Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism: Black speculative writings in search of meaning and criteria

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Abstract
This paper interrogates the concepts of Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, describes and interprets the indices that differentiates both concepts. The paper is informed by the belief that all black speculative writings are Afrofuturistic, and views this classification as inappropriate because Dery's Afrofuturism is clearly an African-American signification that provides no space for the African imaginary. Okorafor's Africanfuturism is hinged on the fact that, there are narrative convergence and departure for both concepts. Using meta-criticism, textual examples are drawn from both concepts, for purpose of critical elucidation and clarification. Meta criticism is systematic, logical, and views the text as an ongoing process, where the critic's opinion becomes a means to the realization of meaning. This article contends that there is the need for a different set of criteria for evaluation and categorization of both concepts, and proposes five-point criteria—experience, authorship, language, black heroism and technology for their evaluation.

Keywords: Africanfuturism, Afrofuturism, black speculative writing, Okoroafor

Public Interest Statement

This article establishes that it is inappropriate to classify all black speculative writings as Afrofuristic because this concept takes into consideration only African-American experience and sensibility. Nnedi Okoroafor's coinage of Africanfuturism takes cares of experiences and sensibilities of both Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora. This article therefore, proposes a five-point evaluation criteria to aid scholars and critics in the evaluation of both concepts.

Introduction

A retrospective view to the 1950s, when the Anglo-American speculative fiction, especially, science fiction boomed across films, books and music, one would have thought it as an impossible feat that someday, African-American, Afro-Caribbean and African writers would demonstrate creative competences in speculative fiction. The hegemonic grip of the Anglo-American imaginary on speculative works of literature was so fierce that one would have dismissed any idea that foresees an age of black techno-culture imaginary and civilization in the context of currents in global speculative writings. commenting on the effect this narrative form has for Blacks all over the world, (Mosley, 2000) argues that through the scythe of slavery black people were severed from their ancestry and speculative writing gives them an alternative form to t recreates this lost history. Science fiction has become an alternative means of empowering black imagination, body, history, literature and experience.

The ample display of black speculative writings from the African Diaspora to Africa from the 1970s to the present, attests to a corpus of imagination which was once stereotyped, but is now gaining recognition in global literary discourse. (Saunders, 2000, p. 404) avers that "We Blacks have more than made our mark in the Western world's popular culture". The creative outpouring of Blacks in popular culture continues to demonstrate the creative intelligence and prowess of black people in speculative writings. This in addition to writers and critics' theorizations bothering on speculative writing in the bid to name and classify this emerging black narrative form.

Fictional works of Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, Steven Barnes, Due, Jewelle Gomez, Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor among other writings from Africa and the African Diaspora are testimonials to black people's contribution to the global knowledge economy, futuristic discourse and artistic imagination. In spite of the contributions of black people in this genre, their speculative writing is of late, burdened with the problem of nomenclature and taxonomy. This problem is evident in the attempt by scholars and critics to construct the sense and appeal of Afrofuturism from those of Africanfuturism. In view of this, it has become expedient for one to note that, what Mark Dery refers to as Afrofuturism and what Nnedi Okoroafor describes as Africanfuturism should be re-visited. The essence of this is to investigate the point of convergence and departure for both concepts and the implications for the criticism of black speculative writings. Results from this investigation aim to add to the debates by scholars and critics to find an appropriate linguistic label and classification for texts that are Afrofuturistic and Africanfuturistic in black speculative writings.

There have been debates on Afrofuturism and Science fiction (Sci-fi) among Afrofuture scholars, cultural critics, writers, bloggers etc. For instance, (Anderson, 2016, p. 228) argues that "Afrofuturism is the current name for a body of systematic Black speculative thoughts originating in the 1990s as a response to postmodernity that has blossomed into a global movement[...]Black speculative writing has its roots in the nexus of nineteenth century scientific racism, technology and the struggle of Africa for self-determination and self-expression". From Anderson's position, Afrofuturism emerged as a counter-narrative to recover Africa's lost history which was aided by the long presence of slavery and

forced migration.

On the other hand, (Eshun, 2003, p. 228), views Afrofuturism as a counter memory movement with the aim of "situating the collective trauma of slavery as the founding movement of modernity". From this standpoint, it becomes obvious that the mental torture of slavery brought about dehumanization, alienation, dislocation and existential homelessness, which culminated in the negative narratives about Africans and their literary compositions. Re-imagining Black future becomes enhanced through the media, sci-fi, sonic, religious prophesies which are predictive of the future and not mere alternative to social realities of Blacks. Sci-fi becomes a means of controlling the future through cybernetic futurism. The basic concerns of Afrofuturism are "the possibilities, of the predictive, the projected, the propletic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future" (Eshun, 2003, p 293). Afrofuturism is not a mere narcissistic movement as most critics allude, rather it presents in vehement temperament, the reactionary mechanism of the Nation of Islam, the regressive compensation mechanism of Egyptology, Dogonesques Cosmology, the totalizing reversals of Stolen Legacy. The revisionist approach, helps in the recovering of histories towards a competing future, erases psychological trauma and alienation and presents a counter-memory that will allow blacks access to a new consciousness.

(Yaszek, 2006) observes that Afrofuturism emerged with cultural critics like Greg Tate, Tricia Rose and Kodwo Eshun who first drew attention to the centrality of science fiction themes and techniques in the works of black authors, artists and musicians. In a review of Ytsha Womack's book, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, (Van Veen, 2013, p. 152) explains that, Womack sees Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, the technology, the future, and liberation in which, Afrofuturist redefine culture and the notion of blackness for today and future by combining elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity and magical realism, with no Western beliefs". Van Veen further posits that black speculative writings are replete with cosmogonies of Dogon and the magical healing power of religion and rituals which are non-western beliefs. He points out that the sociological inventions by Blacks have been used as a means of reclaiming, rewriting whitewashed histories of technological inventions (Van Veen, 2016, 153). science fiction as a form of sociology of the future has its primary domain, not in its literary function, but in its value as a mind stretching force for the creation of a habit of anticipation, using technology to project the future.

Black scholars, artists, curators Bloggers and creative writers use Afrofuturism as a means to recast, past, present and future black culture; this way, black culture will be located within world contemporary technological landscape, with the aim of constructing and reconstructing African American fractured identity through the creation of new and imagined future. This fractured identity has resulted in systematic racism and its morbidities still belong emphatically to this unhappy period (Gilroy 2004).

Black speculative writings: The problems of nomenclature and taxonomy

The term Afrofuturism refers to "Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of the 20th Century techno-culture, and more generally, African-American science fiction that appropriate images of technology and prosthetically enhanced future…" (Dery, cited in Barr, 2008, p. 8). Dery's definition is specific of the African-American imagination as central to what can be Afrofuture in imagination. Aside the African-American signification, Afrofuturism functions more like a collage of experience in the fine arts where an artist assembles different parts into a whole. Afrofuture critics have this image of a multi-

faceted collection of experience in mind when describing and defining Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism therefore, refers to narratives of empowerment, transformative techno-cultural change, audacity and aspiration of people of colour.

Dery specifically mentions 20th Century techno-culture productions as the marked point for African-American speculative writings that engage African-American themes. When Dery moves from the specific to the general in his definition of Afrofuturism, he does so by appropriating technologically enhanced image and future in literary narratives that are connected with the African-American experience. Dery's conceptualizations of Afrofuturism, has no envisioning of the African imagination, experience, knowledge system and signification; this may not be an unconscious omission.

Consequently, the question that comes to mind is: why are speculative writings by Africans categorized as Afrofuturism when in the real sense these narratives address African realities, landscape, knowledge system, history, mythology, future, aesthetics and experience, that are not comparatively African-American? Some e-libraries, online bookshops, physical libraries, scholars and readers of black speculative fiction appear to be culpable of this erroneous classification. The fact that all Blacks, wherever they may be found, are unarguably descendants of one family, does not and should not affect one's knowledge of practical distinctions bothering on frameworks of experience, aesthetics, culture, linguistics and technology.

In every society and age of critical minds, literary critics have always set the parameters for the evaluation of literary texts, because what constitutes aesthetics value is culture-depended. This provides for every society its literary tradition. Tradition gave literature and literary criticism a particular reflection and set values (Webster, 1990). Webster's position calls to mind the earlier position of (Eliot, 1975, p. 38) that "the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with the feeling that…literature…has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order". Through literary interpretation, critics' conceptualization and theorization on objects, ideas and phenomena, the enterprise and frontiers of literary criticism become more robust. The robustness and expansiveness of the domain of literary criticism, explains why, its intellectual endeavour attracts the patronage of both writers, readers and scholars alike. The impact of this patronage is seen in the way and manner creative writers intermittently double as literary critics in order to exercise critical positions in literary discourses, and provide the triangular relationship between the writer, the critic and the text. This relationship accounts for the symbiotic relationship between literature and literary criticism.

Okorafor, for instance, blends ideological fluidity between creative and critical faculties. Amidst critics and writers' indifference to the nomenclature and taxonomy problem in black speculative writings. She, therefore, coins the term Africanfuturism as separate from Afrofuturism. While one might think that the words "Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism" sound the same and are therefore, the same, it is not so for (Okoroafor, 2019, n.p) who posits that "Africanfuturism is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point of view and then branches out to African Diaspora".

The term 'Blacks' refers to those whose ancestry is African. However, the singularity and sameness of skin pigmentation is not synonymous with the singularity and sameness of experience. In other words, the "ism" in Afrofuturism is not the same with the "ism" in Africanfuturism. By "isms", this paper argues that, the nature and components that appeal to the African experience and the experience of people of colour are not all together the same. For example, Gilda the protagonist and heroine, in Jewelle Gomez's "Chicago 1927" is a black African-American girl with preternatural

powers which she uses to sustain black survivalism in an American racist society. Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010), centres on the character of a black African female character Onyesonwu, who also uses her preternatural power to forestall inter ethnic genocide.

Both Gomez and Okorafor r heroines are Blacks. However, the uniformity of their blackness does not translate to sameness of realities, from the perspective of experience. The differences in experience are so predicated or demonstrated because the African experience and the cultural histories that factorize them are essentially different from those of the African-American background. When (Namawali, 2016, n.p) wonders thus: "Whence the "afro" in "Afrofuturism"? She clearly and specifically associates it with the African-American experience. In stating the ideological direction in which she uses the word "afro" which generally appeals to all blackness, one gets to know the specific variant of black experience which she refers to. This paper raises similar questions such as: whence the "afro" and "ism" in Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism? Are both concepts the same or not? If the" isms" in both concepts by Dery and Okorafor differ, what then, are their marked differences? Are there areas of similarities for both concepts and if there are what are those similarities? What are the implications of these similarities and differences for black speculative writings? These and other issues are addressed below in the proposed criteria for the evaluation of these concepts.

The need for criteria in the evaluation of Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism
In as much as the ism in Africanfuturism is not the same with the ism in Afrofuturism, both concepts' centrality is the resurgence of black heritage and its techno-cultural civilization in the context of the 20th Century and beyond. Conversations on both concepts' points of convergence and departure are presented in five-point criteria which the study proposes.

- Experience
- Authorship
- Language
- Landscape
- Black character heroism and technology.

Experience
Since culture is the total way of living of a people, experience becomes an integral content of the summation of a people's culture. Cultures is an acknowledgment of the existence of the traditions that determine a peoples' way of life and worldview (Nathaniel and Onuoha, 2016 p.84). Consequently, Society thrives on experience and experience thrives on culture and this explains why the experience of a people defines their artefact. Experience therefore, is a crucial factor in the history and literature of every race and society, it is a staple of a people's culture, history, philosophy and civilisation. In other words, people's experiences lend credence to their mind, imagination and being. It is therefore a system of lived and unlived perception and of one's worldview–be it scientific or unscientific, practical or theoretical. While experiences may be similar, they cannot be the same. In the same vein, for the fact that the entire black race had been labelled and associated with a 'primitive mentality' among other negative image by the West (Levy-Bruhl, 1910), does not in any way confer on them a homogenous experience, as they are representatives of shifting narratives, identities and objects of cultural experiences, which becomes the backbone of literary culture and tradition (Webster, 1990).

Experience is two-pronged–the African experience and the people of colour experience. However, both may have the same historical bearing of Black people's point of contact with the

West and the realities that constitute this contact. However, colonialism is to the African experience what slavery and racism is to people of colour in the New World. On the one hand, post-independence disillusionments gender oppression, cultural and economic exploitation, corruption, majority/minority ethnic rivalry, and of late, kidnapping for ransom, banditry, terrorism, religious fundamentalism among other realities is peculiar to Africa. For example, in Okorafor's short story "Mother of Invention", she uses Anwuli the heroine as a victim of environmental despoliation in the oil-rich Delta region of Nigeria. Okoroafor uses Anwuli to expose how corruption has become a clog the of development of region.

On the other hand, people of colour have racism, identity crisis, alienation, serfdom, among others as aftermaths of their slavery experience. Octavia Butler's Afrofuture novels are good examples. In Butler's *Fledgling* (2005), the black female character and the heroine of the novel, Shori, is genetically engineered human vampire. Her "Inanes" is questioned as a result of her black skin since all Ina are Whites. Shori suffers racial discrimination and would have been killed by racist Ina families like the Silks and the Dahlmans but for her genetically engineered body that makes her more powerful. Another novel in which we see the African-American slavery experience captured along the thought of Afrofuturism is Butler's *Kindred* (1979). The blend of the antebellum experience with time-travelling narrative technique by Butler accentuates the realm of magical realism as a redemptive channel for deconstructing the negative stereotypes attached to black magic by the West which makes it less science. Butler uses Edana, the black female heroine in the novel to effect narrative turn which, makes the heroine to challenge slavery and slave masters at a time when slavery had become institutionalized in America.

Consequently, it would be considered logical if Africanfuturism addresses the African peculiar experiences and concerns while Afrofuturism addresses those of people of colour. In that way, literary texts whether authored by Blacks or Whites that fail to address these concerns while being conscious of the inherent two-pronged experiences should neither pass as Afrofuturism nor as Africanfuturism. While Afrofuturism can adopt as an approach minoritanism as way to cover earlier works that were hitherto not included in corpus of texts of Afrofutrism, Africanfuturism can have as its approach cosmogonies that is the resorting to faith including magic and juju; like one sees in the Leopard Knocks and the Obi Library in Okoroafor's *Akata Warrior*. techno-culture also will help in proper classification of these concepts. The use of digital music and sonic may fit in Afrofututurism experience, but may to cover those Africanfuturism

Authorship

It has become expedient to raise the question of authorship in black speculative writings amidst the looming confusion of naming and classifying of black speculative writings. It is germane for scholars of black speculative writing to note the characteristics that constitute emerging narrative typologies in black speculative writings. One may enquire whether: people of colour can create narratives of Africanfuturism and Afrofuture concerns? Can non-black writer conceptualize and write Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism while bearing in mind the point of convergence or departure that constitutes the content and form peculiar to the cultural aesthetic of both concepts?

A non-black writers can compose narratives of Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism if he/she is perhaps, not driven by racial tendencies that tend to undermine black peoples' body, consciousness, civilization, imaginative renaissance and techno-cultural bearing across the past, the present and the future. Therefore, commitment to black experience–be it that of Africans or people of colour should not be compromised. A non-black writer who wishes to venture and experiment with these emerging

narrative forms should show his or her commitment through the rejection of deterministic view of race and culture particularly, those on black bodies, culture, geography and imagination. More so, he or she should acknowledge the centrality of humanity over factional solidarity in order to recognise, and appreciate the vast corpus of African philosophy embedded in her culture. There is the need for an objective approach because African philosophical thoughts are entirely different from Western ones.

In addition, African writers can compose literary narratives of Afrofuturism the same way people of colour can write literary texts of Africanfuturism, but this is predicated on some indices, including: authorial recognition of specificities like experience, historicity, cultural cum cosmological backgrounds and other critical variants that constitute the evaluative frameworks which this study proposes. This agrees with the position of (Akung and Simon, 2011, p.57), that in the Nigerian historical experience, "One major threat to the continuous existence of Nigeria as a nation is the vicious circle of poverty". (Lindfors, 1973) gives an overview of the separateness of art and personality in relation to writing a people's cosmological views into literary narrative. According to him, close kinship with Africa is not enough for the Afro-American critics, but they should study the writer's background to know where the nuances of meaning reside in the text

Consequently, writing texts of Africanfuturism, non-African writers and writers of African diaspora may creatively reason along Lindfors' position and insist on the need for a people's background and culture to be understood first, before they write about them. The same parameters apply to any Africanfuturist who wishes to experiment with Afrofuturism. This will help in avoiding misdirection, misrepresentation, wrong shelving, classification and naming of these emerging narrative forms of black speculative writings.

Language

Language is an essential attribute of every human society. Though the choice of language as a defining criterion in the evaluation of what is and what is not Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism appeals to both concepts but, in different dimensions that have obvious linguistic implications for black speculative writings. Language has been a factor in determining what is African and what is not African in literary discourses; thus, language is the basic material of literature (Webster, 1990, p. 32). African writers and critics have engaged language the issue in African literature from different angles among them are: (Wali, 1963); (Achebe, 1975); (Obiechina, 1975); (Ngugi, 1986); (Irele, 1988); (Ohaegbo, 2000); (Muokoma wa Ngugi, 2018); (Aboh, 2018) among others

Coloured writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Octavia Butler, James Baldwin, Derek Walcott, Edwidge Danticat, Nalo Hopkinson, among others have engaged language issue and its experimentation through creative literature and literary criticism. In their engagements, they have always articulated their discourse and experimentation of language, particularly from the angle of constructing identities through the celebration of peculiar linguistic resourcefulness; in what (Irele, 2019, p. 101) articulates as "aesthetic traditionalism" in which he calls for a radicalized language blend and deep-rooted evocation of African imagery and consciousness in African literature in English or French. Black writers' linguistic inventiveness without recourse to the native speakers' usage of the English language is driven by the need to preserve the sanctity of the African worldview.

This study does not concern itself with the absolute insistence of completely writing African literature in African indigenous languages proceeded by translation from source language to target language as proposed by Ngugi and other African critics; at the same time, it does not subscribe to colonialist and racist position of (Roscoe, 1971, p. x), that "If an African writes in English, his work must

be considered as belonging to the English as a whole and can be scrutinized accordingly" However, it recommends a linguistic colouration that blends English language with black people's past, present and emerging linguistic creativity as aspects of their lived and unlived realities. This linguistic creativity of the English and language is manifesting in creole and Black vernacular expressions in sonic. These concepts, appropriate these specific linguistic nuances, fashioned by Africans and people of colour's experiences and culture to create a unique black identity.

Fashioned speech peculiarities are some evidences of how culture contact can propel linguistic creativity and identity construction. Africans and people of Colour are associated with the unique linguistic creation of pidgin and ebonics/creole. Therefore, pidgin is to the self-styled African linguistic identity what ebonics, creole or Black English is to the unique linguistic identity and aesthetic originality of people of colour. Consequently, literary texts of Africanfuturism concerns should blend pidgin and Standard English Language, and stylize their narratives with local colour using code-mixing. Afrofuturists texts could deploy and appropriate the rich linguistic inventiveness and identity of Black English in their speculative writings.

Black writers in the conventional creative writing tradition had set the pace with the works of African-American writers like: Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God,* Walker's *The Color Purple*, Morrison's *Beloved*, Hughes' *The Collected Poems*, Kennedy's *Funny House of a Negro*. Such works fit into these examples. The Afro-Caribbean examples include: Dennis Scott's *Echo in the Bone*, Hill's *Man Better Man*, among others. The African examples include: Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okara's *The Voice,* Okri's *Famished Road*. Soyinka's *The Road*. These writers celebrate black linguistic identity through the use of pidginization, code-mixing and transliteration in their oeuvre. Africanfuturism narrative could also explore the use of *Nsibidi*: a form of photo alphabet that originated from the Ekoi-Ejagham people of Cross River State in southern Nigeria. With the transatlantic slave trade, *Nsibidi* writing is practiced in the Caribbean and Cuba. Some symbols of *Nsibidi* are sacred and can only be interpreted by the initiates of Ekpe Society. *Nsibid*i, its origin and interpretation has been given some prominence in Okorafor's *Akata Warrior*. (Sunday, 2017, p. 4) points out that, "a full knowledge of Nsibidi is an indication that one is a true member of Nyangmangbe". Language therefore, becomes a means that communicates and reflects the anxieties of the people and define their being and reality (Akung & Oshega, 2019, p. 300).

Landscape

The use of landscape within the context of this study refers to the sense of presence in black speculative writing. The article contends that landscape should be a criterion for the naming, classification and evaluation of black speculative writing. To begin with, narratives bothering on Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism concepts in black speculative writing should foreground the black sense of presence. This implies that such texts should resonate with black aesthetics, for them to qualify as black speculative literature. It is through this black sense of presence that a canon of black literature, history and philosophy will be well established. And sustained.

Africa is the ancestral home of Blacks, and often, scholars have doubled up this description in history, philosophy and other polemics by referring to Africa as the bedrock of all civilizations. (Womack, 2013, p. 81) notes that "Egypt reigns in the ancient world and Nubia's influence stands as proof that cultures of dark-skinned people ruled advanced societies and shaped the global knowledge" (p. 81). Womack's position reinforces the influence that African cosmos and worldview have had on Western societies and global knowledge systems.

Landscape therefore, as black sense of presence is two-pronged –psychological landscape

and physical landscape. The former is associated with the African and Black philosophy while the latter deals with physical locations and institutions that are domiciled in black diasporic and African environs. The act of philosophising is not the exclusive exercise of the West especially as (Achebe, 1975, p. 22) explains that "...the making of art is not the exclusive concern of a particular caste of secret society" (p. Black bodies have shown capacity and capability of imagination and their systems and body of knowledge have helped the advancement of global knowledge as one sees the protagonist Aja Oba in (Fielder, 2021). Black speculative texts should have the rich and dominant presence of African philosophy and belief system in them, for it is through this channel that they can have the authentic African realities, system of deification, folkloric tradition, myth, and the overall black system of knowledge articulated into a corpus of knowledge, which we can call the African philosophy. (Irele, 2019) is pessimistic whether African philosophy extends to all Blacks in the same way that one speaks of Western philosophy with relation to imagination and experience. This pessimism notwithstanding, both Afrofuturists and Africanfuturists should not compromise the place of myth, legends and folktales in the sublimity of their creative imagination for they are the "... defining elements of a culture" (Saunder, 2000, p. 404).

Works of Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism blend historical, cultural, mythic and heroic figures and traditional realities. They include cultural figures namely: Papa Bois, Uncle Tom, Obeah man, Babalawo, Ezenmuo, Bolum, Sakchulee, Ogbanje, Abiku, Ilayi Chechegwu, etc. Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Leopold Senghor, etc can be a source of reference for political and historical nationalities. Eshu, Ekpe, Chukwu, Erzulie, Anancy could serve as deities while calypso dance, stick fighting, Tamosi (kabo Tano); capture people of colour and their experiences.

Africanfuturism should in the same vein, consists of literary works that pulsate with the African imagination, knowledge system, deification system, thought and body so that it can have what (Chinweizu, Jemie, & Madubuike, 1985, p. 5) describe as "a controlling consciousness within which African writers, critics, disseminators and consumers of African literature need to work". Africanfuturism could weave the African system of deifications, socio-political heroes, myths, ideologies, philosophy, identities, and cultural practices into its narratives. Divinities such as 'mami wata' and 'Ogbanje', sea creatures in Okorafor's *Lagoon,* pepper bugs in *Akata Warrior are* examples of works replete with the African- traditional divinities. 'Chukwu' and 'Chi' in Okorafor's "The Mother of Invention" is another example of Africanfuturism that references the African cultural value system. In Afrofuturism, some examples readily lend themselves as well; they include: Ti-Jeanne character and the nine-night ceremony which is an adaptation from Dereck Walcott Ti-Jean and his brothers in Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*; Granny Nanny figure, an African American cultural figure in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, Obeah and Tamosi (kabo Tano) in Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, among others. However, it is not enough to merely see these reflected in Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism texts; they should be extrapolated in ways that their impact and connection to global knowledge, modernity and how the black world futurity discourses display profound logic.

The second face of landscape which comprises the physical environments and institutions are necessities that critics and writers from Africa and the African diaspora should not compromise in the debate on what constitutes the sense of presence in literary works that are associated with both concepts. (Kilgore, 2008, p. 12), posits that "A sense of history *and consciousness* [emphasis added] is essential to the understanding of the kind and tenor of generic discourse about narrative codes and conventions". It therefore means that, works of Africanfuturism claim that are devoid of re-creating geographies, character names, cultures, histories, ideologies, and movements that do not

reflect African peculiar landscapes should not be included in the corpus of Africanfuturistic texts. Africa as a body exists and its geographies and institutions exist as well. These are constituents of the realities of the African people that futurists can appropriate into their creative and critical imagination to engage global speculative creative writings and literary criticisms. More so, the same approach applies to texts of Afrofuturism, while bearing in mind the sensibilities of people of colour, across-culture, experience, history, and contact.

Black character, heroism and technology

Texts of Africanfuturism should show commitment to black heroism in narratives of black speculative writings of which Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism emerged. However, while writers could exercise the dynamic blend of mixed-race characters in their narrative of speculative writings, blackness, black heroism, irrespective of gender, should not be compromised, as seen in some narratives that are classified as Afrofuturistic; where writers of these narratives equate "fatalism for blackness" (Womack, 2013, p. 11). In other words, futurists who are committed to black speculative writing should not continue with characterizing Blacks in the Western speculative mode as seen in sci-fi movies like the original *Planet of the Apes* where the black man who landed with Charlton Heston meets the terrible fate of being captured and locked up in a museum in a most degrading manner.

Again, the original *Night of the Living Dead* parodies this Western mode of representing black characters in disastrous fate. In this sci-fi movie, the black man who saved the day is fated to die in the hands of a trigger-happy cop. In *Terminator 2*, the amateur scientist whose poor knowledge almost drove the world into its apocalypse is a black man. Black speculative futurists should counter and recreate black heroism in literary narratives of speculative blackness and sci-fi movies as seen in films like *Blade* and *The Book of Eli* where black characters feature as heroes, who risked their lives in order to fulfil a personal cause that has immense benefits for society and humanity. Works, like Butler's *Fledgling*, *Parable of the Sower* fit into black speculative writings of black heroism. In *Fledgling*, Shori, a young genetically engineered black girl uses her machine strength to conquer racism. In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren Olamina another brilliant black girl uses her earthseed religion to lead a population of mixed race. In Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, Tan Tan repairs society by challenging rape, through her concealed identity of queen robber. In Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Ti-Jeanne saves a city from criminality. All these are ideal forms of black heroism in which black characters are not associated with fatalism. In Fielder's *Infinitum: An Afrofuturist Tale (2021)*, Fielder creates a heroic character, Aja Oba, who ruled his kingdom with an iron fist, and did exploits through extraordinary powers, even as his kingdom is destroyed, he lives. When he is captured by slave merchants and taken to the new world, where his identity changed, he remained 'immortal and indestructible' and ponders on 'how to use his powers to transform the New World. and fight systematic racism. NK Jemisin's *The City we Became, (2020)*, explores and demonstrates the pulsing power of the city calling on her heroine. In *The Fifth Season (2019)*, Jesmin creates characters who are closely knitted to the earth and they manipulate it at will. Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (2019), has characters with strong magical powers. In Roseanne A Brown's *A song of Wraiths and Ruins* (2020), her heroine, through ancient magic resurrects her mother, using the beating heart of a king. The creation of these characters adequately reflects African concept of heroism

Technology is also crucial to the conceptual bedrock of both concepts. For example, both Dery and Okorafor recognize technology as an indispensable factor in their conceptualization of the two concepts. Although for Okorafor, Afrofuturism, either as a concept or as a cultural theory is not weighty enough to account for the African experience, aesthetics and value system. She however,

does not jettison technology as a core element of either Afrofuturism or Africanfuturism as a brand of black speculative writing. Her use of technology and the sanguine turns to magic, to construct magical realism as a techno-culture heritage, establishes an African-Nigerian techno-culture presence in the light of the 21st Century; in her works such as: *Who Fears Death*, "Asuquo", "The Magical Negro", "Mother of Invention", *Akata Witch, Akata Warrior* among others. This presence of techno-culture in her works shows her recognition of technology as a narrative channel for black speculative writings.

According to (Biodurin, 1981, p. 5), "For too long, the Western conception of Africa [and Blacks] has been that of a continent [and a people] that contributed little or nothing to human ideas and civilization". Black Futurists, specifically, those of the black speculative writings have debunked the view which downplays black people's imagination and culture as unfounded and illogical. (Saunders, (2000, p. 404) wonders, "how diminished the arts will be without the contributions of people from Duke Ellington to Alice Walker". To buttress Saunders' point in contemporary black speculative fiction is to state that great scientific ideas are present in Butler's *Dawn* as much as they are in Isaac Asimov's *The Robots of Dawn*. Therefore, neither race nor gender is a barrier to ideation and civilisation. For example, in Butler's novels generally, African women, aside the rationality, brilliance and assertiveness of their characters "play a [crucial] role in defining the shape of human destiny" (Kigore, 2008, p. 122) and this re-aligns with the whole vision of Afrofuturism.

Therefore, whatever talent, skill and knowledge either inherently acquired or learnt by any human being by which he or she can put to use to solve personal and collective problem(s) is considered to be technology. The context in which technology and science is used is in a deconstructive and expansive manner to reveal how writers of science fiction have extended the definition of science and of technology to include bodies of knowledge such as herbal medicine, midwifery or magic (Dubey, 2008). This deconstructive approach realigns with what (Robert, 1993, p. 32) terms as "inverse valorization" which describes and establishes magic as a form of science that has long been marginalised and refused integration into legitimate science. Witchcraft therefore, becomes a form of technology that can be drawn upon by black speculative writers to solve problems that are unsolved and that linger on in hard science. For instance, the protagonist Sunny, in Okoroafor's *Akata Warrior* could pass through a keyhole to enter a room unnoticed. According to (Dubey, (2008, p.34), "Afro-diasporic systems of knowledge and belief, such as vodun, obeah or santeria, are consistently shown to confound and triumph over scientific reason". To refuse this understanding and its application to black people's literary input and its global influence is to turn one's back on reality. Butler's *Wild Seed*, Naylor's *Mama Day*, Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, *Brown Girl in the Ring* are examples of this black speculative writings that utilize African form of science to solve societal problems.

Conclusion

Black speculative writing has continued to vigorously expand its scope to accommodate emerging narrative forms despite the negative perceptions that have trailed this form of narrative from Western scholars. However, black futurists' imagination and presence in the genre will grow stronger, if scholars and critics begin to engage how narrative forms like Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, separately emerge out of the socio-cultural fabrics and sensibilities of two different black societies although with a common ancestry. Recognizing these inherent sensibilities along societal peculiarities will account for setting up different criteria for the classification and evaluation of the corpus of black speculative narratives. This article therefore, recommends the following criteria: experience, authorship, language and black heroism and technology as a way of expanding and broadening

the scope of scholarship on black speculative narrative using Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism as paradigms.

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Disclaimer Statement

This article is not part of any thesis submitted for award of any degree. It is an original endevour of the authors.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

The idea for this article was initiated by Ojima S. Nathaniel. We held several discussion sessions, where we fashioned out an appropriate title for the article. Once this was done, we formed the working structure and outline for the article, and responsibilities were shared with timelines. Jonas Akung worked on the introduction, literature review and conceptual clarification, while Ojima S. Nathaniel worked on the section on suggested criteria for the evaluation of Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. Both authors shared and compared notes and agreed on the final outcome of the article. This article is a product of both authors' endevour.

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