistic, and business talents to enact a global revolution against the white nations that have enslaved and otherwise oppressed them for over two centuries. They do so by decimating the United States with biological warfare, bombing Europe into submission, and establishing a utopian Black Empire in Africa (Yaskek "Race in Science Fiction; the Case of Afrofuturism" 7).

2.2 Literature Review on *Kindred* by Octavia Butler

Scholars of African American literature interpret *Kindred* as a historical transcript that adapts post-realism tropes in a racial context (Myungsung 114). Ellison has noted that *Kindred* uses memory as a repository for experience, i.e. the "obscure alter ego" of "recorded history" (*Going to the Territory* qtd. in Myungsung 132). The device, time-travel, used in the novel has attracted a lot of scholarly attention. Susan Knabe and Wendy Gay Pearson have found problems in the way time travel frames the readers' perception of 1970s. They view with skepticism Butler's political treatment of racial minorities in post-Jim Crow America. They warn of a possibility that the scenes of Dana's antebellum enslavement cloak, or even idealize, the racist nature of modern U.S. culture with the doctrine of post-racial integrationism. They further argue that Dana's impersonation of a female slave is secured by her "ideal" life in 1976 California, where "she can be free … to choose an interracial marriage with Kevin" (qtd. in Myungsung 115). Linh Hua states that the novel's time travel conceals "racist foundations" of the "liberal discourses of citizenship" and the "progressive logic of capitalism" of the modern United States (115). However, Myungsung argues that Dana's time travel to the antebellum past has been reduced to a historical "alibi" that successfully romanticizes Dana's life in present time of 1976 in the novel (122-123).

On the other hand, scholars like Sesshu Foster focuses more on Butler's description of the life of an interracial couple in mid-twentieth century California. He places the context of the novel in the racial discourse of Post-World War II United States while highlighting "the deep anxiety that circulates in the novel around interracial sex and intimacy" (144).

Myungsung has however noted that that none of the critics of *Kindred* has paid any attention to how the novel participates in the contemporary race discourse. Her critical discourse has therefore directed its political efforts at disclosing the invisible power structure that has perpetuated white privilege and the marginalization of racial minorities by delegitimizing the political achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. The novel's representation, according to her, is of post-racial dynamics based on the perception that contemporary US culture has created an ideology that has replaced the traditional" in-your-face racism" and replaced it with individualized racism (124).

2.3 Literature Review on *Who Fears Death*

Who Fears Death by Nnedi Okoroafor is a novel that has attracted a little critical attention. Katy Goodwin-Bates refers to the novel's genre as an "interesting proposition" because it shows characteristics of dystopia but its seemingly realistic setting is complicated by the emergence of the aspects of magical realism, from Onyesonwu's shape-shifting abilities to the spirits, incantations, and prophecies which abound.

Lola de Koning has however noted that the world portrayed in *Who Fears Death* is not free of sexism and gender oppression rather; it is filled with violence towards the female gender by sexual violence, and the objectification of women (27). This novel revolves around a strong female character, Onyesonwu, and her struggles to fight against gender stereotypes and ethnicity. De Koning argues that Onyesonwu has been placed at the "heart of the narrative rather than in

the margins" so as to lay emphasis on the novel's illustration of identity both in terms of gender or ethnicity (16).

Goodwin-Bates posits that the novel plants the seeds of "feminist thought early on" and that the novel focuses on "overtly politicized narrative which weaves its way through every aspect of the novel. The critic of Female genital mutilation in the novel, according to her, remains a hugely controversial issue, and is not one she has seen in fiction before as carried out in the novel. De Koning notes that Onyesonwu's reaction with violence to get what she wants fights against the stereotypical way of representing female characters as soft, docile or in service to the male characters (25).

The review of literature on *Kindred* has shown that the focus of scholars is largely on its time travel tropes and post-racial dynamics while critics of *Who Fears Death* focus largely on female rights. Also, no research has undertaken a comparative analysis of the Afrofuturistic vision inherent in the texts. Therefore, this study wishes to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the Afrofuturist leanings in the texts in a comparative manner.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Literary criticism is not carried out in a vacuum. It is given shape, form, basis and direction by a particular framework. These frameworks are formulated and applied to individual texts in order to run an interpretive analysis with the goal of extending existing knowledge. This study will be using a concept as the framework of its research in the analysis of the texts under study. The conceptual framework that will be used to frame this study is Afrofuturism. It will serve as the structure that will hold and support the study and its application to the selected texts.

3.2 Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is a concept that has been adopted by the black community of writers both in Africa and in the diaspora as they struggle to make a dent in the world where their part in history has been erased, where they have been marginalized and where no place has been created for them in the future. It becomes pertinent to give a name to this social science fiction and this kind of storytelling that wants to elevate the black race and imagine a world viewed through the black lens devoid of the white washed world that society has created already by making whiteness the "norm". Coined in 1994 by Mark Dery, Afrofuturism is a speculative fiction, written by both Afrodiasporic and African authors which its goal is to shatter stereotypes, appropriate the negative images that have been given to the black race and also provides an alternate reimagined future for the black community. Afrofuturism is a global aesthetic movement that encompasses art, film, literature, music, and scholarship. Yaszek has noted the importance of this movement by stating that Black people in America are the unlucky descendants of slaves upon whose backs modern Western nations were built, and Africans are

the victims of colonization practices that have wrought nothing but disease and famine ("Race in Science Fiction: The Case of Afrofuturism"10)

The term is sufficient enough in the fight to rewrite history critique the present situation of black people as well as reimagine a future viewed through a black lens. According to Nelson, Afrofuturism can be broadly defined as "African American voices" with "other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come" (9). It is pertinent to note that this genre does not seek to segregate neither does it become the racist lord it condemns; rather, its goal is to create a "raceless" world where colour does not determine one's place in life—a future that is not based on exclusion, segregation and exploitation of people based on race and gender. The vision is to create a society where one can only be judged by their capabilities. Nelson posits that prediction of a future devoid of any form of racial discrimination is the dominant discourse in this genre which she has called "the politics of the future". She further notes that race has taken the form of a liability in the twenty-first century as race is an old ideology where racial identity, especially blackness, is seen as anti-technology and antithetical to the progressive nature of technology (1). Dery has raised some questions about this futuristic literature by stating that:

> The notion of Afrofuturism gives rise to a troubling antinomy: Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers---white to a man----who have engineered our collective fantasies (180).

There are three goals of the Afrofuturist—to recover lost African history; to show how it has affected the present situation of blacks today and how these histories will also inspire the

future of black people. Yaszek has noted that Afrofuturist seek not just to remember the "bad past, but to use stories about the past and present to reclaim the history of the future" ("Race in Science Fiction" 2). However, Russian poet, Kasimir Malevich argues that futurism is a way to pull oneself out of "the catacombs into the speed of our time". He proposes that futurism is the exponent of modern life in which everyone should tread on instead of being condemned to the crusts of the past (qtd.in Nelson 7). Reed, on the other hand, disagrees on this notion of futurism proposed by Malevich which sets to erase the past. He states that history should not be left behind for modernity but it should rather be seen as the "gateway" that will lead to a better understanding of the future (qtd.in Nelson 7). However, Williams has thrown more light on the importance of reviewing the past in this genre. He states thus:

> It is the accumulation of past deeds that is the trigger, and therein lies the foundation of absurdity of the novel. For most white people, the past is over and done with; but for most black people it is the past that has made them what they are; they know white people will never release them from the past because they cannot do so without losing the misplaced belief in their superiority. But this past is there, as it must be, or the present doesn't exist, all of which is, of course, absurd. The remembrance of things past is nothing if not everything (qtd.in Kali 87).

Afrofuturism also tries to counteract unsettling notions about black people by exploring the potentials of black people. As Womack has noted, speculative fiction is never just about the future. With the power of imagination, creating possible futures can critique the present and maybe even change it (44).

The situation of black women who experience double oppression is also examined by Afrofuturism which gives every form of marginalization a back seat, recreates society and

projects a reimagined future where sexism and racism no longer have a strong hold on people's psyche. Afrofuturism gives black women a voice and a platform to create their own narrative. Womack has seen this relation as she states thus:

> For the first time in history, African-American and African diasporic women can have control over their own creative voice and over the expression of this creativity. In Afrofuturism, women artists get to determine their own voice, outside of masculinity or racist perspectives: while they are obviously influenced and affected by contemporary gender issues, the creations of Afrofuturist women emphasize their individuality. There is a strong desire to think oneself free of the sexism, racism, and other harmful –isms that determined the past and, to an extent, the present (104).

As its name implies, Afrofuturism is not just about reclaiming the history of the past, but also about reclaiming the history of the future as well. Afrofuturism makes use of certain elements and tropes to achieve this goal. Kodwo Eshun has noted that "African social reality is over determined by intimidating global scenarios, doomsday economic projections, weather predictions, medical reports on AIDS, and life-expectancy forecasts, all of which predict decades of doom" (qtd. in Yaszek, "An Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man" 300*-301). The use of the future setting and alternate universe is an important tool in Afrofuturism. Muller, in his own study has underlined the importance of the futuristic setting in encouraging the black reader who is scared of what the white washed future holds for them (qtd.in Kali 84). Afrofuturism combines many elements to make its mark in history and they can include science fiction, fantasy, time travel, Afrocentrism, etc. Tal has noted that the female writers in this genre often employ fantasy mostly as well as rely on spirituality to achieve the aim of resolving the

tension of violence in the world. Their use of fantastical tropes according to him, are metaphors for healing the world and making things right (76).

3.3 History of Afrofuturism

There has not been a comprehensive detailing of the history of Afrofuturism but the concept can be traced back to centuries ago. Yaszek posits that the concept, in its broadest dimensions is an extension of the historical recovery projects that black Atlantic intellectuals have engaged in for over two hundred years which its goal is to recover lost history ("Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future" 299). Toni Morrison has also noted that these projects demonstrate how the conditions of homelessness and alienation experienced by African slaves and their descendants anticipate what philosophers such as Nietzsche claimed were the founding conditions of modernity (qtd. in Yaszek "History of the Future" 178). Although the movement has suddenly become very popular in recent years, its intellectual and aesthetic underpinnings can be traced back to mid- and late-19th-century African American novels and short story writers that imagined alternative realities and communities for black people. Yaszek gives a detailed history of Afrofuturism from 1850-1960 and from 1960 to present.

The period, 1887-1960, marks the establishment of science fiction as well as Afrofuturism and both were popular genres with a lot of similarities. Both were generally written at first by respected mainstream writers who were experimenting with a variety of emergent genres, one of them is Charles Chestnutt. In 1887, he published a short story titled, "The Goophered Grapevine", a gothic commentary on US racism that revolves around white northerners who came to the south and have to deal with the history of racism and slavery. In 1899, Sutton E. Griggs' published *Imperio in Imperium,* a futuristic war story, where blacks in the US take up arms against their white oppressors. A final important story from this time period

is Edward A. Johnson's *New Light Ahead for the Negro,* published in 1904, which imagines a scientific agricultural utopia predicated on black knowledge and industry. It is a story in which blacks essentially transform America into a more productive and racially integrated country by leveraging the technoscientific knowledge that they gained as slaves and the education they gained as free people to build a better place for themselves.

Yaszek makes us to consider the visions of tomorrow crafted by two Afrofuturist authors from the first half of the 20th century which includes Du Bois and Schuyler. Bart Bishop notes that Dubois may be the father of Afrofuturism with his short story, "The Comet". Du Bois is a radical sociologist and civil rights activist who firmly believes that people of colour from across the world should come together to fight racism. Yaszek makes us to know that Schuyler, on the other hand, is a conservative journalist for the Pittsburgh Courier who fiercely condemned racism but who also rejected the notion of a globally unified black art, culture, or politics. ("Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future" 51). But most importantly, both men were committed to using speculative narrative forms to imagine how black people might participate in the creation of the future.

Zora Neale Hurston is another individual that laid the ground work for the movement. According to Bart Bishop, her goal aligns with the goal of Afrofuturism which is to find the truth about African history through the veil of the fantastical. Her ethnographic training leads her to publish *Mules and Men* in 1935, which chronicles her journey across Florida as she documents Negro folklore and myths of the African culture that have been filtered away. Bishop notes that:

> As a contemporary movement that is still ongoing, Afrofuturism can be viewed as an extension, in both themes and intentions, of the earlier Black Arts Movement (1965-1975), which drew influence from the works of DuBois and Hurston. Co-founded in

> Harlem by writer / activist Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement inspired African Americans to establish their own publishing houses, magazines, journals, and art institutions, adding diversity to the literary canon with the portrayal of new ethnic voices in the United States. With these two works, "The Comet" and *Mules and Men*, viewed as proto-Afrofuturism, the Black Arts Movement and Afrofuturism share a common literary antecedent. Forty years later, however, speculative fiction is still a genre of literature for which African Americans have received little recognition.

In the 1960s, Black Arts Movement authors including Ishmael Reed and Amiri Baraka began telling stories about fantastic black people who travelled freely through time and space as seen in Baraka's "Rhythm Travel" and Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo.* Yaszek opines that "After all, their stories suggested that if black men and women could imagine themselves travelling to other worlds and other times, what right did anyone have to prevent them from staking their claims on the future since it was actually unfolding in the present?" ("An Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" 300). Tracing the history of Afrofuturism, Yaszek further notes that:

> Many Americans first encountered what we now call Afrofuturism in the work of 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s jazz musicians such as Sun Ra and Lee "Scratch" Perry, who depicted themselves (and by extension all Afrodiasporic people) as the descendants of aliens who came to Earth to prepare humanity for its eventual destiny among the stars. Thus, these artists projected noble pasts for people of color while carefully crafting a heroic black face for the future as well. Eventually, Afrofuturist storytelling became a regular aspect of black popular music, informing the work of funk musicians such as George Clinton in the 1970s, rap artists such as Public Enemy in the 1980s, and techno

> DJs such as Spooky: That Subliminal Kid in the 1990s and 2000s. ("Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future" 46).

Afrofuturism has a scanty and limited documented history which distorts the part people of colour have played in speculative fiction. Hence, Yaszek proposes that:

> It is important to recover the history of Afrofuturism as it has unfolded over the past two centuries. The first reason is a scholarly one, and has to do with our understanding of literary and cultural history. The past two decades have been marked by an explosion of interest in literary representations of science and technology. These studies tend to follow a very specific and very raced trajectory: they tell us that white authors including T.S. Eliot, Thomas Pynchon, and William Gibson are the real founders of modern technocultural narrative and that authors of color did not engage in this kind of storytelling until identity politics exploded in the 1960s. Thus, it seems that white authors got there first, and that people of color have been mere respondents to the new literary forms of 20th and 21st centuries. But this just isn't true! By recovering Afrodiasporic future story telling traditions, we gain a better understanding of the important intellectual and aesthetic work that these authors have performed on both national and global cultural fronts. In doing so, we also learn more about how Afrofuturism transforms science fiction and other modes of technologically engaged literature today. ("Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future" 58).

In conclusion, Kodwo Eshun has noted that Afrofuturism is important because it is a kind of storytelling that gives authors a public means by which to intervene into those bad futures that are written by the futures industry and to challenge them, change them, write altogether new ones (qtd. in Yaszek, "Race in Science Fiction" 3).

3.4 Research Methodology

The method of this research is a close reading of the two texts under study, *Kindred a*nd *Who Fears Death*, which will lead to a critical appraisal of the manifestations of Afrofuturism in the texts through a clear explicative and comparative analysis. There will also be an evaluation of the critical opinions of other scholars on the study which will act as a part of the bedrock of the study. The research will take the method of an analytical study because it will evaluate the selected novels. The major sources of data will include books, journals, as well as the internet.

The use of Afrofuturism as the framework of this research will explore various aspects of the factors that drive Afrofuturism as they have been represented in the novels. This will serve as the basis of this research as well as lead to an interpretive analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 The Past, Present and Future: An Afrofuturist Reading of *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death*

Afrofuturism addresses the issues that affect the black race by pushing an agenda that plans to erase all forms of prejudice. A lot of questions have been raised concerning the counter future— should it uplift? Should it critique? Should it represent the best of the race or incite a revolution? The objectives of Afrofuturism include all of this. For the latter, it does not refer to a violent revolution but a revolution in the societal orientations and attitude toward racial and gender issues. Jean Paul Sartre answers the question of this agenda succinctly. He states:

> The Negro, as we have said, creates an anti-racist racism for himself. In no sense does he wish to rule the world: He seeks the abolition of all racial privileges, wherever they come from; he asserts his solidarity with the oppressed of all colours. At once the subjective, existential, ethnic idea of negritude passes, as Hegel puts it, into the objective, positive, exact idea of proletariat. For Césaire Senghor says, "the white man is the symbol of capital as the Negro is that of labor... Beyond the black-skinned men of his race, it is the battle of the world proletariat that is his song (qtd.in Fanon 101).

Afrofuturism seeks for equal opportunities and equal treatment for every race and gender and the total eradication of all privileges that could be attached to skin colour and gender which marginalizes the "other". This study is geared towards doing an explicative analysis of the features of Afrofuturism in *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death* and how the thematic preoccupations associated with the genre have been applied in the chosen texts through a comparative approach.

The past, present and future are intertwined in Afrofuturism in other to push the agenda of the genre. This is done through highlighting the injustice of the past by revisiting history,

critiquing the present and reclaiming the future. The writers of history have done a great diservice to the black race as they have painted a distorted history that gives the race a docile and an insignificant role in the area of shaping society. They have also created certain stereotypes about blacks which cast them in a negative light just to justify two dehumanizing endeavours: slavery and colonialism. These are two traumatic experiences which still have a strong hold in the present situation of black people with a high possibility of affecting the future. Yaszek has seen this relation as she notes that Afrofuturist artists are interested in recovering lost black histories, looks at how those histories inform a whole range of black cultures today as well as how these histories and cultures might inspire new visions of tomorrow ("Race in Science Fiction: The Case of Afrofuturism" 2). Hence, it is pertinent that the Afrofuturist fights to rewrite history by telling their own story and recovering stories about the part they have played in history which has been erased. The great Chinua Achebe says that if the lion doesn't learn how to tell his own story, history will always glorify the hunter. Therefore, the first goal of the Afrofuturist is to create stories that help to depict the true history.

Butler's *Kindred* uses Time-Travel to take Dana back to the time of slavery so that she can have a firsthand experience of what slavery is like for the black race as compared to what the official history of America has depicted it to be. The Time travel trope does not only become a history teacher to Dana, it also becomes a history teacher to Kevin, and all white people to understand the underpinnings of the intricacies of race as well its attendant privileges in present time. For Sandra Govan, *Kindred* takes the form of "speculative fiction to extrapolate realistic observations on a historically grounded African-American past rather than to ruminate on a completely speculative future." (79). It also shows that Afrofuturism serves as a tool to justify certain agitations by black people. The time travel trope appraises Reed's use of necromancy to

describe his project as a writer which Reed defines as using the past to explain the present and to prophesize about the future" (qtd. in Nelson 7). In other to justify slavery and colonialism, the black race has been dehumanized and demonized with different subhuman labels ditched out to them like savages, brutes and animals. This has also been done just to justify the notion of superiority of the white race. Afrofuturism fights to upturn and destroy this narrative. Fanon notes the importance of this commitment as he states thus: "Negroes are savages, brutes, illiterates. But in my own case, I knew that these statements were false. That was a myth of the Negro that had to be destroyed at all cost" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 88). *Kindred* portrays the inhumane condition which the black slaves have to go through in the hands of the master, the so called superior humans. Even an animal does not prey on its kind the way the masters do to the slaves but this attitude is witnessed in the novel. Tom Weylin, for instance, is a vile human that behaves like a brute towards slaves and even towards his own son but because he is white, such words as "savage" do not apply to him. We can see this in the scene where his son Rufus, as a little boy, injures his leg. Dana describes his attitude and the reaction of his black slave on account of this:

> "Weylin grunted and knelt to look at Rufus's leg.
>
> "Guess it's broken all right. Wonder how much that'll cost me."
>
> The black man gave him a look of disgust that would surely have angered him if he had seen it (Butler 65).

What this scene hopes to tell us is that behaving like a savage is not an exclusive preserve of a particular race as the mainstream narratives always depict it to be. In this scene, Tom does not bother about the well-being of his son; rather, he is more concerned about the cost of treatment. The attitude is so terrible that the black man, the so called savage, is disgusted by his master's

behaviour. This scene raises a lot of conversation as it tries to conduct a paradigm shift. Who is a savage or a brute? Is it determined by skin color or by individual attitude?

Correspondingly, just like Dana time-travels to the past to witness history for herself, Onyesonwu in *Who Fears Death* uses her powers to take Fanasi to the past in other for him to see for himself the experiences of the Okeke in the hands of the Nuru and the reason Onyesonwu and her friends have chosen to fight against the oppressive system. Okeke in this novel refers to black people while Nuru refers to white people. They have been labeled as rebels and violent people. Fanasi, at first, doesn't understand history and the reason why the three girls would like to embark on the dangerous journey to the land of the Nuru. This represents the attitude of some people who try to deny the existence of the issue of race and prejudice but rather tries to shut black people down from agitating. But as Onyesonwu takes him back in time, he griefs about the things he witnesses and how the Nuru oppress the Okeke in a bid to subdue them. From the vision of the past, we can also see the savage manner the Nuru, the so-called superior human race; brutalize the Okeke by killing and raping their women. This is more pronounced in the way Daib, Onyesonwu's father, rapes her mother Najeeba. He even records this sexual violence on the Okeke women with a camera. Fanasi, witnessing this, understands the reason why the conversation about race is important and the need to shift the narrative and do away with all forms of stereotypes. He also decides to join them in the journey to rescue their race and reclaim the future.

Furthermore, the wealth of some of the countries of the white race is built on the back of the black people through slavery and colonialism but this part is not located in history. As a result, *Kindred* talks about the plantation where the black slaves are made to work in a worst terrible working condition ever known to man. Dana's testimony about history will not be

complete if she is not made to experience it herself. Therefore, when she does not succeed to save Tom's life, Rufus makes her to work in the plantation as a punishment even though she is a house slave. She is made to experience this part in history, where these slaves, who are helping to build the American economy are treated poorly and their children taken away to unknown plantations, where they grow up to become farmers helping further in building the wealth of the master.

Equally, *Who Fears Death* also illustrates this pattern where history excludes the positive role black people have played and the achievements they have garnered. In the novel, this written history is symbolized by "The Great Book". It also represents religious books which have been used to justify the marginalization of racial minorities. On this, Onyesonwu laments:

> There is a portion of the Great Book that most versions exclude. The Lost papers. Aro had a copy of them. The Lost Papers go into detail about how the Okeke, during their centuries festering in the darkness, were mad scientists. The lost papers discuss how they invented the old technologies like computers, capture stations and portables. They invented ways to duplicate themselves and keep themselves young until they died. They made food grow on dead land, they cured all diseases. In the darkness, the amazing Okeke brimmed with wild creativity (Okoroafor 364).

The Great Book excludes the part that extols the feats of black people just like how some parts in history that cast black people in a positive light have been erased. For instance, the narrative the mainstream history tries to sell makes the white race the "bringer" of civilization and as saviours who have come to civilize the "savages" through transatlantic slave trade and colonialism but Egypt in Africa being the cradle of civilization puts a question mark on this endeavour that seem to be altruistic at face value. History has also shown that Africans, before slavery and

colonialism, have a form of writing known as Nsibidi and this is also stated in the novel. Nsibidi is the writing system of the Okeke. As mentioned above, The Great Book also symbolizes the Holy Book that portrays slavery as an endeavour sanctioned by God where it seems to be a natural law that a master and a servant should exist in a society, in this case, a white man and a black man respectively. This God is also seen to be white because everything black is seen as evil, backward and incapable of any intelligent achievement. As Fanon puts it "Indeed no, the good and merciful God cannot be black: He is a white man with bright pink cheeks. From black to white is the course of mutation. One is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 36). Thus, anything good and positive is antithetical to the nature of the black man.

Similarly, Najeeba, Onyesonwu's mother, narrates to her the creation story according to the Great Book and how it has justified the oppression of the Okeke by the Nuru. She says, "For it was well known that the Okeke were born to be the slaves of the Nuru. Long ago, during the old Africa era, they did something terrible causing Ani to put this duty on their backs. It is written in the Great Book" (Okoroafor 17). This part portrays how religion has helped to justify the enslavement and marginalization of black people. Just like Frederick Douglass narrates his own experience when his master's wife tries to teach him how to read and write. He says:

> Some of his neighbors found out what I was doing and offered him fatherly advice. "It was dangerous to educate slaves", they warned. Education made blacks dissatisfied with slavery. It spoiled them for field work. The Methodist minister said it made them disobedient, made them want more than the Lord intended them to have (236).

The goal of Afrofuturism which is to rewrite history has been depicted in *Who Fears Death*. An allusion is made to the biblical version of the creation story which portrays Adam as

the first man that ever existed and this Adam happens to be white. Najeeba, however, tries to tell a different story that raises a lot of questions. She states that "Okeke" means the "created ones". "The Okeke people have skin the color of the night because they were created before the day. They were the first. Later, after much had happened, the Nuru arrived. They came from the stars and that's why their skin is like the color of the sun" (Okoroafor 17). This refreshing narrative creates an array of possibilities that it is possible that a black man could have been the first to be created and this can be justified by the discovery that shows that life started in Africa.

Consequently, the Great Book, just like history and religion, has a negative impact in the psyche of black people to see themselves as inferiors. It influences their behaviour, self-esteem and the way they react to issues concerning them. This is illustrated in the scene where the storyteller talks about the coming destruction of the Okeke by Nuru men. She tells them to get prepared but one of the men replies, "It's been written in the Great Book. We are what we are. We shouldn't have risen up in the first place! Let those who tried die for it!" (Okoroafor 101). This is the social conditioning that drives society where the other have been made to see themselves as second class citizens and deserve whatever that comes their way. Ron Eglash has seen this relation and he notes thus:

> Primitivist racism operates by making a group of people too concrete and thus "closer to nature"—not really a culture at all but rather beings of uncontrolled emotion and direct bodily sensation, rooted in the soil of sensuality. Orientalist racism operates by making a group of people too abstract and thus "arabesque"—not really a natural human but one who is devoid of emotion, caring only for money or an inscrutable spiritual transcendence. Thus, exists the racist stereotype of Africans as oversexual and Asians as

> undersexual, with "whiteness" portrayed as the perfect balance between these two extremes (60).

However, the storyteller, who understands how such labeling can affect the psyche of the members of the outgroup, interjects: "written by who?" she asked" (Okoroafor 101). This rhetorical question carries a heavy impact that protests the agenda of the writers of the history who try to create a narrative that favours the "self". For this reason, Chimamanda Adichie in one of her Ted Talk in 2009 titled, "The Dangers of a Single Story", raises a conversation about a one sided narrative. Onyesonwu also agrees with the messenger as she says "…the Great Book, in my opinion, was mainly crafted lies and riddles" (Okoroafor 190). She is right. It is a made up narrative which the Nuru use to justify their plans to wipe out the Okeke. This greatly angers Onyesonwu—she believes the storyteller has just been recounting the creation story without believing it, she is angry with the man that thinks Okeke people are deserving of what's happening to them and their women are being raped because of karma. But this is the narrative which the Great Book wants them to believe. It is the only way the Nuru want them to think as it will remove all traces of revolution in their spirits.

Racism is a social construct which makes blacks to see themselves as inferior while white is seen as the normative race. On this Fanon notes, "for the Black man, there is only one destiny and it is white" (30). In *Kindred, even* as children, black people have been conditioned to view themselves as inferior to white people. They can only have a master-slave relationship and a friendship between them is unthinkable and yet, it is ironical that this inferior race shoulders a lot of responsibilities. A black man cannot be friends with a white man but you can shoulder his responsibilities. Such is the relationship between Nigel and Rufus. Even though they are of the

same age bracket, it is expected that Nigel watches over Rufus. This is seen in an encounter between Nigel and Kevin when Rufus injures his leg.

> "Just go get some help for your friend."
>
> "Friend?" Nigel gave Kevin a frightened glance, then looked at Rufus.
>
> "Go, Nigel," whispered Rufus. "It hurts. I said for you to go."
>
> Nigel went, finally. Unhappily.
>
> "What's he afraid of?" I asked Rufus. "Will he get into trouble for leaving you?"
>
> "Maybe." Rufus closed his eyes for a moment in pain. "Or for letting me get hurt. I hope not. It depends on whether anybody's made Daddy mad lately" (Butler 60).

This young boy black boy of Rufus' age is scared that he will be blamed for the harm Rufus has brought upon himself. He is meant to shoulder the responsibility of caring for a young boy that belongs to a "superior race". This can also be seen in history where black women, who are seen as subhuman, act as wet nurses to white children. This is an irony.

There is also a reason why black people are referred to as savages and subhuman. The reason is to keep them down from aspiring to be equal to whites. One of the ways they do this is by keeping them away from acquiring basic education and by making them think they are incapable of an intelligent feat. Dana notes that "One of the reasons it was against the law in some states to teach slaves to read and write was that they might escape by writing themselves passes. Some did escape that way" (Butler 49). The escape referred to in this place is symbolic as it represents an escape from both physical and mental slavery. A lack of education will make the escape impossible and this has further deepened the inferiority complex the black man has. This has also made his life uncomfortable and worthless as he sees himself as subhuman. Fanon posits that:

> The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation. Therefore, I have been led to consider their alienation in terms of psychoanalytical classifications. The Negro's behavior makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type, or, if one prefers, he puts himself into a complete situational neurosis. In the man of color, there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence. Whenever a man of colour protests, there is alienation. Whenever a man of color rebukes, there is alienation (*Black Skin, White Masks* 42-43).

There is therefore a need to continue reminding the black man daily that he is unintelligent and two steps away from being an animal. This will keep him away from aspiring to be better. The conversation between Nigel, Luke and Dana puts it in a better perspective. It goes thus:

> "Why you try to talk like white folks?" Nigel asked me.
>
> "I don't," I said, surprised. "I mean, this is really the way I talk."
>
> "More like white folks than some white folks." "You'll get into trouble," he said. "Marse Tom already don't like you." "You talk too educated and you come from a free state." "Why should either of those things matter to him? I don't belong to him. The boy smiled. "He don't want no niggers 'round here talking better than him, putting freedom ideas in our heads." "Like we so dumb we need some stranger to make us think about freedom," muttered Luke (Butler 74).

This sequence of social conditioning which has been instilled in the psyche of black people to view themselves as the inferior race can also be seen in *Who Fears Death*. The messenger tells the people of Jwair the reason to fight against the oppressive nature of the Nuru who think because they are white, they are superior and therefore possess a natural power to rule

and marginalize them. Some Okeke people agree with this and have succumbed to "fate" because the idea that blacks can never be equal to whites has been instilled in their minds that they dare not aspire to be better. This is seen in their belief in the old saying: "a snake is foolish if it dreams of being a lizard" (Okoroafor 17). By abiding with this, it means the Okeke are foolish for demanding to be equal with the Nuru.

Afrofuturism also critiques the erasure of the role black women have played in history and the underplaying of the positive role they bring to society and this is illustrated in *Who Fears Death* through the story of the formation of the community, Jwahir, Onyesonwu's village which is named after a great woman. The name means "Home of the Golden Lady" (Okoroafor 31). The story which occurred 700 years ago is about a giant Okeke woman, who is made of gold, and whose powers have made the city to prosper. This story is not included in the Great Book because any story that makes an Okeke woman a hero is not what retelling. After Najeeba, Onyesonwu's mother, finishes narrating the story to her, Onyesonwu says "I am going to burn my copy of the Great Book …it's the cause of all this" (Okoroafor 31). This format can also be witnessed in the story of the two lovers, Zoubeir and Tia where Tia gives up her life to save Zoubeir but yet, the only person history talks about is Zoubeir. The justification given for erasing such a fact in history is that "She was a girl. It was her duty to sacrifice her life for his" (Okoroafor 264). She is black and female; therefore, she doesn't deserve to be included in the Great Book.

Alternatively, the Afrofuturist tries to highlight the role black women have played in history and also showcases the positive role they play in society unlike certain narratives that give them docile and passive roles. So typically, the women in *Who Fears Death* are very proactive in trying to change the narrative as they question history books written by the Nuru to

justify their constant oppression of the Okeke. Using the two black female characters, the storyteller and Onyesonwu to lead the revolution, this goal has been achieved. This pattern can also be seen in *Kindred* where Dana is given a prominent role of saving Rufus several times. First is when she saves him from drowning and the second is when she stops him from burning down the house and himself. Dana realizes that saving Rufus will help in the preservation of her own ancestor and hence, preservation of her generation yet to come as she is an offspring of Alice, the black woman that Rufus later takes as his mistress. She time travels to the time of Rufus anytime he is in trouble. This portrays the image of a black woman who has been given a great position in the little world of "a white boy". This gives an active role to black women as people who have made a great impact in history.

Furthermore, Butler's *Kindred* also tries to dispel the notion of the violent nature of black people that has been pushed from time immemorial. Violence has no skin colour. Everyone is capable of violence; therefore, it is not peculiar to a particular race. Despite this glaring fact, black people have been described as a race with a violent tendency right from birth. However, the boy, Rufus, in *Kindred*, dispels this stereotype. He is a privileged white boy who is always up to many mischiefs. He burns down the stable because his father has sold a horse he likes. He also tries burning down the house because his father hits him after accusing him of stealing his money. Juxtaposing his character with that of the son of his father's slave, Nigel, who is his age mate, a sweet and gentle black boy, this image of a juvenile white boy goes to show that violence can be seen in any race. Similarly, In Okoroafor's *Who Fears Death*, we also see that it is the Nuru who raid Okeke villages and rape their women repeatedly. Daib, is a character who represents this violent Nuru men. This experience of sexual violence experienced by black

women which results in biracial children is also witnessed in *Kindred* where Rufus always forces himself on Alice after succeeding in taking her away from Isaac, her true love.

The part in history that paints black people as docile is also the stereotype that Afrofuturism is trying to dispel by going back in time to trace how it all began. Dana is taken back in time to witness firsthand the realities of that time. Robert Crossley similarly asserts that time travel, however fantastic, provides "the continuity between past and present" through which Butler draws readers' attention to "a lesson in historical realities" (qtd. in Myungsung 115). The Novel is a realistic story telling of what has taken place in the past and how African Americans are not as docile as they make people to believe. Alice, for instance, doesn't succumb to being raped by Rufus. She, alongside Isaac, the man she loves, fights Rufus even if it poses a danger to their lives. Isaac doesn't really care about the danger to his life. He just can't watch for his woman to be humiliated in his presence. Also, there are daring slave women represented by Alice who history has failed to acknowledge with their resistance of various dehumanizing treatment. Even when Rufus succeeded in bringing her back with him to his family house, Alice doesn't hide her disgust for him and his father even if it means getting a whip from time to time. For instance, when Sarah tells them of the plan of their, Master, Tom, to own all the children Alice will birth for Rufus. Dana narrates: "I looked at Alice. The woman followed my gaze. "He'll never own a child of mine," she said flatly" (Butler 42). Dana also represents strong black women that have fought against the white slave masters who try to exert act of sexual violence on them. This can be drawn from the scene where the patroller tries to rape her but she hits him with a tree trunk and he passes out.

Equally, *Kindred* shows that the description of blacks with docility because it seems they allowed slavery, oppression and colonialism without putting up a fight comes from a place of

ignorance. The reasons why it seems they did not revolt are better experienced than imagined and that's why Dana has been chosen to receive the history lesson. Most of them who try to revolt are killed just like the Okeke who try to revolt in *Who Fears Death* are killed. Dana realizes and understands what some black people have to endure just to keep breathing as well as keep their families alive. This is seen in the argument between her and Kevin.

> "Look, your ancestors survived that era—survived it with fewer advantages than you have. You're no less than they are."
>
> "In a way I am."
>
> "What way?"
>
> "Strength. Endurance. To survive, my ancestors had to put up with more than I ever could. Much more. You know what I mean" (Butler 51).

By this, Dana has noted that American history has erased the raw fact associated with slavery, how dehumanizing it is and how difficult it would have been for blacks to fight against the powers that be. She understands that the history books she has read about slavery trivialized it and her experience through time-travel has helped to shape her views. In this scene, we see a depiction of the scene of punishment of a slave narrated by Dana:

> Weylin punished a field hand for the crime of answering back. Weylin ordered the man stripped naked and tied to the trunk of a dead tree. As this was being done by other slaves—Weylin stood whirling his whip and biting his thin lips. Suddenly, he brought the whip down across the slave's back. The slave's body jerked and strained against its ropes. I watched the whip for a moment wondering whether it was like the one Weylin had used on Rufus years before. If it was, I understood completely why Margaret Weylin had taken the boy and fled. The whip was heavy and at least six feet long, and I wouldn't have used

> it on anything living. It drew blood and screams at every blow. I watched and listened and longed to be away. But Weylin was making an example of the man. He had ordered all of us to watch the beating—all the slaves. Kevin was in the main house somewhere, probably not even aware of what was happening (Butler 92).

It is also noteworthy to know that Dana has been a victim of Tom Weylin's whip for disobeying him. This experience has further helped her to understand that the docility associated with blacks for not being able to fight back in the face of all the ill treatment comes from a place of ignorance of the true story. Dana doesn't try to fight back because she could be punished and she realizes that killing or allowing Rufus to die poses a great consequence to her and her future birth as she states thus:

> Still, now I had a special reason for being glad I had been able to save him. After all … after all, what would have happened to me, to my mother's family, if I hadn't saved him? Was that why I was here? Not only to insure the survival of one accident-prone small boy, but to insure my family's survival, my own birth (Butler 29).

This shows the part black people play to ensure the survival of their own race; they have to gulp down all the dehumanizing treatment. Marc Steinberg has seen this relation as he notes:

> To be reminiscent of a slave narrative, *Kindred* must present a world of intense and implacable oppression, possession, and violence. In the novel, oppressor and oppressed are tightly bound one to another. It is a cruel irony that Dana needs her oppressor in order to guarantee her own birth and life in the future…Or, perhaps, was she also transported because she has been "cho- sen" to receive a history lesson? (468).

Dana has indeed been chosen to receive a history lesson that will guarantee why it seems

that blacks are docile. It doesn't take much for Dana to kill this white man, Rufus, who terrorizes her, as soon as he is grown. But Dana draws a symbol of life which black people represent in the novel. Hear her "If I was to live, if others were to live, he must live. I didn't dare test the paradox" (Butler 29). Also, the scene where Dana witnesses an attack by patrollers on a black family where the man has no pass and the dehumanizing way, they treated him and his wife lays credence to this. The woman is stripped naked in the presence of her husband. They whip the man in the presence of his wife and child who is weeping. The woman is later punched in the face by one of the riders. The man trying to fight back might lead to his death and the death of his family. Now, imagine if all blacks are to team up and try to revolt, it would have led to a genocidal cleansing of the race.

In addition, *Who Fears Death* also tries to dispel the docility stereotype given to the character of black people especially women. To illustrate, Luyu is described as a "pure Okeke woman of the most docile blood according to the Great Book" (Okoroafor 372). This stereotype is however shattered as she joins Onyesonwu to fight the people of Gadi who are raping Okeke women and killing their men. Also, the true story of some of the Okeke people who rebelled against being enslaved have also helped to change the notion. They are not as docile as writers of history made us to believe, hence, they are killed and some are exiled. After they have been exiled, various acts of violence have been exerted on them by the Nuru because they do not just fold their arms and watch these things happen to them. Najeeba states thus: "These Okeke paid dearly for having ambition. Everyone did, as it's always the case with genocide. On and off, this had been happening since. Those rebelling Okeke that weren't exterminated were driven East" (Okoroafor 17).

Furthermore, Afrofuturism tends to illustrate how the past can affect the present. Even though slavery and colonialism have ended, there are still traces of it in present time. The Afrofuturist tries to underscore how learning about the past will help one to understand the happenings in the present in relation to the present situation of the black race in terms of prejudice and stereotypes. Nelson posits that:

> History looks backward and forward in seeking to provide insights about identity, one that asks what was and what if and defining oneself in light of ties to one's history and experience and being defined from without (be it in virtual or physical space, by stereotypes or the state) determines the shape of computer-mediated aggregate identities as much or more than the leisurely flux of personality (3-4).

The Okeke, in *Who Fears death,* through the storyteller, have come to understand the root cause of their oppression by the Nuru and why it still affects them till the present time. Likewise, in *Kindred,* Dana has come to understand the reason why some prejudice and marginalization against black people still continues till this day. Dana, during her time travel, realizes that black slaves don't eat when their white masters are eating. Rather, they wait till they are done. Luke tells Dana "We get food later on after the white folks eat," said Luke. "We get whatever they leave" (Butler 73). This is symbolic as the realities of racial prejudice against blacks still holds true. They are fed crumbs, denied equal opportunities with their counterparts and discriminated against in all fronts. It happened in the past and still continues till this day. For Steinberg, history bleeds itself into a supposedly enlightened present (468).

Also, the scene where Kevin compliments Dana's look justifies Steinberg's view on how history affects the present, Dana reflects: "I wasn't sure what "it" was that looked good on me, but I was glad he liked it. His likes and dislikes were becoming important to me. One of the

women from the agency told me with typical slave-market candor that he and I were "the weirdest-looking couple" she had ever seen" (Butler 57). This woman said this because she is black and the relationship between black and white couples is seen as a strange love affair. In the past, the relationship between a black man and a black woman or vice versa is a master-slave relationship. We see this scene in an exchange between two white people, Rufus and Kevin. While Kevin is from another time, history is trying to teach him through time traveling how the relationship between him and Dana is viewed in the past and why it still looks strange in the present time. The discussion goes thus:

> "My name's Kevin—Kevin Franklin."
>
> "Does Dana belong to you now?"
>
> "In a way," said Kevin. "She's my wife."
>
> "Wife?" Rufus squealed.
>
> I sighed. "Kevin, I think we'd better demote me. In this time …"
>
> "Niggers can't marry white people!" said Rufus (Butler 61).

The woman, in the present time, seeing them as a strange looking couple stems from the notions imbibed from the past. On this, Steinberg states that "Butler's reader is morally appalled if not surprised by such racialized bigotry in contemporary Los Angeles. Butler thus insinuates how the wrongs of the past can survive, have survived in the present" (468). However, Steinberg sees their relationship differently as he further notes that:

> After witnessing the beating of her enslaved foremother Alice, Dana flees not only from the horrific images of the antebellum past but also from a patroller who both beats and attempts to rape her. In the past, the patroller had collapsed across Dana's body; in the present Dana finds herself beneath her white husband Kevin. In this way, Butler connects

> two oppressors' bodies; both men are powerful white figures, and, although Dana's marriage to Kevin appears to be secure, Butler suggests that, for black women, interracial heterosexual marriage too might be a form of oppression not unlike chattel slavery (468).

The negative attitude towards the love affair between interracial couples also exists in *Who Fears Death.* This can be witnessed in the resentment Mwita's parents witness as an interracial couple. They are both later killed. It is on account of this that Dana is advised against calling herself Kevin's wife because in *Kindred,* interracial marriage is not only a taboo but illegal. Hence, Rufus tells Dana "Yes. I want you to say it too if anyone asks you." "That's better than saying you're his wife. Nobody would believe that" (Butler 65). Also, this kind of prejudice in the past is the reason why in present time, a white person marrying a coloured person is seen as an elevation on the part of the black person and it is assumed that the person is seeking to be "accepted" by the "normative" race. Fanon aptly adds that:

> Something remarkable must have happened on the day when the white man declared his love to the mulatto. There was recognition, incorporation into a group that had seemed hermetic. The psychological minus-value, this feeling of insignificance and its corollary, the impossibility of reaching the light, totally vanished. From one day to the next, the mulatto went from the class of slaves to that of masters (*Black Skin, White Masks* 41).

Hence, Dana marrying Kevin in *Kindred* and Mwita's father marrying Mwita's mother in *Who Fears Death* is viewed as a way of acquiring power on the part of the coloured person. Interracial marriage produces biracial kids who are in turn seen as blacks and also slaves. Onyesonwu loves her step father dearly for not being prejudiced like the others. She notes that "Papa was dearly loved, despite the fact that he did marry my mother, a woman with a daughter like me, an Ewu daughter that had long been excused as one of those mistakes even the greatest

man can make" (Okoroafor 4). Afrofuturism critiques this situation and pushes to change the orientation. It also tries to change orientation surrounding racial prejudice in present time as a consequent of the happenings in the past. Racism is no longer institutionalized but it has become an individual prejudice one feels over people of other race. As Joel Olson aptly notes:

> Now, race is cast into the private realm and has been redefined from white supremacy to abstract discrimination. Hence, the term "racist" no longer describes a social structure but individual characters," and "the problem is no longer segregation but 'hate,' not systematic inequality but individual 'intolerance,' not privilege but individual 'extremism' (72- 73).

In addition, Afrofuturism points out that racial discrimination is a learned behavior one is capable of unlearning. Some white people have grown up with the notion of their own superiority which may not be their fault but it becomes their job to unlearn what society has taught them just like Kevin has done in *Kindred*. He marries Dana, a black woman, and treats every other black person without prejudice. Sarah complains about this attitude to Dana: "Your husband … he'd get in trouble every now and then 'cause he couldn't tell the difference 'tween black and white" (Butler 152). In *Who Fears Death* also, Onyesonwu tries to push this agenda to eradicate all forms of racial discrimination. So, this narrative is trying to put whites in the shoes of black people. The Afrofuturist is appealing to whites to change their orientations. This can be seen in the scene where Dana tries to educate Rufus on why he shouldn't call her a "nigger" ---a derogatory word for blacks. This scene is symbolic as it tries to replay the golden rule. She says:

> "I don't like that word, remember? Try calling me black or Negro or even colored."
>
> "What's the use of saying all that? And how can you be married to him?"
>
> "Rufe, how'd you like people to call you white trash when they talk to you?"

"What?" He started up angrily, forgetting his leg, then fell back. "I am not trash!" he whispered. "You damn black …"

"Hush, Rufe." I put my hand on his shoulder to quiet him. Apparently, I'd hit the nerve I'd aimed at.

"I didn't say you were trash. I said how'd you like to be called trash. I see you don't like it. I don't like being called nigger either."

He lay silent, frowning at me as though I were speaking a foreign language. Maybe I was.

"Where we come from," I said, "it's vulgar and insulting for whites to call blacks niggers" (Butler 61).

Again, Afrofuturism puts to rest the ongoing debate that questions if blacks can be racists. Racism is not a discrimination of whites towards blacks; it is generally a prejudice against people based on skin colour. Apart from the systematic racism that occurred in the past, racism is a two way street. So, yes! Blacks can be racist too. To illustrate, in *Who Fears Death,* Aro says to Onyesonwu, "your father was Nuru, a foul dirty people. The Great Mystic points are an Okeke Art only for the pure of spirit" (Okoroafor 71). Aro suggests that the Nuru are dirty and impure in spirit whereas his own race is better. This is a hate speech against the white race in the novel. Afrofuturism condemns this attitude and warns blacks against becoming the racists they condemn. In *Kindred* also, just like some white people frown at interracial marriages, black people act same way towards it. Kevin laments about her sister's attitude towards their relationship to Dana:

"I thought I knew her," he told me afterward. "I mean, I did know her. But I guess we've lost touch more than I thought."

"What did she say?"

> "That she didn't want to meet you, wouldn't have you in her house—
>
> or me either if I married you" (Butler 110).

In the same breath, the novel notes that white people are not the only ones capable of such racist behaviour as Dana also complains about her own father's attitude when she wants to marry Kevin. She says "He wants me to marry someone like him—someone who looks like him. A black man" (Butler 111). Afrofuturism is trying to tell black people through literature to take the moral high ground in trying to condemn such attitude and discrimination. Just like Lindon Barrett holds that "the black voice functions as a figure of value within African American culture, particularly as it is contrasted with the lack of value ascribed to blackness in American mainstream culture" (qtd. in Weheliye 27).

Furthermore, the stereotype that has been created in the past which paints blacks as violent beings has also affected the present. This is why some black movement like Black Lives Matter will remain relevant till this day. Blacks are killed by some police men in America for simply being black. Being black already makes you guilty. Fanon aptly puts it: "Sin is Negro as virtue is white. All those white men in a group, guns in their hands, cannot be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am no good" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 106). Afrofuturism tries to critique the present situation of black people caused by these stereotypes and it pushes to change the narrative which some persons have always believed in. Fanon paints the picture of this narrative and its attendant consequent aptly. He states:

> The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he

> thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up (*Black Skin, White Masks* 86).

Here, blacks are seen as aggressive and have the tendency to be violent just like the revolt of the Okeke against their oppressors in *Who Fears Death* has painted them as violent people in present time. However, there is no justifiable reason for the acts of violence committed by the white race on the black race in the two novels. It is simply man's inhumanity to man. In *Kindred*, Rufus and Tom are two white people that displayed violent behaviour several times against their slaves by way of whipping and hitting them all the time, just like the Nuru commit various acts of violence on the Okeke both in the past and in the present. This raises a lot of questions about the stereotypical way blacks are described. Violence is an individual thing and should not be attributed to a particular race.

Correspondingly, Afrofuturism also strives to motivate women of colour into ignoring the stereotypes given to them as passive beings and push to do greater things to break the glass ceiling as well as push to fight off any agent of female marginalization and violence. Dana and Onyesonwu represent the present black women. Onyesonwu fighting off the rapist on her way to the village of Nuru is symbolic as she states: "I am not like my mother in this regard, I couldn't just lie there" (Okoroafor 179). Here, women are urged never to gulp down any act of oppression; rather, they are to fight their oppressors and take their destiny into their own hands. We also see such scenario in *Kindred* where Rufus makes to rape Dana and she kills him. They are two figures representing women who are fighting the obstacles which society places in the way of the woman which they strive to stop it from happening in the present.

As previously mentioned, history is a very important aspect of life and understanding history will help to understand the present and work towards the future. There are certain

practices in history that are harmful to women and which has a need for it to be dropped and this is one of the goals of the Afrofuturist. For instance, the Eleventh Rite tradition in Jwahir which involves gender mutilation represents one of the acts of violence against women. There is no reason for this barbaric act and no one has bothered to ask questions why it started in the first place. Onyesonwu states thus; "no one really remembered why it was done. So, the tradition was accepted, anticipated, and performed" (Okoroafor 35). Her mother feels the practice is primitive and useless and she agrees with her. Tracing history has helped them realize that it doesn't really serve a good purpose for the woman; therefore, there is a need for such practices to be dropped in present time. This practice however does not exist in *Kindred*.

Ultimately, the traumatic experience of the past has left black people scarred for life. In *Kindred,* Dana's loss of her arm as she tries to save herself from Rufus symbolizes the traumatic experience slavery has left on black people and how it has continued to affect them till now. Just like Dana's arm can never grow back, black people will never fully recover from the experience. The existence of Ewu children, in *Who Fears Death* will also be a constant reminder to the Okeke on the violence and extermination of their people by the Nuru and they can never fully recover from it. However, they strive to rise above it even though the trauma lingers. On this Lloyd Garrison states:

> It may, perhaps, be fairly questioned, whether any other portion of the population of the earth could have endured the privations, sufferings and horrors of slavery, without having become more degraded in the scale of humanity than the slaves of African descent. Nothing has been left undone to cripple their intellects, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind; and yet how wonderfully they have sustained the mighty load of a most frightful bondage, under

which they have been groaning for centuries (qtd. in Douglass ix).

Furthermore, the next goal for the Afrofuturist, according to Yaszek, is a more positive one: not just to remember the bad past, but to use stories about the past and the present to reclaim the history of the future ("Race in Science Fiction: The Case of Afrofuturism" 2). The Afrofuturist depends on the past and present to build a better future for the next generation so as to eradicate the injustice that has taken place in the past and still occurring in the present. In *Who Fears Death,* the storyteller that comes to Onyesonwu community corroborates this as she states that "as we are doomed in the past and are doomed in the present, we will be saved in the future" (Okoroafor 102). The counter-future genre tends to urge black people to use the trauma of the past and the experience of the present to build a better future. Yaszek has noted that "in later stories, the stories of slavery and colonization – the story of modernity's bad past – becomes the source of inspiration for imagining what might be truly new and at least slightly better futures" ("Race in Science Fiction" 10). Afrofuturism builds hope for the future where gender and racial discrimination no longer have a stronghold. This counter-future also houses narrative where blacks free themselves from the obstacles caused by racism. It creates black female characters like Dana and Onyesonwu, who have been destined to topple the order of things. Nelson notes that for Kalí Tal;

> The "information revolution" provides inspiration to reconsider existing texts as counter narratives to the futurism of neocriticism. Tal reflects on black militant near-future fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the generic characteristics of what she identifies as a distinct subgenre of cautionary tales are a utopian vision that is actualized through violence and the decimation of the white population, secret societies, and alternative uses of technology. In the works she discusses, the near future as a utopia in

> which blacks free themselves from the constraints of racism; the racist past and present are dystopic (10).

We witness this pattern in *Kindred* where the future is looked upon as the "saviour". On this, Csicsery Ronay notes that:

> *Kindred*'s 1970s is not only descriptive in the sense of consensus reality. It creates its own future-universe. The 1970s in *Kindred* becomes a space, not only of past and present, but of another chronological register, the future. This particular construction of time relocates the 1970s into another stratum of reality, forming an ontological knot that constitutes "another universe in line, waiting to be born (qtd.in Myungsung 119).

Nelson has called for the ousting of the old order from the social movements of the 1960s and the welcoming of the new category (2). This new category can be achieved through the futurist literature. The future of racial reconciliation is to destroy all the myths against black folks. Eglash further agrees that it is for this reason that we see the turn to Afrofuturism. Rather than merely reverse the stereotypes, the Afrofuturist have attempted to forge a new identity. Yet mere reversal is never sufficient as an oppositional strategy (59-60). Sola in *Who Fears Death* notes the importance of forming a new identity through rewriting the Great Book that has continued to justify the enslavement of the black race which Onyesonwu equally agrees with. This also represents rewriting and condemning religion and history books that have justified oppression. Fanon aptly states that, "With enthusiasm, I set to cataloguing and probing my surroundings. As times changed, one had seen the Catholic religion at first justify and then condemn slavery and prejudices. But by referring everything to the idea of the dignity of man, one had ripped prejudice to shreds" (90).

However, to change the present and reclaim the future, people of colour will need to take their future into their own hands. Just like Csicsery-Ronay puts it, "The future serves as a "narrative convention" designed to provide "distortions of the present" (qtd.in Myungsung 119). The quest to change the world is rooted in the life and destiny of Onyesonwu, the chosen one. She dies with her unborn child while trying to regain freedom for herself as well as create a world devoid of all forms of prejudice and oppression. Daib, Onyesonwu's father, who is the wicked sorcerer, suffers what is worse than death while trying to stop her. He is crippled and he also loses his power. One of the Nuru Chassa twins, who has been saddled with recreating the story of Onyesonwu's feat, describes the event that marked her death as she breathed her last. She states thus:

> The ground shook and people started running. I think in that moment, everyone, all of us Nuru understood where we'd gone wrong. Maybe her rewriting had finally kicked in. We were all sure that Ani had come to grind us back to dust. So much had already happened. Onyesonwu told the truth. The entire town of durfa, all the fertile men were wiped out and all the fertile women were vomiting and pregnant (Okoroafor 412).

The destruction of all the fertile men of Nuru is symbolic as it represents the destruction of the tools of oppression in the novel. The Nuru men serve as agents of the destruction of Okeke men and the raping of their women. To start a new, there is a need for the oppressors to be terminated and the "new man" that will come from the fertile Nuru women who are pregnant will form a new world that will lead to a peaceful co-existence of people of all colour. Dana in *Kindred* also serves as an agent of change by sacrificing her arms just to ensure a positive change in the world. Just like Dana's loss of her arm, Onye's death bestows great gifts on women and this represents the significant role women can play in the future of the world when gender equality is actualized.

They can serve as agents of change that will topple the current world order. The event the Chassa twin describes symbolizes this. She says:

> All the women, Okeke and Nuru, found that something had changed about them. Some could turn wine to fresh sweet drinking water, others glowed in the dark at night, and some could hear the dead. Others remembered the past before the Great Book…thousands of abilities all bestowed upon women. There it was Onye's gift. In the death of herself and her child, Onye gave birth to us all. This place will never be the same. Slavery here is over (Okoroafor 413).

Just like Fanon, it can be concluded that the goal of the Afrofuturist is to have black people "rehabilitated, recognized, sought after, taken up" as against the yearning of the white man who only wants the world for himself and sees himself as the master of the world. But when the black man changes things, the white man would be in awe of this and wonders about the secret of the black man to achieve such feat (*Black Skin, White Masks* 97). As can be seen, this goal can only be achieved by understanding the past and bringing about a positive change in the present.

4.2 Race, Power and Gender in *Who Fears Death* and *Kindred*

Afrofuturism examines how race and gender intersect as a determinant of the power one wields in society as well as how they intertwine to rid coloured women of any kind of power. It shows how social stratifications based on race and gender intertwines to make for a continued marginalization of the "Other". In the society that exists in the two novels, the social ladder in a descending order, spirals from the white man who is at the top before it gets down to the black woman who is at the bottom. In racial discrimination, the transition from systematic racism to colour blind racism has not done anything to change this subtle oppression. Myungsung notes

that the racial colourblindness rearticulates whiteness as a politically neutral concept, and systematic white privilege, which has been maintained for centuries, gets relocated outside the political realm (127). The white man wields the highest power in this society which the black man can only aspire to have. The white man however oppresses him with it. Fanon posits that:

> We understand now why the black man cannot take pleasure in his insularity. For him there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world. Whence his constant preoccupation with attracting the attention of the white man, his concern with being powerful like the white man, his determined effort to acquire protective qualities—that is, the proportion of being or having that enters into the composition of an ego. As I said earlier, it is from within that the Negro will seek admittance to the white sanctuary. The attitude derives from the intention (*Black Skin, White Masks* 36).

However, for the black woman, she is the worst hit as she experiences the peculiarities that come from double oppression which dispossesses her of all the powers she thinks she has. She is disadvantaged in all fronts, first as a coloured person and then as a woman. The Afrofuturist explore how women of colour experience double oppression that comes from racial and gender stereotypes both in the past and in the present. Barbara Smith has noted the importance of a Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers which she sees as an absolute necessity (21). Afrofuturism examines and critiques how people of colour lack the power to effect any change in their life and in society. When combined with gender privilege given to men which marginalizes women, black women experience otherness in its raw form as they belong to the lowest strata of the society. Racial and gender discrimination dispossess the woman of colour of all kinds of power

both politically and otherwise. In the novels under study, Dana and Onyesonwu experience double marginalization because they are coloured and women. Dana is endangered in this society where everything she identifies as works against her. She laments:

> After a moment, I realized that Weylin was looking at me staring hard at me. Perhaps he was seeing my resemblance to Alice's mother. He couldn't have seen me clearly enough or long enough at the river to recognize me now as the woman he had once come so near shooting. At first, I stared back. Then I looked away, remembering that I was supposed to be a slave woman. Slaves lowered their eyes respectfully. To stare back was insolent. Or at least, that was what my books said (Butler 66).

Diana Paulin notes that *Kindred* portrays the exploitation of black female sexuality as a main site of the historic struggle between master and slave. Paulin describes Rufus's attempts to control Alice's sexuality as a means to recapture the power he has lost when she chooses Isaac as her sexual partner (170). For them, a black woman should be subdued and to do so is to have power over her body. As a woman in a society that sees masculinity as the normative gender, the female gender is seen as the other and an appendage to the man. Simon de Beauvoir has seen this relation. He states thus:

> Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being…she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute-she is the other (xvi).

Kindred, according to Steinberg, like many slave narratives, can be interpreted as a power struggle, an attempt on Dana's part to wrest control of her body and her psyche (469). This is considerably true of Dana's experience with the white men in the society where we witness

Rufus and the patroller trying to sexually molest her on one hand, and the psychologically impact of racism and its attendant prejudice dragging her psyche with her on the other hand. Any attempt for her to regain her power and dignity as a human being is doubled down and she is constantly reminded of her place in society as a bottom "feeder" in the social ladder. Here, Rufus reminds her: "You think you're white!" he muttered. "You don't know your place any better than a wild animal" (Butler 164). Alice also witnesses this level of oppression as she is dispossessed of all powers and dignity needed for her to take control of her own life. She is forced to be with Rufus, a man she loathes. In the text, forced Sex is a weapon which the white man uses to possess the black woman. On this, Angelyn Mitchell notes that:

> Compelled to submit her body to Rufus, Alice divorces her desire from her sexuality to preserve a sense of self. Similarly, Dana's time traveling reconstructs her sexuality to fit the times. While in the present, Dana chooses her husband and enjoys sex with him; in the past, her status as a black female forced her to subordinate her body to the desires of the master for pleasure, breeding, and as sexual property (70).

Also, as an Okeke woman, Onyesonwu experiences sexism through sexual harassment as well as racial prejudice right from the time when she is a child and these are tools used to strip her of all the powers she has as an individual. On this, she laments: "In the market, men had tried to grab me but I was always quicker and I knew how to scratch. I'd learned from the desert cats. All this confused my six-year old mind. Now, as I stood before the blacksmith, I feared that he might find my ugly features strangely delightful, too" (Okoroafor 10). Smith argues that black women's "existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression which shape these are in the "real world" of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown. This invisibility goes beyond anything (20). In *Who Fears*

Death, Okeke women are discriminated against and their offspring hated for being raped by Nuru men, an action that is no fault of theirs. On account of this, Okeke women have come to see the sexual violence against them as a consequent of their sins. The man is exonerated from any form of wrong doing and the blame is shifted to the woman. This can be seen in the happening in the scene where Onyesonwu and her friends on their way to the abode of the Nuru, come across a malnourished village where they have scared malnourished Okeke who are too tired to rebel and are therefore not exiled. One of them, who is sickly, on spotting Onyesonwu says, "You're an Okeke woman's curse. May Ani help your mother by taking your life" (367). This attitude can also be seen in *Kindred*. Dana expresses her dissatisfaction with this society seen in her disgust of the attitude of Rufus towards Alice. "I was beginning to realize that he loved the woman—to her misfortune. There was no shame in raping a black woman, but there could be shame in loving one" (Butler 124).

In terms of aspiration, race and gender discrimination deny women the power to aspire for equal opportunities in society. The blacksmith, Onyesonwu's step father, talks about his first wife and how gender prejudice kills her aspirations. He says, "My Njeri could speak to Camels. Camel-talking is a man's job, so she chose camel-racing instead" (12). Njeri the wife can speak to camel but because it is seen as a man's job, she is denied the opportunity to be what she wants to be. However, since she is denied this, she goes for camel racing and becomes a champion in that field. In addition, the denial of equal opportunities to the female gender is aptly represented in the way Aro refuses to teach Onyesonwu the Mystic powers whereas he teaches Mwita because he is male. Any opportunity that will give a woman such powers is denied. Aro in response to this says "…what I teach him is limited. He's male. You're female. You can't measure up. Even in the gentler of skills" (Okoroafor 71). This stereotype creates all sorts of

narratives to disadvantage women as the weaker sex and less intelligent beings. Onyesonwu complains about this to Mwita angrily but he replies, “Precisely why he wouldn’t teach you! You act like a woman. You run on emotions. You’re dangerous” (Okoroafor 80). Mwita says this just to hurt Onyesonwu but even though he is joking, he has voiced the mentality of the men in the society. Onyesonwu feels bad about this attitude and Mwita recants his statement by saying, “no, I don’t believe that. You’re irrational a times …But it’s not because of what’s between your legs” (Okoroafor 80). By this last statement, Mwita has sent a strong message about the ridiculousness of discriminating against people because of their gender. Ada is also a victim of this discrimination. This is seen in her conversation about Aro with Onyesonwu. She says, “He’s always given me inspiration to paint. But when it comes to these deeper things, he tells me nothing.” “Because you’re a woman?” I asked hopelessly, my shoulder slumping. “Yes”” (Okoroafor 95). Furthermore, we can also see this kind of discrimination in *Kindred* when Dana tries to repossess power and take control of an opportunity but Rufus “puts her in her place” by saying “You think you’re white!” he muttered. “You don’t know your place any better than a wild animal” (164). Alice Walker, in her landmark essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens", discloses how the political, economic and social restrictions of slavery and racism have historically stunted the creative lives of Black women (11). This has been displayed in the attitude towards women in the novels.

Equally, these women do not have the power to choose to act anyway they want to. There are certain attributes that are reserved specifically for women even though these attributes are needed in a day to day relationship with our fellow human beings. There are also some which women are not allowed to display and any plan to do so will be misconstrued. A confident and outspoken black woman is seen as angry, arrogant and aggressive but this confidence is admired

in a man. A woman is only allowed to be humble to be "seen and not heard". Humility is a virtue fit for only the woman. As we can see during the time the blacksmith, Onyesonwu's step father, goes to marry Najeeba, her mother, he wears white to see the mother of Onyesonwu and in this society, a man wearing white for that occasion has a certain significance. Onye notes that "to wear all white was to present oneself with humbleness. Usually women did this. For a man to do it, it was very special" (Okoroafor 13). This shows that society sees humility as a gendered attribute. Hence, a confident woman is seen as proud while a confident man is admired.

There are also cultural practices that take away the power of the female child to make a choice and give it to a society where the laws and rules are made by men. One of such practices is gender mutilation that exists in some parts of Africa. This can be seen in the society In *Who Fears Death* where the female children are subjected to the mutilation of their sexual organ once they clock eleven years of age. Onyesonwu states that "In Jwahir, to be uncircumcised past eleven brought bad luck and shame to your family" (35). These children are blackmailed into doing this with a bogus reason as its justification. The ridiculousness of it all is that it is even the women in society that perform this ritual on the girl-child. They have no power to fight such a primitive practice that violates the girl-child. Onye's mother, Najeeba is against it. Onye, however, does this to wipe away the shame from her father's face for marrying a raped woman and the shame from her mother's face for having an Ewu child. Similarly, in *Kindred,* black women are not allowed to make a choice when it comes to giving away their children or to keep them. The power to make this choice which can affect their lives is taken away from them. Alice's children and Sarah's children are given away by Tom Weylin and they cannot put up a protest.

Also, in the society of *Who fears death*, the power is given to the man in all aspects of life even in marriage. Equality does not exist as marriage is seen as a master-servant relationship where the man is the head and the sole decision maker. A woman has no power to leave a bad marriage as she would be discriminated against for being a divorced woman. It is her job to build the home with little or no effort from a man. Marriage seems to be a favour a man does for the woman. Aro who is married to Ada threatens her as she makes to leave because she is tired of the marriage. She narrates to Onyesonwu, "I was a woman and he was a man. By leaving him, I went against all that I was taught" (Okoroafor 94). Luyu sees the ridiculousness of it all and laments: "we're tricked into thinking our husbands are gods" (Okoroafor 86). In *Kindred*, Rufus assumes he is doing Alice a favour by forcing her to be with him. He does not treat her right because he assumes that no matter what, she will always be with him even against her own wish because she is black and female.

Afrofuturism also draws a picture of how oppressive society is towards women of colour as seen in the novels. In *Who Fears Death*, Aro is a symbol that represents these oppressive figures in society. The scalpel used in conducting the gender mutilation on the girls is treated by him with "Juju" so that the women will feel pain when they are sexually aroused until they are married but this clause doesn't cover raped women as they still feel pain when a man tries to forcefully have a sexual intercourse with them. Thus, the burden of sexual purity lays on women leaving the men out of it. This has raised a lot of questions: Why can't men go through such a ritual? Why can't they be charged with sexual purity? Why can't the ritual be used to prevent men from raping women by making them experience pain when they try to forcefully have a carnal knowledge of a woman? Onye, however, finds a way to stop feeling pain during intercourse. Through her powers, she is able to be sexually liberated. On account of this, Aro

charges her to be sexually pure so as not to neutralize her powers. She demands that such responsibility should also be given to Mwita, her lover, and not her alone. This matter of gendering sexual purity frustrates Diti as she laments: “My cousin always talks about how only a pure woman attracts a man pure enough” (Okoroafor 86).

This pattern is also seen in *Kindred* as Dana bears the shame of being called a whore for sleeping in Kevin’s room while Kevin is exonerated from such labelling. This kind of labelling comes from men and women alike as the psyche of women have been brainwashed to think that sexual purity should be reserved for them alone. This is witnessed in Dana’s encounter with Mrs. Weylin as she comes out from Kevin’s room:

> Where did you sleep last night?” she demanded in the strident, accusing voice she reserved for slaves. I straightened to face her, rested my hands on the broom. How lovely it would have been to say, *None of your business, bitch!* Instead, I spoke softly, respectfully. “In Mr. Franklin’s room, ma’am.” I didn’t bother to lie because all the house servants knew. It might even have been one of them who alerted Margaret. So now what would happen? Margaret slapped me across the face. I stood very still, gazed down at her with frozen calm. She was three or four inches shorter than I was and proportionately smaller. Her slap hadn’t hurt me much. It had simply made me want to hurt her. Only my memory of the whip kept me still. “You filthy black whore!” she shouted. “This is a Christian house!” (Butler 93).

Mrs. Weylin doesn’t remember her house is a Christian house when her husband Tom, rapes black women. But suddenly, she remembers because it is a crime for a black woman to be sexually liberated and have control over what to do with her body. This kind of narrative is similar to Mwita’s attitude towards Diti because she goes to be with another man that’s not

Fanasi, her man, whereas Mwita himself has also been in the midst of some older women in the land of the red people. Onyesonwu is disgusted by this and she tells Mwita "we've been raised to feel that it's wrong to open our legs, even when we want to. We weren't brought up to be free as you were…when you were with all those older women, who criticized you?" (Okorofor 289). Onyesonwu tells Mwita this in defence of Diti as well as to challenge societal inhibitions on women. She suggests that both men and women should be treated and judged equally.

Afrofuturism critiques such happenings in society and proposes a society where power should be wielded based on one's abilities and not race or gender a society where everyone will be treated fairly and equally, a society where everyone would be given the opportunity to prosper and grow in their own right and at their own pace. It notes that women of colour possess the ability to make a real change in society when given the opportunity but the agents of society like racial and gender discrimination that dispossessed of them any power wouldn't let this come to pass; therefore, it serves as a voice that critiques this level of discrimination and advocates that women should be given a chance to effect a real change. In *Who Fears Death,* the storyteller comes bearing tales about the coming destruction of the Okeke by the Nuru, the men who have given themselves the power to effect change start panicking. Aro, on account of this says to the Ndiiche, "Abadou brings reality. Take it in, but don't panic. Are we all women here?" (Okoroafor 78). Fear is seen as an attribute meant for women even without giving them a chance to prove themselves but yet, it is fear that makes the men to decide to leave things the way they are. For instance, in the case of the man that says it is written in the Great Book. Onyesonwu and the storyteller think otherwise as they see the need to change the Great Book. These are female characters that have risen against the subordinate and passive role given to them by the society. The Afrofuturist sends a strong message that there is a need to give women the right opportunity

to flourish. Onyesonwu's biological father, Daib, wanted her dead. The reason, according to what Aro states is that: "you're a failure….you were supposed to be a boy"(Okoroafor 118). So, being a woman already makes one a failure. It is ironical that Onyesonwu is seen as a failure but yet out of all the boys that goes to Aro's house, she is the only one that passes the initiation. She also notices that the attitude of Mwita towards her changed because he is surprised and ashamed that a woman passed the test whereas he fails. Onyesonwu makes to correct his mentality by saying to him "just because you were born a male does not make you more worthy than me" (Okoroafor 139). She concludes by telling him not to act like the sexist, Aro. The story of the Jwair woman who makes the community flourish is also an attestation to the ability of the woman to make a real change. This also applies to the story of Zoubeir and Tia where Tia gives up her life to save Zoubeir.

Similarly, the Afrofuturist shows the ridiculousness in the attitude of society to take away any opportunity the woman has to effect a change when every other thing has failed as seen in the action of the seer who alters the prophesy about an Okeke woman that will bring about the necessary change and a lasting peace between the Nuru and Okeke. This seer changes the prophesy to be about a Nuru man who will force the rewriting of the Great book and will lead to the change. He cannot bear the thought of an Okeke offspring, let alone a woman being the destined one. He manipulates the prophesy to such an extent that the only description that can link that prophesy to Onyesonwu is her height. However, this sexism by the seer is in favour of Onyesonwu because the Nuru men do not want this change to occur; therefore, there has been a manhunt for the Nuru man leading them to kill people that fit the description. *Kindred* also shows the real change a woman is capable of bringing to society through the life of Dana and her time-traveling which she uses to rewrite history as well as reclaim the future seen in the way she

tries to influence Rufus and his attitude towards the black slaves if given the opportunity. She notes that:

> Someday Rufus would own the plantation. Someday, he would be the slaveholder, responsible in his own right for what happened to the people who lived in those half-hidden cabins. The boy was literally growing up as I watched—growing up because I watched and because I helped to keep him safe. I was the worst possible guardian for hima black to watch over him in a society that considered blacks subhuman, a woman to watch over him in a society that considered women perennial children. I would have all I could do to look after myself. But I would help him as best I could. And I would try to keep friendship with him, maybe plant a few ideas in his mind that would help both me and the people who would be his slaves in the years to come (Butler 68).

As seen above, the Afrofuturist changes the narrative by creating female characters and put them in a "saviour" position where they wield powers according to their ability. This can be seen in the character of Dana, a black woman, who time travels from her living room to a river bank to save Rufus, a red haired white boy from drowning and dying. Onyesonwu is also the chosen one to fulfill the prophecy of healing the world. The death of Onyesonwu brings about a lasting change for the Okeke and peace in the world. The Okeke women also receive various powers from her Power to do and be whatever they wish to be. By so doing, she has rewritten the great book. On account of this, sola speaks "ah, but the Great Book has been rewritten. In Nsibidi at that… Indeed, Onyesonwu did die. For something must be written before it can be rewritten" (Okoroafor 415). The rewriting done in Nsibidi, the Okeke language is symbolic. It means that Okeke people have taken charge of their own narrative. This also shows the change in the narrative that showcases Africans as unlettered people before the white man comes to

"civilize" them whereas Nsibidi is the old writing system. Onyesonwu becomes the game changer in the society and a history maker who has put an end to the age long war between the Nuru and Okeke as well as the racial and gender discrimination. Sola notes that:

> If Onyesonwu had taken one last look below, to the south, with her keen Kponyungo eyes, she'd have seen Nuru, Okeke, and two Ewu children in school uniforms playing in a school yard. To the east, stretching into the distance, she'd have seen black paved roads populated by men and women, Okeke and Nuru, riding scooters and carts pulled by camels. In downtown Durfa, she'd have spotted a flying woman discreetly meeting up with a flying man on the roof of the tallest buildings" (Okoroafor 419).

The above statement by Sola is symbolic. The Nuru, Okeke and Ewu children playing together symbolizes the eradication of racial discrimination and also shows that people of different races can co-exist peacefully without any form of prejudice. This also applies to the road being plied by both Okeke and Nuru. The flying woman meeting up with the flying man symbolizes the end of gender discrimination and inequality where a woman has an equal opportunity to aspire like a man to whatever position.

In *Kindred* however, the narrative is different but the pattern is the same. Dana's killing of Rufus when he tries to rape her so as to replace Alice with her also puts an end to the sexual domination of women by men who uses it as a way of reinstating power over women. Alice also summoning up courage to take her life instead of continually experiencing the sexual domination on her by Rufus is also symbolic. Her committing suicide means she has regained the power and strength to do whatever she wants with her life including snuffing breath out of it. On this, Pamela Bedore notes that while Rufus seems to hold all the power in his relationship with Alice, she never wholly surrenders to him. Alice's suicide can be read as her way of ending her struggle

with Rufus with a "final upsetting of their power balance", an escape through death (2)**.** Dana and Onyesonwu, become two women of colour, who have rewritten history, brought about a change in the present and reclaim the future; thereby, fulfilling the goal of the Afrofuturist.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The three goals of Afrofuturism are to rewrite history, critique the present situation of black people and to push for a better future. This research has explored the manifestations of these goals in the texts understudy through analyzing the plot, characterization and the thematic preoccupations. Race and gender are identity construct that disadvantage people seen as the other by the "normative" race or gender; in this case, the black race and the black woman and these are what Afrofuturism aims to fight against. This is done by examining and critiquing racial and gender prejudice. Afrofuturism fights to push for a total erasure of all prejudice where the only thing that matters is humanity.

The first goal of the Afrofuturist which is to rewrite history has been illustrated in the study. Rewriting history involves providing the true facts about the black race which has been erased as well as tracing the foundation of the stereotypes given to the black race. In *Kindred*, Dana goes back to the past to be a witness of history so as to see how the parts black people have played in history have been erased as well as to see the root of all the stereotypes given to the race which she discovers to be mostly falsehood and labels created by the whites to keep blacks from revolting against them. Such sequence is also seen in *Who Fears Death* where some of the characters poke holes in history, represented by the Great Book, which contains falsehood about the Okeke. In discovery, the study shows that the writers of history write from the purview of the glorification of their own race.

The second goal of the Afrofuturist is to critique the present and to make sure that the wrong of the past does not continue till this day. It does so by engaging in the reversal of the

docility, violent and subhuman labels given to the black race. The study explores how the two novels have done this by creating characters who portray that violence is not an exclusive quality meant for a particular race; rather, it can be found in every race and gender. It does so by creating the characters of Rufus and his father, Tom Weylin, two violent white men. *Who Fears Death* also shows a similar pattern where we see the Nuru displaying various violent behaviours by raping and killing the Okeke. The only reason why the Okeke are labelled violent which has continued till this day is because of the rebellion of some selected few in the past against the oppression of the Nuru. Self-defense doesn't make one violent; this goes to show that stereotypes are caused by prejudice. The reversal of the docility stereotype as a quality of blacks which makes them seem to be a lackadaisical people has also been undertaken in the texts. In *Kindred* and *Who Fears Death*, the plots show that the black slaves and the Okeke do not revolt just to ensure the survival of their own race. They are outnumbered and any attempt to grapple with the powers that be will lead to their own extinction. This study has also shown how Afrofuturism counters the subordinate role given to black women as passive beings. In contrast, it creates strong black women like Dana who play a prominent and active role in history and in changing society by fighting the powers that be. She time travels to be a witness to history in other to effect a change in the world. Dana, at the end, kills Rufus even at the cost of her own life. By so doing, puts an end to her oppressor. In *Who Fears Death*, Onyesonwu, her friends and the storyteller represent women who question history and don't just fold their arms to watch the oppression of their people to continue, a task no Okeke man is able to undertake.

The third and final goal of the Afrofuturist is to reclaim the future. This study has shown how Afrofuturism gives blacks an array of possibilities of their ability to grow and develop in their own pace despite the projected white washed future. The research analyzes how race and

gender act as determinants of the kind of power an individual wields in a society. This mode of thinking even interferes in the personal choices one makes. This is a form of oppression and in this case, being black and female makes one to experience double oppression. This is seen in the story of Dana and Onyesonwu. For Dana, being a black female slave puts her in a very difficult situation where she is faced with oppression as a black slave, sexual domination and the inability to make a choice as a black female. Alice also experiences this where even the power to own her own body has been taken away from her. This pattern is also seen in the story of the women in *Who Fears Death* where they experience oppression in the hands of the Nuru as well as among their own people where they are denied their individual powers to make personal choices and the right to choose to be whatever they want to be. The two novels show that blacks and black women can take their future into their own hands. Onyesonwu undertakes a task in liberating her Okeke people from the hands of the Nuru who see them as the Other. She does so, frees her people and creates a great future for all thereby aligning with the goal of the Afrofuturist to create a future where colour and gender have no role to play in society.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has explored how this counter-future engages in a total reversal of stereotypes by creating stories and characters that question history as we know it and a critique of society that marginalizes blacks and black women. Afrofuturism is built on the premise of the notion of equality for all irrespective of gender and race where no one should be judged based on their race or gender but because of their individual capabilities as demonstrated in *Who Fears Death* and *Kindred*. The research has shown how Afrofuturism pushes for a change in orientation and attitude in the world and warns against the consequences of a continuous oppression. For just as

John Kennedy has said, "…those who make peaceful change impossible, make violent change inevitable."

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