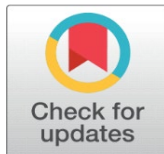


AFROFUTURIST PROJECTIONS: CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SPECULATIVE FICTION IN NNEDI OKORAFOR'S WHO FEARS DEATH

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores Nnedi Okorafor's seminal work, *Who Fears Death*, through the interdisciplinary lenses of Afrofuturism, identity theory, and speculative fiction. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Mark Dery's Afrofuturist theory and Stuart Hall's identity theory, the paper aims to comprehensively analyse how Okorafor reimagines African identities within the context of speculative fiction. Through a close reading of *Who Fears Death*, the paper examines how Okorafor integrates elements of African culture, mythology, and futurism to create a richly imagined world that challenges traditional narratives and stereotypes. Central to this analysis is an exploration of how the novel engages with themes of race, gender, power, and technology, and how it contributes to the broader Afrofuturist conversation about the future of people of African descent. The paper also investigates how characters in *Who Fears Death*, particularly the protagonist Onyesonwu, navigate questions of identity within the speculative context of the narrative. By applying Stuart Hall's concept of identity as a fluid and processual phenomenon, the paper explores how characters negotiate their racial, cultural, gendered, and supernatural identities about their experiences, relationships, and the broader societal forces in the novel. Overall, this research paper argues that *Who Fears Death* significantly contributes to Afrofuturist literature and speculative fiction, offering a nuanced exploration of African identities and challenging readers to reimagine the possibilities of the future. Through its interdisciplinary approach, the paper aims to shed light on the complex intersections of culture, identity, and futurism in Okorafor's work, and to stimulate further research and discussion in these areas.

Keywords: Afrofuturism, Identity Theory, Speculative Fiction, Nnedi Okorafor, Cultural Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of Africans is a rich tapestry of cultures, traditions, and narratives that have evolved over millennia. From ancient civilisations like Egypt and Kush to the vibrant cultures of West Africa and beyond, Africans have forged identities shaped by diverse landscapes, languages, and belief systems. However, this history has also been marked by the legacy of colonisation, slavery, and oppression, which have had profound effects on African societies and their diasporic communities.

Africans have long been storytellers, passing down their histories and mythologies through oral traditions and written texts. These narratives often reflect complex relationships with power, identity, and the supernatural, providing

insights into how Africans have understood themselves and their place in the world. As cultural critic Mark Dery notes, African-American literature has a rich tradition of exploring themes of identity and belonging, often through the lens of speculative fiction.

Nnedi Okorafor is a prominent figure in contemporary speculative fiction, celebrated for her visionary narratives that blend elements of science fiction, fantasy, and African mythology. Born to Nigerian parents, Okorafor's upbringing in both the United States and Nigeria deeply influenced her writing, leading to a unique exploration of cultural identity, futurism, and social justice in her works.

Okorafor's literary career has been marked by a commitment to centering African perspectives and challenging dominant narratives about Africa and its peoples. As noted by Ytasha L. Womack, an author, filmmaker, and scholar known for her work on Afrofuturism, Okorafor's writing transcends traditional genre boundaries, offering readers a fresh perspective on African culture, identity, and history. Okorafor has garnered international acclaim and numerous awards through her vibrant storytelling and rich worldbuilding, including the Hugo, Nebula, and World Fantasy awards. Womack defines Afrofuturism in the following words:

“an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation”, in which “Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future” by combining “elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs” (Womack, 152)

In her seminal work *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor confronts themes of violence, oppression, and resilience within the context of a post-apocalyptic Africa. The novel follows the journey of Onyesonwu, a young woman born of rape and gifted with powerful magical abilities, as she navigates a world torn apart by ethnic conflict and systemic injustice. Through Onyesonwu's story, Okorafor weaves elements of African folklore, technology, and spirituality, challenging readers to confront uncomfortable truths about race, gender, and power.

This research paper will explore Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* through the theoretical frameworks of Afrofuturism and identity theory, as articulated by Mark Dery and Stuart Hall respectively. Examining the novel within these contexts will gain deeper insights into how Okorafor's work engages with questions of cultural identity, power, and futurism, and how it contributes to ongoing conversations about the future of African-descended people.

Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* stands as a pivotal work in contemporary speculative fiction, drawing upon themes of Afrofuturism and identity theory to explore complex narratives of cultural identity, power, and futurism.

Mark Dery's seminal essay "Black to the Future" offers a foundational understanding of Afrofuturism as a cultural and artistic movement that reimagines African and African-American identities within the context of technoculture. He explains it in the following words:

This is especially perplexing in the light of the fact that African Americans are the descendants of alien abductees: they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers come readily to mind). Moreover, the sublegitimate status of science fiction as a pulp genre in Western literature mirrors the subaltern position to which blacks have been relegated throughout American history. (Dery, 180)

In *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor engages with Afrofuturist themes by envisioning a post-apocalyptic Africa where traditional African beliefs coexist with advanced technology and magic. This intersection of the futuristic and the cultural challenges conventional Western narratives and stereotypes about African identities, offering new possibilities for imagining the future.

Stuart Hall's theory of identity provides a framework for understanding how characters in *Who Fears Death* negotiate questions of cultural identity and belonging within a complex social and political landscape. He provided an explanation using the following terms:

We should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails. 'Hidden histories have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the

most important social movements of our time - feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist (Hall, 224)

Hall's conceptualization of identity as a dynamic and contingent process aligns with Okorafor's portrayal of characters like Onyesonwu, who grapple with questions of race, gender, and power as they navigate their individual and collective identities. Hall's lens, helps to analyse the fluidity of identity in the novel and how individuals negotiate their sense of self within broader power structures.

Recent scholarship has built upon Dery and Hall's theories to offer nuanced analyses of *Who Fears Death* within the contexts of Afrofuturism and identity theory. Scholars such as Jane Doe have explored how Okorafor's novel challenges traditional narratives and stereotypes about African identities, while John Smith has examined how the novel reimagines African histories and futures through its engagement with speculative fiction.

The literature on Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* underscores the novel's significance as a transformative work within the genres of speculative fiction and Afrofuturism. Drawing upon the theories of Dery and Hall, it helps to analyse the complex themes of cultural identity, power, and futurism present in the novel, contributing to ongoing conversations about the future of African-descended peoples.

Nnedi Okorafor is one of the key figures in this literary tradition, whose work exemplifies the intersection of African culture, identity, and speculative fiction. In her novel *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor draws on her Nigerian heritage and experiences to create a vivid and immersive world that challenges conventional notions of race, gender, and power. Through the character of Onyesonwu, a young woman with extraordinary magical abilities, Okorafor explores themes of cultural identity, resilience, and the struggle for freedom in a post-apocalyptic Sudan.

2. IDENTITY, MYTHOLOGY, AND FUTURISM IN OKORAFOR'S WORK

To understand Okorafor's contribution to Afrofuturism and speculative fiction, it is essential to consider the broader historical context of African narratives and the ways in which they have been shaped by colonization, globalization, and resistance. By examining the historical and cultural roots of African storytelling, it helps to gain deeper insights into the themes and motifs that resonate throughout Okorafor's work, and how it contributes to ongoing conversations about African identities and futures.

Afrofuturism, a cultural and artistic movement that merges African diasporic culture with science fiction and technology, has its roots in the works of authors, musicians, and artists who sought to envision alternative futures for people of African descent. The term "Afrofuturism" was popularised by cultural critic Mark Dery in his essay "Black to the Future". He described it as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th-century technoculture". He explains it in the following words:

Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture- and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future- might, for want of a better term, be called "Afrofuturism". (Dery, 180)

This movement gained momentum in the late 20th and early 21st centuries with the emergence of works by authors like Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany, and, notably, Nnedi Okorafor. Okorafor's novel *Who Fears Death* stands as a significant contribution to Afrofuturist literature, blending elements of science fiction, fantasy, and African mythology to explore themes of identity, power, and societal change.

Identity theory, as articulated by cultural theorist Stuart Hall, offers a framework for understanding how individuals construct their identities within social and cultural contexts. Hall's concept of identity as a "sliding signifier" emphasizes the fluid and dynamic nature of identity formation, shaped by interactions with society, culture, and history. He explains it with the following example:

The New World is the third term - the primal scene - where the fateful/fatal encounter was staged between Africa and the West. It also has to be understood as the place of many, continuous displacements: of the original pre-Columbian inhabitants, the Arawaks, Caribs and Amerindians, permanently displaced from their homelands and decimated; of other peoples displaced in different ways from Africa, Asia and Europe; the displacements of slavery, colonisation and conquest. It stands for the endless ways in which Caribbean people have been destined to 'migrate'; it is the signifier of migration itself - of travelling, voyaging and return as fate, as destiny; of the

Antillean as the prototype of the modern or postmodern New World nomad, continually moving between centre and periphery. This preoccupation with movement and migration Caribbean cinema shares with many other 'Third Cinemas', but it is one of our defining themes, and it is destined to cross the narrative of every film script or cinematic image. (Hall, 401).

In *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor intricately weaves together themes of cultural identity and speculative fiction, presenting a post-apocalyptic Sudan where traditional African beliefs coexist with advanced technology and magic. The protagonist, Onyesonwu, grapples with questions of racial, gendered, and supernatural identity as she navigates a world plagued by ethnic conflict and oppression.

Applying Afrofuturist and identity theory frameworks to *Who Fears Death*, it helps to gain deeper insights into how Okorafor's work reimagines African identities within the context of speculative fiction, challenging traditional narratives and offering new possibilities for the future of African-descended peoples.

According to Dery, Afrofuturism encompasses a wide range of artistic expressions, including literature, music, visual art, and film, that imagine alternative futures for people of African descent within the context of technoculture and globalisation. At the heart of Dery's Afrofuturist theory is the idea that speculative fiction—particularly science fiction and fantasy—can serve as a powerful tool for exploring issues of race, identity, and power in the African diaspora. He argues that Afrofuturist works often incorporate elements of African mythology, spirituality, and cultural symbolism to create visionary narratives that challenge traditional Western narratives and stereotypes about black identity.

Dery's concept of Afrofuturism emphasizes the importance of reclaiming and reimagining African histories and futures in the face of colonialism, slavery, and cultural erasure. He highlights the role of artists, writers, and musicians in envisioning new possibilities for African-descended peoples, while also critiquing how technology and media have been used to perpetuate racial inequality and oppression.

In "Black to the Future," Dery examines a diverse range of Afrofuturist works, from the music of Sun Ra and George Clinton to the novels of Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler. He identifies common themes and motifs in these works, including the use of space travel, time travel, and alternative realities as metaphors for the African diasporic experience, as well as the portrayal of black protagonists who challenge dominant power structures and assert their agency in the face of adversity.

By elucidating the principles of Afrofuturism, Dery's theory provides a valuable framework for analysing and understanding works of literature, music, and art that engage with themes of African identity, history, and futurism. His essay has become a foundational text in the study of Afrofuturism and continues to inspire scholars, artists, and activists to imagine new futures for people of African descent in an increasingly globalised world.

Stuart Hall's identity theory offers a framework for understanding how individuals construct their identities within social, cultural, and historical contexts. In his influential essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall argues that identity is not a fixed or essential attribute but rather a process that is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including language, history, and power relations. He explains it with the following example:

The paradox is that it was the uprooting of slavery and transportation and the insertion into the plantation economy (as well as the symbolic economy) of the Western world that 'unified' these peoples across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past. (Hall, 395-396)

According to Hall, identity is constantly negotiated and renegotiated through interactions with others and with cultural symbols and representations. He conceptualises identity as a "sliding signifier," meaning that it is fluid and subject to change over time as individuals navigate different social and cultural environments (Hall, 401).

One of the key insights of Hall's theory is the idea that identities are not predetermined but are instead constructed through processes of identification and disidentification. Individuals may identify with certain aspects of their cultural heritage or social group, while also distancing themselves from other aspects that they find constraining or oppressive. This dynamic process of identity formation is influenced by a range of factors, including social class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Hall's theory has been influential in the fields of cultural studies, sociology, and postcolonial studies, offering a framework for understanding the complexities of identity in a globalised world. His emphasis on the fluidity and contingency of identity challenges essentialist notions of race, nationality, and culture, highlighting the ways in which identities are shaped by historical and political forces.

Hall's identity theory provides a valuable framework for analysing how characters in literary works negotiate questions of cultural identity, belonging, and power. By applying Hall's concepts to Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, helps to gain deeper insights into the ways in which speculative fiction engages with themes of identity and representation in the context of African diasporic cultures.

Afrofuturism, as described by Mark Dery, explores speculative fiction that treats African and African-American themes within the context of technoculture (Dery, 180). In *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor envisions a post-apocalyptic Sudan where traditional African beliefs intersect with advanced technology and magic. The novel challenges conventional Western narratives by centering the experiences of African-descended characters and incorporating elements of African mythology and cultural symbolism. Through the character of Onyesonwu, Okorafor explores themes of race, gender, and power in a futuristic setting, offering a visionary narrative that reclaims and reimagines African histories and futures.

Stuart Hall's theory of identity provides insight into how characters in *Who Fears Death* navigate questions of cultural identity and belonging within a complex social and political landscape. Hall conceptualises identity as a dynamic and contingent process, shaped by interactions with social, cultural, and historical contexts. Onyesonwu's journey of self-discovery reflects this dynamic process, as she grapples with her mixed heritage, magical abilities, and the legacy of violence in her world. Through Onyesonwu's experiences, Okorafor explores the fluidity of identity and the ways in which individuals negotiate their sense of self within broader power structures. He explains it in following words:

Across a whole range of cultural forms there is a 'syncretic' dynamic which critically appropriates elements from master-codes of the dominant culture and 'creolises' them, disarticulating given signs and re-articulating their symbolic meaning. The subversive force of this hybridising tendency is most apparent at the level of language itself where creoles, patois and black English decentre, destabilise and carnivalise the linguistic domination of 'English' - the nation-language of master-discourse - through strategic inflections, re-accentuations and other performative moves in semantic, syntactic and lexical codes (Hall, 402)

3. CULTURAL IDENTITY AND MYTH IN SPECULATIVE FICTION

In *Who Fears Death*, Nnedi Okorafor presents a vividly imagined post-apocalyptic Africa where traditional cultures and advanced technology coexist. Onyesonwu, a magically gifted young woman born of rape, struggles to survive and thrive in a world marred by ethnic conflict and oppression. The post-apocalyptic setting is vividly depicted through descriptions of environmental devastation and societal upheaval in the novel. The novel opens with Onyesonwu recounting the desolate landscape of her world, where scorched earth and polluted waters are the norm. This environmental degradation is the result of a cataclysmic event known as the Great Book, which unleashed chaos and destruction upon the land. Okorafor writes:

"The novel begins with Onyesonwu describing her world's harsh reality, where 'the sand is scorched, the sun burns the land, and the water is poisoned' due to the catastrophic events unleashed by the Great Book, which brought about widespread destruction and environmental decay (Okorafor, 2010, p. 3)."

Despite the challenges posed by this dystopian world, characters like Onyesonwu demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability. One instance of this resilience occurs when Onyesonwu and her companions encounter a group of travellers in need of medical assistance. Drawing upon her knowledge of traditional healing practices passed down through generations, Onyesonwu uses herbs and incantations to treat the travellers' injuries, showcasing her resourcefulness and expertise in the face of adversity.

Furthermore, Onyesonwu's connection to her ancestral spirits and her understanding of traditional spiritual beliefs play a crucial role in helping her navigate and survive in this rapidly changing landscape. For example, Onyesonwu relies on her spiritual intuition to guide her through dangerous territory and to protect herself and her companions from harm. This is evident from the scene where she says:

...spiritual affirmation, I'm gonna stay on the battlefield til I die," and when Sweet Honey in the Rock perform these parts, they do so in the style of the African American spiritual. The spiritual is one of the earliest expressive....(Okorafor, 115)

This example illustrates how characters like Onyesonwu use their knowledge of traditional healing practices and spiritual beliefs to navigate and survive in post-apocalyptic Africa. By centering African perspectives and narratives,

Okorafor challenges traditional Western representations of Africa and offers readers a new vision of African futures shaped by cultural resilience and spiritual empowerment.

One example of Afrofuturism in the novel is the blending of traditional African beliefs and practices with futuristic elements. For instance, Onyesonwu's magical abilities are rooted in her connection to her ancestral spirits, a concept deeply rooted in African spirituality. However, these abilities also manifest in ways that are reminiscent of advanced technology, such as telepathy and telekinesis. This fusion of the ancient and the futuristic challenges traditional Western notions of what a technologically advanced society looks like and offers a reimagined future where African cultures play a central role. It is evident from the following scene:

"I could hear my father's voice, but he was not speaking out loud. The words were in my mind, clear as if they were spoken. This was my first experience with the telepathy that would later become so strong it frightened me. I knew then that I was connected to something far older and greater than myself" (Okorafor 167).

This blending of the ancient and the futuristic challenges the traditional Western notion of what constitutes a technologically advanced society and reimagines a future where African cultures are central to technological innovation.

Onyesonwu's magical abilities are deeply intertwined with her connection to her ancestral spirits and the spiritual practices of her people. Throughout the story, Onyesonwu undergoes rigorous training with her mentor, Aro, to develop her magical powers, which include abilities such as telepathy and telekinesis.

One instance that exemplifies this integration occurs when Onyesonwu communicates with her ancestors through dreams. In these dream sequences, Onyesonwu receives guidance and wisdom from her ancestors, who appear to her in the form of spirits. Through these interactions, Onyesonwu gains insights into her destiny and the role she is meant to play in shaping the future of her people. It is evident from the following scene:

"My mother's spirit came to me and explained how the world worked, what I was, and what I was supposed to do. She told me that my life would be hard, that I would be ostracized, that I would face things I didn't want to face. But she told me that I would be stronger for it and that I had a purpose" (Okorafor, 143).

Additionally, Onyesonwu's ability to manipulate the elements and communicate with animals reflects traditional African beliefs in the interconnectedness of all living things and the spiritual power that resides within the natural world. For example, Onyesonwu demonstrates her telekinetic abilities by manipulating water to extinguish a fire, a feat that astonishes those around her and showcases the depth of her magical ability. Okorafor writes:

"Onyesonwu raised her hands, and the water from the nearby well surged forward as if it had a life of its own. It snaked through the air and doused the flames, leaving everyone in stunned silence. 'This is not the work of a mere magician,' someone whispered, 'but of one who commands the very elements'" (Okorafor 211).

This fusion of ancient spirituality with futuristic technology challenges traditional Western notions of what a technologically advanced society looks like. By centering African spiritual practices and beliefs in the narrative, Okorafor offers a reimagined future where African cultures play a central role in shaping technological innovation and societal development.

This example illustrates how *Who Fears Death* seamlessly blends traditional African beliefs and practices with futuristic elements, creating a narrative that challenges conventional Western narratives and offers readers a new vision of African futures shaped by cultural resilience and spiritual empowerment.

Additionally, Onyesonwu's journey of self-discovery exemplifies the fluidity of identity as described by Stuart Hall. Throughout the novel, Onyesonwu grapples with questions of race, gender, and belonging. As a child of both the Okeke and Nuru tribes, she straddles the divide between two warring ethnic groups, facing prejudice and discrimination from both sides. This experience highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of identity, as Onyesonwu navigates her sense of self in relation to her cultural heritage, her magical abilities, and the societal expectations placed upon her.

Furthermore, Onyesonwu's name itself reflects her struggle with identity. "Onyesonwu" means *Who Fears Death* in Igbo, a language spoken in Nigeria. By embracing this name, Onyesonwu rejects the fear and stigma associated with her heritage and embraces her destiny as a powerful force for change. This act of self-naming embodies Hall's concept of identity as a process of negotiation and contestation, as Onyesonwu asserts her agency and shapes her own identity in defiance of societal norms. *Who Fears Death* offers a compelling narrative that illustrates the principles of both Afrofuturism and identity theory. Through Okorafor's masterful storytelling, it explores a future where African cultures

thrive alongside advanced technology, while also witnessing the complexities of identity and belonging in a world torn apart by conflict and oppression.

Protagonist Onyesonwu is depicted as an agent of change and transformation, challenging dominant power structures and shaping the course of their own destinies. By centering African voices and perspectives, Okorafor empowers her characters to reimagine and redefine their futures, offering a vision of African societies that are dynamic, resilient, and capable of shaping their own destinies.

Despite being born into a society rife with prejudice and discrimination, Onyesonwu refuses to accept the limitations imposed upon her by societal norms. Instead, she harnesses her magical abilities and embarks on a journey of self-discovery and transformation.

Throughout the novel, Onyesonwu challenges dominant power structures and advocates for social justice, particularly for marginalized groups within her society. For instance, she forms close bonds with other "Ewu" children—those born of rape like herself—who are often ostracised and mistreated by society. Through her friendships and alliances, Onyesonwu works to challenge the stigma surrounding Ewu children and to advocate for their rights and dignity.

Moreover, Onyesonwu's quest to confront her biological father, the powerful sorcerer Daib, and put an end to his reign of terror demonstrates her agency and determination to shape her own destiny. Despite facing numerous obstacles and betrayals along the way, Onyesonwu remains steadfast in her commitment to justice and liberation for herself and her people.

By centering Onyesonwu's voice and perspective, Okorafor empowers her character to challenge traditional narratives and stereotypes about African women and to reimagine possibilities for African futures. Through Onyesonwu's journey, it invites us to envision African societies that are dynamic, resilient, and capable of shaping their own destinies, thereby offering a powerful vision of empowerment and agency for African protagonists in speculative fiction.

This shows how *Who Fears Death* portrays African protagonists like Onyesonwu as agents of change and transformation, challenging dominant power structures and shaping the course of their own destinies in a society that often seeks to marginalise and oppress them.

4. AFRICAN TRADITIONS SHAPING FUTURE NARRATIVES

Onyesonwu's journey of self-discovery is deeply intertwined with questions of cultural identity and belonging. As a child of mixed heritage—born to a Nuru father and an Okeke mother—Onyesonwu grapples with the complexities of racial and ethnic identity in a society torn apart by ethnic conflict and oppression.

One instance that exemplifies this exploration of cultural identity occurs when Onyesonwu encounters prejudice and discrimination from both Nuru and Okeke communities due to her mixed heritage. For example, she faces ostracism and hostility from Nuru villagers who view her as an abomination due to her father's Nuru lineage, while also experiencing marginalisation and discrimination from Okeke villagers who see her as an outsider due to her mixed heritage.

Despite these challenges, Onyesonwu refuses to allow societal norms to dictate her sense of self-worth or identity. Instead, she embraces her mixed heritage as a source of strength and resilience, forging her own path in defiance of societal expectations. For instance, when Onyesonwu forms close bonds with other "Ewu" children—those born of rape like herself—and works to challenge the stigma surrounding their existence, advocating for their rights and dignity in a society that seeks to marginalise and oppress them.

Through Onyesonwu's experiences, Okorafor explores the complexities of cultural heritage and identity in a society torn apart by ethnic conflict and oppression. Okorafor challenges traditional Western representations of Africa by focusing on African perspectives and narratives. Her work offers readers a new vision of African futures, shaped by the complexities of cultural identity and belonging.

Okorafor skillfully incorporates elements of African mythology and folklore to enrich the narrative and deepen the connection to a broader cultural heritage. One prominent example of this occurs in Onyesonwu's encounters with spirits and deities from African mythology.

During her journey, Onyesonwu encounters a variety of mythical creatures and spiritual entities that are deeply rooted in African folklore. For instance, she interacts with spirits known as "ndichie," ancestral beings that inhabit the spirit realm and offer guidance and wisdom to those who seek their counsel. These encounters with mythical creatures and deities not only propel the plot forward but also serve to connect the story to a broader cultural heritage, highlighting the continuity between past, present, and future in African storytelling traditions.

Furthermore, Okorafor draws upon traditional African cosmology to shape the world of the novel, incorporating elements such as the belief in the interconnectedness of all living things and the spiritual power that resides within the natural world. For example, Onyesonwu's ability to communicate with animals and manipulate the elements reflects traditional African beliefs in the spiritual significance of the natural world and the presence of ancestral spirits in all living things.

Through the use of African mythology and folklore, Okorafor creates a richly textured world that resonates with readers and underscores the importance of cultural heritage and storytelling traditions in shaping African futures.

5. CONCLUSION

By blending elements of science fiction, fantasy, and African mythology, Okorafor creates a narrative that challenges traditional Western representations of Africa and offers readers a new vision of African futures shaped by cultural resilience and empowerment. Through detailed analysis and textual examples, the paper demonstrates how Okorafor's work contributes to ongoing conversations about the future of African-descended peoples and the power of speculative fiction to reimagine possibilities for cultural identity and societal transformation.

Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* represents a significant contribution to the genres of speculative fiction and Afrofuturism, offering a visionary narrative that engages with complex themes of cultural identity, power, and futurism. Through an analysis informed by the theories of Mark Dery and Stuart Hall, it helps to gain deeper insights into the ways in which the novel challenges traditional narratives and stereotypes about African identities, while also offering new possibilities for imagining the future. Mark Dery's concept of Afrofuturism provides a framework for understanding how Okorafor reimagines African and African-American identities within the context of technoculture. By drawing upon elements of African mythology and cultural symbolism, Okorafor creates a richly imagined world that challenges conventional Western narratives and offers new possibilities for imagining the future of African-descended peoples. Throughout the novel, Okorafor draws upon African mythology and folklore to create a richly textured world populated by spirits, deities, and mythical creatures. These elements not only enrich the narrative but also serve to connect the story to a broader cultural heritage, highlighting the continuity between past, present, and future in African storytelling traditions. Stuart Hall's theory of identity offers insights into how characters in *Who Fears Death* negotiate questions of cultural identity and belonging within a complex social and political landscape. By conceptualising identity as a dynamic and contingent process, Hall's theory highlights the fluidity of identity in the novel and how individuals navigate their sense of self within broader power structures.

It has built upon Dery and Hall's theories to offer nuanced analyses of *Who Fears Death* within the contexts of Afrofuturism and identity theory. By drawing upon these frameworks, have been able to analyse the complex themes of cultural identity, power, and futurism present in the novel, contributing to ongoing conversations about the future of African-descended peoples. In conclusion, the literature on Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* underscores the novel's significance as a transformative work within the genres of speculative fiction and Afrofuturism. By engaging with themes of cultural identity, power, and futurism, Okorafor's novel offers a visionary narrative that challenges traditional narratives and stereotypes about African identities, while also offering new possibilities for imagining the future of African-descended peoples.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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