Alternative Spaces, Identity and Language in Afrofuturist Writing

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To the family.

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INTRODUCTION

Afrofuturism has been one of the least researched areas that has been exposed to contradictory definitions that scholars have failed to have a consensus on. This dissertation aims to focus on some of the works that help the development of Afrofuturism and the early examples that shape it into what is generally portrayed as an Afrofuturist work by society today. Although there have been a few scholars who have characterized Zora Neale Hurston and Ralph Ellison as writers who have contributed to the development of early forms of Afrofuturism, these studies do not approach such early Afrofuturistic works in the context of decolonization. While benefiting from Lacan's psychoanalytic theories of subject formation, Frantz Fanon's thoughts on double-voicedness and feminist criticism's focus on the construction of identity and gender, along with Edward Soja's and Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of alternative spaces and their connection to the individuals' both material, imagined and social surroundings, this study demonstrates how Zora N. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* can be categorized particularly as proto-Afrofuturistic works because of the authors' use of decolonized, alternative spaces and technological discourse to generate alternative futures. Moreover, along with analyzing Octavia Butler's *Kindred,* this study focuses on a discussion on the key aspects that constitute Afrofuturism, including the use of settings in the novels as alternative spaces, as well as the depiction of the characters' bodies and language in terms of alienation and activism.

Proto-Afrofuturism, in parallel with Afrofuturism, offers a unique, critical framework that enables scholars to analyze the speculations that support the idea that technological developments will lead to a more egalitarian future. One of the most important aspects that separates Afrofuturism from science fiction is its inclusion of the direct, postcolonial roots; the same implementation is also valid for proto-Afrofuturism. The novels in this study question Afrofuturism's focus on future speculations and its continued stress on technology-related developments as instruments for social progress. In *Invisible Man* and *Kindred* especially, the writers suggest that people should be cautious of the terms of technology and the idea of the "*digital divide*" (Nelson, 2002, 1) which implies that the development of blackness is inversely correlated with technologically

driven progress. It is important to note that, similar to science fiction, Afrofuturism recognizes that the real goal is not to imagine the future but rather imagine alternative futures that "*serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come*" (Jameson, 2005, 288). Afrofuturism emphasizes the risks that follow the erasure of historical contexts related to the past and the repetition of violence against specific groups of people. In the novels, these aspects of the erasure of the past as well as the violence within and toward African-Americans are explored in the plots.

In the analyzed novels, the protagonists are provided with various, alternative spaces that enable them to have a certain degree of autonomy along with resistance. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Homi K. Bhabha asserts that the terms Third Space and hybridity are closely associated and describes hybridity through "*psychoanalytic analogy*" to verify that "*identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point [...] the subject—is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness*" (1990, 211). Thus, psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan's orders of the Imaginary and the Symbolic as well as the concepts of the mirror stage, the split, and the fragmented self are also examined, along with Fanon's double-voicedness, in the study. Bhabha also emphasizes that the concept's importance does not come from its ability to trace two original movements from which the third emerges, rather hybridity [...] is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Ibid.)

He highlights the significance of having an alternative or, rather, in-between space where hybridity can form. Bhabha does not try to describe the Third Space as a place of simplicity, rather, he views the space as a more complicated one where more ideas, resistance, and arguments can arise to help people question and take action. Neither Bhabha, nor Soja idealized the Third Space/thirdspace as all positive. In the analyzed novels of this study, the protagonists clearly face opposition, repression and obstacles in the alternative Third Space/thirdspace but they overcome the difficulties and succeed at embracing their fragmented selves in order to decolonize their minds.

This study also focuses on Afrofuturists' appropriation of the perception of alternative spaces with gender and language formation to decolonize the African-American mind. Homi K. Bhabha's theories on the Third Space of Enunciation and hybridity along with Edward Soja's thirdspace theory have

been discussed in each novel. Jacques Lacan's analysis on body and language that includes the Imaginary and Symbolic orders is also discussed in great length to support the transformation of the main characters' transition. Frantz Fanon's thoughts on double-voicedness have also been analyzed to further assist Lacan's concepts of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in terms of decolonization. Along with the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, an analysis of African-American women's bodies, gender, sexuality, and autonomy has been discussed, mainly through the feminist theories of Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey and Rosi Braidotti.

In Chapter One, the theoretical background and overview of this study have been established. The chapter is divided into two main sections: Afrofuturism and the theory/method of the study. The second section also focuses on two main concepts: the alternative space theories of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Soja as well as the theories of Jacques Lacan and Frantz Fanon on body and language. Before analyzing the literary works, this chapter focuses on the various definitions of Afrofuturism that were presented by different theoreticians to clarify a reference point of its formation. A detailed examination of Afrofuturism's definition, its relation to different genres, and its development has been provided. The focus then shifts onto its use in various different disciplines, on how Afrofuturism came into existence with its current body and who are defined as Afrofuturists. The chapter includes a discussion on the study's theoretical framework. The alternative space theories of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Soja and how the concept fits into Afrofuturism have been highlighted. Frantz Fanon's thoughts on double-voicedness will be incorporated, especially in regard to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories on subject formation. The chapter also includes discussions on Lacan's and the feminist theorists' contributions to the movement of Afrofuturism. Along with the process of ego formation, the importance of surrounding communities, home, interracial relations, and fragmentation are also highlighted. To support the study's thesis, the chapter focuses on how the authors Zora N. Hurston, Ralph Ellison and Octavia E. Butler each fit into the movement in their unique ways. Each author's literary stance and the Afrofuturists' evaluation of their stance have been clarified to support the study's aim. Moreover, the chapter refers to the ideas of Afrofuturist scholars including Kodwo Eshun, Mark Dery, Alondra Nelson, Ytasha Womack, and Paul Gilroy in order to help to place Afrofuturism within the postcolonial framework. The movement's postcolonial roots, as well as its special interest in technology, have also been discussed in detail. In the following chapters, the novels are analyzed in chronological order to

provide a better understanding of the development of Afrofuturism and the concepts it has included within it.

Chapter Two focuses on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). As a character that did not conform to the typical conventions of women at the time, Zora Neale Hurston was most probably familiar with the restrictions enforced, especially, on the African-American women within and outside of the African-American community. In his autobiography on Hurston, Robert E. Hemenway asserts: "*The novel culminates the fifteen-year effort to celebrate her birthright which came through the exploration of a woman's consciousness, accompanied by an assertion of that woman's right to selfhood*" (1977, 232). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, each of the communities Hurston portrays exists for a purpose in the main character Janie Mae's self-transformation toward selfhood and autonomy. She conscientiously details the oppressive powers that surround African-American women at the time. It is not only the white domination but also the male African-American oppression of the women. By not putting Janie Mae within too much of a white oppression scenario, Hurston allows Janie Mae to portray her own transition for autonomy and voice within a male-dominated, African-American community. Her use of imagination along with storytelling and folklore are the most noticeable aspects that interest the Afrofuturist theorists. Through storytelling, she carefully creates alternative spaces that allow African-Americans to use their imagination and move beyond their realities. This movement helps to create alternative narratives that include alternative time continuums as well. Through these concepts, especially, the African-American women were able to create spaces that allow them to be who they want to be, or simply to be themselves. Hurston is among the pioneer, African-American women writers who were guided to use these created, figurative and physical spaces as a way of resistance. The chapter on Hurston helps to emphasize the technology that is highly underlined in Afrofuturism but was not always among the primary focus of the development of the movement.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) is explored in Chapter Three. Ellison rejects the naturalist principals that argue for people being only pawns who are a part of deterministic formations. Rather, he believes, and defends this, that humans are capable of creating their own realities including the past, present, and future. Ellison refers to the view of seeing African-Americans as without a past as home-made, meaning it was all invented by white Americans. He indicates that the thought of African-Americans who believed themselves to be without a past or cultural history is no longer valid. To demonstrate their cultural histories more objectively, they have to search and reconsider the past, so that they can have an impact

on the future, which is also viewed as one of the main aspects of Afrofuturism. Scholar Lisa Yaszek considers *Invisible Man* as an early frame for Afrofuturism because she believes the work examines the significance of African potential. She explains that the novel not only focuses on how Africans are being exploited over who possesses the future, but also describes how "*the African holds within himself the possibility of a new future that is not ready to be born*" (2006, 51). Her perspective externalizes Afrofuturism as disentangling from "*the residual effects of white liberal subjectivity*" (Weheliye, 2002, 30).

In order to create nonlinearity, Ellison uses the underground as an alternative space to enable the unnamed narrator's self-fulfillment. In the novel, with the exception of the underground, *Invisible Man* runs through a linear timeline which starts with the narrator's childhood and continues as he gets older. Ellison describes the novel as mirroring a "*three-part division*," in which the parts reflect the "*narrator's movement from [...] purpose to passion to perception. These three major sections are built up of smaller units of three which mark the course of the action*" (Ellison, 1995b, 218). The pace of time slows and moves in a nonlinear continuum in the underground. In her interview with Priscilla Frank, curator and anthropologist Niama Safia Sandy asserts that time is a "*fluid thing*" (Sandy, 2016) in the essence of Afrofuturism. Analyzing the time concept as nonlinear comprises one of the core concepts of Afrofuturism. And creating an alternative space that facilitates a nonlinear time continuum is one of the approaches that the Afrofuturist or proto-Afrofuturist writers use substantially. Ellison also focuses on technology and its use with African-Americans. Contrary to Afrofuturists, Ellison's African-Americans cannot operate well with technology until the narrator's hibernation period. Afrofuturist Alondra Nelson explains this as the "*digital divide*" which is discussed in more detail in the chapter.

Chapter Four dwells upon Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979). This chapter of the dissertation focuses more on the diversity of the Afrofuturistic tropes of Butler's *Kindred* along with the proto-Afrofuturistic aspects of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Even though Butler does not want to label herself only as an Afrofuturist author, Afrofuturists regard her and her novel *Kindred* as an important part of Afrofuturism. The novel is taught in almost all 'Introductions to Afrofuturism' courses at universities in the United States. It includes almost all aspects of Afrofuturism even before the movement's name was coined by Mark Dery. In the chapter, all theoretical approaches, to a certain extent, attest to the directness of discussions of the past on explicitly addressing issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality and the newfound identity

through decolonization of the mind. As an addition, Sigmund Freud's concept of the "*unheimlich*," translated to English as "*uncanny*," which is the concept of an entity jointly being both familiar and foreign, is useful in terms of analyzing the section on body in Butler. Octavia Butler believes that one of the solutions to the silencing of African-Americans is through the extension of African-American literature. While exploring the movement's core aspects, Butler also frees the protagonist by enabling her to move beyond the Law that Lacan argues a subject should be under in order to complete his subjecthood. The protagonist in the novel, Dana, plays a crucial role in highlighting the African-American woman's endeavor in both the survival of the self and her lineage. The women protagonists such as Dana contribute significantly to the African-American literature so as to reflect the silenced or omitted voices of women. The context of alternative and nonlinear time and space transition emphasizes a past that did not occur in reality and, thus, creates a future that is also nonexistent. As one of the crucial aims of Afrofuturists, the novel's narrative helps to create alternative pasts, presents, and futures for the African-Americans.

The conclusion will discuss how the alternative spaces that are analyzed in each novel present different aspects of the protagonists' autonomy, resistance and decolonization. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* displays alternative spaces that include different forms of oppression for the African-Americans and the protagonist's fragmentation both from inside and outside to decolonize herself from the oppressive forces and create an individual space for her newly gained self. In *Invisible Man*, the oppressive forces include mainly technology. Ellison demonstrates the African-American protagonist's inability to cope with the technological developments until his final, underground, alternative space which he fills with technological devices. It is in this space that the protagonist finds the necessary strength to resist the, already established, colonized thinking but fails to take direct action. As an Afrofuturistic novel, Butler's *Kindred* presents alternative spaces that enable the protagonist to find her double voice, hybridity, resistance and autonomy with the help of technology. The physical and mental fragmentation presented enables the protagonist to abandon the oppressive forces and form a self that is independent from the surrounding constraints.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORIES OF AFROFUTURISM, AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

Afrofuturism is currently among the least highlighted fields, especially in African-American scholarship. One of the reasons may be related to the fact that Afrofuturism has been interpreted and defined differently by scholars that possess different views. In this study, Afrofuturism will be considered as a movement because of its political aspect and the activism it involves. Its colonial aspects that are derived from Afrodiasporic subjects, as well as its focus on creating reality in alternative and imagined spaces and times that were not portrayed in the established epistemology related to Africans, will be analyzed to gain a better understanding of the movement's evolution in the twentieth century. The focus will shift from the proto-Afrofuturistic novels to an Afrofuturistic one. The proto-Afrofuturistic works are more restricted to the boundaries of the period, while the latter novel of Butler eludes the already established restrictions and forms an alternative thinking for the future while referring back to the past. Focusing especially on space, body, and language in the mentioned novels, the study will discuss and highlight the decolonization aspect of Afrofuturism that will form a bridge between the movement and postcolonial studies. By forming this bridge, the study will show that Afrofuturism is involved in many areas of the African body of literature, which needs to be recognized by wider audiences and scholars.

According to Mark Dery, who coined the term Afrofuturism for the first time, Afrofuturism is "*signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future*" related to the subjects of the African diaspora (1994, 136). He generated the term to explain the collection of speculative fiction and assorted media that has been created from the African point of view. By presenting the term, Dery helps to provide a reference point to analyze debatable topics including race, technology, and science in contemporary Afro-American literature, music and art. Lisa Yaszek interprets this definition as Afrofuturism "*explore[s] how people of color negotiate life in a technology intensive world*" (2006, 42). As one of

the cofounders of Afrofuturism.net, Alondra Nelson clarifies the common definition that is accepted as the voices of the victims of the African diaspora "*with other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come*" along with "*sci-fi imagery, futurist themes, and technological innovation in the African diaspora*" (Nelson, 2002, 9). Nelson and the other cofounder of the website, Paul D. Miller, specify the outlines of the Afrofuturist artists and scholars as channeling "*futurist themes in black cultural production and the ways in which technological innovation is changing the face of black art and culture*" (2011). Likewise, in their book *Technicolor: Race, Technology and Everyday Life* (2001), Nelson, Tu and Hines emphasize that the Afrofuturists tend to focus on the produced science fiction and its connection with technology.

In her 2017 Ted Talk, Afrofuturist author Nnedi Okarafor explains the difference between classic science fiction and Afrofuturism with an octopus analogy. She believes that, similar to human beings, octopuses are very intelligent creatures but that their intelligence evolves from a different evolutionary line, so their roots differ. The same description can be applied to the foundations of science fiction's different forms. She believes basic science fiction has its ancestral roots in Western ideology which is white and male. According to her, Afrofuturism's foundation lies within colonialism/decolonialism. Moreover, in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, Ytasha L. Womack asserts: "*Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs*" (2013, 9). Yet, many people—including scholars—seem to categorize Afrofuturism as a subgenre of science fiction or fantasy.

The main issue of categorizing Afrofuturism under such genres seems to be related to definitions being inadequate to explain, especially, the political aspect of Afrofuturism. In "Race in Science Fiction: The Case of Afrofuturism and New Hollywood," Lisa Yaszek asserts that in the early 20th century, Afrofuturist writers published their writings in political magazines such as "The Crisis" and/or the "Pittsburgh Courier" contrary to their white colleagues who were publishing their works in magazines that were more related to science fiction and fantasy genres. These political magazines were important since they were mainly focusing on seeking black modernism that mainly tried to revive not only a cultural but also an aesthetic vision of the Harlem Renaissance (2013, 4-5). While science fiction and fantasy are generally associated with the more Western thinking of technology, science, and plot formation, Afrofuturists place Afrofuturism at the opposite end of the spectrum. With the help of technology and science,

Afrofuturists generally tend to focus on androids and cyborgs to break free from the discriminatory practices and critique of essentialism. By creating alternative spaces and times as well as African bodies and language so as to insert black individuality, Afrofuturism portrays liberation from Western ideology as well as African agency in a world that is driven by technology.

Apart from science fiction and fantasy, black speculative fiction also forms the basis of Afrofuturism. Mark Dery defines the movement as:

> 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 (1994, 736).

While Afrofuturists focus more on the aesthetic and cultural practices, black speculative fiction explores "*the historical scope of Afrofuturism*" (Jones, 2016). Even though the term became popular around the 1960s-1970s, early examples of black speculative fiction can be seen even in the 1850s. *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction,* edited by Sheree R. Thomas is helpful in providing examples from a wide spectrum. This anthology is significant since it constitutes the basics of Afrofuturistic writings as well. The anthology includes the writings of Afrofuturist authors including Octavia E. Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, Ishmael Reed, Samuel R. Delany, Paul D. Miller, Amiri Baraka and others. The common denominator of all the stories and essays provided in the anthology is about going beyond the established acclamation of white manhood being viewed as the universal representation of humanness, especially in the Western mind. These writers possess a goal to improve on the history of Africans that has been implemented by the Europeans and Americans with strong political components. As their narratives become more unrealistic, the historical foundation begins to create its reality. For instance, Samuel R. Delany's "Aye, and Gomorrah" (1967) describes genetically altered post-humans while making references to minorities—especially African-Americans—that were discriminated against due to their color. Although Delany uses "*spacers*" who do not exist in reality, the desire to alter "*deformed ones*" (2000, 129) in the name of the greater good has always been used by Euro-American ideology. The alternative history that is created in the writings questions the core of humanity, its existence, and their active roles in the environmental ecosystem. The writers become advocates of posthumanism in this sense.

Since it is believed that speculative fiction forms the basis for Afrofuturism, the writings in this anthology provide guidance for proto-

Afrofuturistic writings as well. One of the featured writers in the anthology is Octavia Butler who has come into prominence within black speculative fiction and Afrofuturism. In the afterword of "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" (1987) that was published in the anthology, Butler says: "*I began the story wondering how much of what we do is encouraged, discouraged, or otherwise guided by what we are genetically*" (2000, 195), questioning the core of humanism. In *Kindred* (1979), the same themes of genetics and ancestry are used to question the individuality of African-Americans. This study analyzes how the novel takes place in various alternative spaces and times to uncover the reality of Dana's heritage and its effect on Dana's decolonization of the mind with the use of her body and language abilities. Butler creates an entirely new antebellum South with the use of alternative spaces and time traveling in *Kindred*. Through an African-American woman protagonist and her time travels, Butler alters the geopolitical space and time in the antebellum United States. It can be interpreted that Butler tries to find an alternative time/space continuum in the past to create alternative futures, similar to what many Afrofuturists and science fiction authors aim for in their works.

Afrofuturism includes science fiction devices as well as themes of alienation, displacement, and abduction to describe the past African experience in Western countries and recreate possible, alternative futures. African-Americans' effect on technology and technology's effect on them are within the specific focus of Afrofuturists. Africans have been used as human machines and can be counted as part of the labor-based technology. The mechanization of the Africans in slavery caused the dehumanization of the race. In an interview with Mark Dery, Samuel R. Delany states that "*systematic, conscientious, and massive destruction of African cultural remnants*" took place with the process of this dehumanization (1993, 746). Ben Williams even argues:

> [T]he mechanical metaphors […] extend beyond signifying post-humanity to embody a history that began with slavery; indeed, slavery, the original unit of capitalist labor, is here considered the originary form of the post-human […] history of African-Americans as subhuman, unworthy of the rights and responsibilities (2001, 169-170).

Through this process of mechanization in slavery, Afrofuturists argue that they became the figures of cyborgs in white dominated worlds. This beyond-the-human-condition declaration also enables Afrofuturists to avoid essentialism and have more freedom in their argument.

In *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (1999), Kodwo Eshun proposes that Afrofuturism gives a new perspective that can

help to rewrite reality to separate the linkage of modernity with the notion of utopia. By producing an alternative history that connects modernity with the dehumanization of Africans—through colonialism and imperialism—Eshun emphasizes the relationship between the modern enthusiasm for new technologies and trauma. He evaluates Afrofuturism as a critical connection point of race, the future, technology and power relations which were created in order to satisfy the ideologies of white domination which was created and continued to develop from the sixteenth century onward. He also asserts the fact that Afrofuturism has a political agenda since the works of the movement challenge white domination in the past, present and future.

Lisa Yaszek follows Eshun's proposition of the function of Afrofuturism. In "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future," she defines the movement as an aesthetic mode which includes various branches and forms of media forming a unity because of their shared connection of presenting Afrodiasporic futures that originated from Africans' experiences. She asserts that many authors from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the present have engaged in an Afrofuturistic perspective. According to her, Afrofuturism is a political project that aims to reform the epistemological area away from the domination of white supremacy. She identifies the basis of Afrofuturism with African history and indicates that authors including W. E. B. Du Bois, George Schulyer, and Samuel R. Delany laid the foundation stones for the movement.

It is not feasible to define a strict definition of who is an Afrofuturist due to the diversity the Afrofuturists present. For instance, the interviewees in Ytasha Womack's book in 2013 define Afrofuturism as a reactive stimulant that spreads the area of African thought and imagination. The book, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, is significant in terms of projecting the present state of the movement in the United States. Contrary to Mark Dery's belief that suggests that Africans alter technological images developed by whites, Womack demonstrates how Africans use different forms including art, literature, music and philosophy to exhibit their own conceptualization of the future. Just like the artists' works that she follows, Womack seems to travel across time and space in order to record Afrofuturist artists, activists and academics. She argues that these Afrofuturists regard the movement as a reply to dystopian futures for Africans, a break from African stereotypes that restrict black creativity, a means of resistance to oppressive powers, an overview of African life's technological function, the restoration of Africans' scientific inquiries, and an agency that builds self-esteem and community structures. After interviewing all sorts of artists that are connected to Afrofuturism, her final

conclusion is that Afrofuturism is a way that guides the imagination in terms of self-evolution and communal growth. According to Yaszek:

> Afrofuturism is not only a subgenre of science fiction. Instead, it is a larger aesthetic mode that encompasses a diverse range of artists working in different genres and media who are united by their shared interest in projecting black futures derived from Afrodiasporic experiences (2006, 42).

Thus, the diversity of Afrofuturists in the current, popular culture is immense. Afrofuturist Alondra Nelson also agrees on the diversity of the artists. In "Afrofuturism: Past-Future Visions," she asserts that Afrofuturism views popular culture "*to find models of expression that transform spaces of alienation into novel forms of creative potential*" (2000b, 35). In the article, Nelson names many artists who she considers to be Afrofuturists and highlights that all these artists have reflected the history of Afrodiasporic culture but also pushed its traditions further. She believes these artists "*garner text, sound and image in the service of reimagining black life*" (Ibid.). The most important aspect of their work is that they create reflections of the past and exhibit possible, alternative futures.

There are many Afrofuturist artists that create art combined with African elements, culture and myths. They believe that an individual's past and their experiences are essential in determining what they may become. Afrofuturist writers do not restrict themselves by the use of tags, so that they feel comfortable with being referred to as science fiction, fantasy or speculative fiction writers depending on their focus areas. Almost all Afrofuturists' works combine technological and science fiction tropes with African culture, colonial roots, mythology and tradition to revisit the past while creating alternative futures. In literature, Nnedi Okorafor comes into prominence as an Afrofuturist writer. She has produced many works that include the themes of Afrofuturism including the *Binti* trilogy and *Shadow Speaker*. Instead of calling the movement Afrofuturism, she refers to herself as writing in Africanfuturism. In a radio broadcast, Okorafor says Africanfuturism or Afrofuturism is "*deeply rooted in Africa, it grows out of Africa to the rest of the world and beyond. It imagines a future, it imagines what is and what can be*" through the involvement of technological developments (2019, 1:12-1:26). Influenced by Octavia Butler, Okorafor questions gender and identity issues in highly imaginative settings with African women protagonists and with heavy, African cultural content.

In other disciplines such as music, Sun Ra and the Omniverse Arkestra are among the pioneers that started incorporating Afrofuturistic elements into their music in the 1930s. Currently, Janelle Monáe is among the most popular with her on-stage android persona that enables her to engage in

gender roles, technology, and sexuality at the same time. In "Vessels of Transfer: Allegories of Afrofuturism in Jeff Mills and Janelle Monáe" (2003), Tobias C. Van Veen describes how the use of allegories enable such artists to touch upon the much more serious and important colonial aspects of Africans' pasts and at the same time provide the artists with ambiguities that free them from the restrictions that were imposed by the dominant cultures and beliefs. He emphasizes the movement's multiple strategies. One of the strategies includes the study of narrative structure and fictive agency, illustrated to categorize African-American subjects in futurist chronologies. In another, he exposes the Afrofuturism experiences with alternative worlds, realities as well as timelines, as allegories that not only represent but may also alter the present conditions. Afrofuturism not only implements recurring themes of the engagement with aliens, cyborgs, androids or other extraterrestrial figures or simple time and space traveling; it also has the potential to promote the Afrodiasporic existence in various forms.

Referring back, Kodwo Eshun asserts his thoughts on the use of allegory in Afrofuturism in his book as well. Eshun realizes the incompetency of interpreting Afrofuturist art as allegory through the Afrofuturist artist Sun Ra's example, while also focusing on its essentiality. On the one hand, he defends the aspect that guides us to accept the movement's claims of giving concrete form to concepts such as extraterrestrial creatures. Eshun believes this allows the audience to understand that the figure that stands for the extraterrestrial creature is nothing but an allegory for the historical exposure of slavery, discrimination and racism. This aspect leads the audience to imagine Afrofuturism's impermanent effect on how it questions the reality of some sections of the past and vice versa. This questioning also helps to interpret its agenda as autonomous. On the other hand, moving on to Sun Ra's example, Eshun rejects Sun Ra's allegorical stand because he believes that the racist conditions African-Americans went through were inhuman in reality. Therefore, this condition of being treated as non-human puts them in a paradox because this non-existing condition cannot place them in reality. So, the fiction that was, and will continue to be, produced with the same mindset also belongs to this non-existing state. Yet, even when Eshun denies Sun Ra's use of allegory, he still continues to originate his criticism of individuals from the African-Americans' past colonial experiences.

According to Womack's survey in her book, the concept of Afrofuturism enables artists to get organized, and reconstruct its meaning and engagement by reinterpreting its history. In a constitutive manner, she assesses that this history is interlaced with modernity and modernity's progress narratives that have futuristic components in which the purpose was to form a world

or reality without any non-humans. In *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, Paul Gilroy reveals that modernity, or the Enlightenment, was inevitably engaged with the study of human races. He asserts that "*the consolidation of modern raciology[1] required enlightenment and myth to be intertwined*" (2004, 59). He explains how the Enlightenment created new opportunities for man while excluding women and, especially, African-American slaves. According to Gilroy, the only way to move forward is "*planetary humanism*" (Ibid., 2) which is about revoking race in a recreated multiracial society. Just paying attention to humans can easily lead to another confirmation of the language of race in which the human race is held as superior to the other species on the planet. Afrofuturism's argument on this is to become universally alien or post-human. The indicated universality is not related with the land but rather it is about being alien to the Earth through species' cosmopolitanism and moving beyond the state of human.

Prior to moving beyond the state of human, it is important to embrace the past and the path that the Afrofuturists have experienced or argued toward. In an interview in January 2018, Caribbean-Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson states that, currently, the term "*Afrofuturist*" is being used to refer to activists or scholarly activists because "*it is a radical act for black people to imagine having a future*" (2010, 01:35). Therefore, she believes there is "*now a confluence of Afrofuturism and black activism*" and the reason for this activism is to get recognition "*as a human because [blacks] know [they] already are*" (Ibid., 01:40). Hopkinson's perspective of relating Afrofuturism with protesting also connects Afrofuturism with decolonizing resistance. This act of protesting is visible all the way through *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Invisible Man* and *Kindred.*

Apart from being categorized as science fiction, *Kindred* is also evaluated as a slave narrative and speculative fiction as well. However, most of the genres seem to be inadequate in fully describing the novel. Many scholars, for instance, argue that labeling the novel as solely a science fiction would demote its strong political aspect. In her article, Sherryl Vint explains that Butler does not use time traveling out of its concept:

> [S]he is not interested in a Jonbar point upon which to erect some counterfactual, in shaping or adjusting history, but in the affective and embodied connections that exist in and across time. Her concern is not with grandfather paradoxes, with securing the past, but rather with ensuring that the past is actually heard. Her time travel is used not to change the past (and thereby the future) but to change our understanding of it, which changes the

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[1] Raciology is the term used by Paul Gilroy to describe the language of race.

present and opens up fresh possible outcomes for our future (Vint, 2007, 255).

Even though there is no question of time traveling having an impact on the past, the future, or the present, Vint's comment helps to question the traditional use of time traveling as well. The novel does not possess any scientific technology used in time traveling, nor are the episodes done voluntarily by the protagonist. According to Hannah Rehak, Butler combines different genres in her novel: "*Through her original take on a slave narrative, Butler creates a fantastical and non-linear storyline that re-centers an authentic history, comments on a traumatized present, and provides material for a better future*" (2015, 2). In an interview, Butler also denies the labeling of her novel as science fiction and asserts that she believes the novel to be a part of the "*fantasy*" genre because "*time travel is just a device for getting the character back to confront where she came from*" (1991, 495-496). In the interview, Butler emphasizes time traveling as a tool to help the protagonist confront her past, which in this case involves a visit to the antebellum south. By confronting an alternative past, Butler enables her protagonist to create alternative presents as well as futures. It is this aspect, Butler highlights, which places the novel within the Afrofuturistic genre.

As mentioned earlier, Afrofuturists emphasize the need to look at the past to create alternative futures. In her book *Playing in the Dark,* for example, Toni Morrison asserts: "*Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities*" (1992, 38). The oppressive approach from white Americans enabled African-Americans to create a networked consciousness which also helped African-American artistry. Through Afrofuturism, artists of African descent can produce alternative futures that are more African-culture, -heritage and -body oriented. Proto-Afrofuturists as well as Afrofuturists try to exceed the racial limits in the hopes of better future alternatives for African descendants. As Mark Dery points out in *Flame Wars*, "*African-American voices have other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come. If there is an Afrofuturism, it must be sought in unlikely places, constellated from far-flung points*" (1994, 182). As proto-Afrofuturist works, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* seem to fit Dery's description since both novels present parallels to reality while proposing social changes that bring hope for African-Americans' future. Hurston and Ellison are two of the most prominent writers that have helped the development of this movement even before its name was coined. In her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston describes an all-African-American town that is "*lak every other [white American] town*" of the time (2000, 50). Similarly in *Invisible*

Man (1952), Ellison creates an entirely unique underground world that is free of any prejudices and fuels it with technology. These are the main focus of attention for these writers in being selected for this study. As proto-Afrofuturists, they will be analyzed in terms of their contribution to the development of the movement by their use of alternative spaces, bodies and language.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Hurston, the root of Octavia Butler's ideology is very visible. The novel presents a version of proto-Afrofuturistic writing without the use of science fiction or technological tropes. Before the naming of Afrofuturism, Zora Neale Hurston was among the female African-American writers to use the characteristics of the movement including the use of imagination, storytelling/myth, and art to restate how womanness and Africanness are expressed. However, it was not until Afrofuturism appeared that African-American women writers were given credit for their use of imagination and their part in being the designers for the future. This is the reason why Afrofuturist theorists, such as Ytasha L. Womack, honor Hurston for her use of imagination in creating alternative spaces for resistance and feel related to her works as including Afrofuturism's earlier form.

Hurston's "*rhetorical virtuosity and folkloric imagination*" (Leitch et al. 2001, 2317) were not in line with the other realist texts that were written about African-Americans at the time. Rather, she engages in a distortion of the geopolitical history of the United States through an imagining of the African-American woman protagonist's self-journey to her individuality. In her writings, Hurston often uses dialect or "*the folk voice, an orality that captures the essence of the African-American folk experience*" (Anokye, 1996, 152). Hurston believes the folk voice is one of the ways to portray African-American individuality. The portrayed folk voices in her works also undergo changes over time, just like African-American individuality.

Similarly, Ralph Ellison is keen on the African-American folk voice. In *Invisible Man,* Ellison uses dialects to present a general overview of America through the African-Americans. He asserts:

> [M]y task was one of revealing the human universals hidden within the plight of one who was both black and American, and not only as a means of conveying my personal vision of possibility, but as a way of dealing with the sheer rhetorical challenge involved in communicating across our barriers of race and religion, class, color, and region [...] And to defeat this national tendency to deny the common humanity shared by my character and those who might happen to read of his experience, I would have to provide him with something of a worldview, give him a consciousness in which serious philosophical questions could be raised, provide him with a range of diction that could play upon the richness of our readily shared vernacular speech

and construct a plot that would bring him in contact with a variety of
American types as they operated on various levels of society (1982, xxii).

By including such characters as Trueblood, the Provos, Peter Wheatstraw,
and Mary as crucial components of the narrative, Ellison tries to equate them
with the other characters such as Mr. Norton, Mr. Emerson, and his son, that
are thought to possess a value due to their white heritage. By doing so,
Ellison aims to implement his vision to challenge the color barrier in
between.

Some of the themes of Ralph Ellison's novel include the African-
Americans' social invisibility and the white denial of blacks' individuality
(Johnson, 1999, 99). Today, these themes are well processed and commonly
thought of but, in his time, the novel changed the social spectrum on how
people viewed racism and the black literature of the 1940s and 1950s
(Miralles, 2017, 59). Of course, it should be emphasized that by invisibility,
it is referring to Todd Lieber's definition of "*the situation of men whose
individual identity is denied*" (1972, 86). As for the denial, it is defined in
the context of the ones who deny African-Americans as individuals.
Ellison's portrayal of how African-Americans see themselves as well as the
whites put a new perspective on the general idea that the only valuable
perspective was how whites portrayed blacks. The fact that feelings were
mutual was exactly what Fanon describes in his works, especially in *Black
Skin, White Masks*.

For the "Introduction" of *Invisible Man*'s special publication, Ellison
describes the book as "*a piece of science fiction*" (1982, xv). Lisa Yazsek
pronounces Ralph Ellison as one of the "*proto-Afrofuturist*" writers since
Invisible Man is an affirmation of the argument it presents for an alternative
to the empirical experience of African-Americans. To support the claim, it
should be emphasized that many Afrofuturist scholars and authors,
including Mark Dery, Alondra Nelson and Sheree R. Thomas accept his
efforts and contributions to the development of the early forms of
Afrofuturism as well.

The proto-Afrofuturist aspect of the novels allows the questioning of the
positive assumptions on the advancement of technology's influence,
especially on the lives of African-Americans. Imre Szeman calls this
positivism "*techno-utopianism*" and states that it is part of a notion of
politics that people generate that "*only such disasters as technology can
solve; the disaster arises only when the conditions in which to repair it are
already in the process of formation*" (2007, 814). Science fiction is
interested in such utopianism since it dwells on the idea that advancements
in science and progress in technology are going to lead to universal
development. Moreover, early science fiction actually exhibits how the

colonial ideology of advancement constructs the basis for the scientific practices.[2] Both science fiction and Afrofuturist writers are interested in the idea of reconstructing a world where there is a significant amount of economic growth and technological advancement which possess a breaking point from the past history. Proto-Afrofuturistic works, such as *Invisible Man,* challenge the ideology of advancement which exists as a result of "*techno-utopianism.*" In the novel, technology is reflected on as a means for submission and intimidation. Alondra Nelson also describes the issue of the "*digital divide*" which is, basically, the general, prejudiced belief of African-Americans' inability to work with technology to nourish their self-growth. Ellison suggests that careful attention must be provided to the social, material, and moral interests offered by the techno-scientific progress and this digital divide can be overcome with isolation from the restrictions and repressions of the dominant white culture.

A shared characteristic of proto-Afrofuturist texts advocates that the history of African-Americans has always been subjected to racialization in terms of space and time. Within Hurston's and Ellison's protagonists' journeys, the post-slavery economy of the US is described in separation from the neutralized state. Similarly, even though slavery has been long abolished in Butler's *Kindred*, race consciousness that prevents the color line from disappearing still continues to colonize African-Americans. While describing the cognitive map of the colonizing and enslaving of African-Americans, Ellison also provides an alternative space and time concept beyond conventional perceptions. With the use of imagination, Hurston also joins Ellison to help dive into a world of African-American speculative imagining. These proto-Afrofuturistic novels allow an outlook for possible, African-American alternative histories and futures through the creation of alternative spaces.

This dissertation benefits from Edward Soja's thirdspace theory as well as Homi Bhabha's hybridity and "*Third Space of Enunciation*" theories when examining the use of alternative space within the novels. Edward Soja uses Henri Lefebvre's theory on three-dimensional dialectic space, which he refers to as the physical, mental, and social spaces, as a basis to formulate a theory that emphasizes "*the inherent spatiality of human life*" (1996, 1). Soja associates space with the social, geographical, and even political aspects of life. He interprets the physically felt space of Lefebvre as the firstspace that is connected with the "*real material world*" (Ibid., 6). Soja associates the firstspace with the material world as well as the social aspect

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[2] Rieder, John. 2008. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

of individuals' environments. In a "*more exogenous mode of Firstspatial analysis*," he asserts, "*human spatiality continues to be defined primarily by and in its material configurations, but explanation shifts away from these surface plottings themselves to an inquiry into how they are socially produced*" (Ibid., 76-77). This materiality, and the shift in the ways to experience it, underline the impact of authority, ideology, and awareness in the construction of social spaces. Thus, firstspace has a restrictive sense. In contrast, the analysis of the secondspace focuses on "*explanatory concentration on conceived rather than perceived space and their implicit assumption that spatial knowledge is primarily produced through discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial workings of the mind*" (Ibid., 79). Mental space is the secondspace where the interpretation of "*reality through 'imagined' representations of spatiality*" (Ibid., 6) takes place. Soja does not distinguish the secondspace entirely from the material world or the firstspace. Rather, he focuses on the comprehension of this material reality, mainly on the mind, through the subjective thoughts of individuals. The secondspace is more individualistic, composed of the individual's personal and imagined thoughts.

In his previous work, Soja accentuates: "*[T]he organization and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation and experience*" (1989, 79-80). The definition of the thirdspace, hence, includes the space in which all binarisms/oppositions contradict, and are compared with, other alternatives. According to Soja the thirdspace is:

> an efficient invitation to enter a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable. It is a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other (1996, 5).

Social constructions in society include geographical space, as well as individuals who usually come from different backgrounds and their different interpretations related to those backgrounds and mindsets. Individuals do not have a static state of mind about either the social constructions or the physical spaces. Soja's theory focuses on how individuals are unable to view the different dimensions of such spaces in isolation. By developing Lefebvre's theory further, Edward Soja supports the importance of the "*inherent spatiality of human life*" (Ibid., 1). Individuals construct their spaces through their physical reality, past experiences, as well as their personal interpretations of their surroundings. That is why their personal background, experiences, social, and political

perspectives possess importance in their construction and reconstruction of their spaces. Edward Soja also focuses on how the colonizing powers have an effect on the concept of space. He believes the "*hegemonic power*" which possesses authority "*does not merely manipulate naively given differences between individuals and social groups, it actively produces and reproduces difference as a key strategy to create and maintain modes of social and spatial division*" that is to the authority's favor (Ibid., 87). Individuals have to make a choice to either follow the established rules or separate themselves from others. This strategy to produce difference is also closely associated with postcolonial theory.

As one of the main figures in subaltern studies, Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) explores the question of how to understand postcolonial culture. He discusses how a person's identity should be perceived, and its contribution to postcolonial studies. He opposes the belief of a fixed identity and argues that culture has a great impact on identity and its formation. He focuses on binary oppositions and their effects on Western thinking. He is against these oppositions since he believes these kinds of separation restrict any culture as homogenous, fixated and static. Since the emphasis of double-voicedness is mainly on identity and social structure, Bhabha asserts that it is psycho-cultural rather than psycho-political. This is important because when mimicry and imitation exist, the people who are being mimicked may feel destabilized. And for Bhabha that means the beginning of change, power and political resistance. According to him, all social constructions are indeterminate and include "*hybridity*." Bhabha argues that "*cultural hybridity*" is the result of various types of colonization that eventually lead to alteration and encounter. In his article, "The Commitment to Theory," he defines hybridity as "*where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the Other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes [...] the very forms of our recognition of the 'moment' of politics*" and it emerges from the "*Third Space of enunciation*" (1994, 37).

Bhabha discusses two of the important aspects of contemporary, postcolonial theory: the effects of colonialism and the need for fluid representations of race. Bhabha's theories analyze hybridity's portrayal within the colonized in order to emphasize their being and the impact on the colonizer culture. He argues that this helps the colonized groups to be considered a united, homogeneous mixture which is either assimilated or invisible—meaning, absent. By highlighting the effects of the colonized cultures on the colonizer, Bhabha saves them from passivity by giving them an agency and activity. Also, by referring to liminal space, he generates a need to go further than the simple assumption of fixed identification. From

another perspective, in *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (2007) Anjali Prabhu evaluates that hybridity can form an alternative exit, to avoid binary thinking. In addition, it can allow the subaltern's capture of agency and form a reestablishment by causing an instability in the power of the dominant culture. Since the binaries within a society, especially within the colonizer cultures, serve as a tool to administer the racial awareness of the dominant group, Prabhu believes that the heterogeneity of the subaltern group can help to alter such tools.

Bhabha, and many scholars in the same research area, try to stress the complexity of the contemporary and place emphasis on a needed space that allows various—confirming and contradicting—ethnic and racial identifications. Thus, Afrofuturism presents artists with the needed and desired space for hybrid representation which enables them to challenge fixed, racial and ethno-racial views. By using interspecies, for example, Afrofuturist artists can demonstrate the colonial thinking's ideologies on racism. Audiences can explore the chaotic and complex illustration of ethnicity and race and also question the essentialized social norms through freedom of form and expression. The artists can build on Bhabha's cultural hybridity theory by often presenting hybrid characters that disturb the firm lines of hierarchy within society. With the use of liminal space, the Afrofuturists in the United States, for instance, can depict the relationship between the represented racial rhetoric and the hands-on experience of African-Americans.

Bhabha argues that "*all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity*" (Bhabha, 1990, 211). Bhabha's Third Space is a space where production of new possibilities can take place. It is "*the interruptive, interrogative, tragic experience of blackness, of discrimination, of despair. It is the apprehension of the social and psychic question of 'origin'*" (Bhabha, 1994, 238). In this space, the already established values, opinions, and limitations related to culture become vague and allow new alternatives to be produced without any fixed wholeness. A hybrid identity already possesses transculturation and the Third Space helps the healthy division of identity within individuals to occur while enabling them to create meaning from their surroundings. Bhabha's ideas on identity and its formation draw parallels with Fanon's colonialism model and Lacan's conceptualization of the individual's split state and ability for mimicry. Both the split and the mimicry of the African-Americans enable them to create hybrid identities as colonized subjects. However, Bhabha's concept has troubled some scholars for neglecting some of the basic historical and essential terms. On the other hand, Bhabha's Third Space model, along with Soja's theory, help to decolonize the identity of the African body through the use of alternative

spaces. When considering the social, cultural as well as political overtones of Afrofuturistic works, the produced works present significant sources that change the way of thinking. Afrofuturists believe individuals need to acknowledge their own body and mind in order to exist further in a technologically driven world.

Studies of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability focus on how identity relates directly to the body. These studies draw on a wide selection of sources, especially twentieth century sources, for a theoretical background. They include studies in psychoanalysis, feminism, culture, and body—Michel Foucault's works on the body's significance became central and led to its formation as a separate category. Contrary to Sigmund Freud's understanding of women's bodies as being castrated and men's fear of being castrated, Jacques Lacan argues that all living subjects are castrated and deprived of a phallus. This castration invokes the moment of loss that triggers the fragmentation of subjects.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Lacan highlights the significance of the loss which leads to the beginning of submission and the occurrence of symbolization in order for the subject to appear: "*the subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other*" (1978, 199). The Other, or the "*big Other*," is not only another subject with its radical diversity and inadaptability through identification but also the Symbolic order that moderates the connection with that other subject. The Other is inscribed in the Symbolic order because Lacan associates radical diversity with language and law. He says: "*[T]he Other must first of all be considered a locus, the locus in which speech is constituted*" (1993, 274). According to him, women are also regarded as the Other. He says: "*Man here acts as the relay whereby the woman becomes this Other for herself as she is this Other for him*" (2005, 732). Thus, it is natural that Lacan describes the mother as the first person to occupy the position of the Other for the child as well because, aside from being the Other for both men and women, mothers are the ones who read the child's earliest needs as messages and take action accordingly. When the child realizes the flaws with the Other that signify her lack of certain things, such as the phallus, and being incomplete, then she tries to possess the missing things.[3]

In the Symbolic order, the subjects move beyond their bodily functions into the world of words and "*The Law*"[4] that are more related to the

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[3] See Jacques Lacan's and Sigmund Freud's ideas on the "*castration complex*" that are related with "*the Oedipus complex*".

[4] The Law is "*revealed clearly enough as identical with an order of language*" (Lacan, 2005, 66).