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**Digital Diasporas and Cosmic Freedom: Afrofuturist Imaginations in
Nnedi Okorafor's Binti**

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Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to our beloved families, whose endless support, encouragement, and unconditional love have given us the strength to face every challenge. Your sacrifices, patience, and belief in us have been our greatest source of motivation throughout this journey.

To our dear friends, thank you for standing by us through every difficulty, offering comfort, motivation, and moments of joy when we needed them most.

A special dedication goes to our respected teachers, whose guidance, hard work, and passion for knowledge have inspired us to strive for excellence. Your mentorship has been invaluable, and we are deeply grateful for your dedication to our academic and personal development.

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Abstract

This study examines Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti: The Complete Trilogy* as an Africanfuturist narrative that reimagines identity, diaspora, technology, otherness, and female agency through the journey of a young Himba girl into space. The study was carried out to show that Binti's movement beyond Earth is not only a physical journey, but also a complex process of cultural transformation and self-discovery. It aims to analyze how the trilogy presents identity as hybrid, changing, and shaped by encounters with different cultures, species, and technological worlds. The research adopts a qualitative analytical approach based on close textual analysis of selected passages from the trilogy. It also relies on relevant theoretical perspectives from cultural studies, postcolonial hybridity, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, and feminist criticism. The main results show that Binti does not abandon her Himba identity; rather, she carries it into new cosmic and technological spaces. The trilogy also challenges fear-based views of the other by emphasizing communication, recognition, and coexistence. Finally, Binti's transformation reveals female agency because she becomes a mediator, survivor, and decision-maker. The study concludes that Binti offers a powerful vision of African identity as resilient, hybrid, and capable of shaping future worlds without losing its cultural roots.

Keywords: Africanfuturism, Digital Diaspora, Cultural Identity, Cosmic Freedom, Female Agency.

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Contemporary science fiction has become an important space for rethinking identity, culture, technology, and the future. Within this field, Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are especially significant because they place Black and African experiences at the center of speculative imagination. Afrofuturism connects Black culture with technology, imagination, the future, and liberation, while Africanfuturism, as Nnedi Okorafor explains, is more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology, and point of view (Womack, 2013; Okorafor, 2019a).

Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti: The Complete Trilogy* offers a rich literary example of these concerns. The trilogy follows Binti, a young Himba girl who leaves Earth to study at Oomza Uni, an intergalactic university. Her journey exposes her to alien encounters, technological transformation, cultural displacement, and personal rebirth. Through Binti's movement between Earth, space, the Meduse, the Enyi Zinariya, and New Fish, the narrative explores how identity can survive and change across borders, planets, species, and cultures.

Although *Binti* has often been discussed as a work of African science fiction or Afrofuturist writing, its treatment of identity is more complex than a simple story of travel, education, or technological progress. Binti's journey does not merely move her from Earth to space; it transforms her body, her cultural belonging, her understanding of home, and her relationship with other beings. She becomes a hybrid figure who must negotiate Himba tradition, alien contact, technology, female agency, and cosmic freedom.

2. Statement of the Problem

The main problem of this study is therefore to examine how *Binti* represents identity as a process of transformation rather than as something fixed. The study focuses on how Okorafor

uses Binti's journey to rethink cultural identity, diaspora, tradition, technology, otherness, and female agency within an Africanfuturist framework.

3. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does *Binti* represent digital diaspora and cultural identity through Binti's departure from and return to her homeland?
2. How does the journey beyond Earth become a form of cosmic freedom and self-discovery?
3. How does the trilogy negotiate the relationship between Himba tradition and advanced technology?
4. How are alien encounters used to reimagine the concept of otherness?
5. How does Binti's transformation express female agency and the reconstruction of identity?

4. Aims of the Study

This study aims to analyze how Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* represents the transformation of identity through Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist imagination. It seeks to examine Binti's cultural conflict, her cosmic journey, her negotiation of tradition and technology, her encounters with alien and non-human others, and her development as a young African female character with agency.

More specifically, the study aims to show that Binti's identity is not erased by travel, technology, or alien contact. Instead. The study also aims to demonstrate that Okorafor's trilogy

offers a future-oriented vision in which African culture is not left behind, but carried into space, technology, and new forms of life.

5. Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative analytical approach based on close textual analysis. The primary source of the study is Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti: The Complete Trilogy* (2019). The analysis focuses on selected passages from the trilogy and examines their relation to the major themes of the study: digital diaspora, cosmic freedom, tradition and technology, alien otherness, and female agency.

The study also relies on theoretical and critical sources related to Cultural Studies, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, postcolonial hybridity, and feminist readings of Black female identity. Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity as both "being" and "becoming" helps explain Binti's changing relation to her Himba roots (Hall, 1990). Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the Third Space supports the analysis of Binti's in-between identity (Bhabha, 1994). Womack's work on Afrofuturism and Okorafor's own definition of Africanfuturism provide the main speculative and cultural framework for the study (Womack, 2013; Okorafor, 2019a).

6. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the analysis of Africanfuturist literature and contemporary science fiction. It shows how *Binti* offers a different vision of the future, one in which African identity, Indigenous knowledge, technology, and female agency are central rather than marginal. The study is also important because it challenges the idea that tradition and modernity must be opposed. In *Binti*, tradition can travel, adapt, and survive within advanced technological and cosmic spaces.

This research also contributes to discussions of identity in postcolonial and diasporic literature. Binti's transformation reveals that belonging is not always stable or simple. It may

involve conflict, hybridity, loss, memory, and self-reconstruction. By focusing on a young African female protagonist, the study also highlights the importance of gender in Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist narratives.

7. Structure of the Study

This dissertation is divided into two main chapters in addition to the general introduction and general conclusion. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. It discusses the key concepts needed for the analysis, including Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, digital diaspora, cultural identity, hybridity, otherness, technology, and female agency.

The second chapter is devoted to the textual analysis of *Binti*. It examines five major themes: digital diasporas and cultural identity, cosmic freedom and the journey beyond Earth, the negotiation between tradition and technology, alien encounters and the reimagining of otherness, and female agency and the transformation of identity. Each section analyzes selected passages from the trilogy and connects them to relevant theoretical perspectives. The study ends with a general conclusion that summarizes the main findings and shows how *Binti* reimagines African identity within a cosmic and technological future.

CHAPTER ONE:

Historical, Social and Biographical Background

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Introduction

This chapter provides the historical, theoretical, and biographical foundation necessary for the study of digital diasporas and cosmic freedom in Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti*. Since the novella emerges from a complex intersection of African history, diasporic experience, cultural identity, and speculative imagination, it is essential to establish the broader context in which the text can be understood. The chapter therefore begins by examining the historical and cultural background that shapes African identity, with particular attention to diaspora, migration, colonialism, postcolonial realities, African traditions, and the impact of technology and globalization on contemporary forms of belonging.

The chapter then moves to the theoretical background by focusing on key concepts that frame the analysis of the novel. It discusses science fiction as a literary mode, the origins and development of Afrofuturism, and the emergence of Africanfuturism as a distinct framework for imagining African-centered futures. In addition, it explores the notion of digital diaspora and the ways in which technology, global Black identity, and digital networks create new forms of cultural connectivity and exchange. The chapter also addresses the concept of cosmic freedom in Afrofuturist thought, especially the symbolic meaning of space as a site of liberation, reinvention, and escape from historical oppression.

Finally, the chapter presents the biographical background of Nnedi Okorafor in order to situate *Binti* within the author's literary career and intellectual vision. It highlights her life, major works, recurring themes, and distinctive literary style, while also emphasizing her contribution to both Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. The chapter concludes with a review of critical studies on *Binti*, which helps identify the main scholarly perspectives on the novella and prepares the ground for the practical analysis developed in the following chapter.

1.1. Overview of African Diaspora and Migration

The term "African Diaspora" first appeared in the literature in the 1950s and has been broadly defined to include all global communities descended from the historic migrations of peoples from Africa since the 15th century. (Palmer, 1998, p 22–25). This delineates it from the pre-historic Out-of-Africa migrations that led to the peopling of the world. The African Diaspora has also been more narrowly defined to include only the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This narrower definition, which emphasizes the important roles that blackness, slavery, colonialism, racism, and geography played in sustaining the trans-Atlantic slave trade, is the reason why some refer to the "African Diaspora" as the "Black Diaspora" (Segal, 1995). The trans-Atlantic slave trade was the single largest immigration of Africans from the Old World to the New World. The first leg of the triangular trade involved ships from Europe carrying goods (*e.g.*, iron, brandy, weapons, and gunpowder) that were traded for slaves in Africa. The second leg, termed the Middle Passage, involved the shipment of between 12 and 14 million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. The last leg was the transportation of goods (*e.g.*, sugar, cotton, tobacco, rum, and molasses) from the Americas to Europe. (Rotimi et al., 2016)

Although the term African Diaspora seems relatively new, a number of twentieth century scholars utilized a diasporic framework to explain the commonalities among people of African descent around the world. By the twenty-first century, there are suggested rules of usage when engaging the explanatory paradigm. The field of inquiry and the tools of explanation continue to grow and African Diaspora adherents are slowly populating all of the 'traditional' disciplines of academe (Butler, 2000, p 128). Today there is a veritable cottage industry of African Diaspora theorists in the academy continually employing concepts and frameworks that add richness to our understanding of black life in different locales.

There are even interdisciplinary African Diaspora Studies programs located in several universities. Most of what has been theorized and analyzed utilizes an Afro-Atlantic model as the norm with slavery as the point of trauma and dispersal, although this norm has been expanded to

include modern-day African migrations and diasporas including black life via the Indian Ocean. The first task of any narrative analysis is to provide clarity to the concepts employed, and in diaspora scholarship, we must also define the community and individuals under investigation. (Morehouse, 2015)

Refers to the many peoples of African descent who live across the globe. For many of the people in this diaspora, their present place of residence is the result of forced migration due to historical events like the transatlantic slave trade or contemporary life-threatening events such as war or famine. Other reasons for migration include job opportunities, community finding, political exile, etc. (Margarita Lila Rosa, 2024)

The African diaspora has had a tremendous economic, political, and cultural influence in the Americas and around the world. In terms of economics, African diaspora members have done much to boost the financial well-being of both the countries in which they live and their native or ancestral homelands. In addition to being productive members of the societies in which they live and contributing to their countries' domestic economies, many people tied to the African diaspora also support the African countries from which they originated through the payment of special monetary gifts called remittances (Lasky, 2023).

Human resource and the brain drain This issue is of great concern to African countries since essential skills for development in the region have been lost worsening the already inadequate capacity to meet development challenges. Many parts of the African continent are currently affected by a shortage of qualified human resources, created in part by the large-scale departure of professionals and university graduates. Thousands of African professionals including medical doctors, nurses, accountants, engineers, managers and teachers leave their home country each year to pursue better prospects in other countries – both on and off the continent. While this movement may have some limited beneficial effects in certain locales, in developing countries this "brain drain" is a handicap for sustainable development. (African Union, 2006)

1. 1. 2 Colonialism, Postcolonial Africa, and Cultural Identity

Colonialism in Africa was not merely a system of political occupation or economic extraction; it also restructured how African peoples were classified, represented, and made to understand themselves. As Ghosh, Abdi, and Naseem observe, the "true identities" of colonized populations "were wilfully altered" to serve the imperial project (Ghosh, et al. 2008, p. 58). In the same vein, Aluko and Larey argue that colonialism "fundamentally constructed the African identity" by marginalizing indigenous cultures and replacing them with Eurocentric values, institutions, and languages (Aluko, O. O., & Larey, D. P. 2025, p 167). In this sense, colonialism did not simply dominate African territories; it intervened in the cultural foundations through which Africans defined belonging, memory, and selfhood.

The postcolonial condition inherited these disruptions rather than ending them completely. After formal independence, many African societies continued to operate through institutions shaped by colonial epistemologies, especially in education, administration, and language policy. Sangmor explains that colonial linguistic practices elevated European languages while degrading African ones, turning the colonial language into a marker of status and access (Sangmor, 2013). Likewise, Akakpo and Akakpo show that contemporary African universities often remain "contested cultural spaces" where Western norms, languages, and systems of knowledge continue to shape identity formation (Akakpo and Akakpo, 2025, p 528). Thus, postcolonial Africa often finds itself negotiating modern nationhood through frameworks that were historically imposed from outside.

At the same time, postcolonial African identity should not be understood as fixed or simply damaged. It is better described as dynamic, negotiated, and historically layered. Aluko and Larey note that identity formation in postcolonial Africa "is an aspect of hybridization" because colonial residues continue to interact with local traditions and cultural memory (Aluko and Larey, 2025, p. 168). Ghosh et al. similarly insist that cultural identities are not absolute; rather, they keep shifting within "the discourses of history and culture" (Ghosh et al. 2008, p. 57). This

means that postcolonial African identity emerges from tension: between imposed systems and indigenous continuity, between rupture and reclamation, and between the colonial archive and African cultural persistence.

Importantly, this process of identity formation is not limited to loss; it also includes resistance and reconstruction. Akakpo and Akakpo describe identity in contemporary West Africa as a "dynamic and relational construct" rooted in tradition while being continuously reimagined in the present (Akakpo and Akakpo, 2025, p 526). Their discussion of Ubuntu further suggests that cultural recovery in postcolonial Africa depends on re-centering indigenous ethics, communal belonging, and local systems of knowledge against inherited colonial hierarchies (Akakpo and Akakpo, 2025). Therefore, colonialism and postcoloniality must be read together: the first explains the violence of cultural displacement, while the second reveals the ongoing African struggle to reclaim, redefine, and rearticulate identity on its own terms.

1. 1. 3 African Traditions, Knowledge Systems, and Cultural Heritage

African traditions, knowledge systems, and cultural heritage should not be reduced to folklore or marginal survivals from the past. Rather, they constitute living systems of thought and practice that continue to shape African ways of knowing, learning, and relating to the environment. African indigenous knowledge is "experiential knowledge based on a worldview and a culture that is basically relational" (Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013, p. 1). In this sense, African cultural heritage is not confined to monuments or artifacts, but is embedded in collective memory, oral transmission, social values, and everyday practices. Indigenous knowledge systems are also "characteristically oral and passed on from generation to generation in the context of community living and activities" (Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013, p. 2), which makes them central to the preservation of African cultural continuity.

This heritage is also holistic in nature. African Indigenous Knowledge Systems are described as a system that "comprises knowledge, beliefs, practices, concepts, and value systems" and therefore should not be treated merely as an alternative epistemology, but as a

framework that can "guide the way of life and practices of the African people" (Olaitan, n.d., p. 1). The same source explains that the holistic character of African knowledge lies in the fact that it is rooted in community, preserved in oral tradition, and linked to collective memory, rituals, proverbs, and stories (Olaitan, n.d). Thus, African traditions and cultural heritage are inseparable from the knowledge systems through which communities interpret the world and organize social life.

Similarly, Matowanyika and Kaya emphasize that indigenous knowledge systems embody "articulations and traditions of African people collectively" and are "expressed in our languages and linguistic structures" (Matowanyika and Kaya, 2017, p. 6). They further argue that these systems are not peripheral residues, but "foundational and integral to our livelihoods" (Matowanyika and Kaya, 2017, p. 8). This is particularly important because African cultural heritage includes ethics, values, identity, cosmology, and shared histories, all of which structure the relationship between people, land, and community (Matowanyika and Kaya, 2017). Cultural heritage, therefore, is not static inheritance; it is an active reservoir of meanings, practices, and accumulated experiences that sustain African societies across generations.

Recent research also shows that these knowledge systems remain relevant in contemporary Africa. Bol and van Niekerk note that Africa is "endowed with cultural diversity and rich heritage" and possesses a wide range of indigenous knowledge systems spanning medicine, engineering, risk management, and economics (Bol and van Niekerk, 2024, p. 11). They also stress that embracing local knowledge systems does not only strengthen participation in decision-making, but also "promote identity, and preserve cultural heritage" (Bol and van Niekerk, 2024, p. 9). Therefore, African traditions, knowledge systems, and cultural heritage should be understood as living and adaptive resources that connect ancestral knowledge with present realities and future resilience.

1. 1. 4 Technology, Globalization, and African Identity

Technology and globalization have become decisive forces in the contemporary shaping of

African identity. They do not merely connect Africa to the wider world; they also transform how African peoples represent themselves, preserve their heritage, and negotiate belonging in modern society. In recent scholarship, globalization is presented as a process that can intensify cultural homogenization, marginalize indigenous knowledge, and weaken local languages and practices, while digital technologies simultaneously create new possibilities for cultural revival and intergenerational transmission (Malik and Farooq, n.d). In the same direction, Abunimye et al. argue that the increasing integration of Africa into a global system dominated by Western capitalist values has contributed to the erosion of Africa's cultural identity and heritage, with serious implications for sustainable development on the continent (Abunimye et al., 2025). Thus, technology and globalization must be understood as double-edged processes: they can displace African identities, but they can also provide new instruments for reclaiming them.

At the same time, technology has opened new spaces for African self-representation. Digital platforms such as social media, online archives, virtual museums, and language applications now allow African communities to document oral traditions, preserve indigenous languages, and circulate cultural narratives beyond national borders. Malik and Farooq emphasize that African youth have become central actors in this process by using digital platforms to revive storytelling, fashion, music, and local knowledge in ways that connect heritage with modern creativity (Malik and Farooq, n.d). In this sense, technology is not only a carrier of global influence; it is also a medium through which African identity is reimagined, performed, and defended in contemporary global spaces.

Yet the encounter between African identity and globalization is not always harmonious. Doku and Oppong Asante explain that globalization often leads individuals, especially young people, to develop a bicultural or hybrid identity, where one part of the self remains rooted in local culture while another is shaped by global culture. They also warn that this process can generate identity confusion when young people no longer feel fully at home in either sphere (Doku and Oppong Asante, 2011). From an African perspective, this is particularly significant

because identity is not only individual but also communal, language-based, and value-laden. When globalization disrupts inherited systems of belonging without providing stable alternatives, the result may be cultural disorientation rather than genuine cosmopolitanism.

For this reason, many African scholars argue that the issue is not whether Africa should reject globalization, but how it should engage it on its own terms. Kanu describes globalization as a contemporary threat to African identity when it functions as a new form of cultural domination and weakens Africa's capacity for self-definition (Kanu, 2013). Likewise, Ilodigwe insists that Africa must define its own priorities and interests if it is to benefit from globalization rather than become trapped in dependency and confusion (Ilodigwe, 2018). Therefore, technology and globalization should be approached critically: not as forces to be passively consumed, but as fields in which African societies must actively assert agency, protect cultural integrity, and shape modernity from within their own historical and civilizational frameworks.

1. 1. 5 The Concept of Diaspora in Contemporary Literature

In contemporary literature, diaspora is no longer restricted to its earlier association with the dispersal of the Jews; it has expanded to refer to communities that leave their native land, settle elsewhere, and continue to maintain emotional, cultural, or historical ties with the homeland (Dutt, 2025; Laxmiprasad, 2020). This conceptual expansion has made diaspora one of the major frameworks through which modern literature examines migration, exile, and the fractured condition of living across borders. As Mathur (2024) suggests, diaspora literature gives voice to individuals and communities who live between more than one world, where memory of origin and the pressures of settlement continually shape consciousness. In this way, contemporary literary representations of diaspora go beyond physical dispersal and present it as an ongoing emotional, cultural, and psychological condition.

Diaspora in contemporary literature is also closely connected to questions of displacement, identity, and belonging. Diasporic writers frequently portray characters who experience alienation, rootlessness, nostalgia, and cultural conflict while attempting to adapt to unfamiliar

environments (Maheswaran, 2022; Dutt, 2025). In this sense, diasporic literature becomes a narrative space where the migrant subject negotiates the tension between homeland and hostland, memory and present reality, inheritance and reinvention. Upadhyay (2024) similarly shows that contemporary fiction uses diaspora to explore not only the trauma of migration but also the emergence of hybrid identities in transnational contexts, revealing identity as a process of becoming rather than a fixed cultural essence.

Moreover, contemporary literature treats diaspora as a creative and critical mode of understanding the modern world. Rather than presenting migrants simply as displaced victims, diasporic writing often foregrounds resilience, plurality, and the capacity to produce new forms of selfhood and community from conditions of rupture. Begum (2018) notes that postcolonial diaspora writing focuses on both forced exile and voluntary migration while recognizing cultural hybridity and social inclusiveness. Likewise, Mathur (2024) argues that diaspora literature reshapes literary discourse itself by challenging fixed notions of nation, culture, and identity. Therefore, the concept of diaspora in contemporary literature refers not merely to movement away from a homeland, but to a dynamic literary consciousness shaped by memory, negotiation, loss, adaptation, and the continual search for belonging in an interconnected world.

1. 1. 5. 1 Cultural Hybridity and Diasporic Identity

Cultural hybridity is one of the central concepts through which contemporary literature explains diasporic identity. It refers not simply to the coexistence of two cultures, but to the emergence of a new in-between condition in which identity is continually negotiated, reworked, and redefined. In this sense, hybridity challenges the assumption that identity is pure, stable, or rooted in a single cultural origin. Rather, diasporic subjects often inhabit a space where inherited traditions and the pressures of the host culture interact to produce complex and layered selves (Hall, 1990; Bhabha, 1994, as cited in Francis, 2024). As Hall famously argues, cultural identity is not a fixed essence but "a matter of becoming as well as of being" (Hall, 1990, p. 225).

Within diaspora, this hybridity becomes especially visible because migrants and their descendants are rarely able to belong fully to either the homeland or the hostland. They often live in what postcolonial criticism describes as a "third space," a liminal zone where cultural meanings are translated, contested, and recreated. This condition may generate alienation and fragmentation, but it can also become a source of agency and creative self-fashioning. Recent studies emphasize that hybrid identity is not a simple fusion of two worlds; it is a dynamic and ongoing process of negotiation shaped by displacement, generational tension, memory, and social pressures (Gogul and Shanantha, 2025). Likewise, comparative work on multicultural fiction shows that hybridity functions not merely as a descriptive condition but as a productive mode of belonging and resistance in multicultural societies (Prashant and Inalli, 2026, pp. 436–438).

Diasporic literature repeatedly demonstrates that hybrid identity is formed through tension rather than harmony. Characters are often pulled between the expectations of family tradition and the desire for self-definition within the host society. In such narratives, the struggle for identity is inseparable from the search for belonging, since cultural difference is experienced both internally and socially. Studies on Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, for instance, show that second-generation immigrants frequently embody this tension as they negotiate between inherited Bengali values and American social life, especially through language, family dynamics, and generational conflict (Jahangir, Naeem, and Haqnawaz, 2024). Similarly, analyses of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* underline that hybridity produces fragmented yet evolving identities, shaped by migration, colonial memory, and multicultural social environments (Güven and Aldemir, 2025).

Therefore, cultural hybridity and diasporic identity are deeply interconnected. Hybridity is not merely a symptom of displacement; it is one of the principal ways through which diasporic individuals make sense of themselves in a world marked by migration, globalization, and cultural overlap. Contemporary diasporic writing shows that identity is neither wholly preserved nor

wholly assimilated. Instead, it emerges through ongoing acts of negotiation, adaptation, and reinterpretation, which make diasporic identity fluid, unstable, and yet potentially empowering (Allen and Gopinath, 2024; Upadhyay, 2024).

1. 1. 5. 2 Migration, Displacement, and Transnational Belonging

Migration in contemporary literature is not treated merely as geographical movement from one country to another; it is represented as a profound human condition marked by rupture, uncertainty, memory, and continual self-reconstruction. Contemporary Anglophone fiction repeatedly shows that migration reshapes not only the migrant's physical location but also emotional life, social ties, and cultural identity (Upadhyay, 2024). In this sense, displacement becomes one of the most powerful consequences of migration, because it disrupts the individual's relation to home, language, familiarity, and belonging. As recent criticism emphasizes, diasporic narratives do not simply describe movement; they interrogate the trauma, dislocation, and re-rooting that define migrant existence in a globalized world (Upadhyay, 2024).

Displacement, however, is not only a condition of loss. It also produces new forms of consciousness and affiliation. In diaspora studies, displacement is understood as a state in which individuals are separated from familiar social and cultural coordinates and compelled to negotiate life across different spaces at once. This condition often generates feelings of unbelonging, but it also opens the possibility of reimagining identity and community beyond the limits of a single homeland (Mathur, 2024). Van Hear similarly argues that migration and displacement are paradoxical processes because they may be both disintegrative and integrative at the same time: they unsettle old forms of attachment, yet they may also generate wider and more complex forms of connection across borders (Van Hear, 1994). Thus, contemporary literature frequently presents displacement not as a closed rupture, but as an unstable field in which loss and renewal coexist.

From this perspective, transnational belonging emerges as one of the defining responses to migration and displacement. Rather than being attached exclusively to either the homeland or the

hostland, migrants often sustain multiple belongings at once through memory, care, communication, mobility, and imagination. Svensson shows that for displaced populations, especially refugees, transnational belonging is sustained through family networks, affective ties, and practices of care that continue across borders despite separation, instability, and interrupted mobility (Svensson, 2025). In other words, belonging is no longer reducible to territorial proximity; it is maintained dialogically through relations, obligations, and emotional exchanges that connect people to those who remain elsewhere (Svensson, 2025). This understanding is especially useful in literary analysis, where many migrant characters remain psychologically and emotionally present in more than one place at the same time.

Recent scholarship also broadens this idea by showing that transnational belonging is not always rooted in a single fixed home. Gubrium and Colomer argue that migrants may negotiate belonging "on the move," across multiple sites, through memories of origin, routines in the present, and continuing transnational ties (Gubrium and Colomer, 2025, pp. 1–4). Their analysis suggests that belonging may be attached not only to places, but also to movement itself, to recurring journeys, and to the embodied and affective practices through which migrants connect past, present, and future. This helps explain why contemporary literature so often depicts home not as a stable location to which one simply returns, but as a shifting network of attachments distributed across countries, relationships, and memories. Diasporic characters are therefore not always "homeless"; rather, they inhabit forms of belonging that are mobile, layered, and transnational.

At the same time, transnational belonging is shaped by unequal political and social conditions. Verstappen's work on remittance-receiving regions demonstrates that internal displacement and segregation can alter the very geography of belonging, forcing migrants to redirect their ties, investments, and acts of care away from villages of origin toward new locations that feel safer or more viable (Verstappen, 2024). This insight is important for literature because it shows that belonging is not only emotional but also materially grounded: where

migrants can belong is often determined by violence, exclusion, and power. Consequently, contemporary diasporic writing portrays transnational belonging as a fragile, negotiated condition shaped by both attachment and disruption, by longing and practical survival, and by the continuing effort to create home across fractured spaces.

1.2 Theoretical Background

1.2.1 Science Fiction, Afrofuturism, and Africanfuturism

Science fiction has provided one of the most productive formal spaces for Black speculative thought because it allows writers and artists to rethink time, technology, race, and historical possibility at once. In Afrofuturist discourse, the term itself emerged in the early 1990s when Mark Dery used it for Black speculative production engaging African American themes and technoculture, a genealogy later revisited by Alondra Nelson, who broadened the frame to include Black cultural production concerned with "culture, technology and things to come" (Nelson, 2002; Nelson, 2002). Ytasha Womack further clarifies that Afrofuturism is not simply a subgenre of science fiction but "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation," combining speculative fiction with cultural memory, historical revision, and Black self-representation (Womack, 2013, p. 19). In this sense, science fiction is not merely a backdrop for Afrofuturism; it is the narrative laboratory through which Black futures become thinkable and narratable.

Afrofuturism also functions as cultural and political resistance because it contests the long history through which Blackness has been excluded from modernity, technological agency, and the future itself. Nelson shows that Afrofuturist thinking arose partly as a response to technocultural models that imagined the future as raceless while silently preserving racial hierarchy; her formulation explicitly relocates Black diasporic experience within debates about digital culture, access, and futurity (Nelson, 2002). Womack likewise argues that Afrofuturist artists use literature, visual art, music, and grassroots organizing to redefine Black identity for

the present and the future, and she stresses that this imaginative work "activate[s] liberation" by freeing Black identity from inherited stereotypes and deterministic historical scripts (Womack, 2013, pp. 19-21, 26). Thus, Afrofuturism is resistant not only because it criticizes oppression, but because it produces alternative epistemologies, aesthetics, and futures in which Black people become agents rather than objects of history.

Africanfuturism, while related to Afrofuturism, reorients the speculative lens by placing Africa—not the West, and not even primarily the diaspora—at the interpretive center. In *Africanfuturism: An Anthology*, Wole Talabi explains that the original framing of Afrofuturism emerged from an African American context and therefore did not always adequately name speculative work rooted directly in African histories, philosophies, and futures (Talabi, 2020). Nnedi Okorafor responds to this problem by defining Africanfuturism as a subcategory of science fiction that is "more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view," does not privilege or center the West, and remains fundamentally anchored in Africa even when it branches outward into the global Black diaspora (Okorafor, 2020, pp. 8-10). Her distinction is theoretically important because it does not reject Black connectedness across the diaspora; rather, it insists that African-centered futurist imaginaries require their own conceptual vocabulary and critical autonomy.

Taken together, science fiction, Afrofuturism, and Africanfuturism form an interconnected but non-identical theoretical field. Afrofuturism generally foregrounds Black diasporic engagements with technology, memory, and liberation, while Africanfuturism insists on futures generated from African locations, cosmologies, and epistemologies; both, however, use speculative form to disrupt colonial temporalities and to imagine worlds beyond racial subordination (Womack, 2013; Okorafor, 2020). The theoretical value of studying them together lies in recognizing that Black speculative writing does not offer a single model of futurity: it offers multiple routes toward freedom, some diasporic, some continental, all invested in reclaiming narrative power over the future. For a theoretical background chapter, this distinction

is crucial because it prevents the reduction of all Black speculative production to one category and allows a more precise reading of how texts imagine liberation, belonging, and historical transformation.

1.2.1.1 Definition and Origins of Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is generally defined as a Black speculative mode that links race, technology, imagination, and futurity. The term was coined by Mark Dery in 1993 in "Black to the Future," where he defined it as "speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture" and, more broadly, as Black signification that appropriates technological imagery and a prosthetically enhanced future (Dery, 1993, p. 736, as cited in Lavender, 2019, pp. 13–14). Later formulations widened that early definition. Ytasha Womack, for example, describes Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation," while also presenting it as a way of imagining possible futures through a Black cultural lens (Womack, 2013, p. 9). Taken together, these formulations show that Afrofuturism is not only a literary category within science fiction, but also an intellectual and cultural framework for rethinking Black existence across time.

The origins of Afrofuturism as a named concept lie in the cultural debates of the early 1990s, but its artistic and philosophical roots are older. Alondra Nelson notes that Dery coined the term in 1993, yet she also stresses that the currents composing Afrofuturism existed long before the word itself was introduced (Nelson, 2002). This distinction is important because it separates the moment of terminology from the longer history of Black speculative practice. In other words, Afrofuturism was named in the 1990s, but its underlying concerns—modernity, displacement, technological mediation, survival, and future-making—had already been present in Black literature, music, visual culture, and political imagination for decades.

Scholars therefore often describe Afrofuturism as both a recent critical label and a much older historical formation. Isiah Lavender III argues that Dery's coinage provided an influential reference point for discussing race, science, and technology, yet he also insists that the foundations of Afrofuturism as "a literary genre, a cultural aesthetic, and a philosophy" predate the 1993 neologism and extend back much earlier in African American expressive history (Lavender, 2019, pp. 13–14). Nelson similarly frames Afrofuturism as a field in which Black voices have "other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come," thereby emphasizing that its emergence answered a representational gap in mainstream futurist discourse, where Black subjects were often excluded from the future or reduced to its victims (Nelson, 2002; Lavender, 2019). The origin of Afrofuturism, then, should be understood not as a sudden invention, but as the critical recognition of a longer Black speculative archive.

A further dimension of Afrofuturism's origin lies in its response to historical trauma and temporal exclusion. Kodwo Eshun argues that Afrofuturism does more than insert Black figures into science fiction; rather, it reworks history, alienation, and the experience of the Black Atlantic through speculative forms, using science fiction as an allegorical resource for the systemic experience of post-slavery Black subjects (Eshun, 2003). In this sense, Afrofuturism emerged because Black cultural production required a language capable of connecting memory and futurity, slavery and technoculture, estrangement and possibility. Its origins are therefore both historical and epistemological: historical because they are rooted in Black modern experience, and epistemological because they generate new ways of knowing the past and imagining the future beyond the limits imposed by racial oppression (Womack, 2013).

1.2.1.2 Afrofuturism as Cultural and Political Resistance

Afrofuturism can be understood as a cultural and political practice of resistance because it refuses the historical exclusion of Black people from dominant narratives of modernity, science, and the future. Alondra Nelson argues that Afrofuturism emerged as a way of bringing African diasporic experience into conversations about technology and futurity that had often ignored or

marginalized Black subjects, while Ytasha Womack defines it as an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation (Nelson, 2002; Womack, 2013). From this perspective, Afrofuturism does not simply add Black characters to science fiction; it challenges the assumption that Blackness belongs only to the past or to histories of suffering. Instead, it asserts Black presence in the future as an act of epistemic and cultural resistance.

Its resistant force is also aesthetic and historical. A recent Cambridge overview of the field explains that Afrofuturism is held together by "the politics of time" and by the idea of "race as technology," showing how Afrofuturist texts revise official histories, disrupt linear narratives of progress, and defamiliarize established ways of reading race (Wanzo, 2023, pp. 81–95). In other words, Afrofuturism resists not only racial domination in the present, but also the temporal structures that confine Black people to slavery, colonialism, or perpetual crisis. By breaking and reordering time, Afrofuturist writing opens a political space in which alternative Black pasts, presents, and futures can be imagined.

Kodwo Eshun deepens this political dimension by showing that Afrofuturism works as a critical response to the conditions produced by slavery, colonialism, and the Black Atlantic. For Eshun, Afrofuturism is valuable because it uses speculative forms to process historical trauma while also creating new conceptual resources for Black subjectivity and futurity (Eshun, 2003). This means that Afrofuturism resists oppression at two levels simultaneously: first, by exposing the violent structures that shaped Black modern experience; and second, by refusing to let those structures determine the limits of Black possibility. In that sense, Afrofuturism is political not only because it criticizes domination, but because it invents languages of survival, transformation, and collective freedom.

Afrofuturism therefore functions as resistance through representation, world-building, and liberationist imagination. Studies of Black popular culture and Black speculative thought repeatedly emphasize that racism and white supremacy have overdetermined Black futurity, which is precisely why Afrofuturist cultural production matters: it creates new symbolic worlds

in which Black life is not peripheral but foundational (David, 2007; Toliver, 2021). As a theoretical framework, then, Afrofuturism should be read as both cultural resistance because it transforms art, music, literature, and digital expression into sites of Black self-definition, and political resistance; because it contests the structures that deny Black communities the authority to imagine and claim liberated futures.

1.2.1.3. Africanfuturism and the Reimagining of African Futures

Africanfuturism reimagines African futures by shifting the center of speculative thought from the West to Africa itself. Nnedi Okorafor defines it as a mode that is "more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view" and emphasizes that it does not "privilege or center the West" (Okorafor, 2020, pp. 8–10). This distinction is theoretically decisive because it changes not only the setting of speculative fiction, but also its epistemic grounding: the future is imagined through African histories, African cosmologies, and African priorities rather than through inherited Euro-American models of development, progress, or technological modernity. In that sense, Africanfuturism is not merely a regional variation of science fiction; it is a conceptual framework for imagining futures generated from African locations of knowledge.

Wole Talabi develops this point by explaining that Africanfuturism gives critics and readers "a clearer signpost" for understanding the work of African authors who write not just from Africa or in Africa, but fundamentally about Africa (Talabi, 2020, pp. 6–7). For Talabi, Africanfuturist stories foreground African experiences, hopes, fears, sciences, philosophies, and adaptations to technology, thereby making Africa the source rather than the afterthought of future-oriented imagination (Talabi, 2020). As a result, the reimagining of African futures in Africanfuturism involves more than projecting advanced technology onto African settings; it involves re-centering African intellectual traditions and affirming that African societies can generate their own modernities, speculative horizons, and models of transformation.

Africanfuturism also reimagines the future by challenging deficit narratives about Africa as a continent trapped in crisis, dependency, or belatedness. Arit Oku argues that Africanfuturist literature enables readers to envision "alternative pathways for Africa's post-crisis development and economic prosperity," while also portraying a technologically advanced Africa that has overcome many of its present challenges (Oku, 2022, 75). She further notes that Africanfuturism can recast the historical past and bend chronological time so that Africa is no longer represented only through war, famine, violence, or colonial aftermath, but through possibility, innovation, and agency (Oku, 2022). In this way, Africanfuturism becomes a literary form of reconstruction: it revises the stories told about Africa and replaces narratives of lack with narratives of futurity.

A final strength of Africanfuturism is that it imagines African futures without severing them from Indigenous knowledge, land, memory, and cultural continuity. Janet Seow shows that in Okorafor's *Binti*, Africanfuturism integrates technoscience with traditional African ways of knowing, thereby presenting a technologically advanced future that still retains African cultural identity rather than erasing it (Seow, 2022). This synthesis is central to the reimagining of African futures, because it rejects the colonial assumption that progress requires cultural disinheritance. Instead, Africanfuturism proposes that African futures can be modern, scientific, interstellar, and innovative while remaining deeply connected to local histories, languages, spiritualities, and communal knowledge systems. The future, therefore, is not imagined as Africa becoming less African, but as Africa becoming more fully itself on its own terms (Seow, 2022; Okorafor, 2020).

1.2.2. Digital Diasporas and Cultural Connectivity

Digital diasporas refer to the communicative formations that emerge when migration, transnationalism, and diaspora intersect with ICTs, social media, and Web 2.0. Kerstin B. Andersson notes that the field developed from the late 1990s onward as scholars began to examine how migrants use digital media to sustain relations across borders, and she treats "digital diaspora" as an umbrella term for these new configurations rather than a single fixed

model (Andersson, 2019, pp. 143–145). In that framework, digital diasporas are not simply online communities; they are mediated transnational social fields in which communication, exchange, and belonging are continuously reproduced through the internet and related technologies (Andersson, 2019).

Within Black studies, digital connectivity has been especially important because it challenges the assumption that Blackness is external to technology or excluded from futurity. Alondra Nelson argues that Black cultural producers have "other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come," and her introduction to *Afrofuturism* explicitly contests the older fantasy of a raceless digital future by insisting that race remains central to technoculture (Nelson, 2002, pp. 1, 9, 14). In parallel, Kvasny and Hales show that online forums used by people of African descent became spaces for debating ethnicity, heritage, terminology, pride, and mixed belonging, demonstrating that digital media do not erase Black identity but actively reshape its transnational articulation (Kvasny & Hales, 2009).

Digital networks also intensify cultural connectivity by enabling what migration scholars describe as connected presence, ICT-based copresence, and long-distance sociality. Andersson's review shows that ICTs help dispersed families maintain affective bonds across distance, while social media and mobile devices support identity construction, cultural reproduction, and everyday meaning-making among migrants (Andersson, 2019). She further emphasizes that digital diasporic spaces are formed at the intersection of online and offline life and of local and global contexts, allowing users to build community ties and ways of belonging that are simultaneously rooted and transnational (Andersson, 2019).

For a theoretical background, then, digital diasporas and cultural connectivity should be understood as more than technical phenomena: they are cultural infrastructures through which dispersed communities preserve ties, negotiate identity, and circulate memory, symbols, and political feeling. This is especially clear in Black and African diasporic contexts, where digital platforms can function as communication spaces, diasporic contact zones, and resources for

belonging across borders (Mainsah, 2014). The theoretical value of this concept lies in showing that diaspora in the digital age is not defined only by displacement, but also by the capacity to create sustained cultural presence and collective connection through networked media.

1.2.2.1 The Concept of Digital Diaspora

The concept of digital diaspora refers to diasporic formations that are created, maintained, or transformed through digital media such as the internet, social media, and information and communication technologies. Andersson (2019) explains that the term does not have one single rigid definition in the literature; rather, it functions as an umbrella concept covering the intersection of migration studies and new media studies. In this sense, digital diaspora includes online communication, identity formation, cultural reproduction, and transnational community building among dispersed populations. This broad understanding is important because it shows that diaspora in the digital era is not limited to physical displacement, but also involves technologically mediated forms of connection and belonging.

A central feature of the concept is that it connects diaspora to digitally mediated belonging rather than to geography alone. Andersson (2019) notes that digital technologies enable migrants and diasporic communities to maintain everyday contact, emotional ties, and symbolic attachments across borders. As a result, diaspora is no longer understood only through homeland attachment in the classical sense, but also through continuous online interaction, networked participation, and the circulation of memory and identity. This means that digital diaspora captures how dispersed groups remain socially and culturally connected despite territorial separation.

Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff's work is especially important in consolidating the term. Cambridge University Press summarizes her argument by stating that digital diasporas involve immigrants and diasporic communities who continue to use the internet to sustain ties with their countries of origin, while also improving quality of life in host societies and contributing to homeland development (Brinkerhoff, 2009, as summarized by Cambridge University Press).

This makes the concept analytically significant because it does not describe online presence only; it also describes a form of transnational engagement and agency through which diasporic communities act collectively across borders.

More recent scholarship has refined the concept by stressing that digital diaspora should be seen as a relational and layered formation. Ponzanesi (2020) argues that digital diaspora operates on several levels at once: it is internet-specific, network-oriented, and embedded in wider social practices and historical contexts. In parallel, Laguerre's formulation of "digital diaspora" as a model of highly digitalized transnational networking among migrants reinforces the idea that the concept refers to more than virtual communication alone; it includes political, cultural, and social forms of diasporic organization as well (Laguerre, 2010, as cited in Andersson, 2019, p. 145). Therefore, the concept of digital diaspora is best understood as a theoretical tool for explaining how migrants and diasporic communities construct identity, sustain affiliation, and participate in transnational cultural life through digital connectivity.

1.2.2.2 Technology and Global Black Identity

Technology has become central to the making of global Black identity not because it simply "connects" dispersed populations, but because Black communities have long used, adapted, and re-signified technological systems in ways that contest racial hierarchies. Eglash and Bleecker argue that the Black diaspora should not be seen as a passive recipient of modern information technologies; rather, traditions of coding, computation, and technological appropriation have actively shaped identity, access to power, and forms of resistance across diasporic communities (Eglash & Bleecker, 2001, p. 353). In this sense, technology is not external to Black identity; it is one of the media through which Blackness is historically negotiated and politically articulated.

Digital media also intensifies the transnational character of Black identity by enabling cultural and political belonging across borders. Georgiou explains that diasporic groups use media not only for communication but also to make claims, mobilize identities, and sustain

connections that are simultaneously local, national, and transnational (Georgiou, 2013). This is especially important for globally dispersed Black communities, whose identities are often formed through multiple publics at once: homeland narratives, host-country institutions, and networked diasporic exchanges. As a result, Black identity in the digital age is less a fixed essence than a mediated, multi-sited process of belonging and representation (Georgiou, 2013).

Recent research on young Africans in the diaspora shows that technology and media consumption significantly shape how Black identities are constructed, defended, and revised. Mukhongo, Mano, and Chuma find that young Africans in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France negotiate their identities within "liminal spaces," where mainstream representations of Africa remain distorted, yet digital technologies provide access to alternative narratives and new self-definitions (Mukhongo et al., 2023, p. 233). Their findings further show that social media has become a key arena for challenging stereotypes, amplifying African voices, and reconstructing identity, while family, language, music, and diasporic networks continue to anchor belonging to Africa within a broader global Black experience.

A particularly influential framework for understanding this relation between technology and global Black identity is Afrofuturism. Kadiri defines Afrofuturism as an aesthetic and philosophical formation centered on technology, diaspora, Blackness, and speculative temporalities, emphasizing that it reimagines both the future and the past in response to structural racism. What makes this especially relevant is that Afrofuturism does not treat technology as neutral; it treats it as a contested field in which exclusion can be reproduced, but also one in which Black communities can reclaim narrative authority, collective memory, and inclusive technological futures. Thus, technology shapes global Black identity not only by linking dispersed people, but by offering intellectual, cultural, and political tools for imagining Black existence beyond inherited limits (Kadiri, 2021).

1.2.2.3 Digital Networks and Cultural Exchange

Digital networks have transformed cultural exchange by allowing dispersed communities

to sustain everyday contact, circulate symbols, and co-produce meaning across borders. Rather than functioning only as technical channels, these networks operate as social spaces in which diasporic experiences and transnational identities are continuously constructed and negotiated. In this sense, digital communication reshapes public space itself, because migrants and minorities use online environments to create new forms of belonging and interaction that exceed national boundaries (Marino, 2015; Ponzanesi, 2020).

A major consequence of this shift is that cultural exchange is no longer limited to formal institutions or physical mobility. Digital networks enable routine exchanges of language, memory, media, rituals, and political discussion, making transnational interaction more immediate and more participatory. As Georgiou notes, media, telephony, and digital technologies have altered communication practices so profoundly that they now allow daily and extensive exchanges across borders, reinforcing the relationship between mediation, identity, and diasporic space (Georgiou, 2010). Likewise, broader cultural analysis has shown that digital networks are central to the contemporary "networked society," where cultural circulation increasingly depends on communication infrastructures and interconnected media systems (Cvjetičanin, 2011, p. 295).

Digital networks also deepen cultural exchange by creating conditions for knowledge-sharing, skill circulation, and collaborative participation among diasporic communities. Reports on global diasporas in the digital era emphasize that online conferences, websites, and transnational digital communities help participants share expertise and practices while strengthening cross-cultural exchange in concrete ways (iDiaspora, 2021). In parallel, scholarship on migration and digital connectivity indicates that once online ties are established, digital networks reduce the social costs of distance, reinforce mutual support, and become a key driver of sustained transnational interaction (Pelrez Alegria, 2025). Together, these dynamics show that digital networks do not merely preserve culture; they actively expand the circulation of ideas between origin and host contexts.

At the same time, digital cultural exchange is not a neutral or frictionless process. It often produces hybrid identities, contested representations, and unequal visibility, especially when global platforms privilege certain voices over others. Yet even under these constraints, diasporic users continue to adapt digital media creatively, challenging dominant narratives and generating alternative cultural publics. Research on everyday diasporic media use shows that digital platforms and formats can contest hegemonic forms of "old" media representation, opening space for more plural and self-defined expressions of identity and culture (Tran, 2017). Therefore, digital networks should be understood not simply as tools of communication, but as infrastructures through which cultural exchange is intensified, negotiated, and reimagined on a global scale.

1.2.3 Cosmic Freedom in Afrofuturist Thought

Cosmic freedom in Afrofuturist thought refers to a radical reimagining of Black existence beyond the confinements of racial history, colonial modernity, and the limits imposed by dominant Western narratives. Afrofuturism was famously defined by Alondra Nelson as the space of "African American voices" telling "other stories" about culture, technology, and the future, which means that freedom is not framed only in political or territorial terms, but also in imaginative and epistemic ones (Nelson, 2002, p. 9). In this framework, the cosmic is not a decorative science-fiction motif; it is a language for reclaiming futurity for people historically excluded from it, and for asserting that Black life belongs fully to tomorrow.

This is why cosmic freedom in Afrofuturism is deeply chronopolitical. Kodwo Eshun argues that Afrofuturism works by recovering "counter-futures" created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection and by building conceptual tools for intervention in the present (Eshun, 2003, p. 302). He also explains that Afrofuturist temporal strategies disturb the linear model of progress that had relegated Black subjects to "prehistory," replacing it with competing futures that infiltrate the present (Eshun, 2003, p. 297). Cosmic freedom, then, is not merely escape from

Earth; it is a refusal of the historical timetable that positioned Blackness outside modernity, and a demand to inhabit time, history, and futurity on emancipated terms.

The figure who most powerfully dramatizes this idea is Sun Ra, for whom outer space became both a metaphor and a political horizon of liberation. As Georgios Manoudakis shows, Afrofuturism projects Black people "into the future of humanity" through references to space, aliens, and altered history, thereby resisting a world that often imagines the future as implicitly non-Black (Manoudakis, 2024, p. 224). In Sun Ra's artistic universe, Black people have "equal rights to claim tomorrow,"(229) and his cosmic mythology offers an "alternative, liberating and universal viewpoint"(230) that does not deny oppression but exposes its absurdity by imagining life otherwise. Here, cosmic freedom means the right to belong to the universe symbolically, philosophically, and politically, rather than remaining trapped within the violent categories of race on Earth.

More broadly, cosmic freedom in Afrofuturist thought joins speculative imagination to collective survival and world-making. Madhu Dubey notes that Afrofuturist works invent revisionist histories, shatter consensus narratives about the present, and challenge prevailing discourses of futurity, while also rethinking race through technology and speculative form (Dubey, 2023). In that sense, the cosmic is not a flight from reality but a method of transforming it: by imagining Black futures in space, Afrofuturism contests the assumption that Black existence is bound only to trauma, lack, or belatedness. Cosmic freedom therefore names a mode of thought in which Blackness is no longer treated as history's remainder, but as a force capable of generating new worlds, new temporalities, and new horizons of human freedom.

1.2.3.1 Space and the Symbolism of Freedom in Science Fiction

In science fiction, space frequently functions as more than a physical setting; it becomes a symbolic arena where writers test the limits of human possibility, social order, and emancipation. Gwyneth Jones argues that the imagined setting in science fiction is often "a major character" in its own right, which means that planets, starships, and cosmic landscapes do ideological work

rather than serving as neutral backgrounds (Jones, 2003, p. 163). Because these settings are constructed as "other worlds," they allow authors to project desires for mobility, autonomy, and reinvention onto environments seemingly freed from the constraints of ordinary terrestrial life (Jones, 2003, p. 164). In that sense, outer space in science fiction often symbolizes freedom by making estrangement itself productive: distance from Earth permits a rethinking of power, identity, and future social arrangements.

Yet the symbolism of freedom attached to space is historically ambivalent. Contemporary scholarship on space imaginaries shows that outer space is often framed as a "frontier," a metaphor that evokes liberty, adventure, and expansion, but also carries the legacy of conquest and settler colonialism. Anna Szolucha notes that the frontier image gives space a "pioneer spirit and a sense of freedom," while simultaneously remaining entangled with violent colonial histories and social injustice (Szolucha, 2024, pp. 87–88). This duality matters for science fiction because many narratives celebrate cosmic departure as liberation from earthly limits, even as they reproduce imperial fantasies of claiming, settling, or mastering supposedly empty worlds. Thus, space symbolizes freedom in science fiction not simply as escape, but as a contested freedom that can either challenge domination or repeat it on a larger scale.

Within Afrofuturist and Black speculative traditions, this symbolism is deliberately reworked. Ytasha Womack explains that Afrofuturism seeks to "create our own space in the future" and to reclaim imagination from histories that excluded Black people from dominant visions of tomorrow (Womack, 2013, p. 16). She further shows that Black science-fictional uses of space challenge the cultural assumption that people of African descent have no place in the future, turning cosmic imagery into a language of visibility, dignity, and self-definition (Womack, 2013). In this context, space symbolizes freedom because it becomes a site where racial confinement is suspended and where new identities can be imagined beyond inherited structures of exclusion.

A similar point appears in recent literary scholarship on outer space and Black thought. A Cambridge chapter on *Space Is the Place* argues that alternative narratives use outer space as a metaphor to oppose anti-Blackness and to move away from the conventional model of "discovering" or conquering new worlds toward a deeper process of reimagining reality itself ("Other/World(ly)," 2025, p. 289). Alondra Nelson likewise defines Afrofuturism through "sci-fi imagery, futurist themes, and technological innovation" that generate original narratives of identity and futurity, while Kodwo Eshun emphasizes that Afrofuturism recovers "counter-futures" for people historically denied full entry into modern time (Nelson, 2002, p.9; Eshun, 2003, p. 287). Accordingly, the symbolism of space in science fiction reaches its richest form when it is not merely the promise of leaving Earth, but the imaginative right to inhabit freedom, time, and the future on new terms.

1.2.3.2 Cosmic Freedom as Escape from Historical Oppression

Cosmic freedom in Afrofuturist thought can be understood as a symbolic and intellectual escape from the historical structures that confined Black life to slavery, colonialism, and racial exclusion. Rather than imagining freedom only as legal emancipation, Afrofuturism reclaims the future itself as a space from which Black subjects had long been excluded. Alondra Nelson defines Afrofuturism as a field in which "African American voices" tell "other stories" about culture, technology, and things to come, showing that speculative imagination becomes a method for refusing historical erasure and inventing alternative futures beyond oppression (Nelson, 2002, p. 9). In this sense, cosmic freedom is not mere fantasy; it is a counter-historical practice that repositions Blackness within futurity rather than outside it.

Kodwo Eshun develops this idea by arguing that Afrofuturism recovers "histories of counter-futures" within a century marked by racial hostility, and by disrupting the linear model of progress that condemned Black subjects to "prehistory" (Eshun, 2003, p. 297–298). He further explains that these revisionist futurisms generate "competing futures" that infiltrate the present and revise the temporal logics through which Black people were historically denied full modern

subjecthood (Eshun, 2003, p. 298). Cosmic freedom, therefore, signifies escape not only from material oppression but also from oppressive historical time itself: it is a way of refusing the timeline in which Black existence is defined chiefly through suffering, belatedness, or exclusion.

This logic is vividly embodied in Sun Ra's Afrofuturist cosmology, where outer space functions as a liberating alternative to the "American post-colonial identity" imposed by segregationist society. As Manoudakis shows, Sun Ra used ancient Egypt, myth, and outer space to construct a lore that "liberated him" from oppressive social categories, while his astro-black mythology transported Blackness beyond the mundane confines of racist America (Manoudakis, 2024, p. 229). Most importantly, this cosmic turn is presented as a refusal of oppressive history itself: Sun Ra's project sought not simply to resist oppression, but to overcome it by imagining a different destiny, one in which Black people possess "equal rights to claim tomorrow" and belong to the future of humanity.

A broader critical implication of cosmic freedom is that it reframes emancipation as access to future time, space, and possibility. Rasheedah Phillips shows that Black communities have historically been subjected not only to spatial segregation but also to "temporal oppression," whereby racist institutions denied them agency over the past, present, and future (Phillips, 2022, p. 17). From this perspective, Afrofuturist cosmic imagination becomes a tool for restoring access to what oppression tried to foreclose: the right to imagine, inhabit, and shape liberated futures. Thus, cosmic freedom as escape from historical oppression does not erase history; it works through history's violence in order to produce new temporalities and new worlds in which Black existence is no longer trapped by inherited systems of domination.

1.2.3.3 Afrofuturist Visions of Liberation Beyond Earth

Afrofuturist visions of liberation beyond Earth imagine outer space not as a neutral frontier, but as a symbolic and political realm where Black existence can be rethought outside the constraints of slavery, colonialism, and racial exclusion. Alondra Nelson defines Afrofuturism as African American voices with "other stories to tell about culture, technology and

things to come" (Nelson, 2002, p. 9). This means that futurity itself becomes part of the struggle over representation: Black communities are not merely inserted into ready-made futures, but produce alternative futures of their own. In this framework, leaving Earth becomes a way of contesting the historical denial of Black belonging in dominant narratives of progress and modernity.

This liberatory vision is especially clear in Kodwo Eshun's account of Afrofuturism as a project concerned with recovering "counter-futures" in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection (Eshun, 2003, p. 301). Eshun's argument suggests that Afrofuturism challenges the temporal order that casts Black people as belated, primitive, or outside modern history. Visions of life beyond Earth therefore signify more than science-fictional adventure: they express a refusal of the historical timeline that confines Blackness to trauma and subordination, and they open conceptual space for Black self-determination on planetary and cosmic scales.

Ytasha Womack likewise presents Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (Womack, 2013, p. 9). Her definition shows that speculative narratives allow Black subjects to imagine themselves as agents of knowledge, invention, and destiny rather than as objects of history. In this sense, visions beyond Earth are not simply escapist; they are transformative because they create a symbolic space where inherited racial limits can be suspended and new identities can be imagined.

The case of Sun Ra makes this logic particularly explicit. Georgios Manoudakis argues that Afrofuturism can project Black individuals "into the future of humanity," especially through references to space, aliens, and alternative histories (Manoudakis, 2024, p. 224). Daniel Kreiss similarly explains that Sun Ra used technological artifacts and metaphors to create a "mythic consciousness" of technologically empowered racial identity, enabling Black people to imagine utopian societies on outer-space landscapes (Kreiss, 2008, p. 59). These visions of liberation beyond Earth therefore join symbolism with politics: they reject oppressive histories, create safe imaginative ground for marginalized voices, and affirm that Black futures need not remain

bounded by earthly systems of domination.

1.3. Biographical Background

1.3.1 Nnedi Okorafor's Life, Works, Themes, and Literary Style

Nnedi Okorafor is a Nigerian American writer whose biographical trajectory is closely tied to her literary development. Born in Cincinnati in 1974, she grew up between American and Nigerian cultural worlds, and this dual inheritance became foundational to her imagination and authorial identity. A severe scoliosis diagnosis in adolescence, followed by surgery at nineteen that temporarily left her paralyzed from the waist down, marked a decisive turning point: writing emerged out of bodily crisis and recovery, and later became the center of her creative life. This background helps explain why her fiction repeatedly returns to transformation, survival, identity, and the remaking of selfhood under pressure (Vána, 2022 ; Okorafor, 2020).

Her body of work spans children's fantasy, young adult fiction, science fiction, speculative fiction, and adult novels, with several texts now considered central to contemporary African speculative writing. Among her most discussed works are *What Sunny Saw in the Flames / Akata Witch*, which explores identity and difference through a young albino Nigerian heroine; *Lagoon*, which reimagines Lagos through first-contact science fiction; *Binti*, which places an African girl at the center of interstellar knowledge and futurity; and *Who Fears Death* together with *The Book of Phoenix*, both of which engage dystopia, gender, violence, and alternative African futures (Drab, 2021, pp. 129–130; Aiyetoro & Olaoye, 2016, p. 227; Seow, 2022, p. 49; Kwanya, 2022, pp. 224–226).

Thematically, Okorafor's fiction is consistently concerned with reclaiming African-centered futurity, challenging racial and gender hierarchies, and imagining worlds in which Black and African subjects are not marginal but constitutive of the future. Critics have shown that her narratives often dismantle stereotypical images of Black girlhood, foreground strong female protagonists, and contest patriarchal or colonial structures through speculative

worldbuilding. Her texts also return to questions of identity, alterity, empowerment, and cultural continuity, especially through characters who must negotiate difference, exclusion, and power while remaining rooted in African histories and epistemologies (Seow, 2022; Oku, 2021; Kwanya, 2022).

In terms of literary style, Okorafor is distinguished by her fusion of science fiction with African mythology, indigenous spirituality, magical elements, and non-Western systems of knowledge. She has explicitly defined her work as "Africanfuturism," a mode rooted first in Africa, attentive to technology and futurity, yet not centered on the West; she also associates her fantasy with "Africanjujuism," which acknowledges African spiritual and cosmological realities within the imaginative form (Okorafor, 2020, pp. 8–10). Critics further describe her artistry as a convergence of technoscience and Indigenous African knowledge, as well as a blending of magical and science-fictional materials that produces a distinctly African speculative aesthetic and a recognizable narrative voice built on myth, orality, and inventive worldbuilding.

1.3.2 Okorafor's Contribution to Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism

Nnedi Okorafor's most decisive contribution was to redefine the conceptual map of Black speculative writing by coining Africanfuturism as a category distinct from, though related to, Afrofuturism. In her own formulation, Africanfuturism is "more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view," does not center the West, and remains primarily grounded in Africa even when it branches into the wider Black diaspora (Okorafor, 2020, p. 8). This intervention mattered because it corrected the recurrent misreading of her fiction through frameworks built mainly around African American historical experience, and it gave African-centered speculative writing a clearer theoretical and aesthetic identity.

Her contribution to Afrofuturism is equally important because her novels expand and pressure the term from within. Scholarship on *Lagoon* argues that Okorafor challenges the assumption that science fiction must remain conceptually Western or that Afrofuturist thought can be read only through Americentric paradigms; instead, she recasts futurity from an African-

utopian and anti-neoimperial perspective (O'Connell, 2016). In that sense, Okorafor does not reject Afrofuturism outright; rather, she compels critics to recognize that Black futurity includes multiple geographies, histories, and epistemologies, with Africa functioning not as a backdrop but as a generator of speculative possibility.

Through works such as *Binti*, Okorafor gave Africanfuturism one of its clearest literary forms by combining technoscience with Indigenous African knowledge systems. Seow notes that *Binti* uses Africanfuturism to reclaim futurity and personhood for Black girlhood, while also showing how Okorafor bridges African and European cultural frameworks through a narrative where advanced technology and traditional ways of knowing coexist rather than oppose one another (Seow, 2022). Likewise, Alexander argues that Okorafor centers African perspectives, delinks from Western models, and "places Africa into the centre of knowledge," thereby granting Africa an active place in the future instead of confining it to ethnographic or colonial time (Alexander, 2023, pp. 1, 7–8).

Okorafor's broader legacy lies in making speculative fiction a decolonial and counter-hegemonic space for rethinking gender, power, race, and technological modernity. Oku shows that her fiction overturns gender stereotypes, reworks gender-power relations, and imagines technologically advanced African futures that depart from the continent's familiar global stereotypes (Oku, 2021). For that reason, Okorafor's contribution is not merely literary but paradigmatic: she helped move Black speculative discourse from a largely diasporic-centered Afrofuturist frame toward an explicitly Africa-rooted Africanfuturist one, while still preserving a dialogue between the two traditions (Oku, 2021; Alexander, 2023).

1.3.3 Critical Studies on Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti*

Critical studies on *Binti* have largely converged around the idea that Okorafor uses speculative fiction to reimagine Black girlhood, futurity, and personhood. Janet Rosemarie Seow argues that the novella reconstructs the figure of the young Black female beyond stereotypical depictions of inferiority, hypersexualization, and intellectual limitation, presenting Binti instead

as a mathematically gifted, culturally grounded, future-oriented protagonist. Seow further shows that the text uses Africanfuturism to retain Indigenous African cultures within a technologically advanced world, thereby challenging normalized Western assumptions about childhood and the future (Seow, 2022).

A second major critical line reads *Binti* as a decolonial intervention in speculative fiction. Josephine Olufunmilayo Alexander contends that Okorafor deliberately recenters African perspectives and "delinks" from Eurocentric models of science fiction by placing the Himba people, African history, and African systems of knowledge at the heart of the trilogy. In this reading, *Binti* is not simply a space narrative; it is a literary project that brings Africa "into the centre of knowledge" and attributes to it an active place in the future rather than a marginal position in relation to Western modernity (Alexander, 2023, pp. 1–2, 6–7). This approach has made the text especially important in postcolonial and decolonial literary criticism.

Another influential strand of criticism focuses on ecology, cosmopolitanism, and posthuman relationality in the *Binti* series. Dustin Crowley argues that the trilogy consistently blurs boundaries between human and nonhuman, technological and spiritual, local and global, producing what he calls "r/evolutionary cosmopolitan ecologies." For Crowley, the series does not imagine coexistence as a simple harmony; instead, it represents multispecies and cross-cultural relations as dynamic, tense, and transformative. This reading is important because it shows that *Binti* expands African speculative fiction beyond identity politics alone and into broader questions of ecology, interdependence, and posthuman ethics (Crowley, 2019, pp. 237–256).

A fourth important area of criticism examines Okorafor's challenge to the epistemological dominance of Western science in science fiction. Bettina Burger argues that the *Binti* trilogy brings together mathematics, spirituality, indigenous knowledge, and interspecies communication in ways that unsettle conventional Western genre hierarchies and assumptions about what counts as valid knowledge in science fiction (Burger, 2020). Taken together, these

critical studies show that *Binti* has attracted sustained scholarly attention not only as a successful novella, but as a foundational Africanfuturist text; one that reimagines Black girlhood, decolonizes futurity, rethinks human and nonhuman relations, and revises the epistemic boundaries of speculative fiction itself (Seow, 2022; Alexander, 2023; Crowley, 2019; Burger, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the theoretical part of this dissertation has established the essential historical, conceptual, and biographical foundations for understanding Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* within contemporary African speculative literature. It has shown that African literature today increasingly engages with questions of identity, migration, belonging, and cultural memory through new imaginative modes such as Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. It has also clarified that diaspora is no longer limited to physical displacement, but now extends to digital and transnational forms of connection shaped by technology and virtual networks. In this context, the concepts of digital diaspora and cosmic freedom become especially significant, since they offer new ways of thinking about mobility, self-definition, resistance, and the possibility of imagining alternative futures beyond colonial and historical constraints.

At the same time, the chapter has demonstrated that *Binti* is particularly suitable for this kind of analysis because it brings together all these dimensions in a single narrative centered on movement, transformation, and negotiation between tradition and futurity. The biographical background of Nnedi Okorafor, together with the critical studies on her work, confirms her important contribution to Africanfuturist thought and to the re-centering of African perspectives in speculative fiction. Therefore, the theoretical framework developed in this chapter provides a solid basis for the next part of the dissertation, which will focus on the practical analysis of *Binti* in order to examine how the novella represents digital diasporas and cosmic freedom as interconnected modes of reimagining African identity in a global, technological, and interstellar age.

CHAPTER TWO:

Digital Diasporas and Cosmic Freedom in Nnedi

Okorafor's *Binti*

Chapter Two: Digital Diasporas and Cosmic Freedom in Nnedi Okorafor's

Binti

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Introduction

This chapter moves from the theoretical background to the practical analysis of Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti*, with a particular focus on the ways the novella represents identity, migration, technology, and liberation. As a work of African speculative fiction, *Binti* offers a rich narrative space in which cultural belonging is not fixed but constantly negotiated through movement, encounter, and transformation. The protagonist's journey from her Himba homeland to the interstellar university of Oomza Uni allows the text to explore how African identity can be preserved, challenged, and reimaged within futuristic and transnational contexts. For this reason, *Binti* is especially relevant to the study of digital diasporas and cosmic freedom, since it connects cultural memory and rootedness with mobility, technology, and the possibility of new futures.

The chapter first examines digital diasporas and cultural identity in the novella, showing how Binti's displacement reflects both separation from home and the continuation of cultural ties across distance. It then analyzes cosmic freedom and the journey beyond Earth as a symbolic and material movement toward liberation, self-discovery, and expanded possibility. The discussion also addresses the tension between tradition and technology, demonstrating that the text does not treat them as opposites, but rather as interconnected forces shaping Binti's experience. In addition, the chapter studies alien encounters and the reimagining of otherness, particularly through the relationship between Binti and the Meduse, in order to show how the novella questions fear, difference, and exclusion. Finally, it explores female agency and the transformation of identity, emphasizing how Binti emerges as an active subject who negotiates multiple worlds and develops a new sense of self. Through these interrelated dimensions, this chapter aims to show that *Binti* reimagines African identity as dynamic, hybrid, and capable of creating new forms of belonging in a global and interstellar age.

2.1 Digital Diasporas and Cultural Identity in Binti

The tension between cultural belonging and cosmic transformation appears clearly when Binti describes herself as divided between her Himba origins and her new Meduse identity.

In "At Home," Binti's return to her homeland reveals the tension between diaspora, cultural identity, hybridity, belonging, memory, and transformation. Although she comes back as a Himba girl, her journey beyond Earth has changed her body, emotions, and self-understanding. This section shows that home is no longer a simple place of return; it becomes a space where Binti must confront the conflict between who she was, who she has become, and where she now belongs. "For a moment, I was two people—a Himba girl who knew her history very very well and a Himba girl who'd left Earth and become part-Meduse in space. The dissonance left me breathless" (Okorafor, 2019, p43).

Binti's statement "I was two people" (Okorafor, 2019, p43) reveals the deep conflict she experiences after returning home. She remains attached to her Himba roots, her family history, and the traditions that shaped her, yet she is no longer the same girl who left Earth. Her journey into space and her connection with the Meduse have changed her physically and emotionally. This does not mean that Binti has lost her identity; rather, she now carries more than one identity at the same time. The passage shows that diaspora is not only about leaving a place, but also about returning changed and trying to understand where one belongs.

This quote is one of the strongest expressions of Binti's cultural conflict because it does not present identity as a simple choice between tradition and change. Binti does not abandon her Himba identity, yet she can no longer return to being only the girl she was before leaving Earth. Her statement reveals a form of double consciousness created by diaspora: she remains connected to her past, but she is also shaped by the new future she has entered. This makes Binti a powerful Afrofuturist character, since her cultural identity survives movement, contact, and transformation. It becomes wounded and unsettled, but it is not erased.

Within Cultural Studies, Binti's divided identity supports Stuart Hall's view that cultural identity is not fixed, but is a matter of both "being" and "becoming." Hall argues that cultural identities come from history, but they are also transformed by time, culture, and power (Hall, 1990, p. 225). This applies directly to Binti: she remains connected to Himba history, yet her encounter with space and the Meduse forces her to become something new. Her identity is therefore not a pure return to origin, but a continuous process of transformation.

Through the lens of postcolonial hybridity, Binti's condition of being "two people" can be read through Homi Bhabha's idea of the Third Space, where identity is produced between fixed cultural positions rather than inside one pure origin (Bhabha, 1994, p. 55). Binti is not simply Himba or Meduse; she occupies an in-between space where both identities interact. This hybridity does not erase her origin; instead, it creates a new identity that challenges binary divisions such as human/alien, home/space, and tradition/future.

In Afrofuturist terms, the passage shows how African cultural identity can be projected into technological and cosmic futures. Womack defines Afrofuturism as a field that connects Black culture, imagination, technology, the future, and liberation (Womack, 2013). Binti's Himba identity does not disappear in space; instead, it travels into space and becomes part of a new futuristic identity. This supports the idea that Afrofuturism does not separate tradition from the future; it carries cultural memory into speculative worlds.

Regarding Afrofuturist female identity, Hashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan argue that Binti explores voice, identity, independence, and empowerment, especially through a Black female protagonist whose identity is shaped in a technological future (Hashemi et al., 2022). This supports the reading of Binti as a character whose transformation is not only cultural but also gendered: she becomes a young African woman negotiating her place in a universe that challenges both her inherited traditions and her new cosmic existence.

This sense of cultural distance appears clearly when Dele reacts to Binti's transformation and describes her as too complex and stranger than before.

In "The Root," Binti's return home shows that transformation does not only affect her inner identity, but also changes the way others see her. After leaving Earth and becoming connected to the Meduse, Binti is no longer understood in the same way by her community. Her hybridity creates emotional distance, even with people who once knew her closely. This passage reveals how diaspora, cultural change, and personal growth can make the return home painful and uncertain. "You're too complex, Binti," he said. "That's why I stayed away. You're my best friend. You are. And I miss you. But, you're too complex. And look at you; you're even stranger now." (Okorafor, 2019, p49)

Dele's words reveal the social cost of Binti's transformation. When he says, "You're too complex,"; he is not only talking about her personality; he is reacting to the new identity she carries after her journey beyond Earth. Binti is still Himba, but she is also changed by space, by the Meduse, and by experiences that her community cannot fully understand. The word "stranger" shows that her return does not bring her back to her old place in society. Instead, it exposes the gap between who she was before leaving and who she has become.

Within Cultural Studies, Dele's discomfort can be understood through Stuart Hall's theory that identity is not fixed. Hall writes that cultural identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). This supports the idea that Binti's identity is not destroyed by leaving home; rather, it becomes transformed through movement, history, and encounter. Dele wants the old Binti, but Hall's view helps explain why the old Binti cannot simply return unchanged.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Binti occupies what Homi Bhabha calls an in-between space. Bhabha writes that the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" opens the possibility of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). This idea fits Binti because she is no longer only Himba and not only Meduse; she exists between categories. Dele calls this "too complex," but Bhabha's theory allows us to read this complexity as a productive hybrid space rather than a failure of identity.

Seen through Posthuman Studies, Dele's phrase "even stranger now"(Okorafor, 2019, p49) reveals how Binti's body has become a site of new identity. Wilby argues that Binti is a "multi-scalar assemblage" whose identities are nested within themselves, and that her mutations are "complex processes of becoming" (Wilby, 2021, p. 118). This supports the idea that Binti's part-Meduse body does not erase her Himba self; instead, it adds another layer to her identity. Her strangeness becomes a sign of posthuman becoming, where the human self is expanded through contact with nonhuman life.

In Afrofuturist feminist terms, Binti's complexity is part of her empowerment. Hashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan (2022) argue that the core concerns of Black feminist identity include the search for "voice, identity and independence" (p.85). They also state that self-definition and self-determination are forms of power for Black women. This supports the reading that Binti's transformation is not merely alienation; it is also the formation of a new female self who refuses to remain limited by tribal, gendered, or planetary expectations.

This connection between cultural memory and transformation appears clearly when Binti uses otjize to feel like herself again, even though it is now made from material taken from another planet.

In "Night Masquerade," Binti's relationship with otjize shows how cultural identity can survive movement, distance, and change. Otjize is not presented only as a cosmetic practice, but as a ritual that connects Binti to her Himba roots, her body, and her sense of belonging. However, because her otjize is now made with clay from another planet, the tradition itself becomes transformed. This passage reveals that Binti's identity is no longer attached only to her homeland; it travels with her and changes through her cosmic experience. "I needed to remove it all and reapply. I'd feel more myself... my current batch of otjize was made with clay from another planet." (Okorafor, 2019, p50)

Binti's need to "remove it all and reapply" shows that otjize helps her recover her sense of self. The act of applying it is connected to memory, tradition, and the body. It allows her to feel

Himba again, even after the changes she has experienced in space. Yet the phrase "made with clay from another planet"(50) . Complicates this feeling. The otjize still gives her cultural comfort, but it is no longer made from the soil of her home. This shows that her identity remains rooted in Himba tradition, while also being reshaped by her life beyond Earth.

Drawing on Postcolonial Hybridity, the passage shows that Binti exists in an in-between cultural space. Bhabha describes hybridity as an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). Binti's otjize is exactly such a hybrid object: it belongs to Himba tradition, but it is recreated from alien clay. Therefore, the passage does not present identity as pure or stable; it presents identity as something negotiated between origin and transformation.

In Afrofuturist terms, the passage shows how African tradition can enter the future without disappearing. Nasser states that, through otjize, Okorafor shows that "African culture can be reimagined with futuristic technology" (Nasser, 2021, p. 174). This directly supports the idea that Binti's otjize is not a backward-looking symbol; it becomes part of a futuristic African identity that travels beyond Earth while still preserving cultural memory.

2.2. Cosmic Freedom and the Journey Beyond Earth

This search for freedom beyond inherited limits appears clearly when Binti remembers that leaving Earth was her own choice, even though it exposed her to danger, loss, and transformation.

In "Aliens," Binti's journey beyond Earth is presented as more than a physical movement from one place to another. It becomes a personal decision through which she rejects the fixed path expected by her family and community. Although she was chosen to become her community's next harmonizer, Binti decides to leave Earth and study at Oomza Uni. This choice shows her desire for knowledge, independence, and self-discovery. However, the passage also reveals that cosmic freedom is not simple or safe; it brings fear, pain, and the risk of death.

"I was seventeen years old, the second youngest girl in my family, who'd been tapped to be my community's next harmonizer. I'd instead chosen to leave Earth and go to Oomza Uni and nearly died for my choice. I'd lived and then learned, so much. To engage with the zinariya was to overwhelm all my senses. In the distance, I saw a yawning black tunnel swallowing the soft light of the setting sun." (Okorafor, 2019, p73).

Binti's statement "I'd instead chosen to leave Earth and go to Oomza Uni" highlights the importance of choice in her journey. She is not simply escaping home; she is actively choosing another future for herself. This decision separates her from the traditional role prepared for her as a Himba girl and as a future harmonizer. Her journey therefore becomes an act of resistance against limitation. By leaving Earth, Binti opens herself to a wider universe where she can learn, grow, and define herself beyond the expectations of her community.

In Afrofuturist terms, Binti's journey into space represents a search for freedom through technology, imagination, and the future. Mark Dery introduced Afrofuturism as a way of thinking about Black experience through science fiction, technology, and speculative futures, while Ytasha Womack defines it as an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation (Dery, 1994; Womack, 2013). In this sense, Binti's departure from Earth is not only an educational journey; it is also an Afrofuturist act of self-liberation. She enters a cosmic space where she can imagine a life beyond the limits imposed by her family, gender, and community.

Through the concept of Black futurity, space in Binti is not simply a dangerous unknown place; it becomes a field where the future can be rewritten. Alondra Nelson explains that Afrofuturism connects African diasporic experience with technology and new media, challenging the idea that Black identity belongs only to the past. This supports the reading of Binti's journey as a movement toward a new future. When Binti says that she "lived and then learned," her survival becomes part of this future-making process: she does not only escape tradition, but transforms it through knowledge, risk, and cosmic experience.

Regarding Afrofuturist female identity, Binti's journey beyond Earth also represents a young Black woman's struggle for voice, independence, and empowerment. Hashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan argue that Okorafor's Binti trilogy explores voice, identity formation, independence of thought, and empowerment through Afrofuturism (Hashemi et al., 2022, pp. 84–89). This supports the idea that Binti's choice to leave Earth is not selfish or accidental; it is a necessary step in her self-definition. By choosing Oomza Uni instead of the traditional role prepared for her, Binti claims the right to imagine a future for herself.

This movement toward cosmic freedom appears clearly when New Fish reaches deep space and approaches Saturn's ring, turning the journey beyond Earth into a symbol of adventure, openness, and liberation.

In "*Space Is the Place*," the journey into space is presented as more than a movement from one planet to another. It becomes a moment where the characters face the vastness of the universe and the emotional meaning of leaving familiar worlds behind. New Fish, as a young living ship, represents the desire to move freely across cosmic space. Her excitement contrasts with Mwinyi's sadness and hesitation, showing that space can be both frightening and liberating. Under the title "Cosmic Freedom and the Journey Beyond Earth," this passage shows that the cosmic journey is connected to freedom, discovery, and the possibility of becoming something beyond earthly limits.

"Nevertheless, when the equivalent of three days had passed and New Fish excitedly told Mwinyi that they were approaching Saturn's ring in an hour, it was time to face reality.

It's time, New Fish excitedly rumbled. New Fish was a young living ship, a creature born to travel far and fast, and she was in space for the first time. How could he blame her for feeling free and adventurous?" (Okorafor, 2019, p100)

The phrase "hovering in deep space" gives the scene a strong symbolic meaning. Deep space becomes a place of suspension, waiting, and transition. The characters are no longer

attached to Earth, but they have not yet fully reached their destination. This in-between position reflects the larger meaning of Binti's journey beyond Earth: freedom is not simply arrival, but movement through uncertainty. New Fish's excitement also gives space a positive meaning. She is described as "born to travel far and fast," which makes her body and identity naturally connected to movement, speed, and openness.

In Afrofuturist terms, this passage reflects the way space can become a field of imagination, technology, and liberation. Ytasha Womack defines Afrofuturism as an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation, which supports the reading of New Fish as more than a vehicle: she is a living technological being through which freedom becomes possible (Womack, 2013). New Fish's excitement in deep space therefore represents the Afrofuturist dream of movement beyond historical and earthly limits.

Within the narrative logic of the Binti trilogy, New Fish is significant because she connects survival, movement, and rebirth. Critical studies on Binti note that the later movement toward Saturn and Oomza University is linked to New Fish and to Binti's transformed identity as part Himba, part Meduse, part Enyi Zinariya, and part New Fish. This supports the idea that space is not only a setting in the trilogy, but a symbolic zone where identity expands through contact with other beings, technologies, and worlds.

This moment of cosmic liberation appears clearly when Binti enters open space and discovers that her transformed body can survive beyond Earthly limits.

In "Stones of Saturn," Binti's experience in space becomes more than a journey through Saturn's ring. It is a moment of physical, emotional, and existential transformation. She is no longer only a girl who travels in a ship; she becomes capable of existing in open space itself. The words "weightless," (Okorafor, 2019, p107) "flying," and "infinite blackness"(Okorafor, 2019, p104) create a strong image of freedom from gravity, Earth, and bodily limitation. Under the title "Cosmic Freedom and the Journey Beyond Earth," this passage shows that Binti's movement

beyond Earth is not only geographical, but also a transformation of identity, body, and possibility.

"Then I was in space!

Infinite blackness.

Weightless. Flying.

Falling a bit.

Catching myself.

Then flying again.

I wanted to scream and laugh; I had become something more again. This time, I was so changed that I could fly through space without dying. I could live in open space." (Okorafor, 2019, p107).

Binti's words "I had become something more again" show that space is not only a setting, but a force that reveals her transformation. She does not simply observe the universe from a distance; she enters it with her body and survives within it. The phrase "I could live in open space" (107) is especially important because it marks a complete break from ordinary human limitation. Binti's body has changed so deeply that the universe no longer appears only as danger, but as a possible home. Her freedom is therefore cosmic because it exceeds the limits of Earth, gravity, and the human body.

From an Afrofuturist perspective, this passage supports Ytasha Womack's definition of Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (Womack, 2013, p. 9). Binti's ability to live in open space brings together all these elements: imagination, because her body enters a reality beyond ordinary human possibility; technology, through her connection with New Fish and the cosmic system around her; the future, because her

identity belongs to a new form of existence; and liberation, because she becomes free from Earthly and bodily limits.

From the perspective of Black futurity, Binti's transformation also reflects Alondra Nelson's idea that Afrofuturist works create "original narratives of identity, technology, and the future" (Nelson, 2002). This applies directly to Binti because her experience in space rewrites identity through technology, embodiment, and cosmic movement. She does not leave culture behind; instead, she carries her history into a new technological and planetary future. Her flight through open space therefore becomes a new narrative of identity, where the Black female body is not excluded from the future but placed at its center.

From the angle of Africanfuturism, this scene can also be read through Okorafor's own distinction between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. The Library of Congress explains that Okorafor's Africanfuturism is future-focused writing "directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point of view" (Library of Congress, 2024, para. 4). This supports the reading of Binti's cosmic freedom as African-rooted rather than culturally empty. Even when she flies through open space, Binti remains connected to her Himba identity, her mathematical gift, and her African-centered worldview.

From the perspective of Afrofuturist female identity, Hashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan argue that the central features of Okorafor's Binti trilogy include "voice, identity, independence of thought and empowerment" (Hashemi et al., 2022, p. 84). This supports the idea that Binti's ability to live in open space is not only a physical change, but also a sign of empowerment. Her transformation allows her to claim a new voice and a new place in the universe. She becomes a young Black woman whose identity is no longer confined to the expectations of home, community, or even ordinary human existence.

2.3. Negotiating Tradition and Technology in Binti

This negotiation between tradition and technology appears clearly in the description of the Root, where an old Himba family house becomes both a cultural inheritance and a technologically advanced living space.

In "The Root," Binti's family house represents the deep connection between ancestry, women's inheritance, land, and technological life. The house is not described as a simple traditional home; it is a space where heritage and innovation exist together. Its age, stone structure, connection to women, and rootedness in Osemba show its cultural importance. At the same time, its solar power, embedded grids, and bioluminescent plants show that technology is part of Himba life rather than something foreign to it. This passage therefore shows that in Binti, tradition and technology are not opposed; they are blended into the same cultural world.

"My family's house has been called "the Root" for over a hundred and fifty years. It's been in our family for longer than the existence of its name. One of the first homes built in the Himba village of Osemba, the Root was made entirely of stone. Even the bioluminescent plants growing on the outside walls and the roof were generations old. The house was passed down through the women, and my mother—being the oldest daughter in her family and the only one born with the gift of mathematical sight—had been the clear inheritor of it when her mother passed. (Okorafor, 2019, p 46)

The description of the Root shows that technology in Binti is not separated from culture. The house is old, inherited, and deeply connected to family memory, yet it is also solar-powered and biologically alive through the plants growing on it. The phrase "its grids so well embedded into the sides and roof of the house" is especially important because it shows that technology is not added superficially to Himba culture; it is built into the body of the house itself. The Root therefore becomes a symbol of cultural continuity through technological adaptation.

Viewed through Africanfuturism, the Root reflects Nnedi Okorafor's own idea that Africanfuturism is future-oriented but directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology, and point of view. This applies clearly to the Root because the house combines an African-centered cultural inheritance with advanced ecological and solar technology. The Root is not a Western model of progress imposed on Himba society; it is a Himba form of futurity created from within the culture itself.

Ytasha Womack's definition of Afrofuturism offers an additional framework for understanding the Root, particularly as a space where imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (Womack, 2013, p. 9). The Root brings these elements together: imagination appears in the house being described almost like a living creature; technology appears in solar grids and bioluminescent plants; the future appears in its self-sustaining design; and liberation appears in the refusal to treat African tradition as backward or anti-technological.

Chowdhury's reading of the Binti trilogy reinforces this interpretation by arguing that Okorafor's trilogy challenges stereotypes that present the Himba as primitive or without science. Instead, Binti presents the Himba as scholars, mathematicians, and technologically advanced people (Chowdhury, 2022). This supports the reading of the Root as a cultural and technological space at the same time. The house proves that Himba tradition is not outside modernity; it has its own form of scientific and technological intelligence.

This negotiation between tradition and technology appears clearly when Binti discovers that the edan is not only a mysterious object, but Zinariya technology connected to hidden ancestry and cultural memory.

In "The Ariya," technology is presented as something deeply connected to heritage, secrecy, and identity. Binti first understands the edan as a strange ancient object, but Ariya reveals that it belongs to the Zinariya and carries a history that Binti did not fully know. This means that technology in Binti is not separate from culture; it is part of a forgotten genealogy

and a hidden community. The passage shows that Binti's relationship with technology is also a relationship with ancestry, memory, and self-recognition.

"It means 'gold.' That's the name we gave them because we couldn't speak their true name with our mouths and because that is what they were made of. Gold. Golden people. Their bodies, their ship, everything about them was gold. They came to the desert because they needed to rest and refuel and they loved the color of the sand . . . gold. Your edan is Zinariya technology; I knew this when I met you. I just thought, since it allowed you to find it, you could solve it without . . . without—", "Needing to be activated." She nodded. "No one who was not one of us has ever known about the zinariya and those who marry out or leave, they're so ashamed of being Enyi Zinariya that they don't tell their families.". (Okorafor, 2019, p 49)

Ariya's statement, "Your edan is Zinariya technology," changes the meaning of the object completely. The edan is no longer only a tool, a relic, or a scientific device; it becomes evidence of a hidden cultural inheritance. The fact that only the Enyi Zinariya know about it shows that technology is protected through secrecy and memory. Binti's discovery therefore forces her to understand that her identity is larger than what she previously believed. She is Himba, but she is also connected to the Enyi Zinariya and their technological history.

Viewed through Africanfuturism, this passage strongly reflects Okorafor's own definition of Africanfuturism as a future-oriented mode that is rooted in African culture, history, mythology, and point of view. The edan is technological, but its meaning comes from the Enyi Zinariya's history and from Binti's African-centered world. This supports the idea that Binti does not present technology as a Western or external force; rather, it imagines technology as something that can emerge from African memory, land, and lineage.

Ytasha Womack's concept of Afrofuturism also helps explain, the edan also fits Ytasha Womack's understanding of Afrofuturism as a field that brings together imagination, technology, the future, and liberation (Womack, 2013). In this passage, technology opens a hidden future for Binti, but it also reveals a buried past. The edan allows her to move beyond the limits of what she knows about herself, making technology a tool of both discovery and empowerment.

Grimbeek's Binti-focused reading further supports this interpretation, since she describes the edan as an apparently obsolete technological object that enables Binti to resist the Meduse attack and communicate with them (Grimbeek, 2022). This supports the reading of the edan as more than a passive object. It is a technological mediator between peoples, histories, and identities. In "The Ariya," this mediation becomes even deeper because Binti learns that the edan also connects her to the Enyi Zinariya and to a hidden inheritance that she must now confront.

This negotiation between tradition, body, and technology appears clearly when Dr. Tuka explains Binti's transformation through both Himba cultural values and scientific knowledge.

In "Medical," Binti's identity crisis becomes directly connected to her transformed body. The medical examination reveals that she is no longer only Himba in a biological sense; she is also connected to the Meduse, New Fish, and the Enyi Zinariya. However, Dr. Tuka does not describe this transformation as a loss of identity. Instead, she explains it through a cultural comparison with Himba marriage and family belonging. This passage therefore shows that technology and biological change do not simply destroy tradition; they force Binti to reinterpret what belonging, family, and humanity mean.

"Binti," Dr. Tuka said. "In your tribe a woman marries a man, and in doing so, marries his family, correct?"

"Yes," I whispered. "She marries a man chosen by her family and herself, who will provide for and protect her and nourish her being."

"Yes." "This is the path to respect among the Himba. I read up on them before seeing you. So see it this way: You're paired with New Fish and Okwu, each of whom has a family. Your family is bigger than any Himba girl's ever was. And twice, you were supposed to die. And here you stand healthy and strong . . ." She chuckled and then added, "And strange. There is no person like you at this school." (Okorafor, 2019, p 112).

Dr. Tuka's explanation is important because she translates Binti's technological and biological transformation into a language of culture. Instead of treating Binti's bond with New Fish and Okwu as only a scientific abnormality, she compares it to the Himba idea of marriage, family, protection, and social respect. This helps Binti see that her new condition does not necessarily remove her from her tradition. Rather, it expands the meaning of family beyond the human and beyond the Himba community.

This passage also shows that Binti's body has become a place where tradition and technology meet. Her connection with New Fish and Okwu is biological, emotional, and technological at the same time. She is changed by alien contact, microbial transformation, and scientific reality, yet Dr. Tuka insists that she is still "healthy and strong." (112) The final word "strange" does not simply mean abnormal; it shows that Binti now occupies a new form of existence that cannot be explained through old categories alone. Under the title "Negotiating Tradition and Technology in Binti," this moment presents Binti as a character who must accept that her identity is no longer pure, fixed, or simple, but expanded through contact with other beings and technologies.

Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity helps explain this passage because Binti's identity is not fixed, but shaped through history, transformation, and becoming. Hall argues that cultural identity belongs to the future as much as to the past and that it is a matter of both "being" and "becoming" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). This applies directly to Binti because she remains Himba, yet

her body and future are transformed by Meduse DNA, New Fish microbes, and her link to Okwu and New Fish. Her identity is therefore not destroyed; it becomes a living process of negotiation.

Through a posthuman reading, Binti's transformed body can be understood through Donna Haraway's idea of the cyborg as a hybrid figure that breaks the separation between organism and machine, nature and technology. Haraway describes the cyborg as a "hybrid of machine and organism," a figure that joins imagination and material reality (Haraway, 1991, p. 150). Although Binti is not a machine in a simple sense, her body becomes posthuman because it is shaped by alien biology, living technology, and nonhuman bonds. This makes her transformation more than medical; it becomes a challenge to the idea that identity must remain purely human or biologically stable.

Okorafor's Africanfuturist vision also appears in this scene because Africanfuturism is future-oriented while remaining rooted in African culture, history, mythology, and point of view. Dr. Tuka's explanation does exactly this: she uses Himba cultural logic to explain a futuristic biological and technological condition. Binti's transformation is not presented as Westernized science replacing African tradition; instead, African tradition becomes the framework through which technological transformation can be understood.

Afrofuturist female identity gives another important meaning to this scene. Hashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan argue that Okorafor's Binti trilogy centers on voice, identity, independence of thought, and empowerment (Hashemi et al., 2022). This supports the reading of the medical scene as a moment of painful but necessary self-definition. Binti is afraid because her body and future no longer fit the expectations of her community, but the scene also gives her a new way to understand herself. She becomes a young African woman whose identity is not limited by tradition alone, nor erased by technology, but formed through both.

2.4. Alien Encounters and the Reimagining of Otherness

This reimagining of otherness appears clearly when Kande first encounters the Zinariya and moves from fear of the non-human body toward the beginning of recognition and communication.

In "Aliens," the encounter with the Zinariya presents otherness as something strange, frightening, and difficult to understand at first sight. Kande sees them as "not human at all," which shows the immediate distance between the human self and the alien other. However, the passage does not reduce the Zinariya to monsters or enemies. Instead, it shows that this encounter will shape the destiny of an entire people. Their acceptance of the human name "Zinariya" also suggests that otherness can be transformed through naming, contact, and mutual recognition.

"They were a house away before she even moved. And by then, she was sure they'd seen her. Tall, like human palm trees and not human at all. And even in the moonlight, she saw that they were gold. Pure shiny gold. Not human at all. But with legs. Arms. Bodies. Long and thin. Walking slowly toward her in the night. There wasn't another soul silly enough to be outside at this time of night. Just her." (Okorafor, 2019, p 71)

The repeated phrase "not human at all" shows that Kande's first reaction is based on difference. She understands the Zinariya first through what they are not: they are not human, not familiar, and not part of her ordinary world. Yet the description also gives them beauty and presence through the image of gold. They are strange, but they are not presented only as terrifying. Their golden bodies create a sense of wonder, which makes the encounter more complex than a simple scene of fear.

This passage is important because it changes the meaning of the alien encounter. The Zinariya are not only outsiders arriving from another world; they become part of human history through contact with Kande and her people. The fact that they accept the name "Zinariya" given by humans shows the beginning of a relationship based on naming and recognition. Under the title "Alien Encounters and the Reimagining of Otherness," this moment suggests that the alien other is not fixed as an enemy. Otherness can become a space of dialogue, exchange, and shared destiny.

Edward Said's critique of binary thinking helps explain this scene because Kande first understands the Zinariya through the opposition between self and other. Said explains that dominant discourses often create identity by separating "self" from "other," especially through fixed distinctions between familiar and unfamiliar worlds (Said, 1978, pp. 2–3). Kande's repeated thought that the Zinariya are "not human at all" reflects this first stage of othering. However, Okorafor's scene moves beyond that binary because the aliens are not kept as silent objects of fear. They enter history, accept a human-given name, and become connected to the destiny of Kande's people.

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and cultural negotiation also helps explain the importance of naming in this passage. Bhabha argues that identity is produced in spaces of negotiation rather than inside fixed cultural positions (Bhabha, 1994). The name "Zinariya" becomes such a space of negotiation: it is given by humans, accepted by aliens, and then becomes part of a shared history. This means that the encounter does not preserve a strict separation between human and alien; it creates a new relational space where both sides begin to recognize each other.

A posthuman reading through Donna Haraway's notion of "significant otherness" adds another important layer to this scene. Haraway's work challenges the idea that the non-human should be treated only as inferior, passive, or threatening; instead, relations with non-human

beings can reshape how identity and community are understood (Haraway, 2003). This applies to the Zinariya because their alien difference does not remain outside human life. Their arrival creates a new history, new technology, and a new understanding of kinship and ancestry in Binti's world.

Alexander's Binti-focused critical reading further supports this interpretation by showing how Okorafor's trilogy performs a decolonial turn. Alexander argues that the trilogy centers African worldviews and presents Binti's contact with both human and alien communities as part of a broader process of transformation (Alexander, 2023). This supports the reading of the Zinariya encounter as more than a science-fiction scene. It becomes a moment where alien otherness is reimagined through African memory, desert history, and future-oriented contact.

This reimagining of otherness appears clearly when Binti enters the caves of the Enyi Zinariya and discovers that difference can also be a form of belonging, knowledge, and community.

In "Gold People," Binti encounters the Enyi Zinariya as a community that first appears unfamiliar and difficult to understand. Their cave network, flexible family arrangements, and different way of organizing daily life make them seem culturally distant from the Himba world she knows. However, the passage does not present them as primitive or threatening. Instead, it shows a society with its own logic, memory, relationships, and intellectual practices. Under the title "Alien Encounters and the Reimagining of Otherness," this passage suggests that the "other" is not simply someone to fear, but someone whose difference can reveal alternative ways of living and knowing.

"The Enyi Zinariya lived in a vast network of caves in a huge limestone cliff. Within the bowels of these caves were winding staircases that led from cave to cave, family to family. Some caves were tiny, no larger than a closet, others were as vast as the Root. Upon arrival, I was taken for a quick tour of my

grandmother's family's caves. I met so many of her people, young to old, all enthusiastically waving their hands about, that I could not understand the logic of where people lived." (Okorafor, 2019, p 62)

Binti's statement that she "could not understand the logic of where people lived" shows her first experience of cultural difference. She enters a space that does not follow the family structure or domestic order she already knows. Yet this lack of understanding does not mean that the Enyi Zinariya have no order. Their community follows another logic, one based on comfort, connection, shared interests, and flexible relationships between generations. The caves are therefore not signs of primitiveness; they are signs of an alternative social world.

Edward Said's concept of othering helps explain how this passage challenges the habit of reducing unfamiliar communities to backwardness or lack. Said's work shows how dominant discourses often construct the "other" through difference, distance, and inferiority (Said, 1978). In this scene, Binti first experiences the Enyi Zinariya through confusion, but the narrative refuses to leave them as strange objects. Their cave life, family networks, and research practices reveal that they are not inferior to the Himba; they simply organize life differently. This makes the encounter a critique of simplistic judgments about cultural difference.

Alexander's reading of Africanfuturism and decolonial knowledge also clarifies the importance of this passage. Alexander notes that Binti centers African history, African worldview, and indigenous knowledge in a speculative future, rather than treating them as marginal or primitive (Alexander, 2023). The Enyi Zinariya caves function in this way: they are not merely exotic spaces, but places where memory, research, family, and knowledge are preserved. Their difference becomes part of a wider Africanfuturist world.

Janet Seow's Binti-focused analysis further supports this interpretation. Seow argues that Okorafor's Binti uses Africanfuturism to overcome exclusion and otherness, while integrating African Indigenous cultures into a technologically advanced world (Seow, 2022). This supports

the reading of the Enyi Zinariya as an alternative community rather than a threatening one. Binti's encounter with them teaches her that otherness can open new forms of identity, kinship, and understanding.

Chowdhury's discussion of Black futurity helps clarify why the Enyi Zinariya are important in the trilogy. Chowdhury explains that Binti imagines multiple communities and multiple futures, including the Himba, Khoush, Meduse, Desert People or Enyi Zinariya, and Zinariya (Chowdhury, 2022). This helps clarify why the Enyi Zinariya are important in the trilogy. They are not secondary or decorative figures; they expand the social map of Binti's world and show that the future is made of many communities, not one dominant culture. Through them, Binti discovers that difference can become another form of belonging.

This reimagining of otherness appears clearly when Mwinyi communicates with the wild dogs and Binti begins to understand that the Desert People possess their own language, knowledge, and relationship with non-human beings.

In "Hinterland," otherness is not limited to aliens from space; it also includes animals, the Desert People, and forms of knowledge that Binti does not yet understand. At first, the wild dogs appear dangerous, and Mwinyi seems strange because his way of acting is unfamiliar to her. However, the scene changes fear into communication. Mwinyi does not defeat the dogs through violence; he speaks to them, calms them, and sends them away. This moment shows that the "other" is not always an enemy. It can also be a being, human or non-human, with whom communication is possible.

"Mwinyi was speaking to the dogs who would have harmed us. Several of the dogs near the back yipped agreeably, took one more look at us, and then went on their way. The others followed after a moment.

'He's a harmonizer?' I asked.

My grandmother looked at me. 'We don't call them that.'

'Then what do you call him?'

'Our son,' she said, standing up." (Okorafor, 2019, p 54)

The phrase "Our son" (Okorafor, 2019, p 54)

It is especially significant because it redefines Mwinyi's identity. Binti first tries to understand him through the Himba term "harmonizer," but her grandmother refuses this label. By calling him "our son," she places him inside a community rather than outside it. Mwinyi is not a stranger, a barbarian, or an exotic figure; he belongs to a people with their own language, practices, and relationship with the non-human world. Under the title "Alien Encounters and the Reimagining of Otherness," this passage shows that otherness can become kinship when it is approached through respect and recognition.

Donna Haraway's concept of "significant otherness" provides a useful framework for understanding this scene. Haraway explains that relations between humans and dogs can teach an ethics of coexistence because they require attention, respect, and communication across difference (Haraway, 2003). This applies directly to Mwinyi's relation with the dog pack. The dogs are not treated as simple animals or threats; they are beings capable of responding to language, gesture, and presence. The scene therefore challenges a human-centered view of intelligence and shows that otherness can include meaningful relations between humans and non-human beings.

Alexander's decolonial reading of Africanfuturism further illuminates Mwinyi's role in the narrative. Alexander argues that Okorafor's Binti trilogy centers African perspectives and uses African traditional knowledge to create a decolonial turn in speculative fiction (Alexander, 2023). This supports the reading of Mwinyi as a figure of knowledge, not backwardness. His

ability to communicate with the dogs shows that the Desert People possess a sophisticated form of understanding that Binti must learn to respect.

Chowdhury's discussion of Black futurity also helps explain the broader significance of this encounter. Chowdhury argues that Binti imagines Black futures where Himba women and culture are not limited by colonial stereotypes of primitiveness, and where Binti becomes part of more-than-human forms of existence (Chowdhury, 2022). This supports the interpretation of the "Hinterland" scene as a moment where Binti's world expands beyond fixed human categories. The Desert People, the dogs, and Mwinyi's communicative power all suggest that knowledge in *Binti* is relational, embodied, and more-than-human.

2.5. Female Agency and the Transformation of Identity in Binti

This transformation of female agency appears clearly when Binti uses deep culture to stop the conflict between the Khoush and the Meduse, proving that her power comes from knowledge, culture, and action.

In "Girl," Binti is presented as an active female figure who does not wait for authority to save her people. Instead of submitting to the decisions of the Himba council or remaining trapped in the position of a rejected girl, she uses deep culture to intervene in a political and violent conflict. Her power is not based on physical force, but on cultural knowledge, mathematical ability, spiritual concentration, and moral courage. This passage therefore shows that Binti's identity is transformed through agency: she becomes someone capable of acting, influencing, and redefining her place within her community.

"And Binti had succeeded. He'd seen it even from where he stood on the road. She'd channeled deep culture! He'd felt the power of it shivering through the ground, into his feet, halfway up his legs like electricity, like current. Like almost all the other kids in Osemba, he didn't know how to call up current. He'd only

watched Binti do it over the years, glad the practice wasn't his calling. Now, he was watching her do what only a handful had ever done in Himba history. And she used it to convince the leaders of the Khoush and Meduse people to finally stop fighting. She had truly been Osemba's master harmonizer." (Okorafor, 2019, p 95)

The phrase "Binti had succeeded" marks a decisive moment in her transformation. She is no longer seen only as the girl who left home, disobeyed expectations, or became strange after her contact with aliens. She becomes a figure of achievement and authority. Her use of "deep culture" shows that her agency is rooted in Himba knowledge rather than separated from it. Binti does not gain power by rejecting her culture; she transforms that culture into a force capable of creating peace.

Ashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan's discussion of Afrofuturist female identity helps explain Binti's role in this passage. They argue that Okorafor's Binti trilogy focuses on "voice, identity, independence of thought and empowerment" as central features of its characters (Hashemi et al., 2022, p. 84). This supports the reading of Binti as a young African female character whose power comes from speaking, deciding, and acting for herself. In this passage, Binti's voice is not only personal; it becomes social and political because her action influences both the Khoush and the Meduse.

Janet Seow's analysis of Black girlhood in Africanfuturism offers another way to understand the significance of this scene. Seow explains that Okorafor uses Binti to reimagine the Black female child beyond stereotypes of weakness, silence, or intellectual inferiority. She notes that the novella presents Africanfuturism as a strategy that combines technoscience and Indigenous African ways of knowing, allowing the Black girl to reclaim futurity and personhood (Seow, 2022). This applies directly to the "Girl" passage because Binti's power comes from a

combination of culture, mathematical intelligence, and spiritual practice. Her agency is therefore not Westernized or external; it is built from her own cultural world.

Chowdhury's discussion of Black futurity (2022) further reinforces this interpretation. Chowdhury argues that Okorafor positions Himba women in the future as culture bearers, scholars, and figures who carry cultural practices into new forms of existence. This idea fits Binti's role as "master harmonizer." She carries Himba deep culture into a wider interspecies conflict and uses it to shape a different future. Her identity is transformed because she is no longer only preserving tradition; she is using it to create peace and political change.

Okorafor's own comments about Binti also support this reading. In an interview with *WIRED*, she explains that she wanted to tell stories of African women and girls and give them "more agency." She also states that Binti was not meant to be a typical "badass heroine," but a girl with other qualities that make her special. This helps explain why Binti's power in this passage is not physical violence, but cultural depth, intelligence, mediation, and spiritual strength.

This transformation of female agency appears clearly when Binti moves from guilt and insecurity toward responsibility, deciding that she must face the consequences of what has happened.

In "Homecoming," Binti's agency is shown through self-awareness rather than physical power. She recognizes that her return home was shaped by fear, insecurity, and the need to reconnect with her family. However, she does not remain passive in guilt. Instead, she understands that the conflict around her has become larger than her personal pain. Her final decision, "Whatever it was, I had to finish it," marks a turning point in her identity. Binti becomes a young woman who accepts responsibility and chooses to act, even when the situation is dangerous and emotionally painful.

"With each step I took through my hometown, I wondered what I was walking toward, purposely bringing myself closer to. I'd needed to reconnect with my family after I'd left the way I did and with all that went on to happen, but realistically, it was my own insecurities that brought me running home so soon. When the Meduse anger had come forth, I'd immediately assumed something was wrong with me instead of realizing that it was simply a new change to which I had to adjust. I'd thought something was wrong with me because my family thought something was wrong with me. And now my childish actions had brought death and war. What had I started? Whatever it was, I had to finish it." (Okorafor, 2019, p 91).

Binti's reflection shows that her transformation is not easy or triumphant in a simple way. She admits that she came home because of her own "insecurities," which makes her agency more human and realistic. She is not presented as a perfect heroine who always knows what to do. Instead, she becomes powerful because she is able to examine her fear, understand her mistakes, and move forward. This self-awareness is central to her identity transformation.

Hashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan's discussion of Afrofuturist female identity helps explain Binti's decision as an act of agency. They argue that Okorafor's Binti trilogy centers "voice, identity, independence of thought and empowerment" as key features of its characters (2022). This supports the reading of Binti's decision as an act of agency. In this scene, Binti's power begins with thought and self-recognition. She understands that something has changed in her, and instead of accepting the idea that she is "wrong," she begins to see her transformation as something she must learn to control and use.

Janet Seow's analysis of Black girlhood further clarifies the importance of this moment. Seow explains that Okorafor's Binti "unsettles harmful depictions of Black childhood" and reimagines the role of young Black females in racialized communities (Seow, 2022). This applies directly to "Homecoming" because Binti is not written as a helpless girl waiting for

adults, councils, or male protectors to decide for her. Her fear is real, but it does not erase her capacity to act. The passage therefore presents Black girlhood as a space of reflection, responsibility, and transformation.

Alexander's decolonial and Africanfuturist reading also supports this interpretation. Alexander argues that Okorafor gives African girls and women more agency and projects African femininity through strong female characters (Alexander, 2023). This supports the idea that Binti's strength is not based on rejecting her African or Himba background. Rather, her agency grows from her position inside that cultural world and from her struggle to redefine herself within it. Her decision to "finish it" shows that she is no longer only reacting to events; she is beginning to shape them.

Okorafor's own words also support this reading. In an interview with *WIRED*, she explains that she wanted to tell stories of African women and girls and "give them more agency." This directly fits Binti's development in "Homecoming." Binti is not a typical heroine whose power comes from violence; her power comes from self-awareness, emotional courage, and the decision to take responsibility for what has begun.

This transformation of female agency appears clearly when Binti refuses the insult "foolish Himba girl" and publicly claims responsibility for the meeting she created.

In "Homegoing," Binti reaches one of the strongest moments of agency in the trilogy. She is mocked by King Goldie, ignored by political leaders, and left without the support of the Himba council. However, instead of remaining silent, she transforms anger, grief, and humiliation into action. Her declaration, "I'm the one who called this meeting! This was my idea!" shows that she is no longer waiting for male authority or communal approval. She speaks for herself and places herself at the center of a political crisis.

"It was the phrase "foolish Himba girl." That's what did it. In that phrase was condescension, a mockery of my high standing at Oomza Uni, a spitting on my

family and the Himba as a whole. And where was the council? I didn't care. My family was dead...I fell out of the tree. Then POW! the current I'd drawn poured into me....And so, I screamed, "I'm the one who called this meeting! This was my idea!" I faced King Goldie, my eyes wide and wild. He'd whirled around, gawking at me now. . . because it was already expanded." (Okorafor, 2019, p 92)

The sentence "I'm the one who called this meeting! This was my idea is the clearest sign of Binti's agency in this passage. She does not speak as a victim, nor as someone asking for permission. She speaks as the initiator of the political event. Her body is surrounded by current, her okuoko connects her to the Meduse, and her voice reaches both human and non-human listeners. Under the title "Female Agency and the Transformation of Identity in Binti," this moment shows that Binti's identity is transformed through speech, action, and responsibility. She becomes a political actor capable of confronting kings, chiefs, and councils.

Hashemi, Shahabi, and Narafshan's discussion of Afrofuturist female identity helps explain "Homegoing" as a moment where Binti's voice becomes a source of power. They argue that Okorafor's Binti trilogy centers voice, identity, independence of thought, and empowerment as key features of its characters (Hashemi et al., 2022). This supports the reading of "Homegoing" as a moment where Binti's voice becomes a source of power. She does not merely feel anger; she uses that anger to speak, intervene, and reshape the situation. Her agency is therefore both emotional and political.

Janet Seow's reading of Black girlhood further clarifies Binti's confrontation with King Goldie. Seow argues that Binti unsettles harmful depictions of Black childhood and reimagines the role of young Black females in racialized communities (Seow, 2022). This applies directly to Binti's confrontation with King Goldie. He tries to reduce her to a "foolish Himba girl," but the narrative proves the opposite: she is the one who understands the crisis, calls the meeting, and

speaks across cultural and species boundaries. Her girlhood is not presented as weakness; it becomes a site of courage and transformation.

Alexander's decolonial Africanfuturist reading also supports the idea that Binti's power is culturally rooted rather than externally granted. Alexander explains that Okorafor's Binti trilogy centers African perspectives and moves away from dominant Western models of speculative fiction (Alexander, 2023). This supports the reading of Binti's power as culturally rooted rather than externally granted. Her strength does not come from abandoning her Himba identity. It comes from combining Himba knowledge, Meduse transformation, mathematical current, and ancestral memory. Her grandmother's voice, "You tell them, Binti," confirms that her agency is also connected to lineage and inherited female strength.

Okorafor's own comments also support this reading of Binti as an empowered female character. In her interview with *WIRED*, Okorafor explains that she wanted to write stories of African women and girls with more agency, and that Binti would not be a typical violent heroine, but a girl with other special qualities. This matches the "Homegoing" scene: Binti's power is not based on physical domination, but on voice, mediation, intelligence, and the courage to confront public humiliation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Binti* presents identity as a dynamic process shaped by movement, memory, technology, and encounter. Through Binti's journey from her Himba homeland to Oomza Uni and beyond, the novella shows that cultural identity is not lost through displacement, but transformed through it. Her experiences with the Meduse, the Enyi Zinariya, New Fish, and the wider universe reveal that belonging can no longer be understood as attachment to one fixed place or one pure origin. Instead, Binti's identity becomes hybrid, complex, and expanded, combining Himba tradition, cosmic experience, alien contact, and personal transformation.

The chapter also shows that Binti's freedom is both cosmic and deeply cultural. Her journey beyond Earth allows her to challenge inherited expectations, but she does not abandon her roots. Tradition and technology work together in her story, while alien encounters help redefine otherness as a space of dialogue, kinship, and understanding. Most importantly, Binti emerges as an active female figure whose power comes from knowledge, voice, responsibility, and mediation rather than violence. In this sense, Okorafor's novella reimagines African identity as future-oriented, resilient, and capable of creating new forms of belonging in an interstellar world.

General Conclusion

This study has examined Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti: The Complete Trilogy* as an Africanfuturist text that reimagines identity, belonging, and freedom through the experience of a young Himba girl who crosses cultural, planetary, and species boundaries. Through Binti's journey from Earth to Oomza Uni and back, the trilogy shows that identity is not fixed or simple. Instead, it is shaped by movement, memory, displacement, conflict, and transformation. Binti remains deeply connected to her Himba origins, yet her encounters with the Meduse, the Enyi Zinariya, and New Fish expand her sense of self and force her to live between different worlds.

This study shows that Binti does not present technology, tradition, and alien contact as opposing forces. Rather, the trilogy brings them together to create a new vision of African identity in the future. Binti's *otjize*, mathematical talent, *edan*, and transformed body all reveal that African cultural memory can survive within advanced technological and cosmic spaces. The novel also reimagines otherness by moving beyond fear and violence toward communication, recognition, and coexistence. In this sense, alien encounters become a way of questioning human prejudice and opening new possibilities for peace and understanding.

Binti's transformation expresses female agency because she gradually moves from being judged, rejected, and misunderstood to becoming a mediator, survivor, and decision-maker. Her journey shows that freedom is not only physical movement into space, but also the ability to redefine oneself beyond social limits, cultural expectations, and inherited fear. Therefore, Binti offers a powerful Africanfuturist vision in which African culture is not left behind in the future, but carried forward, transformed, and strengthened. The trilogy ultimately presents identity as a living process: wounded, hybrid, unstable, but also creative, resilient, and open to new forms of belonging.

It has comprehensively examined Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti: The Complete Trilogy* as a foundational Africanfuturist text that courageously reimagines

identity, belonging, and freedom. This critical exploration is achieved through the lived experience of a young Himba girl who deliberately crosses cultural, planetary, and species boundaries. By mapping Binti's migratory journey from Earth to Oomza Uni and her subsequent return, the trilogy powerfully demonstrates that identity is neither fixed, static, nor simple. Instead, Okorafor posits that identity is an ongoing, dynamic construct shaped by geographic movement, ancestral memory, physical displacement, existential conflict, and deep ontological transformation.

While Binti undergoes radical cosmic shifts, she remains deeply and intrinsically connected to her Himba origins. However, her subsequent encounters with the Meduse, the Enyi Zinariya, and the New Fish continuously expand her sense of self, forcing her to exist, negotiate, and survive between vastly different worlds. This structural expansion of identity serves as a direct critique of Eurocentric science fiction, which historically relegated African subjects to the periphery of technological progress. Within Okorafor's framework, the periphery becomes the center of cosmic diplomacy. Non-Fixed Ontologies: Rejection of essentialist or colonial definitions of African identity. Second, The Dynamics of Displacement: Utilizing planetary migration to highlight cultural resilience. Third, Liminality as Power: Existing between worlds becomes a source of epistemological privilege rather than alienation

Binti's use of otjize, her exceptional mathematical talent, her possession of the edan, and her progressively transformed body all reveal that African cultural memory can successfully survive, adapt, and thrive within advanced technological and cosmic spaces.

The novel deeply reimagines the concept of alterity or "otherness" by deliberately moving beyond the primitive human instincts of fear and violence. In traditional Western sci-fi, first-contact scenarios often mirror imperialist invasions or violent resource extraction. Okorafor subverts this trope by steering the narrative toward radical communication, mutual recognition, and sustainable coexistence.

In this sense, alien encounters become an allegorical way of questioning deeply rooted human prejudices such as those exhibited by the Khoush against the Himba, and opening brand-new possibilities for global and interstellar peace and understanding.

Finally, Binti's physical, psychological, and biological transformation expresses an uncompromising version of female agency. Throughout the narrative arc, she gradually moves from being judged, rejected, and misunderstood by both her community and outsiders to becoming a vital mediator, a resilient survivor, and an independent decision-maker. Her complex journey proves that true freedom is not merely physical movement or flight into outer space. Instead, liberation is defined as the autonomous ability to redefine oneself completely beyond patriarchal social limits, rigid cultural expectations, and inherited ancestral fears.

Therefore, Binti offers a powerful, clear, and uncompromising Africanfuturist vision in which African culture is never left behind or erased in the future. Instead, it is intentionally carried forward, radically transformed, and structurally strengthened. The trilogy ultimately presents identity not as a static museum piece, but as a dynamic, living process: wounded, hybrid, and unstable, but also highly creative, incredibly resilient, and beautifully open to entirely new forms of universal belonging.

This dissertation leaves open several critical pathways for future academic scholarship in the field of contemporary speculative fiction:

- Posthumanist African Feminism: Analyzing the biological blending of women and technology in African literature.
- Indigenous Eco-Criticism: Exploring how organic spaceships and planetary materials challenge Western urban-industrial futures.
- Decolonial Linguistic Structures: Studying Okorafor's integration of indigenous terminology within English sci-fi prose.

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تتناول هذه الدراسة ثلاثية بينتي لنينيدي أوكورافور بوصفها سردية إفريقية مستقبلية تعيد تصور الهوية، والشتات، والتكنولوجيا، والآخرية، والفاعلية النسوية من خلال رحلة فتاة شابة من قبيلة الهيمبا إلى الفضاء. أنجزت هذه الدراسة لإظهار أن انتقال بينتي إلى ما وراء الأرض ليس رحلة جسدية فقط، بل هو أيضاً عملية معقدة من التحول الثقافي واكتشاف الذات. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تقديم الثلاثية للهوية بوصفها هجينة، ومتغيرة، ومتشكّلة عبر اللقاءات مع ثقافات وأنواع وعوالم تكنولوجية مختلفة. تعتمد الدراسة على منهج نوعي تحليلي قائم على التحليل النصي القريب لمقاطع مختارة من الثلاثية. كما تستند إلى منظورات نظرية ملائمة من الدراسات الثقافية، والهجينة ما بعد الاستعمارية، والأفروفيوتشرزم، والأفريكانفيوتشرزم، والنقد النسوي. وتُظهر النتائج الرئيسية أن بينتي لا تتخلى عن هويتها الهيمباوية، بل تحملها إلى فضاءات كونية وتكنولوجية جديدة. كما تتحدى الثلاثية التصورات القائمة على الخوف من الآخر من خلال التأكيد على التواصل، والاعتراف، والتعايش. وأخيراً، تكشف تحولات بينتي عن فاعلية نسوية لأنها تصبح وسيطة، وناجية، وصاحبة قرار. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن بينتي تقدم رؤية قوية للهوية الإفريقية بوصفها هوية مرنة، وهجينة، وقادرة على تشكيل عوالم مستقبلية دون أن تفقد جذورها الثقافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إفريكانفيوتشرزم، شتات رقمي، هوية ثقافية، حرية كونية، فاعلية نسوية.